

Western Canadian Identity and the American “Other”

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Abstract

This paper investigates the creation of settler identity in the North American West within a comparative Canada/US framework. The creation of a colonial “other” was an important aspect in the creation of settler identity on both sides of the border. It is argued that one particular image of the Native American “other,” that of the “ignoble savage” came to dominate the American imagination, while Western Canadians relied primarily on another image of the “other” in constructing their identity – the image of the inferior American. Whereas American and Canadian settlers both manipulated the imagery surrounding Native Americans to foster a sense of settler superiority, the image of the American as immoral, violent, and generally inferior to Canadians was the most persistent image of the “other” for Western Canadians. Through historical analyses of primary source material such as newspapers, popular fiction, and immigration pamphlets, and analyses of Canada/US relations, this paper explores the image of the inferior American “other” and its importance in the settling of the Canadian West.

Keywords: Canadian West, American West, identity, Indigenous, captivity narratives, colonialism

In her book, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West*, historian Sarah Carter demonstrates how cultural imagery surrounding Indigenous people in the North American West was manipulated to justify repressive measures against the Indigenous population and reinforce traditional gender roles. Central to this process was the creation of a colonial “other” that served as a foil to settler superiority.¹ An examination of the

imagery surrounding the Canadian and American West in sources such as newspaper articles, captivity narratives, and promotional literature, reveals some striking differences between the two nations when it came to creating such an other. Both nations relied on “othering” Indigenous people, and both portrayed them as inferior. However, the othering of Indigenous people in the United States relied almost exclusively on the image of the “ignoble savage,” while the imagery associated with Indigenous people in the Canadian West was more varied. Canadians not only used the image of the ignoble savage, but also those of the “noble savage” and the “incapable Indian,” which portrayed Indigenous people as harmless. In doing so, Canadians were able to demonize the United States as harsh and brutal, claiming that Canada dealt with Indigenous people in a way that was fair and benevolent, despite the fact that both nations suppressed Indigenous resistance with military force.

¹ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West*. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 11.

The imagery surrounding Indigenous people in the Canadian West was mixed, but there was one impression of the "other" that persisted, regardless of what kind of image was created for the West: the image of the inferior American. In order to foster their own identity in *their* West, Canadians othered their neighbours to the South. Often this othering of Americans involved portraying the Canadian West as a *mild* alternative to the American *Wild* West. This othering of Americans was a uniquely Canadian phenomenon since Americans rarely compared themselves to Canadians to foster their own sense of identity.

Consequently this paper argues that, whereas American identity in the West relied primarily on the othering of Indigenous people, Canadian identity in the West relied largely on the othering of the United States. According to historian Keith Walden, popular culture, of which captivity narratives had a role, has a tendency to embody widely shared conceptions and attitudes. Instead of challenging popular beliefs, popular culture tends to confirm them, telling the audience what they already know.² To some extent, the same could be said for newspapers and immigration pamphlets; these primary sources were intended for a popular audience and, therefore, can provide insight into the public discourse surrounding Western colonial identity. Using captivity narratives, newspapers, and immigration pamphlets this article compares the forging of settler identity on both sides of the border. Much historical scholarship has been devoted to explaining the creation of colonial identity in relation to the colonized. By examining popular attitudes towards Americans during the settling of the Canadian West, this paper demonstrates how colonial identities can be constructed, not only in relation to the colonized, but also in relation to other colonial powers.

Settlers in the United States drew on a variety of well-defined and remarkably stable images during and after their expansion westward. Images such as the frontier, the untamed wilderness, the ignoble savage, and the rugged frontiersman helped foster American national identity. The most important of these images, that of the ignoble savage, portrayed Indigenous people as inherently bloodthirsty and violent, providing American settlers with a convenient colonial other that justified expansionist nation-building as a great triumph of civilization over savagery. The image of the ignoble savage was one that existed in the colonial

imagination since contact, but that gained new strength with the expansion westward.

American stereotypes of Indigenous people included more than just the imagery of the ignoble savage. Its counterpart, the noble savage, which depicted Indigenous people as exotic, childlike, and close to nature, was also popular in colonial imagery and was often used by social critics as a foil to Western society. However, the American expansion westward had little use for the noble savage especially during and after the Civil War as violent conflicts between Indigenous populations and settlers increased. Since those fighting Indian Wars could not be cast as heroic frontiersmen in the great national narrative of westward expansion if they were murdering noble savages, the image of the ignoble savage became the Indigenous stereotype most closely associated with the American West.³

One of the most important means of perpetuating the image of the ignoble savage was through the press. American newspapers frequently recounted tales of Indian savagery when reporting on conflicts between Indigenous people and settlers. This stereotyping was in keeping with the national narrative of white superiority and was accelerated by trends in newspaper publishing following the Civil War. The war dramatically increased readership and stimulated competition between newspapers.⁴ The invention and growing popularity of the telegraph meant that news was sent in short dispatches that provided the "bare facts" of Indian-white conflicts with little regard for context.⁵ Such dispatches encouraged writers to fill in the blanks with common stereotypes to make for an exciting story in a competitive market. Since the conflict between Indigenous people and white settlers was most often written about, the stereotype of the ignoble savage was the one most frequently deployed. Desire to include news stories in the exciting national narrative – in addition to changes in the culture and technology of journalism – meant that the image of the ignoble savage dominated the newspapers of the American West, while other popular Indigenous stereotypes that had served the United States throughout its history reduced in popularity.

² Keith Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1982), 4.

³ John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820 - 90* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

The ignoble savage imagery associated with Indigenous people in American newspapers was nearly identical to the imagery used in American captivity narratives. Sold as first-hand factual accounts describing the abduction of noble white women by Indigenous people, captivity narratives had long been part of the American cultural landscape. Like newspapers, their purported aim was to offer a first-hand telling of events, and their readership increased with the improvement of publishing technologies. In her book *Narrative of my captivity among the Sioux Indians*, set in 1864 and first published in 1871, author Fanny Kelly casts herself as "a desolate white woman in the power of savages."⁶ Her account stands in stark contrast to earlier captivity narratives from the colonial period, where captives sometimes wrote favourably of Indigenous societies and the kind treatment they received. Kelly recounts her many trials among people she portrays as inherently violent and cruel – "creatures with whom no chord of sympathy was entertained."⁷ Drawing upon images of the ignoble savage early in her narrative, Kelly describes being led into a trap by devious Indigenous people, and then witnessing the killing of a defenceless white family. The violence continues throughout her narrative as Indigenous people, whom after having "tasted blood,"⁸ are easily provoked, and commit senseless acts of violence against women and children. For Kelly, there is no aspect of Indigenous life that does not relate to war and violence. All dances are described as "war dances," which are celebrations or preparations for war. Upon attending a feast where a dog is eaten, Kelly takes the opportunity to compare Indigenous people to dogs and then discovers that the feast was in preparation for war.⁹ Apart from their occasional departures into drinking, superstition, and gambling, Indigenous people are portrayed as having a love only for senseless brutality. This obsession with violence, according to Kelly, permeates every aspect of the Indigenous character.

Not only does Kelly take every opportunity to reinforce stereotypes of the ignoble savage, she also seeks to disprove other common stereotypes that might pose a challenge to it. Kelly recounts several times when she believed she had encountered a noble savage, only to discover she was mistaken. Early on she is convinced that those who would later take her captive are good, until she sees them kill a family and is taken prisoner.¹⁰ Women, whom she thought might fit the profile of the noble savage – the "dusky maidens of romance" she had read about –¹¹ turn out to be cruel tricksters. Children, whom Kelly thought might make good pupils, soon descend into savagery.¹² These experiences cause Kelly to lose faith in the idea of the noble savage and to conclude that "attempts to civilize have failed,"¹³ furthermore, that Indigenous people "have no kind feelings,"¹⁴ and that they only understand violence.

The image of the ignoble savage remained remarkably stable through mediums such as newspapers and captivity narratives. Following the closing of the American frontier in 1890, Americans nostalgically looked back to the settling of the West, and found other outlets for the mythology associated with it, such as books and films.¹⁵ The mythology of the American West, so crucial to American identity, relied on the ignoble savage as a racialized other, against which settlers could prove their superiority. According to Edward Said, "nations are narrations;"¹⁶ in the grand drama of America's westward expansion, ignoble savages were cast as the villains. The persistent imagery of the ignoble savage was crucial to the narrative of Western expansion and, ultimately, to the broader American national narrative.

⁶ Fanny Kelly, *Narrative of my captivity among the Sioux Indians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2005), 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁵ Matt Todd, "Identity and the Imagined West." *History* 364. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK. 19 March 2013. Guest Lecture.

¹⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993), xiii.

It worked to reinforce other popular images such as its foil, the rugged American frontiersman. By the time the Western Canadian settlement boom began, there was a very well defined set of imagery associated with the American Wild West.

An examination of Canadian captivity narratives reveals the diversity of the Indigenous stereotypes used in the Canadian West. Much like American captivity narratives, Theresa Gowanlock's 1885 account in *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* describes Indigenous people as inherently cruel and uses the stereotype of the ignoble savage. Both Gowanlock and Kelly portray Indigenous people as fundamentally ignorant. However, unlike Kelly's American narrative, the image of the ignoble savage is not the only stereotype deployed. Although she casts her captors, the Plains Cree, as ignoble savages, Gowanlock casts most of the other Indigenous people she encounters as other popular stereotypes.

In contrast to the American narratives, Gowanlock portrays most of the Indigenous people she encounters as ignorant but harmless, and in need of assistance from whites – a stereotype one might refer to as the "incapable Indian." Early in her narrative, Gowanlock encounters some "half-famished squaws begging for something to eat."¹⁷ In this case, Indigenous women are depicted as unable to provide for themselves and, in several other cases, they are portrayed as incapable of raising their children.¹⁸ Big Bear is cast as another type of incapable Indian; although a good man, he is portrayed as an incapable leader with no control over his men.¹⁹ In contrast to Kelly's imagined Indians, Gowanlock's are capable of rising above their inherently inferior state. Although Gowanlock believes there is nothing noble about the Indian character, she believes that "the Indian character is not sufficiently studied," that there are both good and bad Indians, and that there is hope for improvement.²⁰

The differences between Canadian and American captivity narratives can also be seen in the two different

versions of Kelly's narrative. In the version intended for American audiences, the image of the ignoble savage prevails, whereas the Canadian version portrays Indigenous people as docile learners who make Kelly "Queen of the Sioux."²¹

Canadian newspapers also relied on a wider variety of Indigenous stereotypes than those South of the border. Like the stereotypes deployed in American captivity narratives, these images were universally uncomplimentary, but often inconsistent.²² Like the American press, some newspapers relied on the image of the ignoble savage. Indigenous people were described as "numerous and warlike" and "constantly on the war path."²³ However, they were also depicted as childlike and simple in a way similar to those of Gowanlock's narrative; newspaper writers argued over how best to improve the situation of the "heathen" or "poor Indian."²⁴ The diversity of stereotypes can also be seen in the press coverage surrounding the captivity of Gowanlock and Delaney, in which some journalists relied on ignoble savage stereotypes while others championed Canadian Indian policy, as they felt it was responsible for the Indigenous people's respect towards their captives.²⁵

The greatest difference between Canadian and American depictions of Indigenous people can be seen in promotional pamphlets designed to attract settlers to the Canadian West. In these, the image of the ignoble savage was completely absent and readers were reassured that the Indigenous people of the Canadian West were docile and submissive. One pamphlet distributed by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, entitled "What Women Say About the Canadian West," posed a variety of questions of interest to the Canadian homemaker. Upon being asked, "Do you experience any dread of Indians," one recent settler allegedly replied, "Not in the least," and another claimed, "I had a fear of them before coming here, but have found

¹⁷ Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999), 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 44.

²² Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson, *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 48.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 92.

those on our reserve quite an inoffensive lot, and have had them working on the farm several times. They are Presbyterians."²⁶ One would be hard-pressed to find a similar depiction of Indigenous people in the popular imagery associated with the American West.

Though there were differences in how Indigenous peoples were portrayed on either side of the border, both Canada and the United States relied on Indigenous stereotypes to justify colonialism. Whether Indigenous people were portrayed as inferior subjects who were inherently violent and incapable of change, or as inferior subjects capable of change, the result was the same. In both cases, Indigenous people were violently dispossessed of their land. In the Canadian case, however, the fiction of a humane and benevolent Indian policy allowed settlers in the Canadian West to define themselves not only in relation to Indigenous peoples, but also in relation to their settler neighbours to the South. Another stereotype became ingrained in the Canadian imagination as the Dominion expanded westward – that of the inferior American.

In constructing the image of the American other, Canadians drew on a long tradition of Canadian nationalism and anti-Americanism. Although the military conflicts that had pitted Canadians against Americans, such as the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, may have seemed distant in the minds of many Canadians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was tension between the two countries in relation to more recent conflicts. American-Canadian relations during the Civil War were tense at best, with the aftermath of that conflict contributing to the confederation of the British colonies in 1867. At the outbreak of war, Northerners could not comprehend Canadian sympathy for the Confederacy, while many Canadians were not convinced that the North's motives for going to war were completely just. The capture of the British Royal Mail ship, *Trent*, and forceful removal of Confederate diplomats early on in the war was an outright violation of neutrality rights and only worked to reinforce such misgivings.²⁷ The seizure caused London to rush

11,000 troops to Canada and provoked one senior British official to proclaim: "I fear war is upon us."²⁸

Immediately following the Civil War, tensions between the two countries rose as American annexationists looked to British Columbia and the Northwest. American Senator Zachariah Chandler described Canada as "a mere spec on the map" that, if allowed to expand westward, would become "a standing nuisance . . . that we . . . will not tolerate."²⁹ Meanwhile, American consul to Red River, General Oscar Malmros, tried to convince the Métis population that they would be better off joining the United States. As American annexationists sought to fan the flames of annexation movements on both sides of the border, authorities in Washington did nothing to discourage such behaviour.³⁰ America's military force following the end of the Civil War increased Canadian anxieties.

In response to the perceived threat of American annexation, images of Americans as untrustworthy, aggressive, and generally morally inferior became more widespread in Canada. This image was not only prevalent in newspapers and books, but also proved highly influential in politics. According to historian Jack Granatstein, "the British North America Act itself was a rejection of its American counterpart," which was blamed for creating a weak central government that had led to the Civil War, as well as a type of democracy that was inherently aggressive.³¹ The values of "peace, order, and good government"³² and the powers entrusted to the Queen in the British North America Act certainly convey a different vision of law and order than the values of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"³³ and the agency of "the people"³⁴ in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution. The Canadian emphasis on the connection to

²⁸ quoted in *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ quoted in *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ quoted in *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² The British North America Act, 1867.

³³ United States Declaration of Independence, 1776.

³⁴ U.S. Constitution, Preamble to the United States Constitution.

²⁶ quoted in Bruce Peel, "The Lure of the West." *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of Canada V.*, (1966).

²⁷ J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *For Better or for Worst: Canada and the United States to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1991), 2-3.

Britain would only grow stronger with the Dominion's westward expansion.

Images of American aggression also proved politically useful for selling John A. Macdonald's National Policy. According to historian Robert Craig Brown, "Fundamental to the thinking of the framers of the policy was the idea that the United States was much less a friendly neighbour than an aggressive competitor power waiting for a suitable opportunity to fulfil its destiny of the complete conquest of North America."³⁵ The threat of American expansionism, real or imagined, became a useful tool for Canadian politicians. Those who promoted the image of the inferior American often constructed Canadian identity as its opposite, stressing Canadian adherence to British justice and the supposedly Canadian values of "goodness, stability, and strength of character."³⁶

Of course, not all Canadians subscribed to the idea of the inferior American, and Americans did not always fit that image. Many people on both sides of the border encouraged cooperation, and advocates of cooperation often projected a different image of their neighbours. However, as Canadians became more and more interested in settling their West, the positive imagery surrounding Americans decreased in popularity. As the imagery around the Wild West solidified, it became easier for Canadians to deploy the inferior American stereotype to their advantage. The frontier qualities associated with the American West, such as rugged individualism and a strong faith in democracy, were not regional traits, but national traits.³⁷ They were the same national traits Canadians had been differentiating themselves from for decades. With the expansion westward, distinctly American traits were said to have become more pronounced; according to Frederick Jackson Turner, "Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American."³⁸ The idea of the American

West as the most distinctly American place in the world was alive in the imaginations of both Canadians and Americans. Canadians could not have hoped for a more blatant expression of American values to define themselves in relation to.

Using the consistent imagery of the American Wild West, Canadians were able to portray this imagery in a negative way and establish their west as a better alternative. The creation of this Mild West, where British law and order were easily supplanted,³⁹ was only possible in relation to the American other. The image of the inferior American other remained remarkably consistent throughout the many Canadian portrayals of the West.

The Canadian press often emphasised the moral superiority of Canadians over Americans, especially when it came to Indian policy. Following the sale of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1869, the *Toronto Globe* and *Montreal Gazette* predicted a "satisfactory arrangement [with the Indigenous inhabitants who] have always been friendly with those they call King George's men." They contrasted the Canadian approach to that of the inferior American, writing, "our American neighbours place a very light value on the life of an Indian."⁴⁰

The 1885 Northwest Resistance provided another occasion for the Canadian press to portray Canadian Indian policy as more compassionate than its American counterpart. Here, the image of the inferior American helped mask a feature that Canadian and United States Indian policy had in common: the violent suppression of Indigenous resistance. The 1885 Resistance was extinguished with military force and ended with the execution of eight Indigenous men, the largest mass execution in Canadian history. However, the *Free Press* framed Canada as superior to the United States by claiming the government had handled the conflict in such a way that it had taught the Indigenous population that "there is a power in this country so much greater than his own that he need not dream of resisting it, but that it is a power that will

³⁵ Robert Craig Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900, A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1964.

³⁶ Granatstein and Hillmer, *For Better or Worst*, 8.

³⁷ Douglas R. Francis, "The Frontier and Images of the Canadian West in the Settlement Era." *The Journal of Canadian and American Studies* 9 (Spring 1992), 35.

³⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1920), 4.

³⁹ Daniela Rochinsky, " 'Wild' vs. 'Mild' West: A Binary or Symbiotic Unit? The Complexity of the Mythic West Re-Imagined From a Canadian Perspective." MA diss., (University of Saskatchewan Department of History, 2003), 55.

⁴⁰ quoted in Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*, 30.

protect the honest, the peaceful, the industrious."⁴¹ In contrast to Americans, who suppressed all resistance by force, Canadians were portrayed as patient and willing to negotiate. According to the mainstream Canadian press, when force was used, it was more to teach a moral lesson than to secure selfish access to the land.

Fanny Kelly's Canadian version of her captivity narrative contains a similar portrayal of Americans as violent and lawless and Canadians as their opposite. In the preface, she assures the reader that a lady would never fall into the hands of "merciless savages" in Canada "because of the superior form of government" that fostered "greater equality between people, who were all well treated."⁴² Kelly criticizes the "cold-blooded butchery" of Indigenous people by Americans and contrasts it with the humane Canadian approach. Unfortunately, Kelly claims, the Indians may not be willing to fight for Canada should it be "dragged into war by our restless cousins."⁴³ As historian Sarah Carter points out, Kelly's sympathetic portrayal fell out of popularity with the shift in attitudes towards Indigenous people following the 1885 Resistance.⁴⁴ Gowanlock and Delaney's narratives did not portray Indigenous people as sympathetically. However, the Canadian West continued to be portrayed in relation to popular imagery of the American West. Although Gowanlock and Delaney do not specifically criticize Americans, it is clear that the peaceful image of the Canadian West they are trying to convey is one that contrasts sharply with the imagery typically associated with the American West.

Nowhere was the idea of the Mild West contrasted to the Wild West more than in immigration pamphlets, although the pamphlets relied on the same assumptions about the American West, as did newspapers and captivity narratives. Western Canadians are depicted as courteous and peaceful; one pamphlet points out:

In [the Western Canadian's] belt you do not see those murderous pistols which in illustrations distinguish the Yankee ranchman or cowboy of the Wild West... It is the complete security in

which the Western Canada farmer passes his life, which peculiarly characterizes the country.⁴⁵

According to the immigration pamphlets, the prospective immigrant had no reason to fear the kind of violence associated with the American West. Another pamphlet tried to ease people's fears by claiming that a move to the West did not mean a settler had to "bury themselves in the wilderness" and "live away from civilization." People who say such things, it claimed, "little know the beauties of the wilderness [or how] we have seen civilization enter the North West side by side with the settler."⁴⁶ Unlike the American West, which required what Turner called a "descent into savagery" before a better civilization could be built, the Canadian West was portrayed as a comparatively safe place where law and order arrived with the settlers.

Throughout various mediums, such as newspapers, captivity narratives, and promotional literature, the image of the inferior American remained relatively consistent. Americans were consistently portrayed as needlessly violent, cruel, and greedy. In contrast, Canadians were patient, benevolent, and strongly rooted in the British tradition. They were allegedly willing to treat the Indigenous inhabitants peacefully as they imposed their law and order. Canadians did not choose to define themselves against the ignoble savage, but instead manipulated imagery surrounding Indigenous people in a way that demonized their Southern neighbours to reinforce their own sense of moral superiority. By providing Canadians with a stable and well-defined set of images of the Wild West and making it inseparable from American identity, Americans provided Canadians with a set of images that were manipulated to serve Canadian nation-building needs through the creation of a Mild West.

However, it is important to note that it was not just white Americans that were portrayed unfavourably by Canadians. The United States was portrayed as a place where everyone was more violent. Whereas Indigenous people in Canada were frequently portrayed as peaceful, a trait attributed to morally superior Indian policy, Indigenous people in the United States were portrayed as inherently violent.⁴⁷ Their violent acts were usually said to be both

⁴¹ quoted in Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*, 47.

⁴² quoted in Carter, *Capturing Women*, 42.

⁴³ quoted in Carter, *Capturing Women*, 42-43.

⁴⁴ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 47.

⁴⁵ Bouthillier-Chavigny, "Our Land of Promise," 44, quoted in Rochinsky, "'Wild' vs. 'Mild' West," 79.

⁴⁶ quoted in Peel, "The Lure of the West," 29.

⁴⁷ Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*, 51.

their own fault and that of the incompetent American government that did not know how to properly civilize them. Sometimes Indigenous populations that lived on both sides of the border would miraculously turn from ignoble savages into harmless noble savages when they crossed the border into Canada. The United States was also portrayed as a place full of racial violence between African-Americans and White Americans. Usually African-Americans received total condemnation, but sometimes white Americans were blamed for not knowing how to diffuse the tension.⁴⁸ Either way, Canadian civil society was portrayed as superior. Sometimes descriptions of American violence were not associated with any specific group. A report by the *Toronto Globe* simply stated, "the epidemic of murders and suicides is raging to an alarming extent on the other side of the line."⁴⁹ The United States as a place was seen as inherently violent and chaotic.

The imagery associated with the Canadian West persisted long after the initial settlement boom. Much like that associated with the American West, this imagery remained stable as it was brought into other mediums such as literature and film. The idea of the inferior American remained constant, and the image most commonly associated with the Canadian West – the Mountie – was defined in relation to it. In contrast to lawless America, the Mountie was the embodiment of stable British law and order. Significantly, the Mountie was not portrayed as the foil of the ignoble savage. Rather, he was often a trusted friend of the Indigenous people.⁵⁰ Whereas the rugged frontiersman of American westerns was defined in relation to the ignoble savage, the Mountie of Canadian popular culture was defined in relation to the American savage.

With the expansion westward, Americans and Canadians both drew on colonial imagery that had served their national narratives well in the past. Using stereotypes that portrayed indigenous people as inferior, both nations defined themselves in relation to people they were actively displacing. However, Canadians relied on more than common Indigenous stereotypes in forging a settler identity for their West; the image of the inferior American was also crucial. This image helped Canada establish itself as the

benevolent and mild alternative to the American Wild West. Central to this image was the idea that Canadian and American Indian policy were radically different, with the former being based on peaceful negotiation rather than violence. Even when the Canadian state deployed the military against Indigenous people, its Indian policy was still portrayed as being much more just than that of its neighbours to the South. This image of the inferior American helped downplay the violence that accompanied the settling of the Canadian West, and imbued Canadians with a sense of moral superiority that became crucial to the Canadian nation-building project.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Michael Dawson, *The Mountie: From Dime Novel to Disney* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998), 25.

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