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Red Power, White Movies: *Billy Jack*, *Johnny Firecloud*, and the Cultural Politics of the "Indiansploitation" Cycle

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As low-budget independents working outside or on the margins of corporate capital, the exploitation filmmakers who served grind houses had long sought short-term economic returns from sensationalized depictions of timely or controversial subject matter—and the tumultuous racial politics of the 1960s–1970s civil rights movement were no exception. Given the common tendency for discussions of race in the United States to be metonymically condensed into considerations of the African American experience, it is no surprise that much critical attention has been paid to the appropriative influences between Black Power rhetoric and the early-1970s rise of blaxploitation films. Yet, while slavery understandably retains its discursive centrality as the "original sin" contradicting the American national project's higher ambitions of freedom and equality, the history of colonization and extermination faced by Native American peoples is far less often invoked. Indirectly inspired by the well-publicized political activism of groups like Indians of All Tribes and the American Indian Movement (AIM), a short-lived cycle of films—sometimes termed "Indiansploitation"—nevertheless emerged during blaxploitation's boom years, addressing this notably different historical legacy of racism and genocide. Although these films may have imitated blaxploitation's highly marketable popularization of an often violent, racially marked (anti)hero, they also resonated with the growing political consciousness of Native Americans and their non-Indigenous allies, and thus stand as an important but oft-neglected development in exploitation cinema's transcultural impetus.

Blaxploitation films emerged during a period of severe economic downturn within the wider US film industry, with the unexpected success of films like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) and *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971) heralding the industry's sudden "discovery" of black audiences as a potential audience hitherto underserved by the genre films that frequently played urban grind houses. Both independent producers and major studios jumped on the trend, their films influencing one another until the cycle gradually exhausted audience demand in the mid- to late 1970s, by which point the film industry had economically restabilized and a

deliberate catering to black audiences gave way to films with more interracial crossover appeal.[1] By contrast, although movie theaters have long been located on or near tribal reservations,[2] the far smaller (and hence less profitable) potential Native American audience for exploitation films cannot fully account for why Indiansploitation films emerged concurrent with blaxploitation. Nor does the fact that white writers and producers were largely responsible for these films simply equate to a mercenary act of one-way cultural appropriation of racial discontent—a long-held criticism of blaxploitation that has since been complicated by recent scholarship.[3] Rather, these films—while politically limited and sometimes stereotypical in their depictions of Native Americans—also index the "Red Power" movement that reached its height between the 1969–1971 Alcatraz occupation and the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee. With the movement gaining currency among not just Indigenous activists but also via transcultural alliances with Black Power and white countercultural activists, these films about the retributive violence exacted by modern-day Native Americans represent a notable extension of the era's growing awareness of Indigenous rights issues.

In this chapter, I do not claim that Indiansploitation films like *Billy Jack* (Tom Laughlin, 1971), *Johnny Firecloud* (William Allen Castleman, 1975), and *Angry Joe Bass* (Thomas G. Reeves, 1976) are "realistic," "positive," or "authentic" representations of Native Americans—if such a thing could be said to truly exist in the realm of the fiction film. In fact, most of these films star non-Indigenous actors in redface and rely on a plethora of stereotypical traits even as they attempt to generate empathy with their protagonists. Although the historical legacies of African American slavery and Native American extermination share important parallels and differences, exploitation cinema's capitalization on anger over racial inequality has still tended to uphold the wider cultural condensation of blackness as the quintessential symbol of American race relations. As such, this chapter attempts to avoid conflating these different histories of genocide, but some slippage is inevitable on my part. This is due to not only Indiansploitation filmmakers' partial imitation of the blaxploitation formula with Native American themes—a cinematic echo of how the Red Power movement gained momentum and inspiration from 1960s African American advances in self-determination—but also my own intellectual debt to the abundance of existing scholarship on blaxploitation.

Much like blaxploitation, then, I argue that the political value of Indiansploitation films resides more in the retributive fantasies they offer—including to audiences beyond Native Americans themselves—than in some essentialized notion of "Indianness" to which they do not necessarily aspire. Indeed, by foregrounding the concept of race as stylized *performance* instead of biological truth, we can better account for the political resonance generated in their specific historical context.[4] It was, after all, the superficial and even stereotypical connotations of Indianness (e.g. spirituality, environmentalism, communalism) that—for better or worse—made Native American issues so appealing to the era's various countercultural interests.[5] By exploring the threads of integrationist and separatist politics echoed in different films within the cycle, we can thereby understand how white filmmakers briefly capitalized on intersecting facets of Red Power activism, while still creating films whose ideological strategies might render them appealing to white and Indigenous audiences alike.

Transcultural influences and the rise of Red Power

Responding to America's changing racial politics, the early-1970s marketplace for both major-studio and exploitation films engendered multiple cycles with potential appeal across ethnic lines. Examples include not only the crossover white audience for blaxploitation films but also the lucrative African American viewership of East Asian kung fu films at urban grind houses.[6] Furthermore, black protagonists began appearing in major-studio westerns like *100 Rifles* (Tom Gries, 1969) and *Buck and the Preacher* (Sidney Poitier, 1972), not only complicating the genre's longtime equation between white/Anglo heroes and raced/Indian villains but also bridging between the meager integrationism of 1960s social-problem films and later, more separatist blaxploitation westerns like *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (Martin Goldman, 1972), *Thomasine & Bushrod* (Gordon Parks Jr., 1974), and *Take a Hard Ride* (Antonio Margheriti, 1975).[7]

These same years likewise saw a much-discussed spate of revisionist westerns that explicitly reversed the genre's old racial dichotomies by depicting white cowboys and cavalrymen as villains and Native Americans as sympathetic heroes or avengers. Ranging from prominent offerings like *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970), *A Man Called Horse* (Elliot Silverstein, 1970), and *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970) to more exploitative pictures like *Navajo Joe* (Sergio Corbucci, 1966), *Cry Blood, Apache* (Jack Starrett, 1970), *Chato's Land* (Michael Winner, 1972), and *Apache Blood* (Vern Piehl, 1975), these films have often been read as a generic reaction to the political advances of the civil rights era—including the rise of American Indian activism.[8] Yet, as valuable as these films may be in reformulating generic tropes, they still unfold in a mythic, premodern West, offering allegorical value at the expense of more explicitly evoking the Red Power movement. As Jodi Byrd says, "The possibility of an eruption of unanticipated Indian violence and the expectation of the hostile Indian savage seeking revenge for historical crimes remain a powerful threat within non-Indian imaginings,"[9] and I would argue that the political efficacy of such imagined threats is better served in modern dress. For this reason, I see the aforementioned westerns as an important cinematic thread intersecting with the Indiansploitation films under consideration in this chapter, but I instead focus on *contemporary* narratives of Native American retribution.[10]

The desire for political retribution—violent or otherwise—for a long history of forced removal, broken treaties, and cultural extermination had engendered the rise of Red Power activism by the mid-1960s. Federal efforts to terminate tribal sovereignty and force cultural assimilation had remained strong through the 1950s, but the liberation era led to organized political resistance both in the courts and on the ground. A series of "fish-ins" in the Pacific Northwest saw Native American activists reasserting their treaty rights to maintain tribal self-sufficiency by harvesting seafood on and outside reservation land. The resulting string of legal conflicts was not resolved until Judge George H. Boldt's landmark decision in *United States v. Washington* (1974), which saw the federal government finally siding with tribal treaty rights. Meanwhile, a series of well-publicized demonstrations on federal land focused public attention on Indigenous land rights and substandard living conditions. These included the 1969–

1971 occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes; the 1970 return of the sacred Blue Lake (New Mexico) area to the Taos Pueblo; the 1970 occupation of Fort Lawton, Seattle, by United Indians of All Tribes; and the 1972 cross-country Trail of Broken Treaties march to Washington, DC, which culminated with AIM members occupying and sacking the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building. Although Red Power protests would persist throughout the 1970s, the movement arguably reached its peak of public visibility and sympathy when AIM's 1973 armed occupation of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota—initially staged as a protest over corruption within the tribal government—resulted in a violent siege by federal troops at the site of the infamous 1890 Wounded Knee massacre.

Native American tribes do not necessarily share a common culture or past, since cultural differences often existed between individual tribes and regional affiliations. Furthermore, unlike other racially marked groups in the United States, Native Americans already had long-standing (if unfulfilled) promises of intranational sovereignty through specific land bases and treaties.[11] Accordingly, Native American activists did not want their causes to be simply perceived as derivative of the civil rights movement spearheaded by African Americans. In his foundational and widely read Red Power manifesto, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, the author and activist Vine Deloria Jr. argues that viewing civil rights as a *racial* issue instead of a cultural or ethnic issue has not only reduced discussion of race to blackness but also denied the significant differences both within and between presumed racial categories. "The most common attitude Indians have faced has been the unthoughtful Johnny-come-lately liberal who equates certain goals with dark skin," he notes. "This type of individual generally defines the goals of all groups by the way he understands what he wants for the blacks."[12]

In her indispensable history *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power*, Sherry L. Smith details how white, middle-class New Leftists who had supported the African American civil rights movement had become increasingly alienated from the growing separatism of late-1960s Black Power rhetoric. Still desiring to "authenticate" their political involvement by championing social justice for more "authentic," non-white peoples, the counterculture gradually gravitated toward Native American issues. The predominantly white counterculture may have envisioned the vaunted mysticism, environmentalism, and communalism of Indigenous cultures as spiritual predecessors to the cultural alienation of latter-day hippies, but their sometimes-superficial romanticization of Indigeneity nevertheless succeeded in garnering wider attention for Red Power struggles and even spurred some younger Native Americans to increasingly revalue their own culture. As Smith says, these transcultural investments in Indianness were certainly not unproblematic, but they still "represented the absolute antithesis of the assimilation and acculturation models that had prevailed for centuries."[13]

Several social-problem films about modern-day Indigenous life appeared during these years, capitalizing on spreading public awareness of Native American politics. Based on Clair Huffaker's 1967 novel *Nobody Loves a Drunken Indian*, Carol Reed's *Flap* (1970) raises issues of Indigenous land rights within the lightweight context of a major-studio comedy about a man named Flapping Eagle (Anthony Quinn), who quixotically leads a one-man Native uprising. After Red Power activists raised a controversy over

the film's planned use of the novel's original title, Warner Bros. made the retitled film's topical appeal further visible on its posters: "A warning to the mayor: FLAP is here! The Indians have already claimed Alcatraz. City Hall may be next. *You have been warned.*" Several years later, Twentieth Century Fox contributed *When the Legends Die* (Stuart Millar, 1972), an adaptation of Hal Borland's 1963 novel about a young Ute man torn between traditional Indigenous lifeways and cultural assimilation after he becomes a successful rodeo rider. Framed as a generational tension between the precocious Tom Black Bull (Frederic Forrest) and his white rodeo mentor, Red Dillon (Richard Widmark), the film's updating of the novel's setting from the early twentieth century to the present day was calculated to resonate with the youth audience's alienation from parental cultures.

Perhaps the most interesting example, however, is GSF Productions' independent release *Journey through Rosebud* (Tom Gries, 1972), which is about a white hippie named Danny (Kristoffer Tabori) who befriends Frank (Robert Forster), a cynical young Sioux, while traveling through South Dakota's Rosebud Indian Reservation in an attempt to evade the draft. Rather than move to the ghettos of Chicago and risk losing their cultural heritage, the reservation's politically engaged youth decide to organize and reassert the treaty rights that should prevent them from starving on their own land, staging an armed protest to release a local man accused of illegally harvesting food animals. Although many of the Native Americans scorn the appearance of the "goddamn hippies," Danny eventually develops a romance with a local Sioux activist (Victoria Racimo), while Frank becomes more self-destructive after the white organizers of a competitive demolition-derby circuit exclude him from participating in the sort of lucrative traveling competitions that benefited *When the Legends Die*'s protagonist. After Frank dies in a car crash and Danny finds his tenuous tribal relationships severed, he returns to the open road and an uncertain future. Although it plays into the revisionist western's trope of the white man who desires to "go Native," the film's depiction of armed political standoffs was remarkably prescient of the following year's events at the Pine Ridge reservation just adjacent to Rosebud.

While this handful of contemporary social-problem films lacks the more lurid emphasis on violent retribution that the exploitation film market would capitalize upon through blaxploitation-style tropes, these films still demonstrate the timeliness and potential countercultural appeal of Red Power issues. *Variety*, for example, deemed *Rosebud*'s box-office prospects "dubious, although it may do well in big city liberal strongholds," with its serious themes and sparse narrative a "hard sell" in comparison to the more flippant and star-powered *Flap*'s respectable returns.[14]

The *Billy Jack* series

Without sacrificing the transcultural resonance of the era's Red Power issues, exploitation cinema's marshalling of a politically charged Native protagonist to the more populist genre thrills of ass-kicking heroism found its most influential model in white filmmaker Tom Laughlin. Working under various pseudonyms as writer, director,

and star, Laughlin made a four-film series about a character that even Vine Deloria (although dismissing the films as "dreadful") grudgingly called an "overwhelming symbol of the fascination that Indians held for other Americans in the sixties," and a series that "struck a responsive chord in majority hearts and minds."[15]

Introduced in American International Pictures' *The Born Losers* (1967), one of the many late-1960s biker films cycling off from the success of *The Wild Angels* (Roger Corman, 1966), Billy Jack (Laughlin) is a "half-breed" former Green Beret turned liberal-minded vigilante. Repeatedly derided as an "Injun," Billy runs afoul of a biker gang terrorizing a California coastal town (Figure 11.1), but his efforts to intervene where the police do not also results in his arrest and a hefty fine. Like *When the Legends Die*'s Tom Black Bull, Billy is a skilled rodeo competitor, but the next competition is not soon enough to win the money to pay his fine, and he is unable to support himself as a wild horse tamer since the animals have been vanishing (in the sequel, we see that white poachers have been killing wild horses on reservation land for dog food). When the gang subsequently steals Billy's meager savings, a series of violent confrontations ensue as he attempts to recover his ticket out of legal jeopardy.

Meanwhile, the biker gang is on trial for raping several local teenagers after the women acceded to visit the gang's hideout, fascinated with their rebelliously nonconformist image. The gang begins threatening them against testifying in an upcoming trial, and the narrative's central conflict soon becomes the question of whether the women should further endanger their personal safety to testify on behalf of the law and order championed by their parental generation. The victims also include Vicky (Elizabeth James), a bikini-clad college student whose independence is marked by her lone driving of a motorcycle; apparently entreating upon the biker gang's masculinist domain, she is raped after she refuses to be sexually initiated as the

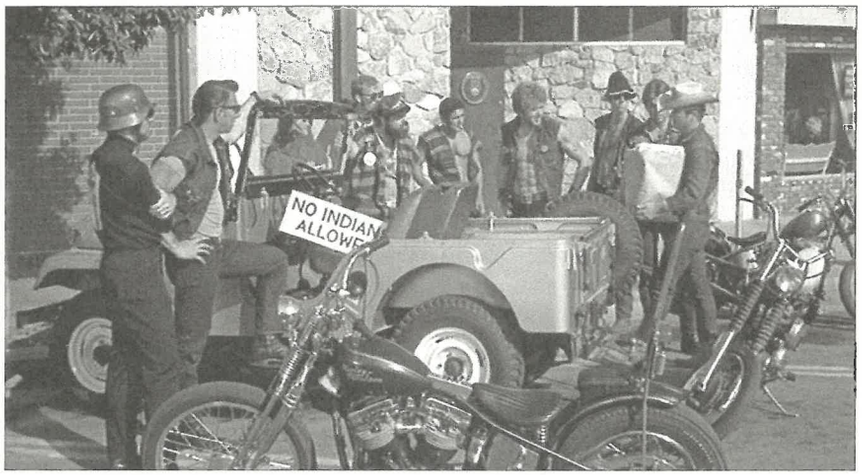

Figure 11.1 Billy Jack confronts the biker gang after they repurpose a "No Indians" sign from a local business, in *The Born Losers* (1967).

gang's newest "mama." After befriending Billy, Vicky must decide whether to be like the younger victims and retreat into a sheltered life of white privilege or to risk her life for the common good. When the gang captures Vicky on the eve of the trial, Billy infiltrates their hideout and eventually turns them over in a police raid—though he is shot and wounded by a sheriff after being mistaken for one of the miscreants.

More than willing to use his hapkido martial-arts training against the gang, Billy's vigilantism positions him outside the law, yet he often acquiesces to the legal system's authority—whether in the fine initially leveled against him or the impending trial against the gang. This ambivalence is little coincidence, since the era saw the outlaw biker's "raw, spiritual freedom" celebrated in countercultural quarters as a figure inheriting the "Noble Savage" trope long associated with Native Americans.[16] The film thus finds the conflict between Billy and the villainous gang symbolizing an ideological tension between "good Indians" and "bad Indians" at a time when Native American and countercultural politics were both gaining wider sympathies. The biker gang's very motto, "Born to Lose," even echoes the implication that Billy's racialized identity marks his inherent (counter)cultural difference—a more "authentic" difference from the white bikers' voluntarily adopted social deviance.

In this regard, Billy's Indianness also helps explain his ostracism as a returned Vietnam veteran whose extralegal activities often pit him against local sheriffs—a trope that would be subsequently repeated in *Journey through Rosebud*, *Johnny Firecloud*, and *Angry Joe Bass*. As Sherry Smith observes, the counterculture often drew parallels between past military massacres of the Native Americans and present massacres of the Vietnamese, with both groups posited as similarly resisting European colonialism.[17] As a "half-breed" uneasily positioned between two worlds, then, Billy's status as a veteran now opposed to the war implicates him as both colonizer and colonized; he may somewhat share the bikers' resistance to the dominant culture's laws, but it is also implied that his ethnicity gives him a premodern moral/spiritual high ground that the hedonistic bikers lack. Yet, the fact that Billy is the only Native character in the film suggests that his "important roles for a liberal audience—environmental steward, precolonial subject, and spiritual guardian" (all traits that would be amplified in the sequel)—serve to render him not only highly visible via stereotype but also a paradoxical embodiment of "ghostly" Indigeneity that has been otherwise absented into a premodern past. As a solitary vigilante, he thus serves as what Michelle H. Raheja calls a nostalgic figure for already-vanished Native American lifeways that are ostensibly distanced from the era's collective struggles over political self-determination—and yet, his very status as the film's lone Native American (notably played by a white man) also serves as an uncanny reminder of white guilt over the cultural genocides that Red Power activism was attempting to redress.[18]

Following *The Born Losers*'s modest success as a biker film, Laughlin further styled himself as a countercultural hero through the tumultuous production and distribution history of its 1971 follow-up *Billy Jack*. After Laughlin independently produced the film, Twentieth Century Fox acquired the distribution rights, but Laughlin stole the film's soundtrack when the studio threatened to alter the film. After Laughlin reacquired the film, Warner Bros. next agreed to distribute it, but Laughlin sued the

studio for dumping it into drive-ins, grind houses, and other areas of the exploitation film circuit in 1971. Warner Bros. settled with Laughlin, allowing him to reissue the film on his own terms for an even split of the profits. Laughlin "four-walled" the film by renting out theaters at a flat rate (thus allowing him to collect all the proceeds), and then used market research to saturate local television with demographically targeted advertising. "Separate ads foregrounded romance, countercultural/anti-Vietnam War aspects, action, and martial arts—a varied campaign designed to reach a broad spectrum of moviegoers." When the $800,000 film became a tremendous hit upon its May 1973 reissue, earning over $32 million, Laughlin's strong-arm tactics against the majors were vindicated; he not only earned a far larger share of the profits than his original distribution deals would have allowed but the larger industry began experimenting with four-walling and localized saturation advertising.[19] Countering *Variety*'s suggestion the previous year about *Journey through Rosebud*, then, *Billy Jack*'s reissue proved that Native American political themes did well beyond just urban liberal enclaves when marketed to appeal to transcultural and multigeneric interests. The film's rerelease on the very day after the seventy-one-day Wounded Knee occupation ended could not have been better timed.

Billy Jack opens with a confrontation between Billy and white poachers (including a local sheriff) on reservation land in the American Southwest, setting up the film's central conflict over sovereignty. Billy is the unofficial guardian of Freedom School, a liberal alternative school and multiracial/countercultural refuge run by the soft-spoken pacifist Jean (played by Laughlin's wife, Delores Taylor). After one of the poachers savagely beats his hippie daughter Barbara (Julie Webb) for coming home from San Francisco pregnant, Billy hides her at the school, which is located on the reservation and therefore a different legal jurisdiction. Barbara soon falls for Martin (Stan Rice), a young Native student who is targeted by local bigots after he is suspected of being the baby's father. After an escalating series of confrontations between the students and bigots—with Billy often stepping in to deliver some hapkido payback—Jean is raped and Martin killed, but Jean urges Billy to control his rage, lest his vengeance jeopardize the school's existence.[20] When the authorities finally come to take Barbara from the school, she and Billy hole up in a nearby church where a Wounded Knee-style shootout ensues—ending once Jean convinces Billy to surrender and, by standing trial, bring attention to Red Power issues.

As in *The Born Losers*, Billy fits the popular 1970s trope of the male vigilante seeking revenge against rapists (as also seen in *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) and *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974))—but throughout he is depicted as less violent and far more spiritual than in the previous entry. Unlike the previous film, his unspoken love for Jean has led him toward pacifism, as she encourages Billy not to follow a retributive path of further destruction. Like the teenage rape victims in *The Born Losers*, Billy is now positioned as the character who must altruistically reconcile himself with the common good instead of simply following a selfish desire for revenge. Since he is no longer the only Native American character, protecting the Freedom School means protecting not only the Indigenous rights to be enjoyed by young people like Martin but also the countercultural youth drawn to Native spirituality and literal relocation

onto Native land. Indeed, Billy explicitly notes that white youth have turned to Native American ways after seeking spiritual answers not provided by drugs or the religion of their parents. "Being an Indian is not a matter of blood; it's a way of life," he concludes, freely opening notions of "Indianness" to countercultural participation.

On the one hand, then, Billy is no longer depicted as a "lone" Native character, suggesting that he is not just a ghostly remnant of a premodern past, but rather one of many Native Americans struggling to survive on the reservation against continual threats to their sovereignty. This political dimension is all the more foregrounded in *Billy Jack* because, unlike *The Born Losers*, the savagely violent and bigoted villains are not an "outsider" group like a biker gang, but prominent white townspeople themselves. On the other hand, the film dilutes the notion of "Indianness" to the point that it becomes accessible to white counterculture members as a trendy mantle that can be discarded at any time to reassert their racial privilege. As valuable as Billy's fostering of transcultural sympathy may be, for example, his statement about Indianness as a way of life also questions the very blood-quantum laws that (for better or worse) provide a legal justification for tribal membership and sovereignty in the first place. Furthermore, he may tell Jean that he'll stop being a vigilante when the law is applied equally to all, but Jean's own moral struggles with adhering to her pacifism are narratively developed in more detail than Billy's stand for Native American rights. When the film ends on a note of solidarity with Red Power—the Freedom School students standing and defiantly raising their fists (Figure 11.2) as the police car carrying Billy drives by—it thus feels like an abrupt shift from the film's primary emphasis on pacifism, an idea that a Vietnam-era audience could perhaps more readily rally behind.

Despite the film's cumulative success at the box office, some Native American critics derided it as "traditional American Western lore dressed in buckskins, authenticated

Figure 11.2 After Billy finally surrenders at the church, the multiracial, countercultural Freedom School students raise their fists in solidarity, in *Billy Jack* (1971).

by an intense Lutheran belief that justification by faith alone is sufficient."[21] Billy also represents common stereotypes of the Indian as violent, mystical, attuned to nature, and unafraid to die in vain.[22] Other critics were more charitable, saying it "does not patronize Indians, and it finds value for life today in Indian ways of living."[23] "Here, for once, is a film that finds part of the solution right in the problem," said another, "a film that harnesses violence in support of peace and brotherhood."[24] Still another suggests that this ideological ambivalence ensured the film's box-office success by appealing to different cultural fantasies: "*Billy Jack* wants to be realistic in its approach to social issues, but finds that for dramatic effectiveness it must use the stock figures of melodrama … Billy Jack is a superhero for an age that needs superheroes, but he is also a man who needs lecturing about nonviolence in an era too 'realistic' to believe in them."[25] Although the film's critical reputation has not greatly improved over the years, more recent critics like Scott Richard Lyons acknowledge "an entire generation of young Indian men … wearing variations of what is now considered to be the standard American Indian Movement (AIM) uniform, but which was originally Billy Jack's iconic outfit," testifying to not only the film's cultural influence upon Indigenous viewers but also its even-handed resonance with Red Power and leftist debates over violent versus nonviolent resistance.[26]

The inevitable sequel, *The Trial of Billy Jack* (1974), actually spends little time drawing attention to Red Power issues through Billy's involuntary manslaughter trial. Billy instead uses his time on the witness stand recalling a My Lai-inspired massacre he saw in Vietnam and denouncing Nixonian foreign policy. Throughout the film, Laughlin pays far more attention to the Freedom School's continuing struggles with corrupt local government and business interests once Billy is released from prison and begins a spiritual purification process. Indeed, the film's prologue betrays its primary interest in white countercultural issues instead of Red Power, listing the number of casualties at real-life student protests like Kent State University before including the fictional Freedom School shootout as the most recent incident. Although there are long sequences dedicated to Native Americans arguing about resistance to white corporate encroachment on tribal lands, the film offers even fewer action scenes than its predecessor. The end result is an overly long, meandering series of scenes featuring Billy, Jean, and their comrades speechifying on leftist views about Vietnam, Nixon, tribal rights, child abuse, government corruption, and civil disobedience. Gripping cinema it is not. Less a coherent narrative than a guidebook to The World According to Tom Laughlin, the film was modestly successful as a follow-up to the previous year's phenomenon, but the series clearly saw diminishing generic and economic returns.

By eschewing the earlier films' vigilante genre thrills in favor of greater political grandstanding, Laughlin gradually lost the multigeneric viewership that *Billy Jack* had fostered through potentially exploitative appeals to martial-arts action and countercultural rebellion. A further film, *Billy Jack Goes to Washington* (1977), appeared several years later, but Laughlin's remake of the Frank Capra classic did not even garner a theatrical run and was instead sold to television syndication. Nevertheless, Lyons reads the trajectory of the series as "a civil rights roadmap, moving as it does from defense of oppressed individuals (*The Born Losers*), to militant confrontation with

'legitimate' power structures (***Billy Jack***), to engagement with the court system (*The Trial of Billy Jack*), and finally to an attempted seizing of power using national electoral politics (*Billy Jack Goes to Washington*)."[27] This reading is important, because even if the series represents an integrationist approach to Native American issues, it was only one direction that the Red Power movement was unfolding as its more radical elements subsided in Wounded Knee's wake. Indeed, as Billy Jack gradually became less violent and more macropolitically involved in liberal causes, another exploitation film would emerge to pick up the far bloodier and more radically separatist elements of the era.

Johnny Firecloud

Although derivative of *Billy Jack*'s far greater renown, William Allen Castleman's 1975 film *Johnny Firecloud* is arguably the quintessential example of a Native American-themed exploitation film, albeit one that has garnered virtually no critical attention despite its strong screenplay and performances. Whereas Laughlin blanched at the thought of *Billy Jack* being merely consigned to drive-ins and grind houses, *Johnny Firecloud* revels in its sleazier pedigree—but without wholly sacrificing political resonance. Sexploitation specialists Entertainment Ventures, Inc. (EVI) were veteran producers of some of the highest-budgeted soft-core films of the late 1960s, but when hard-core porn began dominating the sex film market in the early 1970s, the company branched out into R-rated general-release films for economic survival. EVI head David F. Friedman managed to raise $220,000 (his largest budget ever) for *Johnny Firecloud*, and the major studios were so hungry to cash in on *Billy Jack*'s success that Laughlin's original distributor, Twentieth Century Fox, made a deal with the sexploiteers for *Firecloud*'s foreign distribution rights. Their budget already recouped from the Fox deal, EVI profitably retained distribution rights for the United States and Canada (including playing the film at the Lyric theater on New York City's 42nd Street, among other grind houses), and later syndicated it to television.[28]

As in *Billy Jack*, Johnny Firecloud (Victor Mohica) is another veteran whose Indianness sets him at odds with the local bigots who effectively run a tiny Southwestern town. Local gangleader Herb Colby (Ralph Meeker) is especially out for Johnny's blood after the latter impregnated Colby's daughter, June (Christina Hart), just prior to Johnny's deployment to Vietnam. Kept apart by her father, June lost the baby and has since become an alcoholic. Meanwhile, Johnny has returned to town out of his love for June, which opens him to constant harassment from Sheriff Jesse (David Canary) at Colby's command. Johnny's grandfather, Chief White Eagle (Frank DeKova), is also an alcoholic, but whereas June's racial/class privilege allows her addiction to unfold behind closed doors, White Eagle serves his addiction at the price of debasing himself in public for the amusement of Colby's men—especially at the aptly named Thunderbird Bar, wallpapered with Indian kitsch, where Colby holds court. When Johnny arrives at the bar to beat up the baddies and take his grandfather home, we quickly see the film's indebtedness to blaxploitation in the broadly caricatured conflict between racist white villains and rebelliously heroic men of color, much as the one-

time taboos on miscegenation and Native-on-white violence fuel the conflict in ways that earlier generations of Native American and African American representation would not have lauded.[29]

Yet, unlike Billy Jack, Johnny has turned his back on his ethnic heritage, ashamed of what has become of his grandfather and the poverty-stricken reservation where he grew up. Despite his grandfather's appeals for Johnny to return and rediscover his rich heritage, the younger man accuses White Eagle of wanting to join the white man's world without knowing how. Initially, Johnny would rather integrate with white society beyond the reservation, even at the cost of his birthright to become the new chief upon his grandfather's death. He reminds White Eagle how the "fire cloud" that gave him his name—the atomic bomb tested on the day of Johnny's birth—marked "the beginning of a new age," an age divorced from seemingly outdated notions of tribal sovereignty. This generational divide is not one-sided, however, since Johnny's friend Nenya (Sacheen Littlefeather) is a young woman who also left the reservation, but has returned to teach at the reservation school, college-educated and proud of her Indigenous heritage (Figure 11.3).

Yet, Johnny's refusal to be "just another Indian" changes after he reconciles with June, and Colby subsequently arranges his arrest on a phony rape charge.[30] While Johnny is in prison, White Eagle dons a traditional headdress and is lynched by a mob after demanding Colby release his grandson. Johnny soon escapes, but Colby's men rape and beat Nenya to death (a scene betraying EVI's sexploitation background) when they come to the reservation school looking for the fugitive—another instance of sexual violence prompting vengeance in the cycle, but this time a Native woman savaged by white cowboy types.[31]With White Eagle and Nenya both murdered, all those who challenged Johnny to embrace his heritage are gone, so he decides to finally take a stand for tradition and seek vengeance as the tribe's de facto chief. One of the film's taglines—"They taught him today's violence … He gave them yesterday's revenge!"—suggests the more stereotypically "Indian" methods of Johnny's bloody retribution: death by scalping, by tomahawk, by dynamite, by bag of rattlesnakes pulled over the head, and by burial up to the head to let the vultures do the rest. After Johnny strikes back against Colby, June leaves town, prepared to testify against her father, and Jesse's final confrontation with Johnny in the desert foothills ends in a stalemate.

Instead of *Billy Jack*'s less confrontational appeals to pacifism and long scenes of moral wrestling over vigilantism, *Johnny Firecloud* makes no qualms about the redemptive power of violence when ostensibly rooted in the rediscovery of one's "true" Indigenous heritage. Much as blaxploitation films ideologically marked a shift from an earlier generation's belief in African American integrationism to the younger, more militant separatism of Black Power, we can see ideological differences with the Indiansploitation cycle echoing similar divisions within the struggle for Native American civil rights. Within Native American communities, older generations favored change through the decisions of courts and tribal governments, whereas the younger generation was more prone to direct action and public protest.[32] Littlefeather's role as the proud Nenya is particularly significant in this regard (though she also appeared as a political activist in

Figure 11.3 Sacheen Littlefeather, appearing as *Johnny Firecloud*'s Nenya, after her famous Red Power protest at the 1973 Academy Awards ceremony.

The Trial of Billy Jack), since she was cast after having already become one of the most public faces of Red Power by famously declining Marlon Brando's Oscar on his behalf at the 1973 Academy Awards ceremony to protest the Wounded Knee siege. Thus, if the *Billy Jack* series traces the former civil rights strategy as a path through the legal and legislative systems aided by white countercultural allies, *Johnny Firecloud* echoes AIM's more radical politics of armed and potentially violent resistance against white supremacy—but does so at the risk of problematically essentializing Indianness as an inescapable trait associated with premodern cultures. In other words, much as Black Power and its rhetorical outgrowth in the blaxploitation cycle reversed the cultural devaluation of blackness as a point of racial pride, *Johnny Firecloud* celebrates "Old West" associations of Indianness as a fitting brand of retributive self-defense, even at the risk of also portraying Johnny's political transformation as a "natural" regression into savagery.

Like the masculinism touted by many of the more radically separatist proponents of Black Power, *Johnny Firecloud* pays considerable attention to what it supposedly means to "be a man." After Johnny calls Jesse's masculinity into question for being no more than Colby's puppet, the sheriff confesses that he is also a veteran, but was dishonorably discharged for homosexual conduct—a secret that has allowed Colby to blackmail him into subservience. In this light, Jesse's continual harassment of Johnny appears rooted less in personal racism than a sense of displaced anger and shame that his sexuality has potentially cast him as the only person in town as culturally low as Johnny. In their final confrontation, Johnny defiantly asserts that, as chief, he has more independence than Jesse does under Colby's thumb, then goads Jesse over his inability to publicly acknowledge his sexual identity. "You're always crying about justice … well, where's mine?" Jesse exclaims, saying he just wants to "live like a man." "You've got to know what you are and where you belong to live like that," Johnny answers, implying that, unlike remaining meekly in the closet, coming out as gay will not make Jesse any less of a man. Both Johnny and Jesse have been marginalized

because of some seemingly inherent trait that they cannot deny—whether race or sexuality—and this intersection of identity factors is all the more poignant in a film appearing amid both the Red Power and gay liberation movements. Despite the more outlandish touches of the film's revenge plot, then, the combative relationship between Johnny and Jesse is portrayed in a surprisingly sensitive way, with Jesse clearly departing from the era's stereotypically effeminate depictions of gay men. When both men depart in separate directions for unknown final destinations, the film's open-ended denouement may not picture them comfortably returning to their previous environs, but it at least implies the need for further struggle as they each reclaim their independence.

Angry Joe Bass and the cycle's end

As the decade-long boom in Red Power's public visibility slowed, so too did the brief cycle of Indiansploitation films by the late 1970s. As Philip Deloria suggests, if the white counterculture once turned to freely circulating signifiers of Indianness in a paradoxical bid for "authenticity" amid an increasingly postmodern period of collapsing grand narratives, "for many, postmodern Indianness had become so detached from anything real that it was in danger of lapsing into a bland irrelevance."[33] The low-budget 1976 film *Angry Joe Bass*, a small regional production aping *Johnny Firecloud*, demonstrates the cycle's creative exhaustion and waning political resonance. Like *Johnny Firecloud*, the plot centers on a powerful townsperson, George Hanson (Mike Miller), who leans on local sheriff Bill Hemmings (Rudy Hornish) to break up his daughter Karen's (Molly Mershon) romance with Joe Bass (Henry Bal), a marginalized Native American fisherman. Unfolding on the shores of upper Lake Michigan, tribal fishing rights fuel the central antagonisms, since Bass and his fellow Native fisherman are "illegally" depleting the local trout stock, which businessperson Hanson worries will drive away the tourist trade of sport fishermen. Bass and his friends had previously organized to unsuccessfully fight new laws against commercial fishing, since these laws were a cover for depriving the local Native population of their economic livelihood and thereby driving them out to make room for white land developers. The local Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officer Sheriff Hemmings represents both civic and state authority, but his ineffectual police efforts soon encourage Hanson to hire racist goons against Bass.

Aside from the taboo of miscegenation, however, Karen's parents seem to oppose her romance with Bass less out of racism than classism. They point out that she is college educated and comes from a "good family," whereas the fishermen are all working-class laborers. By constructing a binary opposition between white/middle-class sport fishermen and Native/working-class commercial fishermen, the film oversimplifies the issue of tribal fishing rights, since these correlations between race and class were far more complicated in real life. In actuality, white commercial fishermen were often as opposed to Native fishing rights as sport fishermen (and these tensions continue simmering to this day), despite the 1974 Boldt decision's

reaffirmation of treaty rights having already rendered the film's central conflict largely moot by 1976 (though lingering court battles over fishing rights persisted in later decades). *Angry Joe Bass* may correctly (if inadvertently) link the roots of racism to class competition over scarce resources, but its depiction of racial conflict as binaristic shorthand for more complex conflicts over fishing rights does not convincingly fuel the narrative.

The film's overall poor writing and editing are also to blame, since Hemmings actually emerges as a far more "angry" character than Bass. The latter may be beaten up and his home attacked by gunfire, but the sheriff's murderous mental breakdown provides the most scenes of violent retribution. Bass may injure some of Hanson's thugs, but Hemmings racks up the actual body count. As in *Johnny Firecloud*, the sheriff is depicted as sexually "aberrant," but unlike that film's sympathetic depiction of homosexuality, Hemmings is depicted as a sexual predator who projects his repressed sexual urges outward in the form of racism. After he accuses the Native Americans of trying to "rape the lake" through their fishing haul, one of the next scenes ironically finds him attempting to rape a young woman—a crime prevented by Bass's timely arrival. Later, Hemmings accidentally kills his wife while confronting her over an affair with Hanson, whom the distraught sheriff then murders in revenge. Clearly losing his mind and blaming his longtime antagonist Bass for sparking the chain of events, Hemmings finally kills Bass as Karen watches.

This narrative synopsis may already sound murky, but the film's nonlinear structure borders on incoherence. *Angry Joe Bass* resembles an unfinished project, clumsily patched together as a series of flashbacks narrated by Karen's psychiatrists as they attempt to reassemble the events leading to her committal to a mental hospital. Yet, by attempting to mend the narrative's poor continuity, this awkward framing device merely foregrounds the fact that Joe Bass's story is not his own, but rather the messy product of white storytellers. In this respect, the film points toward some of the Indiansploitation cycle's limitations as a whole: in exploitation film tradition, the narrative may posit broadly sketched white antagonists against a Native protagonist, but the fact that these stories derive from the imaginations of white filmmakers demonstrates that Native American self-determination did not extend to the 1970s film industry itself. The DNR official may emerge as the crazed killer, but the political implications of this twist are muted by the fact that Bass's flouting of fishing laws is only an indirect impetus for the killings compared to Hemmings's sexual issues. Furthermore, *Angry Joe Bass* ends with Karen recovering her traumatic memories and leaving the mental hospital, ready to begin her life anew, while Bass remains depicted as a martyr for a poorly defined cause. With its narrative conceit about fishing rights already relegated to old news and its Native protagonist not only ineffectual as an avenger but eventually killed off, it is no surprise that *Angry Joe Bass* signaled the cycle's end.[34]

As Sherry Smith suggests, the Red Power movement achieved results through a combination of the younger, more countercultural generation's penchant for direct action, which widely publicized Native American issues, and the older generation's more methodical path through the legal and political system. More traditional

methods of court decisions and legislation may have succeeded in achieving the most substantive political gains in the long run—including passage of the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Indian Education Assistance Act, which weakened BIA control by allowing tribes to contract with government agencies and administer their own welfare—but both schools of thought ultimately worked in tandem to produce lasting civil rights advances.[35] As the cycle's key texts, Indiansploitation films like *Billy Jack* and *Johnny Firecloud* epitomized these different political approaches in their respective sympathies with integrationism and separatism, peaceful reform and violent resistance.[36] As the product of white filmmakers playing upon transcultural sympathies with Native American issues, these films all had their stereotypical and otherwise politically problematic traits, but altogether the cycle echoed Red Power's own ideologically fraught dynamics, helping explain their potential appeal to viewers beyond politically engaged Native Americans.

Coda

Although I have suggested that these films were derivative of blaxploitation in some respects, Jodi Byrd cautions that differentiating between the historical racial experiences giving rise to such cycles can have certain pitfalls. American discourse has remained hypersensitive to twentieth-century genocides happening elsewhere in the world, such as the Holocaust, but conveniently disavows the earlier genocides wrought by Native American extermination and African American slavery in the service of national expansion on our own continent. This has allowed "competing discourses of the true genocidal moment [to] pit all survivors against each another while reifying the oppressors' innocence and control."[37] On the one hand, then, Red Power activists like Vine Deloria (who himself advocated Native American separatism) are correct to differentiate Native American civil rights from dominant cultural connotations of race as blackness. When White Eagle is lynched in *Johnny Firecloud*, for example, "[t]he fact that the hanging of Indians evokes violence against blacks in the United States, but not the other way around, suggests that Indians … [are] abjected as sovereign peoples and invisiblized within a racial narrative dominated by black/white relations within U.S. histories of slavery, segregation, and civil rights."[38] On the other hand, popular associations between "noble" Indigenous peoples and premodern culture mean that competing discourses about genocide posit Native Americans as "yet again, the 'logical,' if tragic victims of modernization who stand in the way of progress by competing for needed resources."[39] And yet, when surveying the tremendous impact that the fruits of the African American civil rights movement—including the blaxploitation cycle—still have on popular culture today, in comparison with the far more forgotten legacy of Red Power and Indiansploitation films, the destructively unequal erasure of Native Americans from the cultural landscape should continue to give us pause.

Notes

1. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 80–84, 105, 110–111.
2. Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 40–41.
3. See, e.g., Novotny Lawrence, *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Christopher Sieving, *Soul Searching: Black-Themed Cinema from the March on Washington to the Rise of Blaxploitation* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); and Eithne Quinn, *A Piece of the Action: Race and Labor in the Post-Civil Rights Film Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).
4. Jennifer DeVere Brody, "The Returns of Cleopatra Jones," *Signs* 25:1 (1999): 100, 106; and Tommy L. Lott, "A No-Theory Theory of Contemporary Black Cinema," *Black American Literature Forum* 25:2 (1991): 227–229.
5. Sherry L. Smith, *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6–7, 73.
6. See Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, "Black Audiences, Blaxploitation and Kung Fu Films, and Challenges to White Celluloid Masculinity," in *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, ed. Poshek Fu (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 199–223; Amy Abugo Ongiri, "'He Wanted to Be Just Like Bruce Lee': African Americans, Kung Fu Theater, and Cultural Exchange at the Margins," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 5:1 (2002): 31–40; and Sylvia Shin Huey Chong, *The Oriental Obscene: Violence and Racial Fantasies in the Vietnam Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
7. Joshua Gleich, "Jim Brown: From Integration to Resegregation in *The Dirty Dozen* and *100 Rifles*," *Cinema Journal* 51:1 (2011): 2, 6, 12–13, 22, 25.
8. See Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), chp. 4; Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), chp. 7; and M. Elise Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), chp. 5.
9. Jodi A. Byrd, "'Living My Native Life Deadly': Red Lake, Ward Churchill, and the Discourses of Competing Genocides," *American Indian Quarterly* 31:2 (2007): 316.
10. Likewise, modern-set exploitation films that figure supernatural spirits as sources of Native American vengeance—including *The Manitou* (William Girdler, 1978), *Scalps* (Fred Olen Ray, 1983), and every movie about a haunted house built atop an Indigenous burial ground—are beyond the scope of this chapter.
11. Smith, *Hippies*, 10; and Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 196–197.
12. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Toronto and London: Macmillan, 1969), 168–174. Quote at 170. His son, Philip J. Deloria, would later take up the question of the predominantly white counterculture's cultural appropriation of Indianness, in his book *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), chp. 6.
13. Smith, *Hippies*, 7–8, 49, 65, 143. Quote at 143.

14. Vine, "*Journey through Rosebud*," *Variety* (March 1, 1972), 20.
15. Vine Deloria Jr., "Identity and Culture," *Daedalus* 110:2 (1981): 24.
16. Bill Osgerby, "Sleazy Riders: Exploitation, 'Otherness,' and Transgression in the 1960s Biker Movie," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 31:3 (2003): 102.
17. Smith, *Hippies*, 28, 100, 190. The My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians, for example, concurrently shared newspaper space with the Alcatraz occupation (100).
18. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 107, 120, 124–125. Quote at 120.
19. Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian*, 136; Frederick Wasser, "Four Walling Exhibition: Regional Resistance to the Hollywood Film Industry," *Cinema Journal* 34:2 (1995): 57; and Justin Wyatt, "From Roadshowing to Saturation Release: Majors, Independents, and Marketing/Distribution Innovations," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 74–75 (quoted).
20. Since the school's pedagogical methods apparently consist primarily of amateur folk singing and improv theater—as seen in several extended scenes that painfully date the film from today's perspective—the cynic in me wonders if a drastic curricular makeover might not actually be a bad idea.
21. Deloria Jr., "Identity and Culture," 24.
22. Drew Hayden Taylor, "What Ever Happened to Billy Jack?" in *Readings in Aboriginal Studies, Vol. 4: Images of the Indian—Portrayals of Native People*, ed. Joe Sawchuk (Brandon, Manitoba: Bearpaw Publishing, 1995), 173–175.
23. John A. Price, "The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures," *Ethnohistory* 20:2 (1973): 163.
24. Julian Smith, "Between Vermont and Violence: Film Portraits of Vietnam Veterans," *Film Quarterly* 26:4 (1973): 13.
25. Sidney Rosenzweig, "The Dark Night of the Screen: Messages and Melodrama in the American Movie," *American Quarterly* 27:1 (1975): 90, 97.
26. Scott Richard Lyons, "*Billy Jack*," in *Seeing Red: Hollywood's Pixeled Skins—American Indians and Film*, eds. LeAnne Howe, Harvey Markowitz, and Denise K. Cummings (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 158, 161, 163. Quote at 158.
27. Ibid., 162. Despite an aborted 1985 attempt at making *The Return of Billy Jack*, Laughlin continued soliciting donations at his personal website to help him fund a new Billy Jack film, until his death in December 2013. See Sharon Waxman, "Billy Jack Is Ready to Fight the Good Fight Again," *New York Times* (June 20, 2005), available at http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/20/movies/20jack.html?_r=0 (accessed December 21, 2015).
28. David F. Friedman, Frank Henenlotter, and Mike Vraney, DVD commentary track, *Johnny Firecloud/Bummer!* special-edition DVD, Something Weird Video, 2001.
29. See Sheril D. Antonio, "The Urban-Rural Binary in Black American Film and Culture," *Black Camera* 1:1 (2009): 129; and Lott, "A No-Theory Theory," 224–225. As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick notes, Hollywood cinema had gradually shown Indigenous maidens giving themselves to white men, since this preserved dominant racial hierarchies, but the converse had hitherto remained forbidden (*Celluloid Indians*, 64).
30. The Native American man framed for raping a white woman had formed the plot of another Indiansploitation film, *Camper John* (Sean MacGregor, 1973), which was also released by Cinemation Industries under the alternate titles *Gentle Savage*, *Once Upon a Tribe*, and *Up Yours, Pilgrim!* Occupying a position somewhere between *Billy Jack* and *Johnny Firecloud*, the film is less inclined toward countercultural interests, but still focuses on a local Native population collectively rallying in support of the unjustly accused protagonist.

31. According to M. Elise Marubbio:

> The western often uses the death or rape of the white woman as the catalyst for the hero's regression into savagery, his retaliation against Native Americans, and his regeneration into an American hero. The Celluloid Maiden films of the 1970s, however, invert the racial hierarchy in an embracing of Indianness and the use of the Native woman for this role.
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> (*Killing the Indian Maiden*, 170)

32. Smith, *Hippies*, 13.
33. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 175.
34. The hard-core adult film *Deep Roots* (Joseph Bardo, 1978) is another late entry demonstrating this cyclical exhaustion, but because its narrative does not directly invoke racism, retribution, or civil rights, it is beyond the specific scope of this chapter. The title's allusion to the then-recent TV miniseries *Roots* (1977)—as suggested by the film's tagline "Deeper Than Throat, More Powerful Than Roots!"—nevertheless emphasizes the uneasy boundaries between Native and African American civil rights struggles. Native American actor Jesse Chacan stars as Billy, a young Indigenous man who sells his allotted parcel of tribal land and sets off on his motorcycle for the Hollywood hills to become a painter and experience life beyond the reservation. Once there, he sleeps with Joan (Anita Sands), a white bride-to-be who excitedly notes that she's "never had an Indian before." By the film's end, Billy (dressed as a stereotypical Indian brave) introduces Joan to the members of a costume orgy where she becomes the climactic centerpiece. *Deep Roots*, then, is ultimately as much about Billy's sexual initiation of Joan, and her abandonment of marriage in favor of sexual freedom, as about Billy's transcultural exploration. Indeed, in a tacked-on denouement, Billy abruptly tells the viewer that "you should never leave where you belong," and he finally returns home to his "deep roots" on the reservation—his talismanic role in opening the white woman to the (sexual) counterculture having apparently been fulfilled.
35. Smith, *Hippies*, 13, 111, 217.
36. The latter variety of Indiansploitation tropes were notably resurrected in Richard Bugajski's underrated film *Clearcut* (1993), in which a mysterious Indigenous man (Graham Greene) kidnaps a white lawyer (Ron Lea) who is poorly defending a Canadian tribe against a lumber company encroaching on tribal land. At the film's climax, the Indigenous man forces the lawyer to watch as he "debarks" the leg of the lumber company owner, cutting all the flesh from his bone, as extralegal retribution for centuries of environmental and cultural destruction.
37. Byrd, "Living My Native Life Deadly," 311, 313, 316, 318. Quote at 313.
38. Ibid., 324.
39. Ibid., 329.