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Since approximately the late 1960s, there has been a steady flow of critical writing on the subject of anti-Native-American bias in children's literature. Most of the criticism has challenged readers and writers to reconsider the way Native Americans have been, and are, portrayed in children's books. There is no arguing that such a challenge is needed; anyone familiar with children's literature is aware of the many inaccurate and racist portrayals of Native Americans in children's books. Take, for example, the d'Aulaires' *Buffalo Bill* (Doubleday), published in 1953. The text of *Buffalo Bill* inaccurately informs readers that Plains tribes commonly used poisoned arrows against settlers, and one of the illustrations depicts a stereotyped attack on a wagon train. Of course, before the book has gone many pages, the heroic young Buffalo Bill gets to kill an Indian who has crept up on the whites under cover of darkness.

Many of the children's books published before 1970, such as *Buffalo Bill*, are blatantly racist and deserve the criticism they have received. A look at the dime-novel Westerns that flourished from the 1860s to the early 1900s shows that racism toward Native Americans was once a central feature of books marketed to children. This century, too, has produced significant numbers of children's books so blatantly racist that they would never be published today. Sprinkled among all these old shoot-'em-ups and Indian-bogeyman books, however, are older children's books that do not fit the racist mold.

The Special Collections of New Mexico State University Library, which is centered on the Diana and Joe Stein Collection of 1,100 mostly Western-themed children's books, provides some thirty examples of illustrated children's books about Native Americans published before 1970 that might be recommended today. Of course, no one can begin to consider a group of books like these without addressing the issue of stereotypes. Over the last twenty-some years, critics have developed some guidelines about stereotypes to be avoided in portraying Native Americans. While it is shortsighted to ignore context and condemn a book solely because a stereotype or two is present, the presence of multiple or egregious examples of the following stereotypes is seen by many critics as indicating racial insensitivity:

- Native American peoples and Native American cultures should not be shown as inferior to white peoples and white cultures;
- Native Americans should not be shown as existing only in the past;
- Members of different tribal groups should not be lumped together under the generic rubrics of Indians or Native Americans;
- Native Americans should not be shown as violent, humorless, or lacking in emotion;
- Native Americans should not be shown as buffoons or as ignorant Tonto-talkers;

- Elements of Native American culture, including ethnic garb, religion, and daily life, should be portrayed realistically;
- Animals and non-Native American children should not be shown dressed as Native Americans;
- Native Americans should not be depicted as objects in counting or alphabet books;
- Native Americans should not be shown practicing only stereotypical professions;
- Native Americans should not be depicted as having stereotypical features such as hooked noses or unnaturally red skin.

However, there is something to be said against condemning a book as racist simply because a stereotype is present. The best argument against this kind of condemnation is that some stereotypes can't be avoided. If an author is writing a realistic book about life in the Navajo Nation, for example, it is difficult to ignore the fact that too many Navajos live in poverty—stereotype though this may be. A second argument against condemnation solely on account of stereotype is that one person's stereotype can be another person's cultural virtue. For example, while one reader may see the portrayal of contemporary Native Americans living without the material comforts of the modern world as a negative stereotype, another might see this as a depiction of Native American rejection of white materialism. Finally, the act of scouring books in search of stereotype violations can lead to a checklist mentality that allows a critic to automatically recommend or condemn a book without troubling to consider the really difficult question of whether or not the book perpetuates untrue or harmful ideas about Native Americans.

That said, one stereotype of which the pre-1970 books are generally not guilty is the lumping together of tribes as if there were no essential difference between Mohawks and Miwoks. As a rule, each of the books focuses on a distinct tribe and realistically portrays that tribe's clothing, housing, and cultural artifacts. For example, Marjorie Webber Brown's *Pueblo Playmates* (Whitman, 1938) contains accurate descriptions of such specific Pueblo activities as house building, a wedding ceremony, and a Corn Dance. The author even provides a map showing where the very real Pueblo settlements described in the book are located. *Dancing Cloud, the Navajo Boy* (Viking, 1937) by Mary Marsh Buff includes Navajo words as part of the text, and *Moonlight and Rainbow* (McKnight, 1939), written by Geneva Linebaugh Rhodes, works into its plot Navajo customs such as the prohibition against a married man looking at his mother-in-law's face. Even the cartoonishly illustrated *Cocky Cactus* (Van Kampen, 1946) by Carolyn Ten Eyck Appleton sticks to the facts when it accurately shows a mother rocking her baby in a distinctive Navajo cradle. Myth books such as *Navaho Stories* (Garrard, 1957), *Pueblo Stories* (Garrard, 1956), and *In the Garden of the Home God* (Hazel Dreis, 1943) retell the creation stories of specific tribes instead of lumping together unattributed stories from many different tribes, a common practice which can reduce such stories to the level of "fairy tales."

Besides striving for accuracy, another way these older books dispel stereotypes is through their focus on Native-American family life. In almost every book the plot revolves around mothers, fathers, and children living and working together, and in many books the plots also involve the grandparents, aunts, and uncles who make up the traditional extended family. These family-centered stories and their illustrations depict Native Americans as loving and protective parents. In Roger Vernam's *Antelope: A Navajo Indian Boy* (Platt and Munk, 1935), Antelope's father is shown tenderly holding his sleeping son, while in *Little-Boy-Dance* (Wilcox and Follett, 1946), by Elizabeth Willis DeHuff, the parents frantically search for their child, lost in the dark after growing tired of dancing for stupid white tourists. The Hopi heroine of *The Sun Girl* (Gillick, 1941), written by Elizabeth White, or Polingaysi, is helped by a tender-hearted Navajo couple of whom she is at first fearful because she was brought up believing that all Navajos are kidnappers.

Parents and grandparents are also often depicted as teachers who pass tribal arts and beliefs on to the young. In book after book, mothers and grandmothers are shown teaching girls to cook, make pottery, and weave, and in most cases these arts are given due respect. For example, in *Dancing Cloud, the Navajo Boy*, the mother is described weaving "with the bright wool yarns the patterns that come to her as she works about her busy hogan. She is an artist." Fathers and grandfathers are shown teaching boys to farm, hunt, herd, and make jewelry. Such scenes serve to counter the stereotypes of Native Americans as violent, ignorant beings capable only of savage emotions and primitive crafts.

If anything, older books about Native Americans go too far in presenting favorable portraits of Native American families. In *The Land of Little Rain: A Story of Hopi Indian Children* (Winston, 1936), by Muriel H. Fellows, the members of the family are better than good, and the author treats readers to maxims such as "A good Indian never lies" and "A good Indian never hurts small animals." Similarly, in painting a positive picture of Native Americans, these older books avoid the many social problems which have long threatened Native-American families. The problem of alcoholism is simply ignored; the problem of poverty is generally sidestepped, often by portraying the children as willing participants in a subsistence economy. In too many books to mention, boys are employed in watching the family sheep while girls carry water to hogans and pueblos. In only one book, Wilfred S. Bronson's *Pinto's Journey* (Messner, 1948), is the problem of an absent parent presented, and since the story is set during World War II it may be that the missing father is simply in the service. While the sugar-coating of family life gets in the way of a complete picture of Native American life, such avoidance of social problems is characteristic of most pre-1970 children's books and is certainly not unique to older books about Native Americans.

The only social problem that is faced up to is the problem of balancing a life torn between Native-American culture and white culture. In most of the stories, white culture is represented by the school, and, as might be expected, the school usually wins out in the end. *Wewa: The Child of the Pueblos* (Educational Publishing, 1903)

and *Navaho Land, Yesterday and Today* (Melmont, 1961), though far apart in time, carry similarly propagandistic messages about the virtues of school:

Let us hope they [Native Americans] grow wiser and better at the school, learning good ways, not evil ones, from the white people. (Wewa)

The young Navahos will go to schools and colleges. They will bring about changes that will make life easier for the Navahos. (Navaho Land)

Other books are more understanding about the wedge that school can drive into the lives of young Native Americans. Both Ann Nolan Clark's *Little Boy with Three Names* (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1940) and *Ovada: An Indian Boy of Grand Canyon* (Ward Ritchie, 1969) by Henry C. James center on Native-American boys trying to reacquaint themselves with their families and their native cultures after having been away at boarding school. Some books are more openly critical of school. Stan Steiner's *The Last Horse* (Macmillan, 1961) includes a scene in which a foolish white teacher asks the Navajo protagonist if he would like to be an American, causing the boy to wonder, "What was an American?" But in even the most sympathetic books, school must come before culture. The otherwise well-informed, culturally sensitive *Ashkee of Sunshine Water* (Grosset, 1941), written by Faith Hill and Mable F. Rice, ends with Ashkee lured into attending school because he is fascinated with the school's phonograph.

Although today's readers may not approve of the attitude toward school that these books take, these same readers would likely approve of their general avoidance of violence. Perhaps repelled by the focus on violence in so many books and films about Native Americans, the authors chose to portray gentler sides of Native American life. Many of the stories are given contemporary settings, thus allowing the subject of warfare and the warrior stereotype to be avoided altogether. In only two books, *Antelope: A Navajo Indian Boy* and *Hopi: The Cliff Dweller* (David McKay, 1909) by Martha Jewett, are Native Americans shown fighting. The acts of day-to-day living, not warfare, are the focus of almost all of the stories.

For many Native Americans spiritual life is inseparable from day-to-day life, and for this reason the subject of spirituality is not neglected in this canon. Native-American spirituality plays a part in many of the stories and is largely treated with the respect it deserves. In *Ashkee of Sunshine Water* the family's decision to relocate their hogan because there are *chin dee* (bad spirits) in the area is treated as a perfectly reasonable reason to move. Oliver La Farge's *The Mother Ditch* (Houghton, 1954) includes a rain-dance scene but avoids stereotype by describing the dance as "a solemn religious service" and noting that "there are many prayers in the songs." The accompanying illustration by Karl Larsson also reinforces the spirituality of the ceremony by showing the dancers as figures distant yet connected to the natural world, not as stereo-typed grotesques. In a number of books Native American characters communicate with animals in a spiritual way. In Mary Buff's *Hah-Nee of the Cliff Dwellers* (Houghton, 1956) the grandfather speaks with a black bird, and in

This for That (Golden Gate, 1965), written by Ann Nolan Clark, a Papago boy goes underground to learn from the trade rats. *Young Hunter of the Picuris* (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1943), also written by Ann Nolan Clark, includes a full description of the rituals that surround the hunting of deer. These and the many other examples of deep respect and careful attention to Native-American spiritual life may come as a surprise to those who think that such respect and attention is a new idea in children's books.

Besides stereotypes and inaccuracies, another concern often expressed is the lack of books written and illustrated by Native Americans. While most of these older books were neither written nor illustrated by Native Americans, there was more participation by Native American writers and artists than one would expect. As far as I was able to determine, two of the books were written by Native Americans, one was translated by a Native American, and seventeen were illustrated by Native Americans. Some of these artists executed representational drawings that do not show a strong Native American influence. For example, Andrew Standing Soldier, a Sioux, used lithographic pencil on pebbled board to create rather conventional illustrations for Ann Nolan Clark's *There Still Are Buffalo* (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1942) and *Singing Sioux Cowboy* (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1947). Native-American artist Allan Houser created highly representational illustrations for *The Desert People* (Viking, 1962), yet his artwork often reflects a true insider's awareness of the absurdity of being torn between cultures. His marvelous illustration of Papago Indians dancing and beating drums while dressed in cowboy clothes is both humorous and heartbreaking in its insight. Other Native-American illustrators, such as Acoma Indian Wolf Robe Hunt, work in a less representational style that is closer to traditional Native-American art. Hunt says of his illustrations for *The Dancing Horses of Acoma* (World, 1963), "In illustrating the book I kept close to the authentic Indian flat style, for in it there is a great deal of beauty." Similarly, Roland Whitehorse, a Kiowa artist, uses earthy reds and yellows in his illustrations for Alice Marriott's *Winter Telling Stories* (Crowell, 1947).

Taking everything into account, are all these books perfectly free from stereotypes and absolutely free from racism? No. But many of the books are good—surprisingly good to those who have been trained to expect only the worst from the past—and still worth reading. After all, the present does not have all the answers to the problems faced by Native Americans. Perhaps we could learn something if we listened to those voices of the past that struggled, imperfectly, with these same problems.

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