

From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture. By Chad A. Barbour. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2016. 208 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

Chad Barbour, professor of American studies at Lake Superior State University, draws on his background in literary analysis to offer a close, historically grounded reading of the ways in which Indianness has been performed in American comic books during, especially, the twentieth century. Incorporating such key studies as Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation* and Phillip Deloria's *Playing Indian*, Barbour advances the notion that the comic book narrative in which various white characters, including superheroes, "play Indian" in order to construct their own masculine, white identities. He locates his research within a larger array of work on appropriations on Indianness, including C. Richard King, Elizabeth Bird, Shari Huhndorf, and Robert Berkhofer. Generally speaking, he successfully builds on such studies to offer a dynamic reading of colonial and more recent comic book commodifications of Native Americans by white people.

Although Barbour's book is punctuated by a detailed analysis of comic books, revealing how white characters cloak themselves in Indian corporeality, both to devour imagined essences of the Native and to obscure their own, otherwise invisible whiteness, it appropriately begins with an examination of nineteenth-century precursors to the twentieth-century comics. In chapter 1, the author highlights early efforts in literature and art to inscribe the male Indian body as the desired paragon of embodied perfection, but also as the feared body of danger and transgression. Chapter 2 centers on the figure of the white frontiersman—the counterpart to the romanticized male Indian—who heroically appropriates Indianness by the way he lives his everyday life. This discussion is framed by Barbour's examination of Daniel Boone and the literary figure Hawkeye, of *The Last of the Mohicans*, two men who strengthened their white masculinity by playing Indian.

The author refers to Boone, and to similar figures, as white Indians who fight and kill "real" Native men with an emotional ambivalence. These white Indian frontiersmen embody the ambivalence of an emerging white nation, wherein the body of the Native man is both admired and reviled, both idyllic and savage (46). Barbour shows, successfully, that a set of twisted logics surround the ambivalence of the white Indian and his connection to savagery and nature:

The male becomes "savage" in order to become Indian or to kill Indians. Both roles have some overlap with the natural man, but as a white Indian, Boone's connection to nature routes through Indianness. Indian killing, like playing Indian, drives the white man further away from society and further into nature, further into "savagery" (42).

As such, then, the narrative of the white Indian-frontiersman, as he embraces savagery, reveals the "thin white line" separating civilization from the savage imaginary, from nature, and from the Native American.

Chapter 3 carries forward the premise outlined by Barbour in the early chapters, that the practice of playing Indian frames several narratives and images of the male

Indian body and the white frontiersman. In the nineteenth century, these narratives emerged as a space for the articulation of American (white) masculinity as a nondomesticated, frontier-conquering individual at once immersed in nature and, when required, in imagined worlds of Indian warriors. But beginning with chapter 3, Barbour examines these narratives in different histories and newer media of popular culture, such as comic books. By the twentieth century, as the frontier became less of a material factor in the everyday lives of American people, its mythical significance thrived in dime-store novels, early moving-picture shows, spectacles such as the Wild West Show, and indeed, comic books.

Barbour's study, offering perhaps the most exhaustive account of white Indians in comic books, identifies the frontier mythos—the white gunslinger carving out new territory for the nation—as the narrative that anchored whiteness in early twentieth-century comics. Indeed, Daniel Boone and Buffalo Bill starred in a number of comic books, and Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* was adapted to the platform of these mass-produced, color-illustrated booklets. White ambivalence framed the depiction of the American Indian—the foil for the frontiersman's activities—who is seen as violent, energetic, and vital (72), and yet, the nonwarlike, heroic white man may experience “invigoration of the battle . . . and the potential of the frontier, with its dangers and its exotic peoples” (73). The white frontiersman, then, may become successful because of the bellicose spirit of the Indian.

Mid-century comics feature white men “playing Indian” in a much more specific, iconic sense, incorporating headdresses and tomahawks into their scripts. In the 1930s, Garrett Price produced a comic strip somewhat unimaginatively titled *White Boy*, in which a white teenager is taken by the fictional Rainbow tribe and then adopted. After resisting, the boy is ultimately assimilated and opts to remain with the tribe. This strip, and others that followed, turned on a crisis of white masculinity (107), wherein “bravery and strength [were associated] with Indianness, and . . . weakness . . . with whiteness” (104). By playing Indian, then, the white man might be reborn and cleansed of his modern, urban weaknesses. In the penultimate chapter, Barbour highlights how the most conspicuous American heroes—superheroes—appropriated Indianness. Captain America, Captain Marvel, Superman, Green Lantern, and Batman each appeared in various comic book issues sporting headdresses, Indian regalia, and Indian weaponry. The superhero already embodies hypermasculinity, but by playing Indian, Barbour claims that he is able to advance the mythos of the frontier as central to the very essence of the American nation.

The author might expand further on how these comics articulated with other kinds of Indian spectacles in constructing the notion of a white, masculine American nationhood. In particular, how did these icons and texts work in concert with a changing sense of whiteness and Indianness? May they have obscured certain white racist acts and practices? Jennifer Guiliano's 2015 work *Indian Spectacle* dovetails nicely with Barbour's, identifying an always-emergent, imagined national community of democracy, industry, commerce, and progress and linking a number of spectacles of Indianness to this imaginary. The book's argument might also be enhanced by paying more attention to how readers consume and engage with these comic-book texts in

specific terms. Such a focus could become a different project altogether, yet I believe there is room for Barbour to explore popular readings of these comics. One wonders if Native American youth purchased such comics, and if so, how they reacted.

This book offers the richest available account of comic book portrayals of whiteness and Indianness, and Barbour's readings of these narratives is insightful. By locating early imaginaries of the male Indian body in nineteenth-century art and literature, he provides necessary depth to the "playing Indian" phenomenon. Importantly, he identifies how these texts work to construct a particular notion of a white America, one that is animated by its (mis)uses of the male Indian body. On balance, Barbour's book is an invaluable contribution to studies of whiteness, masculinity, and the American Indian, and I recommend it to students and scholars alike.

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Holy War: Cowboys, Indians, and 9/11s. By Mark Cronlund Anderson. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2016. 293 pages. \$27.95 paper; \$27.99 electronic.

Writing in the wake of 9/11, Mark Cronlund Anderson contends that US military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan should be seen as part of a long American frontier tradition of waging imperialistic war based on the lie of acting defensively and righteously against aggressive, savage enemies. Anderson sees the country's early frontier wars against American Indians as the template for this kind of thinking: "The United States has not merely been at war for two centuries," Anderson stresses, "but has also been fighting the same war for two centuries" (27). Later stand-ins for Indian nations included Mexico during the Mexican-American War, numerous Central American nations, leftist political movements, and in the post-9/11 era, Muslims, particularly Arabs. At one point, Anderson calls this patterned behavior "frontier autopilot" (200). In this, Anderson draws on Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, which not only argued that the character of America was built on civilization conquering savagery, but that the pattern was likely to continue in foreign imperialistic ventures. Taking up this idea, Anderson posits that American imperialistic violence was and is regenerative, likening the United States to a trauma victim who finds temporary relief and purpose in reliving the source of the trauma over and over again.

Tracing these themes through an eclectic exploration of historical events, texts, and movies, Anderson begins with the Mexican-American War and then proceeds to the Battle of the Little Bighorn; United States interventions in the Mexican Revolution, Nicaragua, and El Salvador; the Vietnam War; and invocations of the frontier and divine favor expressed by Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Along the way, Anderson argues that newspapers and the entertainment media have been complicit in the political enterprise of justifying United States militarism with "the white man's burden." In one passage that captures this approach, Anderson writes, "Custer became an American Jesus Christ because he gave his life for the nation, much as Tarzan, or the