

MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN POPULAR CULTURE

by

Jeffrey Miller

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, Florida

May 2014

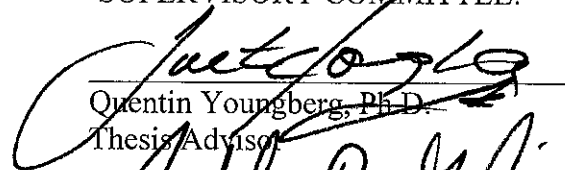
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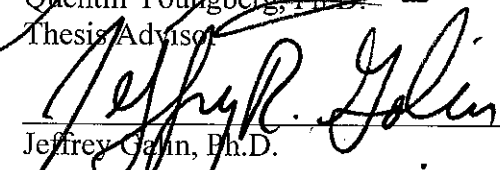
Jeffrey Miller

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Quentin Youngberg, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

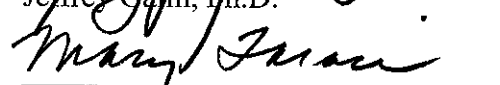
SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:



Quentin Youngberg, Ph.D.
Thesis Advisor



Jeffrey Gann, Ph.D.



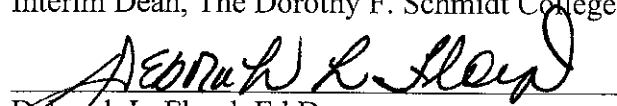
Mary Faraci, Ph.D.



Eric Berlatsky, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of English



Heather Coltman, DMA.
Interim Dean, The Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters



Deborah L. Floyd, Ed.D.
Interim Dean, Graduate College

April 8, 2014
Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Dr. Quentin Youngberg for guiding this thesis to completion. The author is also grateful for the assistance of Dr. Jeffrey Galin and Dr. Mary Faraci. This thesis would not have been possible without the constant support and encouragement of all of my family and friends. In particular, I would like to thank my loving wife, Tara Miller, who always believes in me.

ABSTRACT

Author: Jeffrey Miller
Title: Minority Representation in Popular Culture
Institution: Florida Atlantic University
Thesis Advisor: Dr. Quentin Youngberg
Degree: Master of Arts
Year: 2014

This thesis focuses on the continuous misrepresentations that appear throughout different outlets of popular culture and the negative impacts of these misrepresentations. In the first chapter, the focus will be on the films *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Mission* and the origins and implications of the misrepresentation of Indians in film. The second chapter uses rap music videos such as 50 Cent's *In Da Club*, Nelly's *Tip Drill*, LMFAO and Lil John's *Shots, Where Da Hood At*, Tupac's *Hit 'Em up*, and N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* as primary texts to demonstrate the one dimensional and problematic representations of African American Identity in the rap music industry. The third and final chapter uses the video games *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Gun* as examples of the negative representations that occur and are repeated quickly in the rapidly improving world of video games. While the misrepresentations are achieved and perpetuated differently in each medium, their ubiquitous presence in popular culture calls for discussion.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, the phrase popular culture comprises the aspects of culture that are aimed at and consumed by the broadest and most general part of the population. As a result, there are aspects of popular culture that are ubiquitous throughout all of the various forms of popular culture including film, rap music videos, and video games. In fact, throughout these three forms of popular culture, there is a consistent problem with the way that the racial Other is portrayed and represented. These misrepresentations exist for a number of reasons. First of all, the representations are usually misrepresentations that pose as reality. These representations seem to be realistic based on the viewing and game playing experience. Furthermore, the misrepresentations are given credibility because they are based on earlier misrepresentations in literature, film, or video games. For example, Michael Mann 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans* was influenced by the representations in the 1936 film *The Last of Mohicans* which in turn was influenced by the character descriptions in James Fennimore Cooper's novel of the same name. Another reason that the misrepresentations continue to appear in popular culture is due to the fact that the people creating films, music videos, and video games are often not members of the groups being misrepresented. While a film may cast Indian actors or a rap music video may contain an African American rapper, there is rarely complete involvement by the misrepresented group in terms of writing, production, performance, and development. The seemingly realistic misrepresentations then become the expected image of the Other.

The seemingly realistic misrepresentations then become the expected image of the Other by the consuming population which include members of the misrepresented group. For example, rap music videos teach young African American men about what it means to be and how to be an African American man. Once the misrepresentation has been established as profitable and commercially viable, they will be repeated as long and as quickly as possible. As technology improves, new films, music videos, and video games are released faster and across an increasing number of platforms for easier consumption. Consequently, the misrepresentations of the racial Other are being produced and spread at a faster rate than they can be properly examined and studied for inaccurate and possibly harmful depictions. This only further solidifies the misrepresentations as a realistic image of the racial Other to the mass audience at which all forms of popular culture are aimed.

There is a consistent problem with the way that the racial Other is being portrayed throughout popular culture. These misrepresentations are usually the result of the creators of the various forms of popular culture relying on previously established representations which are often inaccurate rather than involving or consulting members of the represented group for more responsible portrayals. While the experience of viewing a film, watching a music video, and playing a video game are different, there are similarities with how the misrepresentations of the racial Other are created and why they are proliferated to the consuming public. Popular culture will reuse and recycle strategies that prove to be profitable for as long as they continue to be. A consequence is that misrepresentations will continue to be released as long as they are part of a profitable film series or style, rap music video category, or video game franchise.

The first chapter will focus on the representation of the racial Other in film, specifically the way that Indians are portrayed in the films *The Mission* and *The Last of the Mohicans*. Laura Mulvey, in her article “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” examines the images and behaviors of female characters in film. She explains that the female characters in film are confined to occupying secondary roles which are usually passive and sexualized. Mulvey’s ideas on how femininity is depicted in films can be expanded to investigate how the image of the racial Other is similarly displayed. Once the theory has been expanded, a close look at the films *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Mission* provides an opportunity to determine how the misrepresentations of the racial Other are created in film and how those misrepresentations then become the predominant image of the Other to the consuming public. While these two films, and the corresponding discussion on them, are concerned with the image of Indians in film, the conclusions can be extrapolated and applied to other minority groups in film as well as across the different forms of popular culture.

The second chapter expands on the ideas introduced in the first chapter by analyzing rap music videos. Pop music in general, and rap music videos specifically, are created using a format that has already proven to be commercially successful. The rap video creators operate within these profitable formulas in order to entice the largest possible viewership for the music itself as well as the advertisers that support the television stations and websites that play the rap music videos. In his documentary, *Dreamworlds 3*, Sut Jhally examines how music video producers tap into the desires or “dreamworlds” of the consumer in order to ensure repeat viewings (*Dreamworlds 3*). Rap music and videos can be mostly categorized into three main types of songs which are

party, ganster, and socially conscious rap songs (McQuillar 25). Typically, the party and gangster rap videos are the ones that appeal to the dreamworlds of the viewer. These types of videos present a one dimensional view of African American identity. African American men are primarily portrayed as gangsters or drunken partiers while female African Americans exist only as sexual beings. These underdeveloped representations create a dichotomy in the viewing audience. The Caucasian audience is able to adopt the style and language of the African American identity that is presented in the rap music videos without ever experiencing the reality. In addition, African American viewers internalize what they see in the videos, essentially learning about their own identity as African American through one dimensional portrayals in music videos that are often created wholly or at least in part by people who are not part of the racial Other being represented, in this case African Americans. These images and representations will continue to be used in rap music videos until they are no longer profitable as is the case in all representations in all forms of popular culture.

The third chapter applies the ideas introduced in the first two chapters into the world of video games. Video games offer the participant a unique experience in which they are able to engage in the world of the Other in an active way, through the immersive experience of playing the game, while always remaining at a safe distance from the actual reality of the racial Other being portrayed. Games like *Gun*, which contains Indian characters in secondary roles, and *Grand Theft Auto III*, which contains stereotypical depictions of Chinese, Japanese, Hispanic, African American, Colombian, Jamaican, and Haitian characters primary in villainous roles, present the representations of the characters as realistic to enhance the gaming experience when the representations are in

fact inaccurate and potentially harmful. Because of the immersive experience, video games are intended to feel realistic while they are being played. Game developers achieve the realistic feeling by using previously established representations from earlier literature, films, and music videos which are often misrepresentations. The video game player accepts the representations as accurate because they reaffirm previously established misconceptions from other avenues of popular culture as well as earlier video games. Finally, video games are often franchised and serialized in order to maximize profitability. Like Hollywood's recent obsession with sequels and franchises, video games series are often updated as quickly as possible to keep consumer interest high. Variations of the same games are produced and reproduced for as long as there is a profit to be made.

Film, music videos, and video games are just three of the various forms of popular culture that society consumes on a daily basis. Each form has a unique viewing or playing experience which help shape the representation of the racial Other. Concurrently, there are commonalities with regards to representation in all forms of popular culture. These similarities that exist in film, music videos, and video games can also be extended to other forms of popular culture.

CHAPTER 1: VISUAL PLEASURE AND THE CINEMATIC INDIAN

In her article, “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to explain why female characters in films are often passive, sexualized, and secondary. The role of hero is reserved for the male. The same approach can be used when dealing with representations of the racial Other in film. In order to do so, Mulvey’s “male gaze” must be changed to the “imperial gaze” (Kaplan xi). Mulvey’s male gaze creates the passive female characters in film. Similarly, the imperial gaze creates the racial Other through which the dominant white male characters gain “strength and identity by setting” themselves off against the racial Other (Said 25). In films like *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Mission*, the characters who are racial Others, Indians in both films, are often passive and secondary. Furthermore, the Other is often sexualized in order to further differentiate them from the lead white characters. Mulvey explains that female characters are distinguished by the unconscious castration anxiety because their sexual difference remains hidden beneath clothing. The Other’s difference is more overt and cannot likewise be hidden, though anxiety remains. When that anxiety is accounted for, scopophilia, or pleasure gained through looking, through the imperial gaze becomes active (Mulvey 27). The pleasure that the viewer receives when looking at the racial Other, or in the case of these two films when looking at the Indian characters, on screen exists because the image reinforces the idea of one’s superiority over that racial Other. Filmic representations of the Other is often a misrepresentation that poses as

reality. This misrepresentation then becomes the prevailing image of Otherness for the viewing audience who accepts the fictional narrative that they see on screen as an accurate depiction. Because pleasure is gained by viewing what is often a misrepresentation, it is difficult for filmmakers to create an accurate representation of the racial Other which can be made clear by a close look at the films *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Mission*.

Mulvey explains that the viewing audience, though consisting of males and females, goes through a process of masculinization (29). In a similar way, the audience must then also go through a process of imperialization. Despite the actual background of the individual viewer, the entire audience adopts the imperial gaze. So in essence, if Frantz Fanon were watching the situation he describes in *Black Skin, White Masks* where a white girl points out that he is a “Negro” and she is “frightened” by him, he as a viewer would identify with the little girl (Kaplan 7). The imperial gaze when forced on the colonized viewer should cause a sensation that W.E.B. Du Bois would describe as “looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Kaplan 8). However, the nature of the cinematic experience, when performed correctly, makes such self-awareness extremely difficult. The point of film is to convince the audience to take on the reality of the characters on screen. In order to do so, a common gaze, in this case the imperial gaze, must be adopted.

In films like *The Mission* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, the minority characters, Indians in both of these films, are passive because of the imperial gaze that the audience has adopted. The white male characters are the active participants in the plot. Characters, like Nathaniel, Roderigo, or Fr. Gabriel advance “the story, make things happen”

(Mulvey 20). The existence of the Indians in these two films has little to do with the storyline itself. At best an Indian character's importance is what he "provokes" or "inspires in the hero" (Mulvey 20). *The Mission* demonstrates this point throughout the film. In the film, the viewer watches as two vastly different men, Roderigo Mendoza and Fr. Gabriel, interact with the Guarani Indians in a South American Jesuit mission. After the land on which the mission is built transfers from Spanish to Portuguese control, the two men quarrel over how best to help their Guarani friends. This film is about two separate responses to the brutal colonization of South America, Roderigo fights while Fr. Gabriel leads a peaceful resistance, and the ugly side of the colonization of the Americas. However, the importance of the Guarani is limited to what they inspire Roderigo and Fr. Gabriel to do for them. While the film's attempt to show how brutal early colonizers of the Americas were to the natives they encountered, the execution is hindered by the imperial gaze. The Guarani are the ones who suffer in the events of the film, but they have no voice to express their anger. Roderigo and Fr. Gabriel must fight for them. The audience naturally connects to these two European characters because they have names, a voice, and lead the action, or choice of inaction in the instance of Fr. Gabriel. While the plot may depend on the Other, in this case Indian, he is restricted from developing into the type of complete character with whom the audience can identify.

The film, *The Mission*, shows many Guarani both on the grounds of the different missions as well as in the jungles of South America. However, none of these people is given a name or a distinct personality. For most of the film, in fact, the Guarani "remain firmly in the background" (Kilpatrick 142). In one scene, a Guarani leader tells the visiting Bishop Altamirano that he "is a King," and he "will not listen" before leaving the

discussion (*The Mission*). In this one chance at agency, the nameless Guarani leader relies on Fr. Gabriel to translate his thoughts to Altamirano. Even his decision to fight needs backing by the soldier turned priest Roderigo. This is an extremely important scene in the film. Finally, the viewer is given the identity of a Guarani, but it comes late in the film. Furthermore, we do not know why this man is the “king,” or how he became king. In the end he is at least a recognizable face when he is killed in the battle protecting his people. His face is an inspiration to Roderigo to fight and Fr. Gabriel to pray, but his nameless existence highlights the fundamental issue of the imperial gaze. White colonizers decided and fought over how best to help the Guarani, just like Roland Joffe and Robert Bolt, the director and writer of the film respectively, decided how to portray the Guarani in the film.

Michael Mann’s version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, provides Indian characters, like Uncas, Magua, and Chingachgook, with more of an identity than *The Mission*. However, this does not mean that those characters are immune from becoming secondary characters as a result of the imperial gaze. The main way that their passivity is highlighted throughout the film is by their contrast with Nathaniel, the white man adopted by Chingachgook to learn the ways of the Mohicans. The story of Nathaniel is an example of what Freud calls “a family romance” where white children deny “their literal parentage in favor of a more noble, imaginary mothers and fathers” (Baird 197). Although the film does not delve deeply into Nathaniel’s pre-Mohican past, the story is still attractive since he is an example of the desire to denounce one’s heritage in favor of a more noble existence. Not only is Nathaniel a good example of Freud’s family romance, but also, as an adopted son of the Mohican tribe, Nathaniel, “as is common with

white heroes in films with Indians,” is “better at everything” having to with being Indian than the actual Indian characters, particularly Uncas and Chingachgook (Kilpatrick 142). Mann establishes this difference from the beginning of the film. After an epigraph explaining that Nathaniel, Uncas, and Chingachgook are the “last of a vanishing people,” a misrepresentation itself, the camera follows as the three men run through the forest while hunting (*The Last of the Mohicans*). Nathaniel is always slightly ahead of his adoptive father and brother who, while important in their roles as Nathaniel’s sidekicks, “remain firmly in the background” (Kilpatrick 142). The opening scene concludes with Nathaniel killing a deer in the forest. Therefore, from the beginning, Nathaniel is shown to be a better navigator of the forest, a better hunter, and ultimately a better Indian. The opening action is an example of “the hunt” as a type of “initiation ritual” though Nathaniel has clearly been a part of Chingachgook and Uncas’s lives for quite a while (Baird 200). Mann is able to use the hunt as a way to initiate the audience into the character of Nathaniel. He is a white man accepted by an Indian, and he is a better hunter than his adopted brother and father. Chingachgook, on the other hand, stands over the dead animal and says prayers in his native language while no subtitles are provided. Nathaniel the great hunter is contrasted with Chingachgook who is presented with a type of “nature-based nobility and spirituality” which is a stereotypical representation of Indians in Hollywood films (Kilpatrick xvii).

As mentioned earlier, the most important role that the Other plays in film is in what they inspire the hero to do. This results in Other characters filling the role of sidekick or foil to the hero. *The Last of the Mohicans* demonstrates Indian characters filling both of these possible roles. For example, in a pivotal scene in Fort William

Henry, Nathaniel argues with Colonel Monroe about letting the volunteer militia men leave to protect their homes and families. To support his claim that frontier homes have been ravaged by Huron war parties, Nathaniel invokes the word of Chingachgook. The problem is that Chingachgook is nowhere to be found in the scene. The word of Chingachgook is clearly valued, but it is only when coupled with Nathaniel's word that John Cameron declares them to be "Gospel" (*The Last of the Mohicans*). This highlights one of the major problems of Mann's film. The director wants the Indian characters to be sympathetic, at least Uncas and Chingachgook, but the imperial gaze prevails. All power and agency that Uncas and Chingachgook might have in the film is seemingly dependent on Nathaniel.

The scene that perhaps best highlights Uncas as a sidekick is when he attempts to kill the murderous Magua by himself. Uncas engages Magua on a cliff, but he is defeated and killed. When he attempts to establish himself as a hero in his own right, Uncas dies. A consequence of Uncas's death is that Chingachgook is provided with the necessary motivation to get revenge on Magua. Mann's film allows a heroic moment for the elder Mohican, who is able to overcome Magua and deliver justice for himself as well as Cora Munro, but that moment is tainted by the death of Uncas, a death that also means the end of the Mohican race, at least according to the film. This scene aptly demonstrates the way that even a well intentioned film can fall victim to the imperial gaze. It is not coincidence that Jacquelyn Kilpatrick discusses *The Last of the Mohicans* in a chapter titled "The Sympathetic 1980s and 1990s" (101). Mann took quite a few liberties with Cooper's novel. Therefore, it was not simply faithfulness to the source that caused the problems in representation. It was in fact the imperial gaze in action. While it is true that

Chingachgook, and not Nathaniel as in Cooper's novel, defeats the film's main villain, this small victory pales in comparison to all that is lost. Uncas and Alice are dead and the Mohican bloodline has ended. In a film where the continuation of one's family is shown to be important throughout, only Nathaniel and Cora, and by extension Colonel Munro, will be able to continue their family lines. Magua has failed in his revenge quest to kill off Munro's bloodline and his own is never reestablished.

There is another role that the Other can play in narrative film, that of the foil or villain. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, the villain is at times Colonel Munro for his refusal to let the pioneer militia men return to their homes, but the main villain throughout is the blood-thirsty Magua. It should be noted from the onset that Magua offers some justification for his anger and hatred. He blames Munro for the fact that he lost his wife to another man, even though he was in fact taken prisoner by the Mohawk Indians. Colonel Munro did embarrass Magua by having him punished for drinking whiskey (www.imdb.com). Ultimately, Magua fixates all of his anger and desire for vengeance on Munro and Munro's daughters. While action films often try to use "violence to right the world," Magua's violence is particularly hateful and brutal (Baird 202). Even though a character is a villain, the audience may find themselves liking or even rooting for that character. Such is not the case for Magua. He is shown to be almost evil from early in the film. While escorting the Munro sisters and a band of British soldiers to Fort William Henry to join Colonel Munro, Magua leads a Huron attack on the group. He is immediately shown turning on the women that he promised to protect as well as the British soldiers. Magua's first villainous deed is a stark contrast to Colonel Munro's. Munro refuses to allow the settlers in the militia to return to their homes because he needs

them to defend the fort. Magua is presented as a traitorous character while Munro is shown to be a man in a desperate situation. Though both characters are foils to Nathaniel, Uncas, and Chingachgook, Magua is the character who has worse qualities.

In case there is any question that Magua is the real villain and not a confused character in a difficult situation, Mann goes out his way in the film to graphically depict Magua's brutality. Earlier in the film, Magua reveals his plan to kill Alice and Cora Monroe, wiping out the family, before killing Colonel Monroe and ripping his heart from his chest. Now, in a film that depicts scenes of war, male bravado and threats can be expected. However, Magua actually performs the heart removal on screen. After surrendering to the French, the English begin their march to their ships in accordance with the terms of surrender. The Huron led by Magua, attack the retreating and defeated British. Magua seizes the opportunity to fight Colonel Munro. He rips out the colonel's heart and holds it triumphantly over his head. Even amidst a dizzying battle where multiple people are killed, Magua's brutality is staggering. He is shown to be the stereotypical savage Indian, a symptom of the imperial gaze. As if being portrayed as the worst of humanity is not enough, Magua is then forced to listen as Nathaniel criticizes him for "adopting the ways of the French and English" (*The Last of the Mohicans*). Nathaniel is allowed by the imperial gaze to be better Indian than the actual Indians in the films. However, Magua is portrayed as evil and is criticized for behaving like the colonizing powers in the film.

In narrative film, "the meaning of woman is sexual difference" which implies a "threat of castration and thus unpleasure" (Mulvey 21). In order to deal with the castration anxiety the male gaze does one of two possible things. The first is

“preoccupation with the reenactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object” (Mulvey 21). The second is the “complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object” which turns the possible discomfort due to the presence of the sexual difference into something harmless and “reassuring” (Mulvey 21). The anxiety created by the image of the Other on screen is more overt than the castration anxiety created by the female. The signs of the character’s Otherness, skin color, facial features, and even behaviors cannot be concealed by clothing. Despite this difference, the imperial gaze handles the anxiety by punishing or saving the Other or making them an overtly sexual character.

The first way to handle the anxiety experience by viewing the Other on the screen is by “demystifying” him and either “punishing or saving” him (Mulvey 21). It is telling that Mulvey would choose such language as punish or save in her essay as the clearest example of a type of film that accomplishes the handling of anxiety are films that deal with Christian missionaries. In *The Mission*, Father Gabriel, played by Jeremy Irons, and Rodrigo Mendoza, played by Robert De Niro, are working to help a small South American village remain free from Portuguese rule and the slavery that would accompany it (www.imdb.com). The two men are presented throughout the film as at the very least noble for their attempts to save the village, in a sense taking up the white man’s burden. However, their help is predicated on the fact that the villagers are already converts to Christianity or are possible converts. The fact that they have already been “saved” in a sense from an aspect of their Otherness is what makes the heroes interested in saving them from slavery. The Guarani in the film cannot help being “primitive” and

“innocent,” words that “indicate a lesser intelligence” (Kilpatrick xvii). The film also provides proof that the Guarani do in fact need saving. In the opening scene, an unnamed Jesuit is tied to a cross and pushed into a river, eventually falling off of a waterfall. The Guarani may be resistant to missionary work, but actions like the killing of the first priest just proves to men like Fr. Gabriel and his cohorts that they must be brought into the Christian world. Fr. Gabriel’s interest in saving the Guarani is based on their inherent humanity, but the film demonstrates this in a simple way. The priest originally wins over the Guarani by playing his oboe. Later, Fr. Gabriel attempts to convince the Portuguese and Spanish politicians who are deciding what to do with the missions that these Guarani do in fact have value and souls by having a young child sing a song. The song is in fact beautifully performed, but by showing their aptitude at western music rather than their own abilities like surviving in the jungle, the scene reinforces the importance of saving the Guarani from their own savage nature. They can and should be saved, according to Fr. Gabriel. It is important to note that even when the Other is saved or punished, he still remains Other. Even after the demystification is completed, the Other still exists, but is now a source of scopophilia for the viewer rather than causing anxiety.

In the case of *The Mission*, the film’s final scene reinforces the Guarani’s difference and Otherness. It starts with a naked Guarani child leaving the ruins of the mission to join other Guarani children in a canoe to return to the jungle. First of all, this scene demonstrates that despite their best efforts, both Roderigo and Fr. Gabriel have failed as missionaries. In essence, they have failed the Guarani, who have been forced to return to the exotic jungle. Returning to the jungle is like returning to the innocence of the “Noble Savage stereotype” which implies a simpler existence than the troubled

colonial mind (Griffiths 82). The innocence of the Guarani is exemplified by the naked children paddling away from the mission. In a film like *The Mission*, the Indians “disregard for clothing was supposedly clear proof that they were inferior and primitive” (Lent 217). Their nudity and their movement deeper into the jungle accentuates the fact that they are in fact Other and are unable to survive and live in the colonized world.

The Last of the Mohicans uses near nakedness in a different way that is also problematic. Nathaniel and Uncas wear shirts that reveal their chests and let their long hair flow in the wind throughout the film. The clothing choices made by the film’s creators and wardrobe department play into the stereotype of the sexualized Indian. In order for the pleasure to be gained from watching the Other on screen, the threat of the Other must be neutralized. One way this is done is through turning the Other into a fetish or sexualized being. The fact that both Nathaniel and Uncas are both sexualized is an interesting wrinkle in the dynamic. However, Nathaniel, because he is the dominant white character, is already the character with whom the audience identifies for reasons explained earlier. Uncas, on the other hand, is reaffirmed as an Other because of his sexual appearance.

Uncas’s sexual nature is meant to provide visual pleasure to the viewing audience and reaffirm his Otherness. His “exotic good looks are exploited throughout the film” exemplified by the emphasis that the camera places on his flowing “raven-black hair” (Lent 214-215). However, when Alice acts on her sexual attraction to Uncas, both characters are punished. Uncas is killed by Magua, and Alice jumps off of the cliff after him. Mann’s change from Cooper’s story might seem like an attempt to make a statement about the all consuming power of love, but when coupled with the fact that Cora and

Nathaniel relationship is allowed to flourish after the events of the story, the change lends itself to a condemnation on inter-racial relationships. There is no problem or punishment when Cora shows interest in the white man who has been adopted by the Indians. It is interesting that one of the changes that Man made from the novel was making Cora “all white, when Cooper’s was of mixed white and black parentage” (Kilpatrick 143). The same is not true for Alice. The imperial gaze insists that characters who are Others remain that way. In addition, they are punished for attempting to join the Colonizing peoples. It could be argued that Uncas had to die in order for Chingachgook to get his revenge on Magua and for the title of the film to be true, but there is no clear reason for Alice killing herself other than condemnation of her relationship with Uncas.

It is Auguste and Louis Lumiere who are credited with the invention of creating cinema as the type of mainstream medium that would serve as the precursor to the modern cinema experience (Whelehan 2). The French brothers attracted large crowds to their “Cinematheque in Paris,” showing simple short films that eventually led them to send “cameramen to North Africa or Indochina” in search of more “exotic scenes” from the French colonies (Loutfi 20). These short films and images were not necessarily interested in an accurate portrayal of the exotic locales, but rather served as moving versions of the “illustrations of places made popular by the current travel literature” (Loutfi 20). However, because the images were in motion, the films contained mostly “staged events” rather than the natural happenings that a modern documentarian desperately tries to capture (Loutfi 20). As a result, “images of the colonies were built in accord with the ways in which they were already perceived, essentially as a “representation of the exotic” (Loutfi 20). These “realistic” depictions were actually

fictions being marketed as reality. Purporting to be realistic was adopted by narrative mainstream cinema and still exists today. The misrepresentation of the colonies that existed in the early films by pioneers like the Lumiere brothers continues in modern cinema. The representations, or misrepresentations, that appear on the big screen often create images of the Other in the minds of the viewing public that dominate the way they perceive cultures and peoples with whom they have no immediate contact.

The original uses of film for commercial reasons show that the appearance of realistic depictions is more important than actual realistic representations. This fact, coupled with the imperial gaze, causes the audience, who as a whole has been imperialized regardless of individual ethnic background, to accept the images they see on screen as fact. For example, in the film *The Last of the Mohicans*, the history of the actual attack on Fort William Henry is exaggerated for cinematic effect. In fact, after the surrender of the fort, “French-allied Indians” did in fact kill “some soldiers,” but they were mostly “after prisoners and booty” which they had been denied by the French (White 85). There was no assault on Colonel Munro by an angry Indian like Magua. In fact, Munro “never witnessed the brief attack and probably never witnessed the brief attack on the rear” (White 85). Unfortunately, an unknowing viewer would take the battle and aftermath as rooted in historical accuracy, especially when so much attention is paid to recreating the dress and landscape of the period, or at least the perceived dress and landscape of the period.

Now, by extension, something as seemingly small in importance, like the title of the film, can cause serious misconceptions. The title, *The Last of the Mohicans*, implies that following the events that appear on screen, only one Mohican remains. Mann

attempted to make a film that was sympathetic to Indians, but “the one direct statement about Native Americans is that they are doomed to vanish” (Kilpatrick 142). This is reinforced by Chingachgook final speech, which strangely is the first time he speaks English in the film. Just before the credits roll, Chingachgook, while praying over his dead son’s body, says

“Great Spirit. Maker of our life. A warrior goes to you, swift and straight as an arrow shot into the sun. Welcome him. And let him take his place at the council fire of our people. He is Uncas, my son. Tell them to be patient, and ask death for speed. For they are all there but one. I, Chingachgook, last of the Mohicans”

(The Last of the Mohicans).

Unfortunately, this closing speech is simply not true, though most viewers would probably assume that it is. The Mohican tribe is now located on a reservation in Bowler Wisconsin which contains a casino, museum, and campgrounds (www.mohican.com). Clearly, the fictional Chingachgook was not the last Mohican Indian as the tribe operates a website offering plenty of information on all of the activities and ventures that the tribe does on the reservation. So then why allow the film to end with the idea that Chingachgook is the final member of his tribe? In Mann’s film, Chingachgook laments the death of his son, but welcomes the changing landscape of his homeland. The fact that the colonists will eventually conquer the entirety of the continent seems inevitable, and Chingachgook seems to be at the very least accepting of that fate.

When discussing *The Last of the Mohicans*, it is necessary to account for the fact that it is an adaptation of the James Fennimore Cooper novel of the same name. As stated

throughout the paper, Michael Mann made numerous changes to the story to make his own version more of an adventure love story. However, the backbone of Mann's film is still the novel which contained many misconceptions and misrepresentations in its pages. In a criticism of the author and his novel Mark Twain said "Cooper's gift in the way of invention was not a rich endowment" (White 83). Therefore, one of the original descriptions of Indian in literature is from a man with a somewhat limited imagination. Furthermore, this description, while applying to a certain tribe of Indian, has influenced the way that all Indians have been portrayed in literature and film. Even though "Cooper's work has been purported to be sympathetic to the Indian," his shortcomings as a writer and inability to completely make clear the differences between individual tribes as well as three-dimensional characters is a problem that has been recreated since his first Natty Bumppo story (Kilpatrick 3). Whether the writer or filmmaker is simply using the descriptions that he has already seen and recreated them because he thinks those descriptions are accurate, or he purposely looks to undermine those descriptions to show how lacking they truly are, all subsequent representations of Indians in the Americas are in some way a response to Cooper's original misrepresentation.

The titular character in *The Last of the Mohicans* is played by Russell Means who is an Ojibwa/Lakota Sioux Indian. In fact, portraying Chingachgook was Russell Means's first foray into Hollywood film. Before becoming a Hollywood actor, Means was "an early leader of the American Indian Movement" (Oyasin 2). He even led "the 71 day armed takeover on the sacred grounds of Wounded Knee" showing his devotion to American Indian rights. His charisma and passion provided him the necessary tools to become a leading advocate for Indian rights. So how could the former leader of AIM

portray one of the original examples of Indian misrepresentation? As stated earlier, Michael Mann's version of *The Last of the Mohicans* was made with the intention of representing Indians in a positive and respectful manner. In an interview with The Mohican Press, Russell Means explains that Michael Mann casted him because Means personified what Mann thought "Chingachgook's character personified" because of what he did in "the American Indian Movement" (Mohican Press 1). However, despite the good intentions of both director and actor, the film still reinforces misrepresentations of Indian because of the imperial gaze. Means insists that "the principle Indian characters were given three dimensional roles" in the film, but he neglects to mention why those roles seem to fit into early characterizations and stereotypes (Mohican Press 1). *The Last of the Mohicans* may not be overtly racist, but it does still perpetuate misrepresentations of Indians to the viewing audience. Lastly, the fact that "only Indians play Indians" in today's films does not necessarily mean that those characters are being responsibly represented in the films. The Imperial gaze is such a constant and powerful part of the cinema-going experience that even a prominent activist for the American Indian Movement overlooks the negative aspects of the films in favor of the small gains that the film makes for Indians. He has internalized the imperial gaze to the point that he ignores or does not even see the negative aspects of films like *The Last of the Mohicans*.

By extending Laura Mulvey's idea of the male gaze to apply to the way that the Other is portrayed in film, we can see how the Other is often passive, overtly sexual, and misrepresented. In order for the audience to have the pleasure of the viewing experience, the Other is made to be passive by contrasting him with the colonial male characters. These contrasts are highlighted through actions, clothing or the lack there of, and the plot

itself. The films, *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Mission*, provide strong examples of how the imperial gaze affects Others, in this case Indians, in film. It is true, however, that these films have positive aspects. Both films use Indian actors to play Indian characters, for example. *The Last of the Mohicans* even allows for some background to the Indian characters to be more three-dimensional. *The Mission* fails in this regard. These misrepresentations are repeated in most films portraying the Other and therefore form the basis for the audience's impression of the Other actually is. Even the best of intentions by filmmakers can lead to films that misrepresent the Other. Perhaps the only way to help ensure more realistic representation is by furthering the involvement of people who are members of the minority. By finding actual people to help form your film instead of basing your depictions on earlier misrepresentations, you can come closer to an accurate portrayal of Otherness. The Imperial gaze is still active, though. There is a possible problem that the audience, who has been imperialized as a whole, will reject the accurate representation because they expect the misrepresentation that has been reinforced through film, literature, and other forms popular culture.

CHAPTER 2: MASS PRODUCING DREAMWORLDS IN RAP MUSIC VIDEOS

While mainstream cinema often attempts accurate and historical representations of the Other, in the hopes that this perceived authenticity will result in more profits for the filmmakers, music video makers, and in particular the creators of rap videos, try to utilize the fantasy worlds of the viewers in order to attract consumers both for the music itself and the advertisers who support music video stations and websites. Due to the success of stations like MTV and VH1 as well as YouTube, popular music including rap music has developed an “undoubted cultural and economic significance” (Storey 110). By presenting the music with images of the artists partaking in activities that occur in what Sut Jhally calls the “dreamworld,” rap videos create a dangerous dichotomy between the African American and Caucasian audiences (*Dreamworlds 3*). The Caucasian part of the teenage audience targeted by MTV and their advertisers are able to watch, enjoy, and pretend to be a part of the rap world which symbolizes a type of outsider status, while remaining further outside of it. At the same time, the videos reaffirm preconceived notions of African Americans for that audience. For the audience, including the African American viewership, the videos often create a distorted representation of masculinity and femininity which then become the prevailing roles that young people desire to fulfill.

In his essay “On Popular Music,” Theodor Adorno describes the way that popular music is systematized and mass produced to ensure the largest profit. Adorno explains

that “once a musical and/or lyrical pattern has proved successful, it is exploited to commercial exhaustion,” a description that now fits the prevailing trends of popular rap videos (202). Perhaps just as problematic is the fact that listening to popular music and viewing popular music videos is “always passive, and endlessly repetitive, confirming the world as it is” (Adorno 205). The original popularity of music video can be attributed to the cable television station MTV. Advertisers such as “Pepsi Cola, Ford Motor Company, Proctor and Gamble, General Foods, Dr. Pepper, Wendy’s, Swatch, US Navy, Doritos, Honda, Miller Beer, Nabisco, and AMC” eagerly supported the fledgling television experiment (Pettegrew 490). By exploiting the trends that Adorno describes, MTV was able to succeed, playing the types of videos that their viewers wanted while delivering the “target audience” that the aforementioned corporations have the most difficulty reaching (Pettegrew 490). Normally, such a transparent ruse would be rejected by the cynical youth of the United States, but MTV was able to capitalize on a reputation and representation of cool and outsider status. Music videos showed rock musicians behaving like the party loving people of myth and legend on which most adolescent fantasies are based (*Dreamworlds 3*). The introduction of rap videos furthered this trend allowing a white audience to connect to “African American social oppression” while remaining firmly outside of the African American experience (Ledbetter 541). Rap Videos also seemed to provide an African American audience the chance to see their music and parts of their experience displayed for all to see, even though African Americans were and are rarely involved in choosing the depictions. As Adorno pointed out, once MTV, and all of their advertisers, find out what sells to a mass audience, they intend to exploit that thing

for all it is worth with no concern for the negative representations and activities that the videos encourage.

In the specific case of rap music videos, corporations and sponsors exploit the outsider appeal of the music and push the style of rap and videos that have proven to be commercially viable in order to make as much money as possible while ignoring the possible societal implications that inevitably arise due to inaccurate representations. Tayannah Lee McQuillar explains that “today, rap music is like a double-stuffed Oreo cookie with many Blacks acting as figureheads for a white governing body that ultimately owns everything” (161). These corporate entities, comprised of a non-representative and mostly Caucasian group of people, are the ones deciding what type of rap music and the corresponding videos will be produced and distributed to the consuming public. Most rap songs and videos fall into one of three categories: party, gangster, and socially conscious or message rap (McQuillar 25). The people who fund the videos, and by extension perpetuate the representations in those videos, are aware that the first two types of rap songs are more profitable than the third. As a result, party rap songs, which contain lyrics referring to drinking, smoking, and sexual exploits, and gangster rap songs, which often depict gang violence, drug use and distribution, and a negative view of the police are ever present on the radio, television stations that play music videos, and YouTube while socially conscious and responsible message rap songs are ignored. Party rap songs like 50 Cent’s *In Da Club*, Nelly’s *Tip Drill*, and LMFAO and Lil John’s *Shots*, portray women as commodities that are easily purchased and then disregarded and men as drunken buffoons who are in a constant search for sexual gratification. The gangster rap songs like DMX’s *Where Da Hood At*, Tupac’s *Hit ‘Em up*, and N.W.A.’s *Straight*

Outta Compton have videos that glorify gang violence and drug abuse. These negative representations become the prevailing view of the Other in the minds of the audience. Unfortunately, these representations are created and distributed by a non-representational group of people. Furthermore, the African American rappers are basically figureheads aiding in proliferating negative representations in exchange for a large monetary gains.

In his debut hit, 2003's *In Da Club*, 50 Cent raps about going to a dance club. As 50 Cent unleashes a chorus that glorifies drugs, alcohol, and sex over "making love," the viewer is shown images of the muscular rapper working out in a science lab, scenes that would later become part of his partnership with Vitamin Water, interspersed with a stereotypical club scene (*In Da Club*). Women are shown throughout the video. However, most of their action is relegated to dancing suggestively with men or looking beautiful and sexy next to the rapper while he performs his song. The women in this video are secondary and interchangeable, but their passivity is ignored by the teenage target audience because of the charismatic rapper delivering the misogynistic lyrics alongside overly sexual portrayals of women. In fact, the former gangster 50 Cent, brags about being "hit with a few shells" which endears him to a society of youths who idolize the dangerous lifestyle that many rap videos portray (*In Da Club*). Therefore, the audience is "being desensitized to exploitation of women while being conditioned to love and enjoy the exploitation of women without even knowing" that this is happening (Porter 7). Young African American women are presented a world in a video like this one where the only way to get attention from someone as purportedly cool as 50 Cent is to exploit their sexuality. They are "trapped in a sexual imaginary not of their own making" (*Dreamworlds 3*). The young women viewers of videos like this one have no involvement

in creating this dream world, and are therefore defining themselves using someone else's ideas and language. While *In Da Club* inspires young African American women to find value by being sexual beings for the popular rapper and gangster types, Nelly's *Tip Drill* reduces them to objects that can be purchased and easily disposed of when they are no longer wanted or useful.

In 2003, Nelly released a new album entitled *Da Derrty Versions* which contains remixes of some of his most famous songs as well as a few new tracks. One of the new songs, *Tip Drill*, has become a source of controversy for the way that it portrays women. The edited version of the video, the one featured on television stations like MTV, utilizes the same pool party atmosphere that is popular in the party rap videos. What sets it apart is the way that women are so blatantly made into commodities. As Sut Jhally defines it, a tip drill is a woman with whom "man after man can have sex with" for money (*Dreamworlds 3*). Throughout the video, Nelly and other men shower scantily clad women with money. In one instance, the rapper slides a credit card down the backside of one of the women. This shot is a close up of only the credit card and the woman's rear end. The connection between sexuality and money is explicit throughout, and especially in this moment, leaving very little to the viewer's imagination. As a result, the African American women are made to "believe that it's alright for boys and men to treat women like toys, especially if the boy or man has an expensive car and money- all she has to do is provide the sex" (Porter 9). In order to gain access to the rap video world of excess and money, young women need to be always sexually available. Again, this access is dependent on meeting gender roles that the women had no part in creating. The objectification of women in music videos has proven successful in all genres so it is only

logical that the corporations, producers, and advertisers would continue the trend in rap videos. After all, as Adorno noted, the producers and money makers involved in music simply recycle successful techniques until they are no longer useful in making money. Unfortunately, the videos portray a world where access is limited and based on the “male pornographic imagination” (*Dreamworlds 3*). Women are shown a glamorous and fun world that can only be accessed through exploiting their sexuality.

The *Tip Drill* video is a particularly controversial music video due to advances in technology in the form of websites like the popular YouTube. In fact, Nelly and his producers made an unrated cut of the video where instead of scantily clad, the women are completely nude. They partake in graphic scenes that display women kissing other women in order to please the men, both the viewers and those in the video, which is the hallmark of the dream world (*Dreamworlds 3*). This video, with its nudity and over the top sexual exploitation was banned from television stations like MTV. However, radio stations websites and YouTube provide easy access to the more explicit video. These sites are sponsored by many of the same advertisers as the television stations like MTV so the unrated videos are another way of squeezing more money out of the videos and songs. In the case of YouTube, a simple search brings up the explicit version of the video. After creating a simple account that verifies that the viewer is at least 18 years old, the video begins playing. Making the viewer sign in is not a very stringent safeguard against minors viewing the video. The website does not require a credit card or other way of guaranteeing that the provided age is accurate. Radio station websites allow even easier access to such videos, providing only a NSFW, not safe for work, disclaimer near the video. These controversial videos allow the station to promote itself and attract

visitors to their websites. While on the websites, the viewers of the video also see promotions for the station's advertisers. These advertisers are a part of the same corporate structure that dictates the content of the videos with no input with the misrepresented Other. The content of the video is therefore only important in the number of people that it brings to the website and the corresponding advertisements. Since party videos that objectify women have proven to be popular and financially successful the formula is repeated. Women will continue to be exploited and negatively portrayed as long as there is money to be made. Because of this repetition, "images and stories work their way into identity," and ultimately become the norm (*Dreamworlds 3*). By tapping into the dream worlds of adolescent fantasy, advertisers and producers are able to sell more of their products with little attention paid to what these images are doing to society in general and African American youth and teenagers in specific.

Obviously, party rap videos do not portray women in a responsible manner. Unfortunately, the depiction of African American men in these videos is no better. First of all, it is the rappers and their entourages who objectify the women who exist only in the background of the videos. This occurs even though it is the people behind the videos, directors, producers, and advertisers, making the decisions about the video's content. Additionally, the rappers and other men in the videos are depicted in a rather one dimensional way. As Sut Jhally mentions, in rap videos "black men are largely presented as violent, savage, criminal, and drunken thugs" (*Dreamworlds 3*). In the subgenre of party videos, the stereotype of the drunken buffoon or thug is exploited to the fullest. In LMFAO and Lil John's video for the song *Shots*, the rappers spend the entire video with an alcoholic drink in their hands, dancing wildly with bikini-clad women. They take shots

of Patron, a blatant case of product placement, before shooting other alcohols out of water guns. The rappers are portrayed as party-loving and sex crazed and nothing else. This lifestyle is mimicked in the real world where such behavior can have some negative consequences. Of course, these consequences are never shown or even hinted at in the songs or videos. Even the complicit rappers seem oblivious to the fact that acting these fantasies out in the real world can lead to problems with the law. D.U.I.'s and disorderly conduct do not exist in the dream world of music videos, but they certainly do in the real world. The most troublesome part of the song and video is the fact that there is an entire section of the song devoted to different types of shots. Jagermeister, Ciroc, and Patron are mentioned by name while Johnny Walker, Jim Beam, and Jack Daniel's whiskey get subtle consideration due to the references to a Three Wise Men shot. This blatant blending of the music with selling a product is the primary objective of the video. Responsible representations of African American men and women cannot even be considered secondary because there is clearly no thought about them in the making of such videos. Making money, and if possible promoting specific products, is the primary and sole reason for the videos and music. While party rap appeals to the dream world sexual and party desires of the audience, gangster rap celebrates the outsider image of the gangster lifestyle, a different part of the dream world.

Gangster or gangsta rap was born out of a time when most rap resembled the "tame heavy metal-styled anthems" of rap groups like Run DMC (Roc-A-Fella). N.W.A. may not have been the first to embrace rapping about the gangsta lifestyle, but they were among the first to popularize the style and make it appealing to a wide audience. One of their first and most popular hits was the song *Straight Outta Compton* which celebrates the

neighborhood that the group members, Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Eazy-E, and MC Ren, came from. The song, as well as the accompanying video, promotes gang violence as well as violence and antagonism towards the police. The rappers, dressed mostly in black and wearing Oakland Raiders gear, are shown running through graffiti filled streets while rapping about different types of guns and the police. The video splices these images with ones showing police officers suiting up before arresting, seemingly indiscriminately, the rappers. These visuals set up a relationship based on power and mistrust between the police and the African Americans in the video. The intent of NWA was to make known the problems of their low-income and oft-ignored neighborhood. They demonstrated to advertisers, producers, and record companies that the themes of violence, anger with the police, and drug use could be commercially viable. As a result, the gangster rap genre was able to explode and become a mainstay in the popular music scene. Now, this is not to solely blame NWA for their violent videos and lyrics, but to demonstrate that such lyrics, videos, and style could be used to make money by people who really had no insight into the world these men were trying to expose to the world.

Each rapper, in their verse, mentions guns and killing other gang members in order to make his “rep grow bigger” (*Straight Outta Compton*). In his book, *Gangsta*, Ronin Ro notes that “gun homicide had been the leading cause of death for black teens since 1969, and while the mere presence of gangsta rap was not the sole cause of escalating rates,” the casual discussions about gang related murders in rap songs “somehow made homicide acceptable” (7). The video for *Straight Outta Compton* shows many different types of guns being handled proudly by the rappers as they prepare for a day of walking through the neighborhood. They brag about the times that they “smoked”

or killed other gangsters as if it is something that is done lightly. Songs and videos like these “equated guns with masculinity” demonstrating to an impressionable audience of young African American boys that men handle their differences with violence and that peaceful medication of problems was both impossible and not masculine (Ro 7). While the group was simply trying to rap about things they knew and take advantage of a “built-in audience” of “thousand of gang members infiltrating L.A.” their legacy has become one of spreading violence and helping create a one-dimensional version of what is to be an African American male. These stories of masculinity are “tied to power, intimidation, and force,” and are “reflected in real life situations” as demonstrated by the escalating numbers of gun deaths among African American teens (*Dreamworlds 3*). This legacy is the result of the group’s financial backer’s realization that these personal topics had appeal to a wide audience. While the songs were meant to highlight the problems in the rapper’s neighborhoods, the proliferation and systemization of their message by those with the money and making the decisions regarding representations, those people who are not a part of the rapper’s world, has caused their message to get lost in a cacophony of drugs, violence, and celebration of outsider status.

NWA helped make gangsta rap popular to a wide audience. Their anger was directed primarily at what they saw to be overzealous police officers and members of rival gangs. Gangsta rapper DMX released a video for his song *Where Da Hood At* in 2003. The song and video share a sense of the anger that the earlier NWA songs did, but DMX’s anger is directed at anyone and everyone with whom he has a problem. In particular, DMX paints a cruel picture of homosexuals, especially gay men in jail, police officers, and rivals, though not necessarily members of a rival gang. There are the

obligatory mentions of guns and murder as well as images of police preparing to arrest African Americans for no clear reason. When African American teens listen to songs from the gangsta rap subgenre, they will “try and relive the colorful tales told by their heroes to escape rampant poverty and unemployment” (McQuillar 144). Even if the songs do not necessarily reflect the actual lives of the listeners, how could it, those listeners internalize the rapper’s songs and videos in such a way that the violent images on the screen will become real situations in lower income neighborhoods.

Songs like *Straight Outta Compton* and *Where Da Hood At* emphasize the importance of the way that you are perceived in your neighborhood and by your peers. They also affect the way the represented areas are perceived as a community. The young African Americans who are watching and recreating what they see in these videos are under the impression that “they will never be treated on equal footing as a man by society because of racism, so maintaining street cred becomes of paramount importance” in order to gain a sense of self worth (McQuillar 143). Like the videos that portray African Americans as one-dimensional the “criterion for gaining street credibility is so one-dimensional, there is no room for individual growth” (McQuillar 143). Living the gangsta lifestyle, as described in videos like *Where Da Hood At* traps African American identity. The images and representations recur in most videos of the subgenre because, like party rap, the formula has proven successful for producers and advertisers. There is a lot of money to be made from these dangerous representations, and those making the money care little about the damage done by these negative portrayals.

A corollary to the images and lyrics being recreated in poverty stricken neighborhoods is the emergence of middle class, suburban kids, mostly white, who adopt

the style and attitude of the rappers while remaining firmly outside of the lifestyle. They live as temporary visitors to a serious situation which only serves to widen the gulf between the people who are actual members of the neighborhoods and situations described in rap videos and those “wannabes.” The reason that these wannabes exist is that adopting the style and language of rappers provides “some tenuous connection to African-American social oppression” (Ledbetter 541). Therefore, white teens who wish to express some sort of rebellion against their parents or against their suburban lifestyle try to mimic the dress and behaviors of the rappers they see on television and the internet. In a strange way, the white adoption of rap music and culture is a way of taking the “language of an excluded people” in order “to sound more included” (Savan 365). Since rap music is in a way the “flipside to the voice of the Man,” the disenchanted youth are drawn to anything that can be described as outsider (Savan 365). Consider films for a moment. It is the police officer who breaks the rules, like John McClane in *Die Hard* or Dirty Harry, who the audience roots for and thinks is cool. It is only natural that teens looking for a way to escape the umbrella of their parents would be attracted to a musical genre that is deeply rooted in outsider status.

There are serious problems with this type of thinking by the wannabes of rap culture. The first is that rap music, like all pop music, has been so commercialized that corporations finance videos, television stations, and websites because the music is attractive to America’s youth. In fact, by stealthily supporting rap music and videos, advertisers are able to connect with “the most difficult to reach of all audiences” (Pettigrew 490). Corporations play on the knowledge that the outsider image sells and “the hip-hop black man represents the ultimate outsider” (Savan 366). By supporting

rappers and rap music, corporations and advertisers have been able to take what was once deemed undesirable, namely advertising, and making it an “acceptable part of the cool life” that these all important young consumers desire (Savan 366). So the voice of the outsider is being supported by the CEO of Pepsi, Nike, Patron, and all sorts of other companies. In the videos, the styles that the rappers champion, the shoes they wear, the cars they drive, are deliberately chosen because certain companies are sponsors of that rapper or that video.

The second problem with the growth of wannabes is that the wannabes themselves see the African American experience as something that can be easily appropriated and understood. This is a narrow view of what it means to be an African American which permeates society. The reality is that “blackness is too complex, too amorphous a code” to be treated like a mask that can be worn whenever the listener feels like it (Ledbetter 543). Because the rap industry is just that, an industry, the producers, advertisers, and rappers themselves invite wannabes to be a part of the culture as long as they are willing consumers. The tragic result is that the videos do not portray an accurate representation of what it means to be black both now and historically. Furthermore, wannabes who believe they have a true understanding of African American identity begin speaking for a people without the intimate knowledge necessary to do so. The voice that speaks out of oppression has been taken away from the originators and appropriated for a singular reason which is making money.

While wannabes only wear the external styles of the hip hop lifestyle and culture, there are people who come from the neighborhoods and situations that are misrepresented in the videos and internalize those misrepresentations. At times, even the rappers

internalize these negative stereotypes and misrepresentations to the point of causing harm to themselves and the people who idolize and mimic them. One of the most famous rappers of the last 25 years is Tupac Shakur. His early career is filled with “socially conscious songs” that “endeared him to millions of people who were so touched by the lyrics that they decided to keep on loving him long after he had moved on to harder and more dangerous tunes” (McQuillar 25). After early hits like *Dear Mama* and *Keep Ya Head Up*, Tupac switched to party raps like *California Love* and gangsta raps often targeting his rival Notorious B.I.G. Tupac, a gifted artist who also appeared in films and published a book of poetry, fully ingratiated himself in the gangsta lifestyle that he sang about in the middle and late stages of his career. After all, once gangsta rap was shown to be commercially viable, the producers pushed for more songs and videos from that subgenre. Unfortunately, Tupac’s over the top barbs at rivals and violent lyrics certainly played a role in his untimely death at the age of 25. However, his gangsta image has managed to outlive him. Rather than a warning to the dangers of a violent lifestyle, Tupac has become a type of martyr for his devotion to “the game” and refusal to back down from adversity. Because he was a “noted studio rat,” record companies have been able to release numerous albums even after Tupac’s death. In fact, the sales of his records have sky-rocketed since that day in 1995, and the people who own the rights to his songs are able to profit from the image that Tupac created and that they have sustained (www.streetgangs.com). It is important for the record companies and their investors and advertisers to keep up the myth of Tupac as an outlaw. That way he can serve as a model for other rappers who try to replicate his style, reputation, and success. Tupac is remembered in the annals of rap the same way someone like Jesse James or Billy the Kid

is remembered. His life is romanticized so that his gangsta rap style can be reused until it is no longer commercially viable. As a result, Tupac's legacy is trapped in the dreamworld and will be used continuously to turn a profit. The possible positives that could be gleaned from his tragic life and death are overlooked, just like his early message rap songs. It was his gangsta raps and death as a gangsta martyr that have survived, while his socially conscious efforts have become decidedly secondary.

In rapper Eminem's video for the song, *Love the Way You Lie*, the female rapper and singer Rihanna provides backup vocals. The song and video detail an abusive and passionate relationship. While Eminem raps, he is shown from the waist up, and in a dominant pose. Rihanna sings in between Eminem's verses sometimes shown wearing only her underwear. Her attire throughout the video is sexually revealing and meant to be titillating. As explained earlier, women in rap videos are often in the videos just to be sexually beings. However, Rihanna is a successful artist in her own right and should have a bit more agency in the videos. The most interesting part is really Rihanna's involvement in the song in the first place. Sut Jhally mentions that women who wish to become a part of the music world have to occupy pre-established gender and sexual roles. Therefore, even though Rihanna was hit multiple times in the face by her then boyfriend Chris Brown, she is aware that her continuing popularity is dependent on her appearance in songs like this one. She has internalized the music video view of femininity and sexuality to the point where she will appear in a video which glamorizes the exact type of abusive relationship that she experienced. And make no mistake, the video utilizes former *Lost* actor Dominic Monaghan as the violent lover of actress Meghan Fox to demonstrate and glamorize abusive relationships. The video seems to justify the violence as a result of

extreme passion. Rihanna, a victim of abuse, allows herself to be complicit in propagating abuse by her appearance in the video. However, this is just an example of how the negative representations in rap songs and videos are internalized. In order to continue her career and stay popular, Rihanna must continue to fit the expectations of the dreamworld even though she has personally felt the possible consequences. This cycle will continue until the videos and songs are no longer making the producers, advertisers, and record companies money.

The fact that rap music and videos are used to make money is not necessarily a problem as such. However, a problem has developed because rap videos have “focused on certain aspects” of African American culture which prevents three dimensional representation (*Dreamworlds 3*). As mentioned earlier, there is a third type of rap that is often neglected in favor the more commercially viable gangsta and party rap. Message rap focuses on social issues and provides a more realistic glimpse into the loves and struggles of certain African American communities. Interestingly, rap got its start in the form of message rap, which like spirituals and jazz music before it, was then commercialized by the majority, and used as an agent of consumerism. Message rap offers an alternative that would give African American youths more than “a stereotypical definition of who they are and what they should be” (McQuillar 138). Unfortunately, message rap is often secondary, only getting radio and video play after an artist has become famous because of gangsta or party raps. The problem is not the party and raps songs themselves, but rather the fact that the representations in those songs present viewers with so few choices in their lives.

Rap videos, namely party and gangsta rap videos, tap into the desires of their audiences in order to ensure repeated viewing. The adolescent sexual fantasy creates situations where women are overly sexual and readily available as shown in videos like *In Da Club* and *Tip Drill*. Male identity is reduced to and rooted in violence or drunken behavior like in *Shots*, *Where Da Hood At*, and *Straight Outta Compton*. The images in these videos are then repeated in real life situations, highlighted by tragic stories like those of Tupac, Rihanna, and numerous anonymous young men and women who have suffered from gang violence. Furthermore, these depictions are so one-dimensional that they offer a negative view of African Americans to outsiders while also trapping African American youths in stereotypical options for their future. This fact is exacerbated by the existence of wannabes who attempt to be a part of rap style and culture while remaining firmly outside of it. These images will continue as long as wannabes and those involved with the misrepresented communities continue to purchase the music, clothes, and products championed by the rappers. Although message rap offers the opportunity for responsible representations, these songs are often overlooked for the commercially successful party and gangsta rap songs. The sad reality is that the rappers and their listeners are subjected to the desires of producers, advertisers, and corporations who are only interested in producing the music and videos that will generate the most money. As a result, these videos will continue to be made as long as they help generate revenue for the interested parties. If and when the musical style proves to be unable to make money, the record companies and the corporations who own them will simply move on to the next big thing and give little or no thought to the damage they have done.

CHAPTER 3: VIDEO GAMES

The success of the home version of Atari's video game console Pong ensured that home gaming systems could be and would be a profitable enterprise. Though predated by the Magnavox Odyssey by 3 years, the Pong console signaled the beginning of the popularity of home video game consoles (<http://www.thegameconsole.com>). As the technology improved, there was a push for the consoles to provide games that were more realistic. John Madden, who lends his likeness to the popular Madden Football series, noted that the earliest version of the game did not have fans on the sidelines which made the game seem less real. While not integral to game play, Madden and the creators insisted on meeting the gamer's expectations of a realistic football video game and inserted stands and fans into subsequent versions of the game (www.gamespot.com). As that franchise has developed, gamers are now able to play a full season, act as a head coach, or draft and create their own franchise which allows an insight into the NFL world. This insight and the way that the NFL experience is depicted is dependent on the way that the creators and programmers wish to represent said experience. Similarly, games like *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Gun* are charged with creating a type of realistic experience for the players. The resulting representations of minority, Indian, and female characters are dependent on the choices made by the creators of the games.

Because of the nature of video games, players are allowed an interactive and temporary foray into the lives, history, and culture of the Other without ever having to

come into direct contact with the actual people being portrayed in the games. Since the situations and even the historic events in the games are created by programmers and developers who are not necessarily members of the represented people, the depictions are often a misrepresentation that then becomes the prevailing image of Otherness for the gamers. Additionally, the misrepresentations are repeated if the video game proves to be a commercial success. Popular games, like the *Grand Theft Auto Series*, are made into franchises which tend to recycle the same inaccurate and stereotypical views of Otherness as their predecessors.

In Rockstar Games's 2001 release, *Grand Theft Auto III*, the player takes on the role of an up and coming gangster in the Leone family. This third incarnation of the popular role playing series is especially important as it introduced a 3-D world where the player seemingly moves where he wants. Furthermore, the necessary missions and side games can be completed in a less than chronological order, propagating the false idea of complete player control in the simulated world of Liberty City. The truth is that the player has the choice to work his way through the story of the game or engage in the numerous side plots. However, because it is a video game, there are a finite amount of missions and jobs that the player can undertake. These missions may have multiple ways of success, but a successful result is predetermined by the Games' programmers. For example, part of the storyline calls for the protagonist, the character controlled by the gamer, to kill a member of the rival gang, the Triads. Whether this is accomplished with fists, guns, explosives, or even a car is the choice of the player. This semblance of control is ultimately moot however. After a favorable outcome for the player, who else would the gamer be rooting for if not the character that he controls, the Triad is dead and the story

continues. This guise of control helps mask the fact that the gamer is being shown images of the Other that neither he nor the Other being depicted has control over. These images are often gross misrepresentations and focus on stereotypical characteristics of the various minority groups in the game.

Grand Theft Auto III utilizes a common technique in video games where the player is subject to a short video that serves as a background to the story into which said player is entering. This particular game “opens with a series of shots of the self-reputed leaders of each gang” (Leonard 14). From the beginning, the player is inundated with stereotypical depictions of the various gangs, all of which are populated by non-white characters. The Leone Family itself is a poor imitation of Italian Mafia families seen in *Goodfellas*, *The Godfather*, and *The Sopranos*. However, it is clear from the description of the family in the instruction booklet that the Leone Family is held in higher regard than the rest of the gangsters. Their style is described as “charming, smart and traditionally well-dressed” while the Chinese gang, The Triads are simply “heavily tattooed” (Houser and Worrall 15). In the accompanying artwork, the tattoos are of Chinese characters and dragons, just to solidify the fact that the Triads are in fact Chinese. It is as if the exaggeratedly squinty eyes and stereotypical haircuts were not enough to signal the Triads as Chinese and therefore Other. The corresponding written descriptions cement the negative representations. The fact that the player is introduced to these misrepresentations while viewing an informational video beginning only adds to the problem. The player may be able to freely navigate Liberty City, but the city itself, the depiction of the characters, and the story are all decided by the programmers before the player presses the

on button. This fact, this limited freedom, is demonstrated by the video that begins the game.

In a game like *Grand Theft Auto III* where many of the characters, including the main character, are criminals, it is necessary to delve into the subtle differences in criminal behavior in order to comment on the representation of the racial Other in the game. As David Leonard explains, “when the Leone Family participates in violence, it is always reactionary and justified” while the Triads and other race based gangs “shoot at you just for driving in their neighborhood” (14). The Leone family is the standard that the player controlled character wishes to meet. They represent a romantic and correct way of operating in the criminal world while the Chinese, Japanese, Hispanic, Black, Colombian, and Jamaican gangs are portrayed as cutthroat, bloodthirsty, “ruthless and disloyal” (Houser and Worrall 15-16). This contrast between the different criminals is important because successfully completing the story of the game means overcoming all the Others. The game itself is another example of the white character being placed in “a series of possible relationships with the Other without ever losing the relative upper hand” (Said 26). After all, story based video games like *Grand Theft Auto III* must have some sort of conclusion. This game provides only the conclusion of the player-controlled character defeating all of the rival gangs and continuing the Leone family’s dominance. As long as the player is willing to attempt to beat the game as many times as possible, the white character will triumph over the Others. While there is the appearance of choice in terms of which mission you do and when you do it, the ending is predetermined and always the same. The player is never given the chance to play as a Triad or Yardy, and

thus those characters are destined to be beaten in the battle over the criminal world of Liberty City.

It can be said that these rival gangs populated by the Other lack agency and in essence a voice. This is quite literally the case in terms of lines spoken in the game and who is doing the speaking. The leading characters in the game are often voiced by major “Hollywood actors” (Leonard 13). Recognizable names and more importantly voices like Michael Madsen, Michael Rappaport, and Joe Pantoliano provided an added depth to the characters that are part of the Leone crime Family (Houser and Worrall 23). Furthermore, because these actors’ voices are recognizable, the player immediately searches his brain trying to locate where he had before heard this voice. In matching the voice to the actor, the character becomes more human, while those less recognizable and voiceless characters are trapped in their stereotypically drawn existence. Of course, the makers of the game expected the popular voices to be recognized adding some credibility to their game.

Popular video games like *Grand Theft Auto* are often franchised and serialized. *Grand Theft Auto III* is the third entry in the series, but it is the first of the popular series that contains a 3-D world where the player appears to have the freedom to move wherever they want in the game world. This new game play strategy has been reused in all of the *Grand Theft Auto* games that have been released since *Grand Theft Auto III* in 2001. There have been two all new games, *Grand Theft Auto IV* in 2008 and *Grand Theft Auto V* in 2013, as well as seven expansion games that have links to the three stand alone *Grand Theft Auto* games. The game developers behind the *Grand Theft Auto* series maintain interest in the games by releasing an expansion game or brand new entry into

the series as often as possible. In fact, the longest delay between games was between 2009 and 2013. This was also a marketing ploy to manufacture anticipation for *Grand Theft Auto V* which turned out to be a significant commercial success (www.vgchartz.com). The four year delay is a notable exception. Between 2002 and 2009, a new *Grand Theft Auto* game or expansion was released every one to two years. With new games being released so rapidly, it is difficult for scholarly research into the games to maintain the pace. Furthermore, the new games and expansions, while not recycling all the same characters, reuse the same character types. As a result, stereotypical and inaccurate representations are released quickly to the consuming public. As technology improves and the game play experience becomes more realistic, the misrepresentations of the racial Other in the game becomes for the player the prevailing image of the Other.

Each new entry in the *Grand Theft Auto* series maintains the same basic game play structure. Technological improvements allow for a more expansive and realistic setting in each new game. In an effort to keep the games fresh, while staying within the same basic format, new missions and minority groups are added. As in *Grand Theft Auto III*, the representations of the racial Other are stereotypical and inaccurate. For example, the expansion game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, which was released in 2002, received criticism for its depiction of Haitian-Americans. The plot of this entry in the series revolves around the drug trade in the fictional Vice City. The main character, Tommy Vercetti, a stereotypical Italian-American gangster reminiscent of the Leone from *Grand Theft Auto III*, navigates drug cartels and gangs in order to gain control of the city's drug trade (www.rockstargames.com). Henry Frank, the executive director of the Haitians

Centers Council, describes *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* as “a cultural attack on the millions of Haitians living in the United States” (Thorsen 1). The Haitians, who serve primarily as foils to the main character, are portrayed as “thugs, thieves, and drug dealers” (Thorsen 1). While *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* expands the world that the video game player can operate in, the game is unable to portray the racial Other, in this case the Haitian-American characters, in an accurate and responsible way. Instead, the characters are stereotypes. The Haitian-Americans in the game are thugs and drug dealers. The realistic feel of the game causes the player to internalize this portrayal as authentic which influences the player’s view of Haitian-Americans outside of the game world.

Unfortunately, the misrepresentations have continued throughout the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise. For example, in 2013 Rockstar Games released *Grand Theft Auto V* which has gone on to be one of the top 25 selling video games of all time (www.vgchartz.com). Wei and Tao Cheng are secondary characters in the game that can play an important role in the game depending on what the person playing the game decides. While these two Chinese characters, who speak only Mandarin in the game, can be integral to game play, they nonetheless suffer in terms of representation. Similar to the characters in *Grand Theft Auto III*, Wei and Tao Cheng are members of the Chinese gang the Triads (www.rockstargames.com). Wei and Tao Cheng do have more character development than their predecessors in *Grand Theft Auto II*, but they are still relegated to the role of foil to the lead character options. The video game player is not able to actually play as the Chengs or any other member of the Triad gang for that matter. In fact, the Chinese characters in the game only exist as Triad gangsters. Furthermore, as mentioned

previously, these Wei and Tao speak very little English are dependent on a translator. The translator is also a Chinese character which would seem to be an improvement, but any appearance of agency is diminished significantly by the fact that the translator is not given a name in the game. The translator is able to navigate between both main character and the Triads, but his identity is completely tied to his job. Some of the secondary characters have been given more fully developed back stories as the *Grand Theft Auto* series has grown in order to enrich the game playing experience, but the game play options and missions in the games still limit these characters' representations to little more than stereotypes.

In Activision's 2005 release *Gun*, players must navigate the harsh realities of the Wild West United States in 1880. By controlling Colton White, the player must find a way to get revenge on the man who killed Colton's adopted father, Ned White. The creators of the game intended to paint a "gritty picture of vengeance and gun play in the Old West" (Sinclair 1). What they did not intend was to offend anyone in the depiction of life at that time in history. However, The Association for American Indian Development championed a boycott of the game due to "derogatory, harmful, and inaccurate depictions of American Indians" (Sinclair 1). Early in the game, the player must control Colton as he protects a railroad bridge from attacking Apache Indians. The implication is clear. The railroad represents progress, mobility, and freedom, while the Indians are relics of a time that is almost over. Furthermore, the mission clearly states that the player must "kill all the Apaches" in order to properly secure the railroad bridge. The AAID notes that a similar call to "kill members of a specific racial group like African-American, Irish, Mexican, or Jews would never be tolerated" (Sinclair 1). Colton may not be killing the

Apaches out of hatred, but he slaughters teams of them for the money. The player must complete this part of the mission to continue the story of the game. Opportunities to scalp the fallen Apaches, for no discernible reason other than to do it, only exacerbate the problem.

Activision responded to the criticism by apologizing, but also offering two different defenses for the representations in the game. First of all, the video game production company noted the change in Colton's relationship with the Apaches as the game progresses. It is true that Colton does later help a group of Apaches escape from captivity in Hollister's Fort. However, this change is also problematic. Colton easily dispatches his captors without the aid of a weapon while the Apaches watch helplessly. An engaged player cannot help but notice how easy it is to dispose of the guards and how little the Apaches do for themselves. When it comes time for the only named Apache, Eagle-Eye, to play a part in the escape, the game falls into common stereotypes. Eagle-Eye utilizes his knowledge of the land to lead his new friend through a cave. Like in western films, the Indian's value lies in his "harmony with Mother Earth" (Kilpatrick 104). Activision is correct in pointing out that Colton ultimately acts as a friend to the Apaches, but his help is dependent on the fact that it furthers his true goal of revenge. Regardless of how he interacts with the Indians in the game, it is clear that they are meant to be secondary characters, important only for what they can allow Colton to do. Whether he kills them or saves them is ultimately of little importance to Colton and the story of the game as long as it helps him guarantee his revenge.

The game creators and producers chose a common retort to defend the portrayals in *Gun*. That excuse is they were trying to recreate the historical realities of the time. In

response to the AAID, Activision released a statement saying, “While Gun depicts scalping and killing, these actions are not directed exclusively toward any race or gender but are used against a variety of opponents, reflecting the realities of that time” (Sinclair 1). Granted, the scalping option can be used against any of Colton’s fallen enemies, but the game never explicitly calls for the wholesale slaughter of a specific race of people other than the early mission to “kill all the Apaches.” This history excuse is very problematic. It traps Indians in a vacuum where atrocities against them are part of history and therefore allowed. Feeling offended by these depictions is by extension unnecessary according to Activision and others who employ the history argument. The painful history of the Other can at times become untouchable subjects, but Indians are not allowed this consideration. While this example is specific to Indians in popular culture, the continuous use of misrepresentations that have become acceptable due to the fact that they are the only representations provided is rampant across racial categories.

In a final attempt to point responsibility away from the game creators and producers, Activision apologized to “any who might have been offended by the game's depiction of historical events which have been conveyed not only through video games but through films, television programming, books, and other media” (Sinclair 1). This statement only reiterates the fact that these gross misrepresentations have been occurring since the earliest representations of Indians in American popular culture. The fact that Activision counts an excuse equal to “well everyone else already did it” as valid for their reckless representations is an example of the overall problem. These misrepresentations do in fact exist and must be revealed if there is ever any hope for accurate and fair representation in popular culture.

Towards the end of *Gun*, the player discovers that Ned was not really Colton's father and that Colton is in fact an Indian himself. While this can be construed as a positive, Colton is more like the hybrid Indian in the vein of Natty Bumppo. When it is revealed that Colton was saved by Ned and Eagle-Eye during a raid on his tribe, he is seemingly unmoved and does not waver in his quest for vengeance for Ned. The fact that Thomas Macgruder may have been responsible for his real parents only adds more reason for Colton to get revenge. This revelation also sets up the final moment in the story of the game which will be discussed later. What is troublesome is the fact that Colton still identifies with Ned after the revelation and by extension so does the player. Ned and Colton look and act like the Natty Bumppo archetype, a white man who has ventured into the wilderness and adopted the lifestyle of the Indians. This example of "going Indian" is just another in a long tradition "occurring often in American history, letters, and media" (Baird 196). Ned and Colton are by no means the first example of the white man, or the apparently white man until the very end, being a better Indian than the Indians themselves. Nor will they be the last. However, it is important to recognize this fact and not be fooled by the convenient revelation near the end of the game. Colton does not look or act like any other Indian in the game. More importantly, he shows no remorse with the realization that he has killed many of his own people. As the AAID mentioned in their condemnation of the game, later revelations "do nothing to excuse the earlier portions of the game" (Sinclair 1).

The story of the game ends with Colton defeating the evil Thomas Magruder by causing a cave to collapse on both of them. At the last second, none other than Eagle-Eye appears to pull Colton to safety, an event that happens in video rather than player control,

before the entire cave collapses around them. This final twist would be more impressive if not for Colton's lack of interest in his Indian background. Sure, Eagle-Eye has told him an interesting story about where he came from, but it is clear that Colton considers himself Ned's son and different from his tribesman. Colton dresses like a cowboy, acts like a cowboy, and is treated like a cowboy. As a result, this final moment in the story of the game rings hollow.

While Activision defends some of the actions and occurrences in the game by citing historical accounts of those occurrences happening, they cannot explain away the differences in representation in the game itself. For example, when Colton approaches the shopkeepers in the towns he is greeted with "May I interest you in some fine goods," and "Just received a new shipment of goods. Have a look around." The lone Indian trader initiates commerce by saying, "How may I serve you great warrior?" There are clear power relationships being expressed in these encounters. Clearly, the shopkeepers in town are portrayed as equal to Colton in negotiations. The Indian trader, by contrast, resorts to flattery. Even if the history is completely accurate, though it is not, the game still creates negative representations of Indians in the form of these contrasts. Perhaps the only aspect of the game where Indians receive equal footing is that fact that Colton kills them with little emotion involved. However, the game still creates disparity in the way that characters die. In the controversial scene where Colton must "kill all the Apaches," wounded and killed Indians fall with a blood-curdling scream. Every other character that is killed dies with considerably more dignity. Bandits, gang members, and the overall villains are given the opportunity to lament their imminent demise with lines like "I've been hit" and "Oh, they got me." While historical accuracy is only ostensibly important

in the game, the creators miss an opportunity in simple portrayals like the situations described above. After all, they are simply recreating a history that has been engrained in them through literature, films, and television. However, this excuse cannot ever be tolerated, and the situation is made worse by the producers' insistence on making a clear contrast between the Indian characters and all others in the game.

Video games offer the unique experience of becoming actively engaged in the "land of the Other" (Kirkland 21). However, the representations that appear in certain popular games are in fact misrepresentations that are being repeated regularly in popular culture. The difference is that unlike film or television, the player is now actively engaged in perpetuating these misrepresentations. Since the player is able to step into a faux version of the world of the Other, the player develops opinions, expectations, and certain understandings of the Other. However, this is done through indirect rather than direct contact with the Other. As a result, the player often accepts the misrepresentations as accurate. At best, the racial Other in a video game can serve as a sidekick or almost but not quite adversary to the lead character. At worst, the racial Other exists solely on the periphery of the game, being displayed more like scenery than people until they are needed by the player. Indians are stuck in a historical vacuum where atrocities committed against them, are acceptable as a part of history. All the Other characters are one dimensional and stereotypical when contrasted with the white male lead character in games like *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Gun*. These problems can be made clear and are easily recognizable if a person is looking. Unfortunately, the games are crafted in such a way that historical accuracy and politically correct representations are not necessarily expected, and therefore not demanded. The games are meant to feel and seem real. John

Madden understood that having fans in the stands and players on the sidelines makes the football game seem more realistic. In the same way, the creators of *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Gun* intended to create world that seem real though they are not. The resulting misrepresentations and stereotypes are really of no consequence, other than providing an entertaining and worthy foil for the play, to the producers as long as the game makes a profit. The *Grand Theft Auto* series generates new games and products every year. The *Gun* team has had a more difficult time releasing a sequel, but this has more to do with programming and story than their gross misrepresentations of Indians in the game.

CONCLUSION

Popular Culture exists in the mainstream and is consumed by a mass audience. Because it is created for and absorbed by the largest possible audience, there are certain similarities that are consistent throughout the different popular culture forms including film, rap music videos, and video games. This can and does become a problem when what is being proliferated are stereotypes and misrepresentations as is often the case with the racial Other in popular culture. Film, rap music videos, and video games provide a different experience to the viewer or participant, but the image of the Other is a misrepresentation in each form. The way that the Other is portrayed is based on earlier misrepresentations such as other films, television shows, or novels, such as the work of James Fennimore Cooper. The people writing, directing, producing, or otherwise creating new entries into popular culture are usually not members of the groups being represented. Additionally, rarely are the represented groups involved in the creative process in order to achieve actual authenticity. As a result, the image of the Other is being created on preconceived notions of the Other and presented as accurate. Those within the groups being misrepresented are then learning about their own culture through stereotypical and one dimensional depictions in films, music videos, and video games. For example, an African American youth learns about how to be and what it means to be African American from rap music videos. These misrepresentations are then reproduced as

quickly as possible. Once a strategy or style has been established as profitable in popular culture, it is repeated and copied for as long as profitability remains with little regard for accuracy and possible negative consequences. Lastly, as technology becomes more dominant in popular culture, misrepresentations and stereotypes are being proliferated at a much faster rate. New films, music videos, and video games are emerging faster than they can be properly dissected and studied. As a result, images of the racial Other are being produced and consumed before inaccuracies and harmful representations can be revealed or eliminated. The misrepresentations then become the prevailing image of the Other to the mainstream audience.

Acknowledging the issues with how the racial Other is portrayed in the different forms of popular culture is just the first step in finding a solution. It is important and necessary for academics to locate these misrepresentations, determine the causes of them, and discuss possible ways of eliminating the harmful misrepresentations. At the very least, there needs to be attempts at making the portrayals more responsible in their accuracy. One way of ensuring the possibility of an accurate and three dimensional portrayal of the racial Other in popular culture is to involve the group being represented in the creative process. This means going beyond just casting Indian actors to play Indian characters. It means having Indian producers, writers, directors, casts, and crews involved in developing and making a movie that will contain Indian characters, themes, or stories. It means using experts on Chinese or Indian culture from within that culture when developing video games that contain images of people from those ethnic groups. It means producing rap music videos that would fall into the category of message rap like Tupac Shakur's song *I Wonder if Heaven's Got a Ghetto*. Involving the group being represented

can work, because it already has worked. In 1998, the film *Smoke Signals*, “the first feature film written, directed, acted, and co-produced by Native Americans,” debuted (Cobb 206).

Smoke Signals tells the story of two young Indian men named Thomas and Victor who travel to gather Victor’s father’s remains after his death. The film provides a glimpse into contemporary Indian life while following the two men on their journey. The film was “directed by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne) and written by Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene)” as a form of “cultural sovereignty” (Cobb 207). It is an important landmark in Indians in film because the binary of Indian and white is not the focus of the plot. *Smoke Signals* demonstrates “Indian people telling an Indian story” (Cobb 211). Films like *The Mission* and *The Last of the Mohicans* portray Indians as background characters, villains, savages, sidekicks, one dimensional, and seemingly existing solely in the past. *Smoke Signals* is significant in that the film is able to “challenge popular culture by creating popular culture” (Cobb 207). The film is able to critique earlier misrepresentations like in *The Mission* and *The Last of the Mohicans* by telling the story of contemporary Indians who are thoroughly developed three dimensional characters.

It is important to note that the film was also a financial success. *Smoke Signals* was produced on a budget of \$2 million dollars and has a lifetime gross of \$6,719,300 (www.imdb.com). Since popular culture reproduces films, music videos, and video games styles that are profitable, it was extremely important that *Smoke Signals* “proved that a Native American film could be commercially viable” (Cobb 226). Now that the precedent has been set, the process can be repeated. *Smoke Signals* established that there is an audience for accurate three dimensional depictions of contemporary Indians.

The success of *Smoke Signals* does not indicate that misrepresentations of Indians in film or of the racial Other in all forms of popular culture will cease. In fact, in 2013, Johnny Depp portrayed a mystical, shirtless Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*. The video game *Grand Theft Auto V* was also released in 2013 and features new characters like Wei Cheng and Tao Cheng who suffer the same representational fate as their Triad counterparts in *Grand Theft Auto III*. However, *Smoke Signals* does set an example that accurate representations in popular culture can be commercially and financially successful, especially when completed in a way that is entertaining and approachable to a mass audience. Rap music may continue to glamorize the gangsta and party lifestyle, but the recent success of songs and videos like Macklemore's *Same Love*, which supports homosexual relationships and marriage, shows that there is room for message rap songs on the popular airwaves and video stations. *Smoke Signals*, *Same Love*, and popular culture entries like them demonstrate that popular culture does not have to rely on recycled ideas and misrepresentations. Accuracy and understanding can be profitable as well. *Smoke Signals* and *Same Love* are important exceptions, but their success and popularity only demonstrate that responsible representations are possible.

The racial Other may continue to be misrepresented in popular culture for the foreseeable future, but there are ways to combat the stereotypes and negative portrayals. As technology grows and offers more and easier avenues for consumption of popular culture, it is important that popular culture is constantly being analyzed and studied in all of its forms including film, music videos, and video games. The film *Smoke Signals* demonstrates how participation from the represented groups can lead to more positive and accurate representations of the racial Other in popular culture while at the same time

remaining commercially viable. It is important to recognize projects like *Smoke Signals* for their positive influence on popular culture while also continually discussing, dissecting, and analyzing the misrepresentations that are prevalent in all popular culture forms.

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