UCLA
American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title
Negotiating Publicity and Persona: The Work of Native Actors in Studio Hollywood

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9gg4p4d3

Journal
American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 42(3)

ISSN
0161-6463

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Publication Date
2018-06-01

DOI
10.17953/aicrj.42.3.floyd

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Negotiating Publicity and Persona: The Work of Native Actors in Studio Hollywood

Jacob Floyd

Film history regarding Native Americans in Hollywood has largely focused on the images and stereotypes presented in Western films and not on the actors who played those roles; however, these actors were actual people who had their own career goals and reasons for working in the film industry. Oral histories and memoirs by film workers and those who knew them are the most direct way to retrieve this history, but lacking these resources, and without access to Native actors who are no longer living, what other materials can shed light on their experiences? This article draws from film publicity materials, which I argue can be important sources for scholars who seek to understand the careers of Native actors in studio-era Hollywood (roughly 1930–1948). While at face value publicity material may appear unreliable, its intertextuality and collaborative construction carries traces of the work done by Native actors in creating and perpetuating their on- and offscreen personas. The film roles available to these Native actors were small and limited by generic expectation and industrial practice, but because the publicity of the time focused primarily on actors' offscreen lives, more than film content, Native film workers were able to take advantage of this platform to critique and potentially affect their onscreen representations and their reception with audiences.

Michelle H. Raheja writes that "Native Americans in mass media have occupied a twilight zone existence in which they are both hypervisible in ways overdetermined by popular and nostalgic representations and completely invisible because Native American actors are often uncredited, unpaid, and cast in ancillary, sometimes demeaning roles."[1] At times, this invisibility extends from cultural and narrative space into film scholarship

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that focuses heavily on the image of Native Americans on film, as opposed to lives of Native workers involved in filmmaking. The discourse becomes concerned with how non-Natives represented Native Americans rather than how Native Americans represented themselves. In such discourse, they risk becoming the objects of history, not its subjects. One explanation for Native actors' "twilight zone existence" is that scholarship has historically approached films in the tradition of literary studies, viewing film texts as the primary "site for the production of meaning."[2] This approach was beneficial in film studies' attempts to find institutional legitimacy within the academy and can be useful in studies that chart the developments of film aesthetics and narratives.

This textual approach, however, can overlook the variety of experiences that inform the work of film production. Not only did the narrative requirements of the Western genre push Native figures to the margins, but studio Hollywood's rigid production methods meant that these actors worked under a hierarchy of creative control that limited their input into how their images would appear onscreen. Moreover, the editing process in filmmaking operates as a control mechanism designed to excise any unwanted elements, so that images or performances that deviated from expectation or directorial orders were removed from films and lost to history. Consequently, an approach that relies only on the film text has problematic limitations if we are to analyze prolific Native actors like Chief John Big Tree (Seneca actor Isaac Johnny John) or Chief Yowlachie (Yakama actor Daniel Simmons), who had decades-long careers in minor film roles that perpetuated the image of Hollywood's Indian. When the available object of study only presents a stereotype, how, then, do we account for a Native actor?

One approach is to study production materials in order to shed light on decisions made by key creative personnel about the portrayal of Native Americans in individual films. This approach can historicize the context of a film's production within the political and cultural environment in which it was made, enrich our understanding of films, and complicate generalized narratives about the evolution of Native stereotypes onscreen. For studying Native film workers, however, these materials present limitations as well. Because the majority of the production notes and correspondence surviving in archives were produced by studio heads, directors, producers, production managers, and agents, they document the film as experienced and understood by powerful non-Natives in film production. With a few rare exceptions, the machinations of studio Hollywood, the socioeconomic effects of United States government policies, and racial hierarchies in the early twentieth century limited Native film workers from these positions of creative control. Given that production materials obscure Native presence in Hollywood and create the skewed perspective that Native film workers were not meaningfully involved in cultural production, what other sources should we examine?

In addition to production, the lifecycle of a film also includes distribution and exhibition, but as Mark Miller argues, these three branches "borrowed and relied" on a fourth—promotion or publicity. The major studios, who held monopolistic control over the three branches of the industry, were involved and economically invested in each stage of film production, distribution, and exhibition, and publicity influenced each of these three stages. As Miller notes, "in the film industry, the 'salability' of the movie was . . . central to nearly all the decisions involved with its production."[3] The term "publicity"

may suggest that the material is dubious. Publicity material was often embellished and occasionally fictitious, but offered potential avenues for agency and critique. Examining how studio publicity articles were constructed in context provides insights into the complex negotiations these actors performed. Publicity preserves traces of the offscreen work of actors as they helped to create, shape, and reinforce personas. As a kind of cultural production that existed intertextually with their films, the discourses regarding a film's publicity are a significant and underutilized resource for understanding the work of Native actors in studio Hollywood.

The key element to sell a film to an audience was the actor. Studios needed stars to sell their films to audiences because movies would come and go, but actors would remain a continual advertisement for the studios that employed them. As such, publicity at all levels focused primarily on actors and their offscreen lives. An article publicizing *Hills of Wyoming* (1937), for instance, exhibits traces of the kind of studio publicity campaign that deliberately breaks a film's illusion in order to influence audience reception of the film and Big Tree's persona. The article first introduces us to a tomahawk-wielding image of Big Tree, only to reveal that he is playing a character and is "far from ferocious. In fact, the chief is a trifle camera shy, and has a tendency to giggle in his big scenes. Humanitarians will be glad to learn that the customary massacres did not take place, although the kids probably were a bit disappointed."[4] The article's mix of violence and humor parallels the tonal mixture of the film, providing audiences a glimpse of what they might expect in theaters. The final line serves to quell, or at least acknowledge, the worries of parents while still presenting an element of danger to their children, who made up an important portion of B-Western movie audiences.

This behind-the-scenes anecdote also previews the nature of the film's Native characters, who, reflecting a 1930s B-Western movie trope, are more ambivalent than openly antagonistic and often are only made violent by duplicitous settlers. In the film, Big Tree's character is initially hostile to a group of white settlers because he believes they are rustling his people's cattle. Eventually the film's protagonist, played by Hopalong Cassidy, is able to prove that a gang of rustlers is responsible, who become their common enemy in the remainder of the film. Although relatively more sympathetic than his roles in other Westerns, on screen Big Tree's character is still stereotypically one-dimensional, so an anecdote like this humanized him further in the eyes of potential film viewers but just as importantly, for audiences and fans of Big Tree's offscreen performances in pageants and advertising campaigns. The note about his "tendency to giggle" risked painting him as unprofessional, but the overall tone of the article likely helped his acting career because it suggested that, as a mild-mannered person offscreen, he was able to play a "ferocious" character in movies. Such endorsement of his acting ability was important at a time in Hollywood when directors openly believed Native Americans could not act, or more correctly, act as the limited caricatures they wanted.[5]

Pressbooks, Intertexts, and Personas

Native actors negotiated and leveraged their appearances in public to achieve their own interests, career goals, and cultural projects. These appearances were ways of

constructing their personas and influencing publicity materials that could affect the way viewers viewed their films. Films were made within the hierarchies of standardized film production, but it was through extratextual film materials that Native actors were able to exert some degree of control and agency over their public image.

The most significant artifacts of studio marketing and publicity campaigns are pressbooks, documents created by advertising divisions located in New York that provided theater managers with content and strategies for publicizing a given film, or "catalogues of 'promotional' strategies."[6] Pressbooks were divided into four sections, "publicity," "exploitation," "advertising," and "accessories." The "publicity" section offered prewritten articles to plant in newspapers and to provide to gossip columnists, while "exploitation" offered promotional strategies to theater managers. For example, in the *North West Mounted Police* pressbook the exploitation section offered instructions for constructing wigwams and teepees or for hosting displays of "Indian arts and crafts."[7] "Advertising" sold the film's visual art, such as posters and lobby cards, and "accessories" advertised promotional items from regional studio exchanges such as costumes, props, and sound effects records for theater managers to buy or rent.

Pressbooks collect the traces of studios' publicity campaigns and analysis of their contents allows us to infer how a studio and others involved in creating a film viewed their product, as well as to identify themes, people, and characters the studio, publicists, and theater managers believed would resonate with audiences.[8] At Warner Bros. Pictures, for instance, five employees would edit the pressbook months before film production began, using

> in-office materials, press releases generated in other departments, and the "blue book" of publicity articles that was written and forwarded to the department by studio publicists . . . publicists also supplied production anecdotes and star biographic material often in the form of "vital statistics,'" typically "two or three pages of pre-production anecdotes, star gossip and biographic tidbits, usually presented as two or three sentences strung together between ellipses."[9]

From these "tidbits," it was the job of pressbook writers to enlarge (and often to make up, or to "dream," as one publicity writer put it) enough material to turn this information into attractive advertising copy.[10]

While rare, actors did sue studios over publicity material[11] and though given creative license to fill out material, pressbook writers also had to ensure that their "dreams" fell within a legal realm of believability. We can also imagine that pressbook writers assumed, like the genre filmmakers of the movies they advertised,[12] that audiences held horizons of belief regarding actors and subjects, and that actions in a pressbook article had to be believable to an audience familiar with the actor. Pressbook contents were embellished, but industry checks on publicity material held it to a relative standard of truth. Beginning in 1933, publicity was heavily regulated by an enforceable Advertising Code (AAC) that required all advertising materials be submitted to the AAC for approval.[13] Studios, in response, adapted to the AAC by adopting a more streamlined approach to produce publicity material by realigning "the production-distribution-exhibition structure of advertising by making advertising

accountable to a central authority."[14] While the bulk of the AAC's work responded to complaints about sexually suggestive movie posters, the code was also concerned with truth in advertising copy, stating that "we subscribe to a code of business ethics based upon truth, honesty and integrity. All motion picture advertising shall: (a) conform to fact, (b) scrupulously avoid all misrepresentation."[15] The AAC did not enforce this aspect of the code as regularly as restrictions on visual promotion, but it was nonetheless enforced.[16] Articles were embellished but still based on enough truth to avoid attracting AAC or legal attention from studio talent.

In addition to explaining the many inaccuracies found in studio publicity, the collaborative construction of pressbooks suggests that they offered actors a small but important space to shape their personas, even if they were rarely able to influence their onscreen appearances and roles. Actors' offscreen activities provided material for gossip columns and production anecdotes, and these items would provide content for pressbook material and influence publicity writers. During production the film itself was likely to change, yet pressbooks were assembled before a film was completed, so often the personas and biographies of those involved would drive the promotional campaign, benefiting Native actors. Onscreen, Native actors were relegated to background roles in scenes that lasted for only fractions of a film's running time, but they inhabit an outsized role in the publicity material for these films, suggesting that promotion of these actors was a successful strategy. Aside from occasional supporting roles, Native actors were typically marginal characters in films, but even Native extras, virtually unidentifiable on screen, have articles devoted to them in pressbooks. As an example, in *Northwest Mounted Police* (1940), there are only two relatively brief sequences involving Native characters, yet of the seven pages of "publicity" in the original 1940 pressbook, three contain articles devoted to Native actors and topics, and the film's exploitation heavily focuses on Native themes.[17]

My research suggests that the personas of Native actors were important to them as products of meaningful creative work. Significantly, Chief Yowlachie and Big Tree are buried under their performance names.[18] Likewise, most documents I have encountered regarding Chief Rolling Cloud's work as a performer and as a community organizer in Los Angeles refer to him as "Rolling Cloud" or "Chief Rolling Cloud" and not as Muscogee (Creek) actor Charles Brunner.[19] More than illustrating the ubiquity of their offscreen performance, these instances suggest that these actors' personas were not considered simply burdens placed on them by the industry, but creations they valued to some extent.

We may be tempted to separate person from persona, but personas, even with their fictive elements, were the result of real work. This labor should be viewed as a creative act of work on the part of the actor. "Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities," writes Richard Dyer; "they are both labour and the thing that labour produces."[20] Danae Clark reminds us that the "actor as worker should not be construed as the true identity of the actor, but rather as an effective discursive construct."[21] Instead of attempting to separate actor from persona, it is more helpful to examine the discourse surrounding a persona and the ways in which an actor contributed to that discourse

and benefited from it. Chief Rolling Cloud, for example, used the publicity generated from his performance career to publicize his community efforts in Los Angeles.[22]

As actors' labor, personas are the intertextual culmination of multiple films together with all other appearances across media. While we may be tempted to think of intertextual multimedia experiences as a recent phenomenon, moviegoing was a sophisticated intertextual experience in the 1930s and 1940s and studio publicity material played a significant role in audience reception. This is additionally significant during this period because audiences went to see cinematic programs, not simply individual films. The film workers in this study were involved in Westerns that typically were filler in these larger programs: a purpose articulated by the pressbook for *Where the North Begins* (1947) which advertises the forty-minute film as "perfect FILLER-INNER for that TOO LONG PROGRAM."[23]

Another staple of programs that provided a significant amount of work for Native actors was the serial and more than any other type of film, the serial required and exploited intertexts. As Guy Barefoot's study argues, audiences experienced 1930s Western serials in a doubly fragmented fashion, both as individual episodes that were part of larger programs viewed on a single occasion, and also as multiple episodes days or a week apart. Producers expected audiences would likely miss one or more installment of the series and that consequently, intertexts were essential to the audience's comprehension of the serial. The serial thus required and exploited intertexts more than any other format. *The Lone Ranger* encompassed, for instance, a radio broadcast, a syndicated comic strip, and novels.[24] Republic Pictures believed these intertexts were so important that they were "reluctant to release the serial in locations not receiving the radio programme, though this led to a successful drive to increase the number of radio stations broadcasting the show."[25] Intertextual media, combined with publicity materials, fostered intertextual moviegoing experiences especially among fans of serial franchises, but multimedia approaches also extended beyond serials to programmatic Western films. Pressbooks of the period, for example, continually suggested that films utilize the radio and Paramount's head of publicity directed his staff to "maximize newspaper space" in every possible way. *Red Fork Range* (1931), for example, utilized newspaper space by featuring hand-drawn representations of Big Tree in scenes from the film.[26]

While these intertexts helped satisfy fans' appetites and filled in gaps resulting from moviegoing habits, it was likely the publicity and news articles that, more importantly, shaped how audiences viewed Native actors offscreen. According to Miller, "the era's promotional culture . . . helped determine the reciprocal links between production and promotion."[27] Films were made to be promoted, and promotion influenced future production.[28] In this environment, actors were able to use their personas to intervene and influence texts that shaped and countered their onscreen depictions. Offscreen appearances, should they successfully promote the star and their films, had the potential to influence what would be made in the future. For the biggest stars, this meant star projects; for lesser-known actors, it may have influenced the roles available to them. At this economically distressed time, actors vying for roles with better pay in an intensely competitive industry had to differentiate themselves. According to Barry

King, "actors seeking to obtain stardom [would] begin to conduct themselves in public as though there [was] an unmediated existential connection between their person and their image."[29] The most successful actors were those able to create personas that transcended individual film roles, and expanded across multiple films, into offscreen appearances, and into their own personal lives. On one level, this was a form of "eternal advertising,"[30] but in addition, a reciprocally beneficial relationship developed between actors, their personas, and studios. Actors with well-known offscreen personas helped the studio promote its films through regular appearances in the press and at public events. This offscreen work helped improve actors' standing and studios rewarded them with better work.

Maintaining a persona in public was only one form of offscreen work. Native actors also performed in other capacities: Yowlachie was a fixture on radio and sang onstage nationally, including at Carnegie Hall; Big Tree was part of a campaign in the late 1920s for General Motors' Pontiac brand and made personal appearances at screenings of *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) for RKO; Jim Thorpe and Chief Many Treaties (Blackfeet actor William Hazlett) traveled together on war bond drives; and Chief Rolling Cloud performed at California Angels baseball games.[31] While Westerns generally reinforced the trope of the "vanishing Indian," actors' offscreen presence challenged it through repeated appearances at contemporary events. Occasionally, these appearances were political. Yowlachie performed for President Roosevelt and then rallied for Wendell Wilkie's 1940 campaign, and Many Treaties and Rolling Cloud met with the chair of the Committee on Indian Affairs to discuss problems facing Native Americans in Los Angeles.[32] In all of these appearances, Native film workers advertised themselves, their films, and the studios that made those films, but offscreen performances and interactions with fans shaped actors' personas that fed back into the ways the studio utilized and promoted them.

If pressbook and newspaper articles and offscreen performances had the potential to affect the ways audiences viewed Native actors in their films, gossip columns provided another important means of crafting offscreen personas. Gossip columnists frequently borrowed from studio publicity for material, and in turn publicity departments used columnists' original reporting to exploit their films. Erskine Johnson wrote about Yowlachie and Hedda Hopper about Many Treaties.[33] Additionally, because gossip columns were often located in the movie pages of newspapers, a reader could see an ad for a film featuring Yowlachie next to an article about his offscreen life, potentially informing their reception of that film. It was in Kaspar Monahan's gossip column that Many Treaties was able to advocate for a wider range of roles for Native actors, pointing out that in the film industry "no censor sticks up for the real Americans. So we have to play villains."[34]

The Actor as Worker: Contextualizing Actors' Agency

A focus on actors' agency in shaping their own publicity also must take into account that publicity's goal was to sell films to audiences. An actor's place in publicity materials was part of a complex, nearly constant act of negotiation between their persona,

crafted on- and offscreen, and the studio's ability to sell that persona. Richard Dyer suggests that actors "do not produce themselves alone" in that a star's persona is an aggregate of multiple films and texts produced by different people and moreover, is received in different ways by audiences.[35] Dyer notes, for example, that during the production of a single film the actor's image is the product of ideas negotiated by different departments. Screenwriters, hair and makeup artists, costume designers, and the director all contribute different attributes to actors' personas.[36] While various figures contributed aspects to the stereotypical imagery of Native Americans on screen, it was primarily outside of production, in public appearances and performances, gossip columns, and in the press that actors worked to develop their personas. Studying publicity allows us to see traces of this work.

A significant intervention in the study of film actors, and one helpful in analyzing the experience of Native American actors in Hollywood, is Danae Clark's concept of the "actor as worker."[37] For Clark, who argues that actors in studio Hollywood had greater agency than is generally thought, using the term "worker" instead of merely "actor" matters because traditional approaches to studying actors limit their agency by flattening them as images. Actors are studied not as people with their own agency and desires, but as "star images," either aesthetically or as commercial properties. Clark's work does not focus on race or ethnicity specifically, yet by extension, a "star image" approach is especially problematic when looking at Native actors because of the overdetermined place of Native images and bodies in cultural and racial thought. In other words, to view Native actors as images without considering their offscreen labor risks an analytical focus on an image that reinscribes the same racial stereotypes and assumptions that informed the production of those images on screen. In addition, Clark's broader term "film worker"[38] better describes Native performers in classical Hollywood because while the majority of Native film workers were actors, many also worked in other jobs, both credited and uncredited, as stunt performers, technical advisers, unit directors, and in music, props, and costume departments.

Accordingly, it is crucial to recenter the study of actors from the images of their performance and toward the work they performed. In Clark's model, within the contextual limits of studio Hollywood "the actor as worker becomes the site of intersecting discourses involving the sale of one's labor power to the cinematic institution, the negotiation of that power in terms of work performance and image construction, and the embodiment of one's image (onscreen and offscreen) as it becomes picked up and circulated in film and extrafilmic discourse."[39] She finds that the traces of the actors' labor to inhabit their persona on- and offscreen are best seen in the "extrafilmic discourse," of which publicity is the most prominent. When examining extrafilmic discourses, we must recognize the impossibility of defining a clear distinction between an actor as person offscreen and the roles they play onscreen. Chief Many Treaties and William Hazlett, for example, are not two easily differentiated people. Instead, they are points of reference in an ongoing discourse involving his onscreen performances, the associations surrounding the characters he played, his offscreen life as reported in the press and gossip columns, and an audience's experience with all of these texts. Many Treaties was a person. Many Treaties was also a persona.[40]

Native actors during this period present an interesting and productive challenge to the traditional star studies approach to analyzing actors.[41] For most of their careers, Native actors worked in supporting roles, bit parts, and as extras. If judged by screen time alone, one might assume that these workers had a nominal presence in the industry and popular culture. However, in studio pressbooks, newspapers, society pages, and across other media such as radio, novels, and comic strips, Native film workers take on significant roles in the publicizing of, and discussions about, the films in which they had meager parts. In other words, Native film workers are treated and discussed like stars. If "movie stars," as Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery define them, "are actors 'with biographies,'" and, "in some cases . . . their 'biographies' completely overshadow their 'works,'" the case of Native film workers pushes this definition to its limits because they are movie stars who are often not featured in their movies, at times even performing anonymously.[42] The significance of their screen roles is only revealed when considered in conversation with other media texts and offscreen appearances.

The negotiations of actors as workers are pertinent to Native American experiences in film historically, but are also relevant to other Native public performers in the first half of the twentieth century. These negotiations are evident among Indigenous cultural performers in a pre-cinematic antecedent, the Wild West show, and among Indigenous cultural performers who constructed their images by negotiating the expectations of audiences and employers with their own self-interest and cultural projects. Linda Scarangella McNenly's useful study of Wild West shows, for instance, similarly relies upon a process of "negotiation" in arguing that performers had their own "goals and interests guided by the social and political relationships that structure[d] their lives."[43] Many Native film workers performed first in Wild West shows or in other forms of public entertainment: Yowlachie was a singer, Big Tree a model, and Jim Thorpe was the most famous athlete in the world. Many Treaties, for example, likely had a unique understanding of publicity because in addition to a brief career in politics, he edited *The Ft. Cobb Record* (Oklahoma) from 1906 to 1910.[44] Native performers and actors likely learned from such experiences with dominant culture and applied these lessons across cultural forms and media. Viewing agency in this way moves beyond a simple view of "exploitation" that assumes performers were either taken advantage of or complicit in perpetuating dominant stereotypes.[45] In fact, Native performers were resisting relative to the historical and industrial limitations in which they found themselves. In a heavily regulated industry, one that benefited from the depiction of racist stereotypes of Native peoples, traces of individual agency and resistance of any sort are highly significant.

In addition to personal benefit, show business "gave Native performers socially viable ways of maintaining and expressing their culture and identity," and it appears that public performances allowed actors to explore and celebrate a Native identity that had been denied in other contexts.[46] Many Native film workers attended Carlisle Indian School, including Many Treaties, Jim Thorpe, Luther Standing Bear, Thunderbird (Richard Davis), and Big Tree, while Yowlachie attended the Cushman Indian Trades School in Tacoma, Washington and Rolling Cloud attended Bacone College in Muscogee, Oklahoma.[47] Rolling Cloud's time at Bacone, especially, recalls Chickasaw

performer and educator Ataloa (Mary Stone McLendon) and the concept of "Indian Play" that Lisa Neuman developed from a study of her methods.[48] At Bacone, Ataloa, a Columbia University-educated teacher and classically trained contralto, founded and led the Bacone Girl's Glee Club, which raised funds for the school and achieved her goals of educating the public and promoting Native culture.[49] Playing to images of Native American life drawn from dime novels, Wild West shows, and film, Ataloa and her students, most from Southeastern tribes, performed in Navajo-style blankets and sang popular Indian-themed songs composed by non-Native writers. The stereotypical performances appealed to white audiences and their popularity gave Ataloa a platform to showcase Native culture.

The negotiations present in Ataloa's performances were similar to those made by Native film workers, and like film publicity, extratextual materials from these performances can challenge our initial impressions of them. Neuman describes "publicly engaging, articulating, and negotiating ideas about their own and other's Native identities" as "Indian play," and that "while playful and spirited, the Indian play of students at Bacone was dedicated to a serious purpose: challenging white stereotypes of Indians."[50] Although Ataloa's methods may seem counterintuitive today, Indian play creatively negotiates between romantic stereotypes and Native cultural production. In the Bacone student paper, Ataloa and her students wrote articles criticizing "simplistic stereotypical portrayals of Indianness" and "attempted to convince white audiences that 'Indians are not all alike.'"[51] Native Americans used Indian play to achieve collective and personal goals within systems established to eradicate and/or celebrate the eradication of Native people and culture. They deployed stereotypes within specific performance contexts in order to criticize and challenge those stereotypes in the margins and intertexts connected to those contexts, such as backstage interactions, pamphlets and lectures, publicity, and offscreen performances. While Wild West shows, the Bacone Girl's Glee Club, and Native film workers in Hollywood are different performing contexts, all three resulted in remarkably similar responses by the Native performers: in each, Native performers appealed to popular romantic images of Native Americans to attract white audiences, but used the attention they received to improve their own circumstances by criticizing those same performances in other media texts.

Such negotiation can also be seen in a work of publicity regarding Chief Many Treaties and the film *Buffalo Bill* (1944). The name "Many Treaties" is a noteworthy aspect of his persona, which was unique among the major film "chiefs" because his name could be read politically and was not based on an aspect of nature. "Many Treaties" suggests that the chief was experienced in negotiations that resulted in treaties—appropriately, Chief Many Treaties served as a spokesperson for the local community of Native film workers—and simultaneously recalls the history of broken treaties between the US government and Native nations. The name's allusion to historical injustice was not lost on studio publicists. A newspaper article that highlights Many Treaties was adapted from the film's pressbook and published on Christmas Day in 1943. Titled "New Film to Offer Indian Oration," the article describes his involvement with the film in political and legal terms, noting that "the case of the American Indian against Buffalo Bill and other frontiersmen is given free expression in 'Buffalo Bill,' which 20th

Century-Fox is making." The article draws a direct parallel between his name and his oration: "A Blackfeet Indian, Chief Many Treaties makes the charges which are based on the white man's perfidy in breaking treaties and his wanton slaughter of the buffalo, which was food, clothing and housing to the plains Indian."[52]

As with much of the publicity related to these actors, the article focuses more on actor than film. We do not really know what *Buffalo Bill* was necessarily about from reading it, but it does provide insight into Many Treaties' persona. We learn that *Buffalo Bill* was a massive production and featured "five thousand extras including three Indian tribes."[53] That Many Treaties was selected to be a significant part of the film's publicity, and that this publicity credits him with being an advocate for Native American causes, suggests that his public persona influenced how his performance in the film was framed by studio publicity to be read by its targeted audience of moviegoers. Like this example, many publicity articles concerning Native actors challenge the thematic content of the film it was created to advertise. The onscreen depiction of Many Treaties, as with other Native film workers in Hollywood, was largely regressive and one-dimensional; however, with greater context, considering the information provided by offscreen texts, and knowledge of his offscreen life, his portrayal takes on greater complexity and, in this case, potential political power.

As with many publicity works regarding Native actors, this article functions both progressively and regressively. The closing comment is not only frustrating, but also shades the meaning of the entire piece: "the Chief's points are very well taken, but it is doubtful if the many movie fans will understand it. He delivers the charges in the language of the Cheyenne tribe."[54] Many Treaties is credited with being able to speak a specific Indigenous language onscreen (though not his own), yet this also means his English-speaking audience is unaware of the political nature of his onscreen performance. A more cynical reading is that this final sentence is intended to be a joke, as was the practice in many publicity articles: that the famously inarticulate "Hollywood Indian" is actually giving a fine speech, but one lost on his non-Native audience.[55] Regardless of the tone of the actual film, audiences would not know the content of Many Treaties's speech without the publicity article as an intertext.

Negotiating Studio Publicity

Casting Native actors in Indian roles afforded studios promotional opportunities because "authenticity" was a significant selling point in film publicity during the 1930s.[56] Publicity could not only advertise a studio and its films, but also serve as public relations for the entire industry and demonstrate its usefulness to the nation.[57] Discourses concerning films' "authenticity" allowed the industry to suggest it had done important historical research and provided viewers with at least some educational value. Monogram's *King of the Stallions* advertised "Indians in real life" and that Yowlachie specifically lent "authentic realism" to the film, a point that appears to have influenced the *Los Angeles Times* reviewer, who wrote "the Indian lore is deeply interesting and probably authentic."[58] In addition to advertising authenticity, another pressbook article for the same film highlights the powerful resources of Hollywood's

casting agencies. Noting the presence of Yowlachie, Many Treaties, and Rolling Cloud, it advertised "more than 30 tribes are represented in the picture, and the cast virtually amounts to an Indian Congress of Nations. Illustrating again that Hollywood can assemble a cast of practically any nationality on a few hours' notice."[59]

Publicity such as this was double-edged in influencing audience reception. It risked endorsing the films' stereotypical representations as truthful, but it may also have introduced a reasonable element of doubt: if some films are authentic, then others are not. Publicity for films that offered "authentic" Indians would call attention to the fact that too often, Indian roles were played by actors of other races. An article regarding the 1936 version of *Ramona* noted that it sought the assistance of Jim Thorpe and Luiseño actress Gertrude Chorre to cast three hundred "real Indians" for the film, noting that this decision ended up being cheaper than the standard practice of putting "Indian makeup on 300 white extras every day."[60] Additionally, these articles elevated the profiles of Native actors, potentially furthering their careers. For instance, while mentioned in the publicity for *King of the Stallions*, Rolling Cloud went uncredited for his role as an anonymous Indian in the film, a common industry practice. That the articles mention him by name suggests both that the studio stood to benefit from advertising his presence and that his place in the film's publicity might help him with future work.

If authenticity was a frequent theme of publicity material, another was the artificial and fictitious qualities of filmmaking. As seen in the case of Chief Many Treaties, this tactic often exposed the moviemaking process and subverted a film's content. By conveying narratives about production, these stories performed a "type of demystification of film production."[61] We may assume that classic Hollywood's "dream factory" would prefer to conceal the manufactured nature of its films, but this publicity assumes that audience fascination with production is worth more than total illusion. Generally, these production stories tend to avoid unflattering glimpses into film work and labor issues. As Mary Beth Haralovich writes, "the glimpse behind-the-scenes gives the appearance of filmmaking as a job, albeit a glamorous one."[62] Clark goes further, arguing that these production narratives, while ostensibly highlighting film work, "perpetuated a discourse of stardom that trivialized actors' labor."[63] While studios welcomed the publicity these offscreen stories provided, they drew the line at publicity that revealed too much about the industry's apparatus or that might damage the financial viability of a film. Yet publicity material related to Native actors often crosses this line to draw attention to the film's artificiality. Such approaches appear to have been the result of the publicity department negotiating Native film workers' personas with their presentation onscreen.

Demystifying publicity was produced for *The Avenging Arrow* (1921) in regard to Big Tree, for example. This early article features what would become a common narrative structure in pressbook material, one that features a dramatic situation as a hook, and then a reversal that reveals to the reader the situation was manufactured and part of a day's work in Hollywood. This particular format was used in articles about Native film workers with a particular wrinkle: they would begin by describing Native actors in stereotypical settings, only to upend these assumptions with anecdotes that note their modernity. In this story, a "picture cowboy" introduces himself to Big Tree by speaking

simplistic, broken English. In response, Big Tree (who, the article notes, was a Carlisle graduate "who could tell you why Pope should have been an essayist instead of a poet") tells the cowboy to speak with "more lucidity" because "I experience some difficulty in grasping the entirety of your thought."[64] Instead of their onscreen stereotypes, the actors are presented as literate, talented, well-traveled, and involved in politics. Articles like this one demonstrate how studios attempted to balance Native actors' simplistic, often violent depictions onscreen with their offscreen personas, which were often tied to their educational lectures and social causes.

In addition to demystifying filmmaking and the history portrayed in Hollywood films, publicity articles occasionally challenged misconceptions about Native Americans in popular culture. Exhibiting the self-referential nature of some studio publicity, an article on Fox's *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) titled "Buffalo Nickel Chief Much Too Modern" recounts an insider anecdote that confronted an erroneous assumption about Native Americans. Harry Brand, the studio's "head exploiteer," approached a writer to develop a publicity column about the film based on Big Tree, saying "why . . . we've engaged the fellow who posed for the buffalo nickel." In response, the writer suggests that Brand "go out and get the guy who posed for the Jefferson nickel and then you'll have something."[65] The joke may have been a different way to present this commonly related piece of trivia, one that almost always accompanied any mention of Big Tree in publicity (that he was the model who posed for the famous coin), with the suggestion that he was not as famous as the other profile featured on a nickel. Yet the headline suggests a reading in which a writer mistakenly assumes that the coin's Native model must have been an historic figure and not a living person. Where this article challenges the conception of Native Americans as figures of the past, other articles alert their readers to differences in tribal nationalities, thus countering one of Hollywood's most egregious practices: exchanging one nation for another. A *Wild West Days* pressbook article, for example, reveals that when Johnny Mack Brown decided to learn an "Indian word" to use in one of his films, he asked a studio interpreter to "translate" the word. The interpreter replied, "which one? There are 58 American Indian languages and 400 dialects."[66]

Perhaps most significantly, publicity articles provided a significant space for actors to critique or challenge the depictions of Native life on screen, but the studios were able to exploit those criticisms to promote themselves, illustrating how the content of publicity was negotiated between actors and studios. A 1940 column for Twentieth Century Fox's *Brigham Young* profiled the prolific career of Big Tree, who had been cast as "Big Elk" after his performance in *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and also announced that the film had cast "most of Hollywood's Indian extras." In the article, Big Tree takes issue with the character and inaccuracy of his film roles: "I've 'killed' an average of 600 men and women a year in movie work . . . this has always pained me. My people never were as bloody as the movies have painted them. They seldom were the aggressors."[67] Twentieth Century Fox not only publicized Big Tree and the other Native cast members to add authenticity to the historical epic *Brigham* Young, but also to advertise his appearance in another of their films still playing in theaters. The studio likely did not object to Big Tree's grim assessment of his own filmography in

the article's profile because it encouraged potential moviegoers to differentiate *Brigham Young* as a less violent product than other Western films.

Even as late as 1959—long after the end of studio Hollywood—an article on *Yellowstone Kelly* demonstrates that similar film publicity practices were still in use, and actors like Yowlachie were still using publicity to criticize the onscreen depictions of Native Americans and note his frustration at the roles available to him. Reprinted under different headlines, the theme of the article is signaled by one that read, "Indian Chief Longs to Sing in Movie Roles." The article suggests that while actors' carefully constructed personas were crucial for prolonged success within the industry, they could be limiting. Ultimately, Yowlachie's criticism illustrates that although individual actors could negotiate with the film industry, they could not fundamentally alter it or its biases. Noting that he had played over 120 film roles since 1926, Yowlachie explains that he had recently become upset when the film's director chose "a man with an untrained voice" to sing in a scene instead of him and despite his opera training and prestigious performance history, that "only once has his singing voice been heard by moviegoers." Yowlachie uses this incident to voice his frustration at the roles available to him: "I've been so typed over the years that directors can't see me as anything but an Indian . . . so they bypass me." Yowlachie further criticizes the integrity of these Indian roles, stating that Hollywood can "louse up" the presentation of Native Americans. As frequently done in publicity about Native actors, the article presents his critique alongside more condescending aspects: its author notes Yowlachie's "perfect English" and his attempt to be cast in a Chinese role is depicted as curiosity, rather than a sign of harsh economic necessity.[68]

For Yowlachie and his fellow film workers, representations of Native life on film were one-dimensional. Until relatively recently, the same could be said of histories of film: Native Americans have been involved in cinema from its beginning, yet Native people have been largely absent from its history. This absence can be attributed to film studies' traditional focus on the "great men" and artists who left their marks on the industry, and its focus on the film text as its primary object of study. Studying publicity material challenges both of these tendencies and allows expanded film studies and histories. Publicity material can destabilize film texts by calling attention to aspects of their production and reception. It also provides research material that allows us to tell the stories of film figures who may have left only marginal onscreen traces. In a Native context, publicity points to the complex work in which Native actors were involved within the studio system and in conversation with popular culture at large.

If the work of Native actors on- and offscreen appears to reinforce dominant stereotypes, we must remember, as Nicolas Rosenthal warns, that "condemning American Indian performers for their participation in these cultural productions or understanding them as only victims fails to understand the choices they made within their historical context."[69] To understand the actions of historical Native film workers, we must contextualize how they utilized the opportunities available in a highly regulated and hierarchized industry. Publicity and offscreen performances are important methods for understanding how they negotiated their careers in film and intervened in the industry as best they could.

NOTES

1. Michelle H. Raheja, "Reading Nanook's Smile," in *Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching, and Theory*, ed. M. Elise Marubio and Eric L. Buffalohead (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 71.

2. Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 502.

3. Mark Stuart Miller, "Promoting Movies in the Late 1930s: Pressbooks at Warner Bros.," PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1994, 311, 211.

4. Donald Kirkley, "Reasonable Injuns Study Ballistics," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 19, 1937.

5. For one such example, see Richard A. Maynard, *The American West on Film: Myth and Reality* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Company, 1974), 84.

6. Mark S. Miller, "Helping Exhibitors: Pressbooks at Warner Bros. in the Late 1930s," *Film History* 6, no. 2 (1994): 188–96, 188.

7. Paramount Pictures, "*North West Mounted Police* Pressbook (1944 Reissue)," Margaret Harrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Pictures Press Sheets: Releases Season 1944–1945, Group A-4, 2.

8. Miller, "Promoting Movies," 81.

9. Ibid., 251, 256.

10. Ibid., 254.

11. Miller, "Promoting Movies," 291. James Cagney, for example, sued Warner Bros. over pressbook material for *Ceiling Zero* (1936), arguing the material violated aspects of his contract.

12. See Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 20–22.

13. This issue was so important to studios that it instituted the AAC a year before its self-regulating "Production Code" that banned certain objectionable film content. See Mary Beth Haralovich, "Motion Picture Advertising: Industrial and Social Forces and Effects, 1930–1948," PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984, 17–21.

14. Ibid., 110.

15. Ibid., 224.

16. Ibid. Notably, the AAC rejected as false advertising Howard Hughes's campaign for *The Outlaw* (1943), which claimed to be screened "exactly as filmed—not a scene cut."

17. *North West Mounted Police* Pressbook, 3–4, 6.

18. Find A Grave, "Chief John Big Tree (1877–1967)," https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/39318290/john-big_tree; Find A Grave, "Chief Yowlachie (1891–1966)," https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/6662805/chief-yowlachie.

19. Alvin Deer, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, January 12, 2017; Kogee Thomas, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, May 21, 2017.

20. Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

21. Danae Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood: The Cultural Politics of Actors' Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 12.

22. For example, Rolling Cloud served as the Vice-President of the Indian Actors' Association and was involved in picnics that acted as gatherings for Native Americans and Oklahomans living in the Los Angeles Area. See "Picnic and Reunion Held by Indian Screen Actors," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1938; "Oklahomans Plan All-Day Reunion," *The Van Nuys News*, May 30, 1949.

23. "*Where the North Begins* Pressbook," (1947), Margaret Harrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Janus Barfoed collection, 2.

24. Guy Barefoot, "Who Watched That Masked Man? Hollywood's Serial Audiences in the 1930s," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 31, no. 2 (June 2011): 167–90, 179, https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2011.572604.

25. Ibid., 181.

26. "*The Law Rides Again* Pressbook" (Monogram Pictures, 1943), Margaret Harrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Ken Maynard f.5552, 4; "Newspaper Ads Still Lead, Says Gillham," *Showmen's Trade Review*, January 27, 1945; "Red Fork Range," *Moberly Monitor-Index*, January 24, 1931.

27. Miller, "Promoting Movies in the Late 1930s," 217–18.

28. Ibid.

29. Quoted in Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*, 22.

30. Haralovich, "Motion Picture Advertising," 3.

31. "Indian Chief Longs to Sing in Movie Roles," *The Times* (Shreveport, LA), May 17, 1959; "Warriors Honor Namesake of Chieftan," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 29, 1928; "Heap Good Stunt," *Showmen's Trade Review*, December 14, 1949, 8; "Jim Thorpe Goes East on Bond Drive," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1944; "Meet Chief Sitting in the Dugout Bull," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1938.

32. "7500 Buy Tickets for Willkie Rally," *Santa Ana Register*, October 25, 1940; "Thomas Consults Indians Here on Tribal Problems," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1936.

33. Erskine Johnson, "In Hollywood," *The Portsmouth Herald*, May 23, 1949; Hedda Hopper, "Many Stories Planned for Clark Gable," *The Times* (Shreveport, LA), June 6, 1944.

34. Kaspar Monahan, "Show Shops: Here and There in the Theater," *The Pittsburgh Press*, June 5, 1947.

35. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 5.

36. Ibid., 4.

37. Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*, 12.

38. Ibid., 11.

39. Ibid., 12.

40. Philosopher Stanley Cavell uses Humphrey Bogart to illustrate this point: "'Bogart' means 'the figure created in a given set of films'. . . Humphrey Bogart was a man, and he appeared in movies both before and after the ones that created 'Bogart.'" For Cavell, the actor and the cumulative effects of their roles, especially iconic roles, create a "presence" for the audiences. This presence is a collaborative creation, as suggested by Cavell's title "Audience, actor, and star," because one does not exist without the other two. The vital word in Cavell's short chapter on actors is "creation," a form of continual labor. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 28.

41. Clark's study, like the majority of studies on actors, focuses primarily on stars, yet hopes to eventually move from star to "actors' studies"; see *Negotiating Hollywood*, 121.

42. Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 172.

43. Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows: From Buffalo Bill to Euro Disney* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 10, 53.

44. Dan Crumley, "Indian, in Bed for 5 Years Receives TV Set from Club," *The Lawton Constitution*, April 5, 1956.

45. McNenly, 10.

46. McNenly, 79.

47. Kiara M. Vigil, *Indigenous Intellectuals: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the American Imagination 1880–1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 267; "World War I Selective Service System draft registration cards, 1917–1918, Item 5, Washington Indians, Prisoners, Insane, In

Hospitals, Late Registrants, A–Z," image 1026, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB7-2M1?i=1025&cc=1968530; Charles Bruner, interview by Helen Angwerd, CSU Fullerton Oral History Indian Urbanization Project, October 25, 1971, Westminster, CA, tape transcription by Nicolas G. Rosenthal, 2003, The Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton, CA.

48. Bacone was not a government-operated boarding school. For a discussion of the similarities and differences between Bacone and other Indian schools, see Linda K. Neuman, *Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone College* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 279–81.

49. Ibid., 76.

50. Ibid., 20.

51. Ibid., 80.

52. "New Film to Offer Indian Oration," *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), December 25, 1943.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. The nature of this article may have had its roots in an earlier, more critical version of the film. Reportedly, "William Wellman [and] Gene Fowler decided to write a screenplay about the 'fakiest guy who ever lived.' After the two had butchered Cody on paper, they decided, 'you can't stab Babe Ruth . . . you can't kill any of these wonderful heroes . . . Buffalo Bill is a great figure and we cannot do it,' so they burned three months' work and started over." See Sandra K. Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on the Silver Screen: The Films of William F. Cody* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 160.

56. Miller, "Promoting Motion Picture Advertising," 102.

57. Haralovich, "Motion Picture Advertising," 1.

58. "King of the Stallions Stars in Film," *Mount Carmel Item*, October 7, 1942; "Indian Film Engaging," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1942.

59. "*King of the Stallions* Pressbook" (Edward F. Finney Productions, 1942), 2, Margaret Harrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Dave O'Brien Pressbooks f.55564.

60. "Gaunt Variety Scarce," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 17, 1936. For more on Choree, see Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 29.

61. Haralovich, "Motion Picture Advertising," 3.

62. Ibid.

63. Clark, *Negotiating Hollywood*, 75.

64. "Heap Big Surprise," *Altoona Tribune*, April 6, 1921.

65. "Buffalo Nickel Chief Much Too Modern," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 5, 1939.

66. *Wild West Days* Pressbook, 3, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Pressbooks f.5601.

67. "Indian Extras, Chief Hired," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 23, 1940.

68. "Indian Chief Longs to Sing in Movie Roles."

69. Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 47.