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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5pv246gz>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 44(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2020-09-01

DOI

10.17953/aicrj.44.4.mohler

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Playing (the Casino) Indian: Native American Roles in Peak TV

Courtney Elkin Mohler

EXPOSITION: DRESSING THE SET

With the advent of on-demand streaming services and the social acceptability of binge-watching, quality, scripted, hour-long “prestige” dramas have proliferated significantly. Sometimes called “Peak TV,” the current era was ushered in with serious, creator-driven shows of the late 1990s such as *The Wire* and *The Sopranos*.¹ In the complex narrative structures of late twentieth and twenty-first century television and serial drama, as Jason Mittell and Trisha Dunleavy have noted,² often the programs gaining the largest following and enjoying critical acclaim illustrate not only intricate story worlds, but also closely follow the relationships and actions of morally questionable, transgressive antiheroes.³ Brett Martin similarly argues that multiplying broadcast and Internet channels allow for niche and risky plotlines, “ruthless” narratives, and “morally compromised, complicated, deeply human” characters.⁴ Indeed, the lifelike, webbed story lines of multiple morally ambiguous characters is a hallmark of several Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning series.

New renditions of character tropes and types have emerged with this glut of television programming that follow patterns and expectations set by racial and gender politics. Often, non-white character types seem to exist only to further the story world or add to the moral predicaments faced by leading characters, usually white. Appearing

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with increasing frequency is a Native character type, a manipulative, money-hungry casino “chief” or CEO, usually a criminal. This article analyzes examples of the “Casino Indian” characterization found in several award-winning, critically acclaimed television dramas: *The Sopranos*, *Big Love*, *The Killing*, and *House of Cards*.⁵ Adapting the figure of the imagined “Indian” to suit the anxieties of our political and economic moment, each of these shows create an image of “Indianness” juxtaposed with fictional casinos—thereby adding a Casino Indian trope to the long-established line of “Indian” characters crafted by non-Native “experts,” writers, and artists of the stage and screen.

This “Casino Indian” role simultaneously offers dramatically significant guest star roles for Native actors and reflects a neoliberal version of the noble savage trope fit for twenty-first century audiences.⁶ Such representations of the noble/ignoble savage binary are as old as colonial encounter itself, found in Columbus’s and Vespucci’s often-fabricated, usually boastful accounts of their voyages.⁷ Characterized by dueling representations of horrifying savagery and Edenic innocence, Gretchen M. Bataille points out that the European fascination with and tendency to mythologize Native Americans reflects “the creators of those images” rather than Native people.⁸ Products of the neoliberal era, these prestige television shows both produce and critique empire.

Defining empire as a “new global form of sovereignty” that is “decentered and deterritorializing,”⁹ post-Marxist scholars Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that empire creates wealth through “biopolitical production, the production of social life itself”; it “not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature.”¹⁰ This analysis of plotlines and characters in popular culture is in a scholarly tradition of analyzing American imperial culture, politics, and economics against the “backdrop” of the “Indian Problem.”¹¹ In most works of artistic representation by, for, or about the dominant culture, the lasting narrative is entwined not only with the monetary profits the entertainment industry enjoys from public consumption of its products, but also normalizing ideas and social identities that likewise promote a culture that validates generating profit.

Neoliberal cultural and economic politics are especially disastrous for Indigenous communities within and beyond the United States. Given this context, the material realities Indigenous people must face contrast dramatically with the access to power and money that the plotlines of peak television dramas ascribe to greedy Casino Indian characters. Their function in mainstream American culture enacts what Philip Deloria describes as “playing Indian,” whereby the Indian “other” is referenced, produced, written, directed, and performed in ways that reflect dominant American identities and socioeconomic anxieties.¹² Depictions of Native Americans joined to casino interests produce and are produced according to the aesthetics, messages, and norms of neoliberalism.

Further, the Casino Indian—wealthy, greedy, but tribally focused—complies with the double-edged, schizophrenic construction of “American identity” that embodies the relentless individualist drive to practice economic “freedom” and capitalist success, an aspect of national identity since the American revolution that seems authentic, original, and timeless. Not surprisingly, most Casino Indian characters normalize western patriarchy, which even in the twenty-first century largely limits the realm of

business to men. Three of the four “Indian” characters explored here are powerful, middle-aged, able-bodied, and well-dressed males. *The Killing*, however, advances a key modification to the trope in creating the first female Casino Indian. Yet, as I will later argue, *The Killing*’s Chief Nicole Jackson upholds such precepts of neoliberal ideology as meritocracy and respect for diversity in capitalist pursuit.

This article also explores the type’s roots in historical tendencies to imagine the United States in relation to the peoples it displaced and the lifestyles it forever altered by its imperialist policies. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor present how film and television Westerns imagine “The West as Myth and Symbol,” and trace corresponding changes in the academic critique of the genre.¹³ They give special attention to historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932), whose predominant “frontier thesis” attributed the ability to forge one’s destiny in the American wilderness to national egalitarian values of independence and ruggedness. The vast West, according to Turner and his disciples, provided a safety valve for individuals to escape the overcrowding, job competition, and other pressures of modernizing urban centers. Rollins and O’Connor write that, like Turner’s thesis, “Hollywood producers used [the Western frontier] as a backdrop for a myriad of dramatic relationships and situations that were characteristic of the American experience and values—and therefore, presumably, especially appealing to American audiences.”¹⁴

Among other analyses of how myriad narrative tropes and stereotypes in twentieth-century American film have fashioned popular (mis)conceptions of Native people, Jacqueline Kilpatrick’s work extends examination of the most pernicious stereotypes into the 1990s, including the “Bloodthirsty Savage,” the “Noble Savage,” and the more recent “Natural Ecologist.”¹⁵ Kilpatrick identifies a “New Native American warrior” that emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century, “armed with attorneys and economic clout,” whose battle for tribal sovereignty “is the most dangerous and confusing of all to those who thought the Indian Problem settled.”¹⁶ Her assessment of the emergent wealthy warrior figure points to the troubling “double bind of need-based sovereignty” in which, as Jessica R. Cattellino explains, the sovereignty of impoverished Native Americans is not called into question, but when Native nations become economically successful through casino ownership, their “authenticity” and corresponding right to sovereignty and recognition is challenged.¹⁷

This double bind partially fuels the contradictory nature of the Native American characters that this article analyzes below in that these wealthy, powerful, casino-owning characters are always corrupt, helping to perpetuate that “real” or “authentic” Native American identity is somehow tied to poverty and that economic success in a neoliberal market undermines this authenticity. Although Kilpatrick’s appraisal is that such roles are potentially dangerous, she writes that compared to the limited images of twentieth-century celluloid Indians, these of the twenty-first century, “whether positive or negative, are at least contemporary, complicated and differentiated.”¹⁸ Kilpatrick’s hopeful, measured prognosis and Cattellino’s prescient analysis of Native “need-based sovereignty” both guide my reading of the Casino Indian as the figure repeats and adjusts in a variety of television dramas.

Dustin Tahmahkera has extensively analyzed the ways in which settler-centered television narratives have created “rare and repetitious Indian characters intended to represent the indigenous.”¹⁹ With a lens on “representational genealogies and patterns of televisual indigeneity,” Tahmahkera explores the history of the image of the “fixed Indian” in American and Canadian sitcoms from the 1950s through the early 2000s, and contrasts this with the recent Indigenous-created programming featuring “the flexible Native.”²⁰ Drawing on this observation, I argue that the recent televisual representations of Casino Indians below similarly contribute, as Tahmahkera puts it, to “social and political discourses concerning indigenous identities and relations between Natives and non-Natives.”²¹ In the past two decades, as this article will show, the ontogenesis of the Casino Indian character and the ways in which each rendition functions display neoliberal misgivings about identity, cultural distinctiveness, and economic opportunity.

Representations of successful, wealthy Casino Indians on television illustrate the slippery relationship between authenticity and assimilation for Native Americans who are racially marked, for example. The contemporary Casino Indian reveals telling shifts in the noble/ignoble savage trope first promulgated in Columbus’s and Vespucci’s journals. Historically, the noble savage is noble in part because of his willingness to assimilate, and, perhaps mournfully, to recognize the inevitability of colonial conquest; the ignoble version resists assimilation and settler colonialism by advocating or fighting for Indigenous sovereignty. Blurring this tropic structure of noble-assimilated/ignoble-resistant, Casino Indians are racialized others who have assimilated the rules of capitalism, which is noble, but too well—by disrupting the status quo of white supremacy, which is ignoble. Like the excess of greed and capital associated with casinos themselves, Casino Indians imply an excess of assimilation and success. Their success renders them corrupt, at least in part, due to the fact that they are born into, but always outside of, white structural power.

Part of the broader context for the emerging Casino Indian are the political misgivings and related policies that have controlled American (and increasingly global) life for the past forty years which perhaps have reached their zenith with the election of a politically inexperienced reality TV star as president of the United States of America. Comparable to the election of “Champion of the Common Man” Andrew Jackson, Donald J. Trump’s 2016 and 2020 campaigns equated pernicious othering with nationalist strength. In defending hegemony of Christian, straight, cisgender, white males as inevitable, no matter the human and environmental cost, Trump’s policies paid tribute to his favorite presidential forbear. The contrast between Native American activists risking arrest to protect their tribal waterways from multinational oil pipeline projects and the machinations of the wealthy, powerful Casino Indians represented in today’s television programming is stark, illustrating how neoliberal artistic production can simultaneously hide the potential for capitalist violence and heighten it.²²

Casinos and the Indian reservations in which they operate are fashioned in these television dramas as a continuation and reimagining of “the frontier” on which American settler popular culture has continually fixated. Gaming, which takes place in tribally regulated spaces and is illegal outside reservation borders, mingles the potential

of extreme wealth with the risk of financial ruin. Such high stakes literally and symbolically offer the quest of “the frontier” for the neoliberal individual. Conflict, cooperation, betrayal, and mutual gain between settler and Native are negotiated within television’s imagined Indian casino and streamed across the world. As Cattelino observes, “Indian gaming is reshaping popular images of the indigenous peoples of this continent” that reflect “deeper realignments in the ways that many Americans reckon the relationships among cultural difference, economic power, and political rights.”²³ Over many decades, non-Native-authors have imagined Native peoples as exotic, different, and other. The dominant culture of neoliberal capitalism fashions the borders of the reservation and doors of the casino as sites for the transference of wealth, political and financial quid pro quo, and threat of political retribution.

The emergence of the Casino Indian as a television trope reflects the degree to which the contemporary media culture measures Native cultural identity against Native access to monetary wealth. Depictions of the white American pursuit of individual success and access to power are familiar in American popular culture, while representations of contemporary Native Americans are practically absent. These new characterizations of exploitative and self-interested Native powerbrokers indicate settler discomfort with Native cultural sovereignty and the economic means by which it might be achieved. The four Casino Indian characters analyzed below at once reflect majority cultural recognition and repudiation of neoliberal conceptualizations and uses of cultural identity. In other words, Casino Indian characters function within these white-centered narratives in ways that reflect and critique neoliberalism as the arbiter of interracial and intergovernmental relationships and illustrate changing attitudes toward (and the limits on) the assimilation narrative for Native Americans.

Episode I—The Identity Politics of Columbus Day in The Sopranos

This third episode in the fourth season of *The Sopranos* is aptly titled “Christopher.” Airing in 2002, it predates the other episodes examined in this article, which appeared after 2010.²⁴ Exploring the concept of identity in America through the (in) famous figure of Columbus, the episode’s dramatic conflict emerges as the perspectives of the recurring Italian American characters are opposed to those of guest-starring Native American characters. The episode presents two distinct kinds of “Indian” character types: an identity-politics-driven, anti-American ignoble savage, and a dangerously powerful, Americanized Casino Indian as a neoliberal noble savage. Both Native types are depicted as standing outside of the close-knit community of Italian Americans, but the Casino Indian is more formidable, a moneyed and politically connected force.²⁵

“Christopher” opens with members of the DiMeo crime family of New Jersey discussing a news article about a planned protest of the upcoming Columbus Day Parade. The episode’s scene introduces how the main characters view identity politics and establishes the Italian-American characters’ opinion of Indians as whining, drug-using freeloaders. This exchange frames power, representation, and the power of representation in relation to the Casino Indian trope, with the characters of Indian

protesters serving as a narrative foil that enable an episode about identity politics and its pitfalls. Ralph first explains the ire of the Native American protesters:

- Ralph: See, it's these Indians and the Commie fucks. They wanna paint Columbus as a slave trader instead of an explorer.
- Christopher: You gotta admit, they did get massacred, the Indians.
- Silvio: It's not like we didn't give them a bunch of free shit to make up for that. Land. Reservations. And now they got the casinos.
- Vito: What the fuck we ever get we didn't work our balls off for?
- Bobby: I wouldn't mind sitting on my ass all day smoking mushrooms and collecting government checks.²⁶

Notably including no Native American characters, the scene's focus is the recurring characters' fears and frustrations over loss of their Italian heritage, power, and security. Silvio, Bobby, and Vito consider the "radical" Indians as anti-American for protesting Columbus, linking them to "Commies" as modern-day ignoble savages. This brief dialogue between the DiMeo thugs, which invokes ideas of Native American entitlement, is a forecast of recent television portrayals of Indians.

The "Christopher" episode later introduces a group of Native Americans protesting before the Columbus Day Parade, led by anthropology professor Del Redclay, played by Larry Sellers (Osage/Cherokee/Lakota). In an improbable scene, Ralph attempts to intimidate Redclay into calling off the protest by threatening to tell the press that Iron Eyes Cody, the star of the "Keep America Beautiful" anti-littering campaign commercials, was really Italian American. Actually, Cody has been frequently termed a "wannabe Indian" within Native American studies and as a Native anthropologist, Redclay would likely be familiar with Cody's misrepresentation in pop culture.²⁷ This long-established fact renders Professor Redclay's genuine concern in the scene that this "news" is a "major PR boner" ridiculous. Finally, Tony Soprano himself attempts to squelch the protest once and for all, using a casino contact to secure a meeting with the Casino Indian: Chief Doug Smith, CEO of Mohonk Enterprises and the Deerpark Casino. Smith, who speaks the American language of money and backroom deals, reaches an arrangement with Tony to oppose the Native protesters.

The Chief is not only manipulative and greedy, but as communications scholar Celeste LaCroix points out, reflects another commonly held assumption about the Indians who benefit from casino money—that they are not "authentic" Indians anyway.²⁸ In addition to replicating a history of redface in film and television, casting non-Native, white American actor Nick Chinlund as Chief Smith emphasizes the theme of ethnic fraud. Soprano and the television home audience meet a self-serving businessman whose success depends on tenuous blood ties, exemplifying the ways in which neoliberal capitalism exploits essentialist identity politics. Smith says to Silvio and Tony, "Frankly, I passed most of my life as white . . . until I had a racial awakening and discovered my Mohonk blood. My grandmother on my father's side, her mother was a quarter Mohonk."²⁹ Besides his notably Anglo name, Chief Doug Smith appears in an expensive suit, with a short coiffure. Although phenotype should not be used as the sole evidence of one's ethnic or cultural identity, within the political-cultural

context in 2002, when this episode aired, such a characterization plays into mostly unfounded fears about “fake” Native people scamming the system.

In 1993, then-businessman Donald Trump expressed a similar sentiment to a congressional committee on gambling about the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, owners of the successful Foxwood Resort Casino: “They don’t look like Indians to me . . . They don’t look like Indians to Indians.”³⁰ As a major player in the non-Indian casino industry and an advocate for economic deregulation, Trump became the mouthpiece of the white investor class, which feared the passing of the Indian Gaming and Regulation Act (IGRA) of 1988 would lead to unfair competition to the existing industry. In this same statement to the congressional committee, Trump helped to cement the nefarious notion that organized crime runs unchecked in Indian casinos, a connection also advanced in the “Christopher” episode. Insidiously, the “fake Indian” character carries the inference that authentic Natives are not modern, do not own casinos, and must “look like” Indians. Cattellino points out the complex relationship between non-Native (majority) perceptions of Indian casino culture and Native American cultural distinctiveness, citing Paige Raibmon’s assessment that “white society continues to station authenticity as the gatekeeper of Aboriginal people’s rights to things like commercial fisheries, land, and casinos.”³¹ Cattellino goes on to describe how in order to address this double bind, casino-era cultural revitalization efforts often respond to sociopolitical pressures both internal and external to the tribe. In the case of the Florida Seminoles, both the outside pressure to prove their cultural “distinctiveness” and tribal concerns over how to allocate the influx of casino money, have motivated claims and projects that emerge from internal and external “perceived cultural loss.”³²

As television critic Emily Todd VanDerWerff explains this episode’s context, *The Sopranos* was being criticized for creating “a perception that all Italian Americans were in the mob.”³³ The forced plot of “Christopher” depends on the unlikely premise that a crime family would be intensely invested in a Columbus Day parade. The episode does unfold like a clumsy defense of the representations of Italian Americans in the series, along with a Native American plotline that adds up to the cliché that “there’s two sides to the story.” The overall message of the episode comes in the form of an uncharacteristic speech from Tony, who explains to a resistant Silvio that people should find their identity as individuals and shouldn’t be too invested in identity politics:

Let me ask you. All the good things you have in your life. Did they come to you because you’re Calabrese? I’ll tell you the answer. The answer is no. You gotta smart kid lika gonna college. You gotta wife with a piece of ass. At least she was when you married her. You own one of the most profitable topless bars in North Jersey. Now didja get all of this shit coz you’re Italian? No. You gotta it coz you’re you. Because you’re smart. Coz you’re whatever the fuck. Where the fuck is our self-esteem? That shit doesn’t come from Columbus or the Godfather or Chef fucking Boyardee.³⁴

Ironically, Tony here invokes the merits of American individualism by way of rejecting identity politics, even though his family lineage is the basis for his success. His clout

within the New Jersey Mafia relies on both his attributes as an individual and his ancestral heritage and cultural community as a heavily connected Italian American.

The episode's troubling failure to mention, even briefly, how differently identity politics function for different groups of people, is compounded by the limited time afforded to this subplot, disallowing more fully developed characterizations of Native people.³⁵ Chief Smith is arguably the least nuanced representation of the Casino Indian examined in this article, but the episode offers a valuable parameter for analysis of the more complex characterizations seen in *Big Love*, *House of Cards*, and *The Killing*.

Episode 2—*The Cost of Assimilation in Big Love*

Only a few single-episode, guest-starring roles were scripted for Native actors in *The Sopranos*, whereas both HBO's drama *Big Love* and AMC's crime thriller *The Killing* feature substantial, recurring guest-star Casino Indian roles. Just as *The Sopranos* humanized a fictional Italian American crime family, the creators of *Big Love* tapped into voyeuristic impulses to explore another secretive and mythologized subcultural group, the polygamous Mormon family. The series situates the normative Mormon Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the dominant culture, and the Henrickson family and the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as polygamous subcultural groups. *Big Love* begins its third season in 2009 with the introduction of Jerry Flute (Robert Beltran), a Blackfoot businessman.³⁶ The show's main character, Bill Henrickson (Bill Paxton), a Mormon, proposes a partnership with Flute to start up a Mormon-friendly casino ninety minutes from Salt Lake City. The intercultural plotline positions the Blackfoot and Mormons as similarly outside of the American mainstream, yet tied to American economic pressures and opportunity. By drawing broad parallels between these two subcultures, *Big Love*'s Casino Indian characters and casino setting serve to legitimize the Hendrickson family's polygamy.

The character of Jerry Flute appears in six episodes in season three as negotiations around the new "Blackfoot Magic Casino" begin, and he appears again in five episodes of season four.³⁷ Much of season four's plot involves turmoil at the Blackfoot Magic casino, which is partly owned by the Hendricksons and managed by Jerry Flute's paranoid son Tommy, played by well-known First Nations actor Adam Beach (Anishinaabe) in a role that develops over nine episodes. At times, the intensity that Beach brings to Tommy conveys the stereotypical humorless Indian warrior. However, the writers also have Tommy explode in anger when "first wife" Barb Hendrickson employs a Navajo in the casino who he knows is addicted to meth, implying his deep concern for the health of his people. Considerable attention is also given to Barb's and Tommy's budding sexual attraction, eventually squelched by Barb. Although the *Big Love* blogosphere and TV critics alike wish that the tension between Barb and Tommy had developed into an affair, this subplot mainly exists, like all others in the show, to trace Bill's loss of his God-given control over his wives, business, and family.³⁸

In unearthing a subaltern polygamist subculture, for many viewers the show's appeal partly lies in the ways it evokes simultaneous emotions of loathing and rooting for its lifestyle.³⁹ Brenda Weber describes why stories about “Mormon polygamy are so popular in the American mediascape,” writing that “tales about the surreptitious secret (sex) lives led by Mormon men and women” rivet an American audience “steeped in the histories of Puritan asceticism” and that polygamy plots tell “the same tale of regulated sexual economy in reverse.”⁴⁰ The premise invites the show's audience (mostly non-Mormon) to view the Henricksons as the oppressed outsiders attempting (and failing) to assimilate. The suburban Henricksons attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture, but carry a marked difference as closeted polygamists that will forever prevent their complete inclusion. As such, the ongoing drama of the show is weighted toward the tensions, advances, and setbacks the Henricksons face as outsiders to the dominant LDS hegemony. As the series develops over several seasons, the Henricksons push to distance themselves from the fictionalized fundamentalist group the “United Effort Brotherhood” (UEB) in which Bill Henrickson and his second wife were raised.

The family's doubly disadvantaged social position as Other is not usually placed upon white, upper-middle class, cisgendered heterosexuals. In season three, introducing the Flutes and the Blackfoot Magic Casino to the story helps to sharpen the contrast between the normalized LDS and the polygamist Henricksons. Early in the casino negotiations, Bill makes the case to Jerry that as oppressed minorities, they “have too much in common to let (their deal) fall apart” and therefore should join forces for monetary gain.⁴¹ Bill's attempt at persuasion mirrors an extensive history of white American storytelling that attempts to create economic partnership around allegedly shared qualities such as rugged individualism, honesty, and resourcefulness. To seal the deal between the Blackfoot Tribe and the Henricksons' Weber Gaming, Bill continues with an impassioned speech:

Your people were forced into reservations. In a way, my people were too. We're both trying to improve the lot of those we love and maintain a sacred life in the midst of a culture that has forgotten what's holy. It's an unlikely partnership, yours and mine. We both have a shared history together that needs mending. Let's mend and prosper at the same time. Look, I'm not Vegas. I'm not glitzy. I'm just a regular guy trying to support my family.⁴²

In this neoliberal framing, Bill Henrickson and Jerry Flute are the same: male exemplars of a racially and religiously diverse America, hard workers attempting to provide for their families, and dealmakers willing to work across differences toward the common goals of financial and political power and success.

Like *The Sopranos'* Chief Doug Smith, and as I will later show, the tribal leaders in *The Killing* and *House of Cards* as well, the Flutes evidently have no scruples about doing business with morally questionable white Americans, including the Henricksons and their polygamous lifestyle. The Flutes are shrewd business professionals willing to work with anyone who, as Flute directly says, “can make us the most money.”⁴³ Chief Doug Smith is, however, a caricature of a money-grubbing opportunist with tenuous ties to his tribe, while as a whole *Big Love* offers more nuanced explorations of the

financial and cultural concerns faced by Native communities who seek economic independence through casino development.

By definition, complex serial drama extends the complexity of subplots throughout multiple episodes with more developed characters, yet it is notable that these shows' protagonists and the special brand of realism they communicate continue to be linked to masculinity and whiteness. Fundamentalist Mormon Bill Henrickson and mafioso Tony Soprano offer a similar appeal: each hypermasculine in his own way, both are white antiheroes who act in accordance with a moral code that pushes the boundaries of what an audience will accept. In Lisa G. Perks's examination of male and female antiheroes of the past fifteen years, an analysis of new patterns of media consumption, she finds that their cultural significance lies in the "ludic play space of media marathoning [that] invites reader involvement in the narrative" and the moral ambiguity of the characters that mimics real people and lives.⁴⁴ When crafted successfully, this verisimilitude garners empathy and a kind of pleasurable voyeurism that allows the shows' creators to put seemingly realistic characters into impossible dramatic situations. The more the leading characters cause suffering, suffer, and survive, the greater their appeal. As we enjoy the aura of their flawed but intoxicating humanity, we forgive these white American antiheroes repeatedly, whether a wealthy Italian American mob boss or a polygamous businessman.

Episode 3—The Killing and Neo-Ruthless Casino Indians

With Nancy Botwin of *Weeds* (2005–2012) and Jackie Peyton of *Nurse Jackie* (2009–2015) commences the inclusion of white American antiheroines into peak television. The supposed success of 1960s second wave feminism is often featured in neoliberal artistic twenty-first-century production, as in television and films that frequently include feminist and multiculturalist themes indicating social progress. Such positive story threads may also distract from narratives defending or obscuring neoliberal policies and their effects.⁴⁵ AMC's *The Killing* and *House of Cards* reflect the expanding reach of neoliberalism in popular culture. Both of these peak American television series evidence the strange likability of morally ambiguous white American professionals in explorations of white America's struggle to obtain happiness and a sense of meaning while fixated on, and limited by, the American Dream. With the key difference of gender, the forgiveness earned by white antiheroes is also extended to antiheroine Sarah Linden, *The Killing's* scrappy, emotionally troubled detective, arguably a negligent mother, as well to *House of Cards'* antihero "First Couple," the ruthless, cutthroat, politicians Claire and Francis Underwood.

This shift reflects a key tenet of the neoliberal project: *all* are welcome to play by the rules dictated by the market, to scrap, cheat, and strive for a slice of the "good" life. Into this more inclusive television culture enters the stoic, but obsessive antiheroine figure of detective Sarah Linden (Mireille Enos). At the outset of the thriller-mystery series *The Killing*, the body of a teenage girl is found in the trunk of a car in a Seattle lake on the edge of reservation land. The first two seasons slowly unwind the homicide from the points of view of Linden and her partner Stephen Holder (Joel Kinnaman).

Female tribal leaders are a feature of many traditional tribal communities, but in mainstream film and television they are rarely represented. One of this series' many plot tangles connects a heated mayoral race with a proposed waterfront development project that requires contractual negotiations between the mayor's office and the leader of the fictional Kalimish tribe and manager of the Wapi Eagle Casino, Chief Nicole Jackson (Claudia Ferri).⁴⁶

Jackson, a chief who is a lesbian woman, is a break from the usual male Casino Indian stereotype that provides an interesting variation on the trope, yet like the other Casino Indians discussed, she is predisposed to cut closed-door political deals if they promise to be profitable. Also, this character's presentation references stereotypical or stock lesbians generally coded as white—a portrayal that does not reflect how some Native two-spirit people are embraced within and provide service to their communities, in part for their ability to transcend binary gender roles.⁴⁷ Instead, Jackson is fashioned for a primarily white viewing audience, operating as within the show as a highly unsympathetic villain. Indeed, we learn several episodes into the subplot that she has committed murder and has a penchant for physically abusing her girlfriends. Her character plays into the immoral, dangerous lesbian trope previously normalized in heterosexist American popular culture. Many cultural villains are coded as queer, if not overtly lesbian or gay, and nonnormative sexuality is often explicitly or implicitly tied to deviant behavior.⁴⁸

Here, Jackson's leadership strength is tainted by abusive behavior and lust for power and crime. Portrayed as a calculating businesswoman and an authoritarian leader, in nearly every scene Jackson is accompanied by her bodyguard and girlfriend Roberta Drays (Patti Kim) and flanked by a posse of Native muscle. She is feared by her people, and allows drugs, child labor, and prostitution within her casino. As Mary, a young Kalimish casino maid (Q'orianka Kilcher) tells Detective Linden, "My uncle says she uses the tribe to line her own pockets. She controls everyone. All I know is, I wouldn't cross her."⁴⁹ Linden and Holder's investigation eventually uncovers Jackson's backroom negotiations with a campaign manager and a developer to sabotage the election. Linden then finds the victim's blood in the casino's construction zone and woods within the reservation boundaries.

This storyline is drawn over ten episodes, allowing considerable plot development and nuanced dialogue concerning sovereignty and the limits of Seattle police jurisdiction on Native lands. Despite her fierce ambition and dangerous disposition, Jackson righteously evokes government-to-government ethics when she refuses to cooperate with the police: "Your police have no place on sovereign Indian land. It would set a terrible precedent. Please understand that I speak for the American Indian Nation when I say this."⁵⁰ In response to her refusal to cooperate, the mayoral candidate rejects Jackson's proposal for a cultural center and museum to be developed on the waterfront, a project she had requested in return for endorsing his election. The dialogue here establishes that justice, politics, and development permits are all available for a price in the free market. Under the paradoxical logic of neoliberal ideology, women too, even lesbian Indians, can join the capitalist project, and when they do, they will have equal access to the moral and material risks and rewards of success.

The character of the villainous lesbian Casino Indian chief in *The Killing* obscures the very real obstacles faced by people who occupy minority social identities, let alone those who experience intersectional oppressions. In the end, Chief Jackson does not get what she is after because a white male politician denies her access to power outside of the reservation. *The Killing's* Casino Indian subplot illuminates and critiques neoliberal ideology in that Jackson is defeated, but it also reproduces its logic of meritocracy. Any impulse to examine the forces that limit her and her people's access to liberty and prosperity are erased by Jackson's undeniable villainy.

Episode 4—Betting on Red, White and Green in House of Cards

In season two of Netflix's political drama *House of Cards* a similar scenario develops, in this case between United States Vice President Underwood and casino owner Daniel Lanagin, played by Gil Birmingham (Comanche). As Underwood strategizes how to replace President Walker, he learns that the president's close confidant, multinational business mogul Raymond Tusk, has been illegally attempting to influence federal policy by funneling money from China through the Adohi Gaming Casino. Like the guest-starring Casino Indian characters before him, Lanagin's "primary concern is profits" and he is scrupulous in pursuing his financial interests. He takes special pleasure in pointing out the vice president's hubris when he promises a "direct line to the White House" and the "president's ear" in exchange for stopping the flow of casino money "in the wrong direction." Lanagin's rejoinder bitingly reminds Underwood (and the audience) of the centuries-long history of opportunist white Americans' lousy deals with Native people: "You know what I like about money?" he says to Underwood. "I can stack it, on a table like this one. I can measure it with a yardstick. I can see it, smell it, buy things with it . . . things that are real. You're gonna have to show up with more than beads."⁵¹ Lanagin's rejoinder bitingly reminds Underwood (and *House of Cards's* television viewing audience) of the centuries-long history of lousy deal-making between Native people and opportunist white Americans.

Lanagin's opulent Missouri mansion sets the stage for these alpha males to compete in a spectacular pissing contest in the subsequent episode. Also, much to VP Underwood's annoyance, the president's confidant Tusk joins them at Lanagin's white-linen-topped table for a lunch of imported Japanese steak. Realizing at this juncture that Lanagin will not be intimidated or won over, Underwood stands to leave.

Lanagin: Come on! Live a little, Frank.

Underwood: Mr. Vice President.

Lanagin: Not my vice president. You're on sovereign land.⁵²

During this short but memorable scene, Lanagin appears to have both the upper hand and the final word as Vice President Underwood storms off, defeated. However, as Brendin Mock writes, overall *House of Cards* sheds light on the rule of white supremacy in American politics:

The main thing that “House of Cards” wants you to know is that power, for some, must be preserved and expanded at all costs. Power in this tale, in this White House, is white privilege and supremacy. It’s something that cannot be bought, though many characters in this political saga try the best they can. . . . Almost every person of color in the show thinks they have some measure of power, until white power wielders—namely Underwood and his nemesis, the Koch Brother-ish Raymond Tusk—show them what power really is.⁵³

In fact, despite his tough talk and impressive homestead, Lanagin’s position depends on negotiations settled by Tusk’s limitless access to multinational capital. When Tusk offers Lanagin more money to grant reenrollment to the Ugaya people—making them eligible to operate a competing casino—Underwood’s threat becomes impotent and his leverage collapses.

Neoliberalism creates a seamless, nearly invisible conflation between political and corporate interests that deemphasizes the historical and social circumstances that privilege select individuals over others to compete successfully. Much of the drama in *House of Cards* explores the moral cost of forging and concealing the relationship between democratic power and multinational capital. The show reflects, and in doing so critiques, the ugly irony that Native American sovereignty is controlled by the United States federal government. As Dina Gilio-Whitaker notes, Indians “are controversial in a multitude of ways” that make for “good drama.” The Casino Indian plot line in *House of Cards* taps into the power of the controversial history of American colonization; in Gilio-Whitaker’s words, “the collective American conscience, Indians—especially today’s modern Indians—are a living reminder of the country’s troubled history . . . the ultimate symbol of a tainted past that says something else about the land of freedom and justice” that the United States claims to be.⁵⁴

Casino development offers tribes landlocked by settler colonialism the potential for economic independence and liberty to self-govern. Dictated by market forces, however, individual casino tribes will enjoy higher profits when they limit their competition. If neoliberalism is an ideology predicated on the conflation between freedom and profit, its invisible power is epitomized in Native American–US relations in which the mythologized, nineteenth-century power of “the West” and its expansion just seem to keep winning. Andrew Jackson’s effort to conquer through dividing hundreds of tribal communities from one another is realized fully in the neoliberal age where the colonial state decides one’s tribal status, and the best opportunity for “sovereignty” relies on settler greed and fewer “competing” Native peoples. After all, “competition (is) the defining characteristic of human relations” in a global culture dominated by neoliberal ideology. Because of its emphasis on competition “the freedom that neoliberalism offers . . . turns out to mean freedom for the pike, not for the minnows.”⁵⁵ The reach of empire is exemplified by the paradox of Indigenous efforts to achieve sovereignty as domestic dependent nations. Tribal sovereignty is achieved through working within the “white world of abstract symbols” of currency, debts, and deals that Vine Deloria described decades ago.⁵⁶ The capital, treaties, contracts, and laws made behind closed doors out of the purview of the community now appear to be the only road available

for Native American prosperity. That prosperity comes at a significant social and political price, however, as the US federal government and the non-Native American cultural imaginary question the authenticity of Native communities who stand to benefit from casino money.

CASINO INDIANS IN PEAK TV

The earliest white Americans invoked Indian imagery and play in opposition to Britain and Europe. This quickly evolved into whites playing Indian and laying claim to the image and its meanings through scouting, the use of Indian mascots in professional and college sports, environmental tropes, and the countercultural hippie and New Age movements.⁵⁷ Since the Boston Tea Party, these reenactments and embodied imaginings have commenced at various points in American history, and each has continued into the present.⁵⁸ These coopted images purport to reference and pay homage to Native peoples, but of course reflect white America. Nevertheless, such a fascination does hold a certain “mysterious well of cultural power” of which many Native people are aware and utilize.⁵⁹ This well is a precarious resource that teeters between total dependence on the colonial power for its acknowledgment and the potential for resistance and self-sufficiency.

After years of Native American characters that only appear in historical films and television shows as the ignoble or noble savage, complex serial television is relatively replete with contemporary Native characters. But these representations are hogtied by the negative associations casino money carries and their dubious alliances with venal white characters. While there has been an effort to cast Indigenous actors in these roles, and most of these actors are from Canadian First Nations, their narrative function is to obstruct or assist the shows’ non-Native antiheroes. This is qualitatively different than white actors in redface playing Indian, and even more different from the examples Philip Deloria enumerates in *Playing Indian* as he illustrates how, since the nation’s founding, white Americans have rehearsed and enacted certain ideas about Indians to articulate their own Americanness. Despite these qualitative differences, which reflect more progressive understandings of racial identity within current television production, the quantity of these Casino Indians, and the striking similarity of their circumstances and storylines in relation to complex white leading characters, constitute another kind of playing Indian. This suggests not the obliteration of the noble/ignoble topical structure that undergirds the Casino Indian, but rather its malleability. No longer functioning as a dichotomy, the trope has evolved to meet our televisual moment.

The phenomenon of the televised Casino Indian also reflects the layered tensions inherent in neoliberal capitalism. The free market promises any one individual, group, or business access to economic wealth given one plays by the rules of the market. Despite the rhetorical trickery embedded in the word “free,” it is a closed market, bound by its own symbols, supply, and demand. What better synecdoche for the limits on the freedom afforded through the unbridled, underregulated pursuit of capital than the Casino Indian—whose success relies on their oppressors’ excess money and recreational time, who is dependent on the United States’ federal government to recognize their difference and determine the rules by which they can make a living?

Fredric Jameson reminds us that “the economic dimension of globalization” finally collapses “the cultural into the economic—and the economic into the cultural.”⁶⁰ This contemporary era of prestige television drama, enabled by the very technologies that stimulated globalization, reflects the anxieties, preoccupations, and paradoxes of our time. Ultimately, the purpose of these shows is to create profit through brand extension. Yet as artistic production they contain storylines that push back against notions of progress and post-racialism, wealth disparity in the United States, and racialized violence. A defining feature of the neoliberal project is “the absolute dependency of nation-states outside the First World core on foreign capital, in the form of loans, supports and investments.”⁶¹ This kind of precarious potential for success (or survival) is limited by and created through the economic, political, and cultural domination of global capital. The trope of the Casino Indian exemplifies the paradox of attaining sovereignty through capitalism. The potency of this trope is heightened by the medium of its production: the globalizing force of the US-controlled entertainment industry.

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The Casino Indian manifests the cynicisms generated by the consequences of neoliberal ideology: this type is the ultimate image of the American “sellout.” No longer shedding a single tear for the destruction of the environment or catching the colors of the wind to teach white people to appreciate resources other than gold, these figures instead fully participate in the same winner-takes-all political and economic systems promoted by their colonizers. This characterization is also likely to propagate misconceptions that all Native people are prosperous and have access to casino money; in reality, less than half of federally recognized tribes operate high-stakes gambling and only a handful make significant profits from their casino enterprises.⁶² Contemporary Native lives are so rarely represented in popular culture that these Casino Indian types hold significant symbolic power. The repeated appearances of the Casino Indian in critically acclaimed and ravenously consumed television series distracts from and distorts the fact that casino tribes suffer from disproportionate social, economic, and mental and physical health issues after centuries of settler colonization.

A variety of questions remain. In what ways do complex, contemporary representations of Native Americans illustrate ambivalence toward neoliberal white structural power? As men, women, elders, and children protest the reversal of environmental protections and regulations at water protection sites, does the critique of neoliberalism implicit in the Casino Indian trope help to support their efforts? Do these portrayals of money-focused Indians highlight the limits of sovereignty for all subaltern people in the wake of globalization, or do they promote the damaging rhetoric of “opportunity” in a “post-racial” America, and the ideology of neoliberal capitalism as an elixir for racial and social inequity? And finally, as American culture is increasingly defined by vicious culture wars, what kinds of Native characters will surface on television over the next several years? Which forms will “Indians” assume after neoliberalism gives way to an ideology as yet unknown?

NOTES

1. *The Wire*, created by David Simon, produced by HBO Entertainment, distributed by Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2002–2008, and *The Sopranos*, created by David Chase, produced by Chase Films, Brad Grey Television, and HBO Entertainment, Distributed by Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 1999–2007. For analysis of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century prestige television, see Brett Martin, *Difficult Men Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From the Sopranos and the Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013), David Carr, “Barely Keeping Up in TV’s New Golden Age,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/business/media/fenced-in-by-televisions-excess-of-excellence.html>, and Lisa G. Perks, *Media Marathoning: Immersions in Morality* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015).

2. For the narrative complexity of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century television dramas, see Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Politics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York University Press, 2015), and Trisha Dunleavy, *Complex Serial Drama and Multiplatform Television* (New York: Routledge, 2018). For an examination of the “anti-heroine” and other gender issues in complex serial dramas, see Margaret Tally, *The Rise of the Anti-Heroine in TV’s Third Golden Age* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

3. Tally, *The Rise of the Anti-Heroine*, 5. This article also draws on the four characteristics of complex serial drama that Dunleavy identified in *Complex Serial Drama*: they “are grounded in the serial form;” eschew predictable settings such as police stations and hospitals “in favor of a genuine diversity of settings and milieux;” often center around “transgressive primary characters;” and tend to incorporate “more explicit content than is possible for American broadcast drama;” see 3–5.

4. Brett Martin, *Difficult Men Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From the Sopranos and the Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad* (New York: Penguin Press, 2013), 9–10, 4.

5. *The Sopranos* (1999–2007); *Big Love*, created by Mark V. Olsen and Will Scheffer, produced by Anima Sola Productions, Playtone and HBO, distributed by Warner Bros. Television and HBO Enterprises, 2006–2011; *The Killing*, developed by Veena Sud, produced by Fox Television Studios, Fuse Entertainment, KMF Flims, Fabrik, Entertainment, distributed by 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2011–2014; and *House of Cards*, created by Beau Willimon, produced by MRC, Trigger Street Productions, Wade/Thomas Productions, Knight Takes King Productions, distributed by Sony Pictures Television, 2013–2018.

6. Tally, *The Rise of the Anti-Heroine*, 3.

7. Amerigo Vespucci, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Christopher Columbus, *The Letters of Amerigo Vespucci and Other Documents Illustrative of His Career*, trans. Clements R. Markham (New York: Burt Franklin Publishing, 2011), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36924/36924-h/36924-h.htm>.

8. Gretchen M. Bataille, “Introduction,” *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, ed. Gretchen M. Bataille (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 4. Analyses of the predominance of the “imaginary Indian” in popular culture are ample. Bataille describes the long-standing tradition of seeing and representing Native Americans through “European-eyes” (2). These European impressions impacted colonial and early American representations of the “Indian.” Non-Native anthropologists, ethnographers, novelists, dramatists, and filmmakers refashioned their imagined Indians to meet their needs of the time, portraying them as vanishing, primitive, squaw, half-breed, warriors, or militants, each “taking their turn in the foreground during various historical periods” (4).

9. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii, 10. *Ibid.*, xiii, xv.

11. Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 12–16. Deloria’s watershed book investigated the ways in which white

Americans and the United States government have treated Native American peoples as problems to be solved.

12. Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2–8.
13. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Conner, *Hollywood’s West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).
14. *Ibid.*, 6. While Turner’s analysis focused primarily on the white male experience, Rollins and O’Connor’s edited anthology also includes essays that explore film and television representation of women and non-whites in “Hollywood’s West.” Part Four, “The Postmodernist Western, 1980–2000” explores late-twentieth-century Western aesthetics and tropes, but the Casino Indian type is not noted. *Ibid.*, 239–99.
15. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1999).
16. *Ibid.*, 142.
17. Jessica R. Cattellino, “The Double Bind of American Indian Need-Based Sovereignty,” *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 235–62, 235, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01058.x>. In *High Stakes Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), Cattellino details the many ways casino wealth has changed the economic, political, and cultural landscape for tribal communities. At 234 she cites, for example, Supreme Court Justice Kennedy’s 1998 opinion in *Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma v. Manufacturing Technologies, Inc.*, because he “singled out indigenous economic enterprises as incompatible with sovereignty” and, as a reason to invalidate tribal immunity, he specifically listed tribal enterprises such as casinos. According to the First Nations Development Institute, chief among the reasons for decreased support was “the perception within philanthropy that Native communities have access to federal funds and ‘casino money,’ and therefore do not need philanthropic dollars” (Cattellino, *High Stakes*, 2).
18. Neva Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016 [1999]): 142.
19. Dustin Tahmahkera, *Tribal Television: Viewing Native People in Sitcoms* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), xiii.
20. *Ibid.*, 7. The inclusion of Native characters in 1950s and early 1960s sitcoms took the concerning tack of framing Native economic opportunity in accordance with “settler expectations,” Tahmahkera explains: in these episodes “recognizably Indian” characters could not be both Indigenous and modern, but rather found themselves “in cahoots with crooked settlers or, worse in the context of indigenous self-determination, working under the control of shady settler bosses” (42). Tahmahkera also argues that in sitcoms of the late 1960s representations of settler-Native cooperation had the effect of obscuring asymmetrical power relations and assimilationist goals. As President Nixon’s policies (and the national cultural attitude) shifted toward Indigenous self-determination, 1970s sitcoms featured plotlines “sympathetic” to the Indian “plight.” These romanticized portrayals of Native people, issues, and concerns tended to “subsume the indigenous talk of self-determination within a rubric of settler-driven determination” as settler characters patiently listened and proposed solutions to Indian problems (73). Tahmahkera finally turns to *King of the Hill*’s recurring representation throughout thirteen seasons from 1997–2010 of Native spiritual healer John Redcorn III. Partially due to the extent and frequency of his tenure, Tahmahkera attests that “representations of Redcorn reproduce and challenge the colonial discourses informing the recognizably Indian and indigenous-settler relations, (109). Although Redcorn eventually builds the Speaking Wind Casino upon the advice of a white male settler character, Dale, Redcorn does not neatly fall into the corrupt Casino Indian category due to his many other entrepreneurial ventures over the years.
21. *Ibid.*, xvi.

22. An exhaustive explanation of the myriad conflicts between Indigenous American water protectors and public and private crude oil pipeline projects is beyond the scope of this article. For more information see: Kathryn Northon-Smith, Kathy Lynn, Karletta Chief, Karen Cozzetto, Jamie Donatuto, Margaret Hiza Redsteer, Linda E. Kruger, Julie Maldonado, Carson Viles, and Kyle P. Whyte, "Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples: A Synthesis of Current Impacts and Experiences," Pacific Northwest Research Station General Technical Report (Portland, OR: US Department of Agriculture), <https://doi.org/10.2737/PNW-GTR-944>.
23. Cattelino, *High Stakes*, 7–8.
24. *The Sopranos*, "Christopher," dir. Timothy Van Patten, Season 4, Episode 3, Home Box Office, September 29, 2002.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *The Sopranos* 2002, episode no. 43.
27. Angela Aleiss, "Iron Eyes Cody: Wannabe Indian," *Cinéaste* 25, no. 1 (1999): 30–31, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41689203>.
28. Celeste Lacroix, "High Stakes Stereotypes: The Emergence of the 'Casino Indian' Trope in Television Depictions of Contemporary Native Americans," *Howard Journal of Communications* 22, no. 1 (2011): 16–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2011.546738>.
29. *The Sopranos*, "Christopher."
30. Lacroix, "High Stakes Stereotypes," 17, citing D. Horgan, "The Denis Meets the Donald's Standard for Looks," *The Hartford Courant*, October 8, 1993: A2.
31. Cattelino, *High Stakes*, 61.
32. *Ibid.*, 60.
33. Emily Todd VanDerWerff, review of *The Sopranos*, "Made in America" (season 6, episode 21; originally aired 6/10/2007), AVClub.com, <https://www.avclub.com/tv/reviews/the-sopranos>.
34. *The Sopranos*, "Christopher."
35. Many Americans who associated casinos with organized crime opposed the Native American tribal communities seeking to build and operate casinos in the 1980s and 1990s because they assumed that these tribes must be tied to the Mafia.
36. *Big Love*, "Block Party," dir. Daniel Attais, Season 3, Episode 1, Home Box Office, January 18, 2009.
37. *Big Love*, "Block Party"; "Empire," dir. Jim McKay, Season 3, Episode 2, Home Box Office, Jan. 25, 2009; "For Better or for Worse," dir. Julie Anne Robinson, Season 3, Episode 5, Home Box Office, February, 15, 2009; "Come, Ye Saints," dir. Daniel Attais, Season 3, Episode 6, Home Box Office, Feb. 22, 2009; "Rough Edges," dir. Daniel Attais, Season 3, Episode 8, Home Box Office, March 3, 2009; "Outer Darkness," dir. Micheal Lehmann, Season 3, Episode 9, Home Box Office, March 15, 2009; "Free at Last," dir. Daniel Attais, Season 4, Episode 1, Home Box Office, January 10, 2010; "Sins of the Father," dir. David Petrarca, Season 4, Episode 5, Home Box Office, February 7, 2010; "Under One Roof," dir. Daniel Attais, Season 4, Episode 6, Home Box Office, February 14, 2010; "Next Ticket Out," dir. David Knoller, Season 4, Episode 8, Home Box Office, February 28, 2010; "End of Days," dir. David Petrarca, season 4, episode 9, Home Box Office, March 7, 2010.
38. For evidence of fan interest in Barb and Tommy's growing sexual tension see numerous posts on the *Big Love Compound Blog* on the thread "Temptation of Barb: SPOILER ALERT," <http://big-lovecompound.proboards.com/thread/161/temptation-barb-spoiler-alert>. Television recap bloggers express a similar disappointment with the outcome of the almost-realized affair; see Julie Kushner, "Oh No, Mr. Bill (Henrickson)!: A Recap of Big Love's 'Blood Atonement,'" *TV Recappers Anonymous* blog, <https://tvrecappersanonymous.wordpress.com/2010/02/22/oh-no-mr-bill-henrickson-a-recap-of-big-loves-blood-atonement/>, and Irin Carmon, *Big Love* Finale: Teetering On The Brink," *Jezebel.com*, March 8, 2010, <https://jezebel.com/big-love-finale-teetering-on-the-brink-5488234>.

39. Tanya D. Zuk, "'Proud Mormon Polygamist': Assimilation, Popular Memory, and the Mormon Churches in Big Love," *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26, no. 1 (2014): 93, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.26.1.93>.
40. Brenda Weber, *Latter-Day Screens: Gender, Sexuality, and Mediated Mormonism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 35.
41. *Big Love*, "Empire," dir. Dan Attias, Season 3, Episode 2, Home Box Office, January 25, 2009.
42. Ibid.
43. *Big Love*, "Block Party."
44. Perks, *Media Marathonning*, 187.
45. For thorough analysis of how post-feminism, environmentalism, and multiculturalism promote neocolonialism in Disney's 1995 film *Pocahontas*, see Derek T. Buescher and Kent A. Ono, "Civilized Colonialism: Pocahontas as Neocolonial Rhetoric," *Women's Studies in Communication* 19, no. 2 (1996): 127–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.1996.11089810>.
46. *The Killing*, "Off the Reservation," dir. Veena Sud, Season 2, Episode 8, AMC, May 13, 2012. According to her IMDb biography, being a polyglot Canadian actress of Mediterranean, Irish, Scottish, French, and Native American descent, Claudia Ferri is cast in a variety of ethnic roles and performs in several languages. Her biography does not mention tribal affiliation.
47. While in-depth analysis of two-spirit identity is beyond the scope of this paper, it can briefly be defined as a 1990s pan-tribal term that refers to Indigenous gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people. According to Margaret Robinson in "Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity," *Journal of Homosexuality* 77, no. 12 (2019): 1675–90, 1681, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1613853>, "Two-spirit identity prioritizes cultural roles within one's Indigenous nation over connections with Settler-dominated LGBTQ communities. In doing so, two-spirit identity asserts that the meaning of sexual or gender difference among Indigenous people is to be found in Indigenous cultural frameworks rather than Settler categories." Also see Qwo-Li Driskill, "Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 69–92, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2009-013>, and the Indian Health Service webpage "Two-Spirit," <https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/>.
48. For analysis of the ubiquity of queer or queer-coded villains who are typed as dangerous and devious in popular culture, see Sean Griffin, *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out* (New York University Press, 2000); Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton University Press, 1994); and Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).
49. *The Killing*, "Off the Reservation."
50. *The Killing*, "Sayonara Hiawatha," dir. Phil Abraham, Season 2, Episode 9, AMC, May 20, 2012.
51. *House of Cards*, "Chapter 20," dir. James Foley, Season 2, Episode 7, Home Box Office, February 14, 2014.
52. *House of Cards*, "Chapter 21," dir. James Foley, Season 2, Episode 8, Home Box Office, February 14, 2014.
53. Brentin Mock, "The White Supremacy of 'House of Cards': A Thread of White Supremacy Helps Shape This Political Drama," *Colorlines*, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/white-supremacy-house-cards>.
54. Dina Gilio-Whittaker, "The Indians in Netflix's 'House of Cards,'" *Indian Country Today*, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/the-indians-in-netflixs-house-of-cards>.
55. George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism—The Ideology at the Root of All Our Problems," *The Guardian*, US edition, April 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>.

56. Deloria, *Custer*, 7.

57. See Jason E. Black, "The 'Mascotting' of Native America: Construction, Commodity, and Assimilation," *American Indian Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2002): 605–22; Deloria, *Playing Indian*; and Stephanie A. Fryberg, Hazel R. Markus, Daphna Oyserman, and Joseph M. Stone, "Of Warrior Chiefs and Indian Princesses: The Psychological Consequences of American Indian Mascots," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 3 (2008): 208–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530802375003>.

58. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 1–10.

59. *Ibid.*, 178.

60. Fredric Jameson, "Globalization and Political Strategy," *New Left Review*, no. 4 (2000): 53, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii4/articles/fredric-jameson-globalization-and-political-strategy>.

61. *Ibid.*, 55.

62. Patty Leow, "Introduction: Finding a New Voice—Foundations for American Indian Media," in *American Indians and the Mass Media*, ed. Meta G. Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 5.

Beaming Up and Hanging Out

A new special edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* is taking off! Our next issue, “Settler Science, Alien Contact, and Searches for Intelligence” reports on what happens when earthlings meet aliens—or settler government scientists meet Indigenous Studies scholars.

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