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# Men of Word and Deed: Whiteness, Masculinity, and Popular Culture Productions of the Texas Rangers

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Men of Word and Deed:  
Whiteness, Masculinity and Popular Culture Productions of the Texas Rangers

Kerry Marjorie Knerr

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Prerequisite for Honors in  
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## Acknowledgments

If I could creatively title this section, I would call it “And Kerry’s Heart Grew Three Sizes That Day.” Writing this thesis has been extraordinarily taxing, intellectually, emotionally, and physically, which is not to say that it hasn’t been extraordinarily rewarding as well. Thinking of the people who helped me get here is both humbling and heart-warming. First and foremost, I owe an un-payable debt of gratitude to my thesis advisor, Prof. Ryan Quintana. I’m not certain that it would be possible to parse out and enumerate the ways in which Prof. Quintana has helped me develop my skills as a writer and as a thinker. He has given me his time and his attention; and in return, I have wavered, I have whined, and I have winced. I’ll never really understand why he agreed to work with me on this abomination of a project, but I’m incredibly thankful that he did.

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## True Fiction: Whiteness, Texas Rangers, and Westerns

I will tell you something about stories,  
[he said]  
They aren't just entertainment.  
Don't be fooled.  
They are all we have, you see,  
all we have to fight off  
illness and death.

You don't have anything  
if you don't have the stories.

-Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*<sup>1</sup>

James W. Parker had stories, and not much else. He watched as Comanche raiders cut down his father and brothers inside the walls of the fort they had built as a family. Stories built that fort—John Parker, Texas Ranger captain, patriarch of the Parker clan, and one of the men killed in the raid, in 1833 pushed the family far beyond state-controlled lands and used his family's compound as a Ranger hub. Encouraged by the presumed superiority of white Texan settlers and the militia-turned-constabulary Rangers, the Parkers brought the hopes of Anglo Texan settlers out to the very edge of their known world. We don't know what stories James told that night out in the wilderness to his wife, three surviving children, two orphaned nephews, and the nearly dozen survivors from the other families who had settled with the Parkers. Now the head of the Parker family, he led the group to a nearby fort after almost a week in the brush. However, he left his three children and two adopted nephews, and went to follow stories of his captured daughter and niece, Rachel, age seventeen, and Cynthia Ann, age nine. Rachel was ransomed from the Comanche by a white trader in the Rocky Mountains after almost eighteen

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006) 2.

months in captivity—less the unborn grandchild she had been carrying at the time James last saw her.<sup>2</sup>

But it was the stories of Cynthia Ann that haunted James. He raised Ranger units to follow every lead about the young white girl held among the Comanche. He unsuccessfully petitioned Sam Houston, the first president of the Lone Star Republic, to fund a scouting unit to find her. He tracked reports of her as far as Missouri and New Mexico. As his own children grew into adulthood, as his wife died of illness, he dragged himself across the country—searching. After nine years, he gave up his expeditions, but continued to spend what little money his family had for any information that might pertain to Cynthia Ann. Stories drove James Parker into the wilderness, over and over again; stories bankrupted his family and orphaned his children.<sup>3</sup>

By the time Parker published the narrative of his trials looking for Cynthia Ann in 1846, his daughter's story, which had circulated in newspapers some six years earlier, and other stories of frontier families captured by the Comanche had reached hungry audiences across the recently annexed state and the U.S. Earlier, they had propelled Mirabeau B. Lamar, second president of the Republic of Texas, to fame and to an “exterminating war” against all Texas's Native peoples. These tales defined a common enemy and a common purpose; they also obscured the experiences of those who chose to never return or who were “redeemed” against their will. They hid from Anglo Texans the motivations of Comanche raiders or Comanche adoptees by creating a fictionalized world where Indians were always bad, where whites were always good, where

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<sup>2</sup> John Wesley Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas, Original Narratives of Texas History and Adventure* (Austin: Hutchings Printing House, 1889), 310-315; S. C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2010) 12-22.

<sup>3</sup> James Parker, *Narrative of the Perilous Adventures, Miraculous Escapes and Sufferings of Rev. James W. Parker, During a Frontier Residence in Texas, of Fifteen Years ... to Which Is Added a Narrative of the Capture, and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer*, (Louisville: Morning Courier Office, 1844).

white womanhood needed protecting, and where white men held the responsibility of redemptive violence. These are the stories that sent people West, that told them why they stayed, that built white cities from red dirt—these are the stories that conquered.<sup>4</sup>

Imagine sagebrush. Imagine more sky than you've ever seen. Imagine a solitary man on horseback, perched on a lonely ridge, surveying the barren land. Sometimes he duels with black hats, sometimes he fights Indians; always he fights for justice and truth and to protect that which is good in the world. Perhaps less reflective of a bygone era of American history, this image is more comfortable in the canon of popular culture and of Westerns. The classic imagery of the West endures as a powerful set of tropes in American culture and art. Westerns draw on nearly two centuries of pop culture expression, from serialized captivity narratives and adventure stories in the nineteenth century to dime novels and long-running television programs in the twentieth century. Continually revisited and revised for generations, westerns serve as a site of popular historical memory, provide a stage for the depiction of social struggles, and comprise an evolving cultural arena ripe for analysis.

When reality failed to produce clear and sustainable power structures, for example in the throes of western expansion in Texas or in the aftermath of modernization at the turn of the twentieth century, westerns could be used to express an idealized social climate. Because they have an aura of historical representation, the social milieu they represent carries more weight than any other literary form. Therefore, when authors created an idealized society in westerns—one clearly dominated by moral, middle class, white men—their fiction bled into their readers'

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<sup>4</sup> Gwynne, *Summer Moon*, 73-88; Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1821-1875*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) 130-132.

understandings of both the past and the present. In describing a preferred, hypothetical fantasy, western authors created a support for their imperiled reality and did so in a medium that seemed to reflect some kind of historical truth.<sup>5</sup>

The power dynamics in westerns and the representations of white, male, middle-class heroes constitute a social production of an idealized white masculinity and a support for white male middle class power. This kind of articulation is only possible in fiction, freed of the contestations and shifts of everyday life. Through that artificial clarity, these cultural products serve to externalize and reinforce the power of middle class, white men. I seek to understand the processes by which these fictional expressions of power came to interact with real socio-historical power by examining several specific expressions of western fiction and their concurrent cultural atmosphere.<sup>6</sup> To this end, I specifically focus on articulations of middle-class white masculinity, the historical and cultural role of the Texas Rangers, and the place of westerns in popular culture.

Underlying all of this work is the importance and interdependence of the combined social status of middle class, white men. Though there is significant value in examining the separate ways in which race, gender, and class are constructed, in the case of westerns, which almost reflexively feature middle class, white male heroes as the lead, the synthesis of this power proves a more fertile source of study. Though they undergo different processes of construction and revision, each identity is dependent on the others. It is of the utmost importance that we understand race, gender and class not as natural, transhistorical facts, but as constructed categories, which at any point in history are being cobbled together from various influences.

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Lives of Westerns*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 10-18.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Clark Mitchell, *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3-8.

Neither gender nor race nor class is a truth; they are ideologies and statuses, which change, combine, synthesize and contradict one another, and through which individuals enact some idea of “truth.” To examine whiteness both in western literature and in society without teasing out the ways in which manhood interacted with the construction of racial hierarchies is to naturalize gender. To examine manhood without including the ways in which race enhanced or undermined masculine privilege is to essentialize race. To ignore the way that class complicates systems of privilege enforced by racial and gender knowledge is to interpret race and gender as a monolithic, rather than multivalent, phenomena. Though it may seem an artificially complex undertaking, without examining the interdependence of these identities we cannot fully analyze any of them. Rather than focus exclusively on the development of whiteness, representations of gender, or assertions of class; in the case of westerns it is more fruitful to examine the intersection and interdependence of these identities.<sup>7</sup>

Because middle class white men are among the most privileged groups in society, it is almost more important to define who doesn't belong than to define who does. They derived power not from only one of these social categories; rather, their combination exponentially increased the social power of these men. By placing themselves atop various social power structures, middle class white men could extend dominance across all social categories and exclude others from social power—for example, middle class white women or lower class white men. Through heightened performances or revised definitions of any combination of whiteness, manliness, or middle-class-ness, middle class white men restricted the number of those who had

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<sup>7</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 10-44.

access to the social and historical power of this specific identity. The intersectional power of middle class white masculinity then is the power of exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

One of the ways that we can use westerns to illuminate middle class white masculinity is by examining the different ways in which race, gender, and class are constructed within a given western and the ways that these constructions play off of one another. For example, if a middle class white male western hero is in conflict with lower class white males, the ways that the author demonstrates this difference are telling of his or her understanding of the nature of class. Similarly, if the same western hero is later put in contact with and then quickly dominates an Indian chief, the author's representation of the power of whiteness to overcome class difference is both telling of these characters racial qualities as well as complicating and informing the previous intra-racial class conflict. In the overlaps of identity assertions such as these, we can see the ways that middle class white masculinity is constructed differently as a category.<sup>9</sup>

The power and privilege of middle class white men in the West is never a natural certainty, but an artifice that requires constant and unwavering upkeep. I argue that one way this is achieved is through western fiction. By analyzing representations of white masculinity in western fiction, we can see one of the ways in which the power of white men came to seem naturalized. Regardless of their usable power at any point in history, a variety of factors have made the experiences of middle class, white men the basis for most mainstream understandings of history, with the notable exceptions of more recent multicultural studies or segregated narratives in marginalized groups. One of these factors, I argue, is the use of cultural products such as westerns as an externalization of perceptions of the past. Westerns as a genre rely on an

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<sup>8</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 23-31.

<sup>9</sup> Jefferson D. Slagle, "The Heirs of Buffalo Bill: Performing Authenticity in the Dime Western," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 39.2 (2009).

idealized conception of a historical West, whether or not that image is in line with a historical reality. Given the relatively standardized style of westerns as a genre, the way that certain types of characters are represented by the author or interacted with by other characters opens a window into the processes by which the stories of middle class white men came to dominate popular history. These works serve as a sounding board for contemporary conceptions of and conflicts within middle class white masculinity and as such we can see within them overlapping, conflicting, and competing constructions of identity.

The bias of mainstream historical narratives towards the experience of middle class white males is a product of social forces, including the use of cultural sources like westerns as a site of popular historical memory. For many years the experience of middle class white men were considered to be the most valuable sources of American experience, both by social observers and by historians. More than that, they were considered to be the genetically dominant inheritors of the nation. During the time that this was the prevailing conception of middle class white masculinity—throughout the nineteenth century and at least the first half of the twentieth—stories, narrative, tellings, and retellings that supported or furthered this idea were nurtured, while those which undermined the supposed supremacy of middle class white men were dismissed, ignored, forgotten, or conveniently revised. In the special case of Western history, the ascendancy of white men on the Plains was taken for fact much more often than it was questioned. More fundamentally, many historians assumed that masculinity, though its expressions may have changed over time, was in some way connected to an inner essence shared

by all those humans with a Y chromosome.<sup>10</sup> Similar assertions were made about the immutable scientific hierarchy of races and the inheritability of class.

In the more recent past, historians have questioned and undermined the old theoretical models that spawned such ideologies. Postmodernist criticism proposes that all identity categories are socially constructed and historically contingent. Chicano scholars proposed the borderlands model of understand the intertwined histories of the American West and of the Mexican North. In addition to rejecting the condition of identity as linked to some indescribable inner essence, borderlands historians also reject the model of center and periphery that has dominated Western history.<sup>11</sup> In their model, the borderlands represent an area of constantly shifting identities and allegiances, one that can both defy social conventions and reinforce notions of difference carried from the metropole.<sup>12</sup> These analyses undermine the perceived naturalness of the social power of middle class white men.

Each piece of western fiction that I examine in this work centrally focuses on middle class white male heroes who are associated with the Texas Rangers. I have chosen these figures because they serve as both a production of and an enforcer for middle class white male supremacy and because they feature prominently in westerns' revision of history. Embodying class, gender, and racial privilege, the Rangers lend themselves easily to the role of a literary western hero. As literary actors, they have a prominent place in the genre, though perhaps not one that closely resembles their history. This divide between the history and the cultural draw of

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*, (New York: Norton, 2000) 25-29

<sup>11</sup> For one of the earliest Chicano studies of myth and the Texas Rangers, see Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture" in *Cultures of American Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) 16-17

the Rangers is where Western authors insert their conceptions of middle class white male privilege. By focusing on the hyperbolized, sensationalized, and fictionalized aspects of Rangers, we can see how the author is constructing or manipulating paradigms of middle class white manhood. Another part of their literary appeal is the force of law carried with the Ranger badge, giving their privilege tacit state sanction.

Beyond their literary function and almost unending popularity, the Texas Rangers were prominent and important actors in Texas's western expansion. First formed in the 1830s as an irregular constabulary to secure the western borders against Native groups, most especially the Comanche. Though there are extant Ranger rolls and several autobiographical accounts of Ranger service, it is very difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in this early history of the Rangers. Autobiographical accounts are sometimes embellished, hyperbolized, or entirely invented; early histories such as John Wesley Wilbarger's *Indian Depredations in Texas* or John Henry Brown's *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas* are heavily biased and poorly sourced, though remarkably entertaining.<sup>13</sup> More recent archival studies of the Rangers, especially Gary Clayton Anderson's *Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820–1875* and Brian Delay's *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War*, have produced what is likely a more accurate version of early Ranger history.

In this early period, the Rangers were small, irregular forces supposedly commissioned by Stephen F. Austin and tasked with protecting white settlements, rescuing white Texans taken captive, and very occasionally venturing into Comanche land—a huge portion of what is now Texas. During the tenure of the Lone Star Republic, the Rangers served a more hands-on role

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<sup>13</sup> John Henry Brown was himself a Texas Ranger, and was involved with the expulsion of the Texas Reserve Indians in 1857. For his history, see John Henry Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*, (Austin, TX: Statehouse Press, 1988).

under Lamar's presidency (1839-1841), especially in relation to the growing stream of immigrant Indians from the American southeast. Post-annexation, the Rangers were more formally constituted into a state police force. They continued to push back Indian settlements in furtherance of white settlement and the advancement of the industrial frontier. In 1859, the Rangers oversaw the expulsion of the Native American residents of the Clear Fork and Brazos Reserves, which had only been formed five years before. After forcing the last free band of Comanche onto reservations in 1875, the Rangers focus turned more towards eliminating criminal elements within the state—white outlaws and Mexican or Mexican-American bandits. In addition to securing the border against Indian raids, the Rangers had also been tasked with patrolling the southern border with Mexico.<sup>14</sup>

The legal and cultural role of the historical Texas Rangers in enforcing racial and class privilege in nineteenth century Texas is examined in Chapter 1. Their place as enforcers of white male privilege in Texas was not guaranteed from the beginning of Anglo American immigration into Texas; rather, the world that bore them was a stunningly multicultural world in which no one group could claim absolute power. The ascendancy of the Rangers was instead the consequence of Anglo immigrant ambition, and the Rangers violently created a privilege structure that benefitted the white community. For Nelson Lee, whose story is examined in Chapter 2, the Ranger badge seems but an adornment for an already remarkable (and almost certainly completely fictional) story of capture, survival and escape from a band of Comanche. However, Lee needed to provide credentials somehow, and he chose to do so by aligning himself with the Rangers. His story, which is largely based on and driven by his notion of racial

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<sup>14</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 189-202; George Klos, “‘Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe From Another:’ The 1859 Expulsion of the Reserve Indians from Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97.4 (April 1994) 598-619; Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1935).

privilege, needs moral association with the Rangers and thereby the proper order of things in Texas. As described in Chapter 3, for Zane Grey, the Texas Rangers offer a path of redemption for *The Lone Star Ranger's* protagonist, Buck Duane. Duane is driven by his quixotic belief in honor toward the life of an outlaw. He uses his inherited skill at gunfighting to terrorize outlaws and eventually is drafted into secret service for Ranger Captain MacNelly. As a Ranger, his honor and his badge allowed him back into the good graces of civilization. In Grey's story, the Rangers give legitimacy to an already honorable character and authorize his quest to differentiate himself from lower-class white men. In each of these stories, the Rangers offer a path to and a guard for moral, white manliness.<sup>15</sup>

Histories of the Texas Rangers tend to fall somewhat ironically into a white hat/black hat scheme, with some scholars touting them as stellar examples of American manhood and others decrying them as racist actors in an oppressive system. Depictions of Rangers in westerns, essentially revisions of popular understandings of history, tend to depict Rangers as white hats—that is, virtuous men interested in protecting truth, justice, and the American way. This makes them excellent devices for productions of middle class white male privilege, since as Rangers they are both authoritative and sympathetic characters. More recent histories of Texas and of the Texas Rangers that portray the Rangers as unnecessarily violent or characteristically racist would seem to give lie to their place in western fiction.<sup>16</sup> While these facts are powerless in the face of the enduring myth of the West, some of their ideas are useful to this project, specifically what

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<sup>15</sup> Nelson Lee, *Three Years Among the Comanche: The Narrative of Nelson Lee, the Texas Ranger*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Zane Grey, *The Lone Star Ranger*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1915).

<sup>16</sup> For the clearest examples of this divide, see Webb's glowing history, Webb, *The Texas Rangers*; and Anderson's excoriating study, Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*.

historian Brian Delay terms the “Texas Creation Myth.”<sup>17</sup> Delay describes this myth as a foundational piece of Texas history that basically states that white immigrants came to Texas to rescue it from the ineffective control of Mexico and the nonexistent influence of Indians, eventually to consecrate it to the realm of American empire. Many fictionalizations of Rangers follow this idea, consciously or not, and when it is brought into the study of westerns, the privilege of characters associated with the Rangers becomes all the more clear. By examining the ways in which the Rangers as a historical organization and stories about the Rangers interact and reinforce one another, the instability of privilege can be exposed.

The work of depicting complex, multilayered identities or of placing those identities in conversation with real historical figure may seem a daunting task for the lowly western. Such a task might seem reasonable for a piece of high literature, which by its very nature is meant to illuminate the human condition and elicit serious intellectual criticism from the reader; but how could a western? A western isn't meant to plumb the depths of the human soul. It's a piece of popular entertainment, meant for consumption, not criticism. Mass-produced, a literary product of commercialism, westerns were one of the most popular forms of literature in the nineteenth century, through to the mid-twentieth. As radio, television and film grew in popularity, westerns moved into those media as well. As a genre, westerns tend to rely on a rather static set of character and plot tropes. Even more constricting is the idea that westerns are meant to describe or convey a sense of the true West; that in order to be effective, they must play into the preformed idea of the authentic West in some way, leaving little room for improvisation or divergence. These strict standards may seem to make it even less likely that westerns could deal with complex representations of identity, but in fact it makes them uniquely suited to such work.

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<sup>17</sup> Brian Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 226-228.

Westerns require their characters to represent themselves within the guidelines of the genre's tropes, to garishly display their identity and their privilege or lack thereof so that the reader can readily distinguish the good, the bad, and the ugly, so to speak. This realism and dependence on authenticity makes westerns a rich source for cultural analysis in that it requires authors to present and assert certain cultural modes. It both places Western social constructs in dialogue with Eastern social constructs, and assumes that the entirety of western fiction could pass as historical commentary. Within the tensions of these demands, the character of the middle class, white, male hero takes on deeper cultural significance, which I intend to examine in this project.<sup>18</sup>

One of the driving forces of plots and characters in westerns is authenticity. Recent critics of the genre have proposed this as a model through which to examine both the representation and the reception of western fiction. Rather than emphasizing literary features, such as intertextuality or narrative constructions, readers of westerns tend to focus on issues of realism, that is whether the characters are authentic or inauthentic, whether the storyline is realistic or mythological, or whether the author is accurate or unreliable. There is more to presenting a western than locating it within a certain scheme of authenticity, but in order to be an effective work within the genre, authenticity must be satisfied.

Some recent literary critics of Western fiction have emphasized the role that authenticity plays in these works. In this case, authors assert their characters' authenticity (or inauthenticity) by attaching them to pre-existing cultural or literary tropes. For example, this could mean that a

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<sup>18</sup> For exhaustive reviews of Western literature in the place of American history, see Richard Slotkin's frontier trilogy, especially the second and third works; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1820*, (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1973); and Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

female Western character could typically be a damsel-in-distress, a (re)productive but subordinate frontier helpmeet, or an evil temptress; each of these stock character type rely on a very specific model of womanhood, and in creating these types of characters, the author reaffirms the place of specific gender constructions in American culture. These figures loom large in western fiction because they bear the patina of the true West; that is, because they play into the self-conscious, nebulous cultural construction of the West and of Western history. Because they present themselves as true reflections of past figures, they are well received by the audience. Whether or not this is an accurate depiction of Western American history, it feels real and so it is. Consequently, the actions of western characters revise the past that they seek to represent.<sup>19</sup>

The privilege structure that gave middle class white men superlative power was never clear in the everyday lived experience of the West, and was in fact constantly being contested and manipulated by those it oppressed. In depicting an idealized version of the past, Westerns create a popular misunderstanding of history and use that misunderstanding to naturalize the power of white men. Popular conceptions of identity work by claiming to reveal the idealized inner essence of static characters—their presumed inner essence being measured by the author’s stipulated social constructs. How closely the character resembles the social construction is their authenticity. In this way, traditional Westerns can serve to articulate and reinforce social norms.<sup>20</sup>

The burden of authenticity created a need for outsized representations of identity in Westerns. Consequently, each generation can use Westerns as a way to represent certain gender

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<sup>19</sup> Nathaniel Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) 1-13.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Lives of Westerns*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3-19; Slagle, “Heirs of Buffalo Bill;” Lewis, *Literary West*.

and racial attitudes, using the perceived authenticity of Westerns to stabilize inherently unstable categories—exactly the work that those, like Roosevelt, who used Western stories to legitimate their constructions of race or gender needed them to do. In early Westerns, like serialized dime novels or Grey’s substantial oeuvre, the power of white, male, middle class heroes becomes a way to order an otherwise chaotic space. This further supports the need for “authentic” characters, for without the ordering power of observed identities, everything is a moving target in an unstructured social space. The reader is directly engaged in the author’s construction of race, gender, and class by evaluating the characters’ performance of their prescribed roles.<sup>21</sup>

Because westerns seem to describe the past, they have an unmatched power to create social prescriptions. Just as historical understanding is contingent on contemporary criticism, western literature comments on the past, under the veil of authenticity. Rather than sappy, nostalgic eulogies for an era of expansion and conquest, westerns themselves constitute a conquest of the past. They shape popular understanding of history to conform to contemporary sensibilities, leaving behind the parts of the past that might belie or undermine their preferred vision. Western authors build an idealized world crowned by middle class white male supremacy, project it into the past thereby naturalizing their construction, then use the supposed historical realism of their fiction to solidify social custom. Through this, westerns turn the fictional into the normative.<sup>22</sup>

Because westerns are a product of popular culture, for much of the time when they were popular, literary critics treated them as drivel unworthy of serious attention or as a curiosity. More recently, there has been increased scholarship on the genre, especially from cinema

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<sup>21</sup> Tompkins, *West of Everything*, 47-67; Slagle, “Heirs of Buffalo Bill.”

<sup>22</sup> Christine Bold, *Selling the Wild West: Popular Western Fiction, 1860-1960*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), xi-xvii.

scholars and historians of popular culture. Some of the most innovative works concerning the literary tradition of westerns have focused on the construction of the genre, specifically Scott Simmon's *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century* and Nathaniel Lewis's *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship*. Lewis's work is of particular use to this study, as it focuses on the constructed nature of the "true West" and the ways in which that mythos can reinforce other social functions. Simmon's book focuses on the productions of gender, specifically manliness, which are central to so many westerns. Both of these works try to understand the role of westerns in shaping and influencing broader culture, rather than pigeonholing them as insignificant cultural fluff.<sup>23</sup>

Though they lack the prestige of high literature or art films, westerns form a fertile ground for cultural analysis. By examining the privileged intersection of class, gender, and race, the historical and symbolic role of Texas Rangers, and the manner in which westerns work in popular culture, we can see something more from these enduring staples of American culture than just sagebrush and Stetsons. The role of middle class white masculinity, the Rangers, and westerns combine to form an external and naturalized support for the intrinsically messy work of asserting privilege. They project into the past an image of supremacy that is drawn on time and time again to justify characteristically unstable hierarchies. By teasing apart these intertwined forces, we can see where the true fiction lies.

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<sup>23</sup> Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lewis, *Literary West*. For more on authenticity in Westerns, see Slagle, "Heirs of Buffalo Bill."

## The Word Made Flesh: The Texas Rangers, Violence, and Race, 1823-1845

On the surface, the story of American westward expansion is one of over-leaping ambition. It is the story of men and women looking out to the horizon and watching the nation unfold. The great American experiment kept rolling forward until it ran out of continent. Immigrants moved from the crowded and contaminated East to the open and endless West. They saw their future billowing out before them like the sails that brought their forebears across the sea. But their future came at the expense of others who occupied the land that would soon come to be the United States of America. These stories, the ones that give lie to that shining myth of the West, show us a much more complicated story.

Unlike the celebrated pioneers, Antonio Perez watched his future shrink. Little is known about his life. From what record remains, he seems to have come of age around San Antonio during the first waves of Anglo American immigration to the northern Mexican province, Tejas y Coahuila. Perez was mostly likely a member of the non-elite Tejano population known as *vecinos*—the people of Mexican citizenship and descent who formed the bulk of San Antonio and the surrounding areas' population who did not have the lineage, connections, familial honor, or wealth to claim elite status. Indeed, most of what is known about him comes from his connection to Juan Seguín, the son of a prominent *vecino* family that had been serving as cultural brokers between American immigrants and the broader Tejano and Mexican populations. Perez lacked the illustrious connections the Seguín family had, but it is clear that he too was invested in creating a multicultural northern province, and thus welcomed the Americans with seemingly open arms. To that end, in 1841 in response to the theft of two Tejano merchants' property, Perez

raised a company of Tejano Texas Rangers and served as a co-captain with the lauded Texas Ranger captain John “Jack” Coffee Hays. Later, Perez and Hays patrolled the Nueces strip, then the recognized border between Texas and Mexico, taking action against suspicious indigenous bands and marauding thieves of every race. This local vigilantism and Indian-fighting would propel Jack Hays’s career to lasting fame, as he is considered one of the progenitors of Texas Ranger tradition, his life and deeds have been memorialized in songs and legends, and he has a county named after him. His co-captain is not similarly represented in the historical record.<sup>24</sup>

Early nineteenth century Texas was an extraordinarily turbulent place; from 1821 to 1860, Tejanos lived under 5 flags, and many, including Perez, found themselves caught between these overlapping powers and their concomitant identities. By the founding of the Lone Star Republic in 1836, Perez was losing ground in his native land. Though he might have rode with the other early Ranger captains, before the end of the following year, Perez’s identity as a loyal Texian would be revoked, and he would descend into infamy. He and other prominent Tejanos followed Seguín’s company of Tejanos in the Mexican General Adrian Woll’s short but scarring occupation of San Antonio during the Mexican government’s 1842 *reconquista* expeditions. He was suspected as a spy for Seguín, and his actions excoriated in the press. By the end, the former Ranger captain would find himself the object of Ranger violence. Reports of Seguín’s activity in the October 26<sup>th</sup> issue of the most prominent Texas newspaper, Houston’s *Telegraph and Texas Register*, ran along side an article detailing the “Curious Peculiarity of Mexican Soldiers.” “Mexican soldiers have never been able to withstand a direct charge of Anglo American troops.”

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<sup>24</sup> Raúl Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 173-191; Harold J. Weiss, Jr., "Hays, John Coffee," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fhabq>), accessed March 10, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

Like Tejanos, Anglo Texans were caught between identities—Texian and American—but they were sanguine in their conflict. The early days of cooperation between Tejanos and Anglo immigrants melted in the bright light of possible annexation by the United States. Increased violence and mutual animosity marked the relationship between Anglos and Tejanos, and as power consolidated in Anglo hands, they made it harder for people of Mexican descent to participate fully in the new Republic.<sup>25</sup>

After Perez's brief and complex foray into armed resistance, he evaporated almost entirely from the record, cropping up again only once. An 1858 article published in the *San Antonio Ledger* states that an Antonio Perez, formerly of San Antonio, arrived in Phoenix with news of Apache depredations around Tucson.<sup>26</sup> In this last glimpse of Perez's life, we see a wanderer, unable or unwilling to return home. Seguín's legacy—the son of a prominent family who eventually betrayed the budding republic—rings through Texas history. Hays, a son of the backcountry who made his name through virtuous violence, looms similarly large. Perez, who arguably best exemplifies the struggles of individual Tejanos more than the celebrated and powerful Seguín, remains almost completely illegible. His absence from the historical record a direct consequence of the increased violence and increasingly racialized policies of the Lone Star Republic and its successor, the state of Texas. As Anglo Texans (re)created themselves in the image of their American forebears, they scaffolded their republic on a system of racialized oppression.<sup>27</sup> This was done at least in part through the work of the Texas Rangers, and even to

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<sup>25</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 187-191; quotation from *Telegraph and Texas Register*, October 26, 1842.

<sup>26</sup> *San Antonio Ledger*, June 19, 1858.

<sup>27</sup> Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1821-1875*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 195-211; Robert M. Utley, "Texas Ranger Tradition Established: Jack Hays and Walker Creek," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 52.1 (Spring 2002), 2-11.

other Texas Rangers, like Perez. While Perez participated in early Ranger actions in fighting Indians and rustlers, the organization that he served turned against him later in life, when he and other Tejanos chose to violently resist Anglo control of the state. There are a plethora of sources regarding the Anglo Rangers' activities in Texas, including memoirs, early hagiographies, and excoriating revisionist histories.<sup>28</sup> There are tragically few sources available to speak to the experiences of those who felt the brunt of Ranger violence, and it is this silence that enables and undergirds the mythically enormous legacy of that celebrated police force.

The myth goes something like this: the Texas Rangers came into a space that was free of civilization, but full of violent Indians and interloping Mexican bandits. The Rangers brought law and order to Texas under conditions that would have rendered any other, more traditional, police force completely ineffective. Embodiments of the frontier spirit, they stepped into a void, a wilderness, and brought with them the full weight and power of civilization. As Walter Prescott Webb characterized them, “and so it is with the Ranger. When we see him at his daily task of maintaining law, restoring order, and promoting peace—even though his methods be vigorous—we see him in his proper setting, a man standing alone between a society and its enemies.”<sup>29</sup> A Texas Ranger—a man alone—supports order, keeps the peace, and safeguards the very idea of

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<sup>28</sup> There are at least a dozen extant Ranger memoirs, most of which come from the Frontier Battalion that was raised in 1861 to combat Indian incursions from Oklahoma. See, James Parker, *Narrative of the Perilous Adventures, Miraculous Escapes and Sufferings of Rev. James W. Parker, During a Frontier Residence in Texas, of Fifteen Years ... to Which Is Added a Narrative of the Capture, and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer*, (Louisville: Morning Courier Office, 1844) and James B. Gillett, *Six Years with the Texas Rangers, 1875 – 1881*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925); for the most famous Ranger history, which has received wide criticism for its uncritical praise, see Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965); for revisionist takes on the Rangers, see Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*.

<sup>29</sup> Webb, *Texas Rangers*, xv.

society. From this idea, it would follow that by examining those who the Rangers act against you could see who is “society” and who isn’t. The actions of the Rangers implicitly delineated what kind of order would define Texas.

Such a characterization of the Rangers, as the moral guardians of a benighted society, necessitates a very flat reading of the time and space that bore the organization. The Rangers did not emerge fully formed from an Anglo nation to tame the wilderness; but rather were born out of chaos, haphazardly enforced laws of questionable legality, and eventually coalesced into a force for protecting and advancing white male dominance in Texas. The exact moment when the Rangers came into being is difficult to pin down, but it is clear that the Rangers originated as a protective force for white settlements against Indian incursions and marauding thieves. That moment in Texas history, when Anglo immigrants in Texas decided that they needed a separate police force to protect their privileged version of order, was a moment of unprecedented social, political, and economic complexity.

Recent studies of the Rangers and of Texas’s split with Mexico have tried to bring the social complexity of the region to bear on their analysis. Earlier works tended to make a case that the Rangers were a relatively unchanging institution for roughly the first hundred years of their history, as Webb or Robert Utley have done. Others have explained violence in Texas as the result of the cruelty, ineffectuality, or general inferiority of the Mexican government, as T. R. Fehrenbach did. More recent, multiculturally-focused works, such as Américo Paredes’s seminal work on Gregorio Cortez and Mexican American resistance against the Rangers in Gary Clayton Anderson’s study of ethnic cleansing in the early republic through the end of Reconstruction, have tried to reconcile the iconic status of the Rangers with the devastating violence that usually characterized their actions. However, both of those studies, as well as others in the same vein,

emphasize the racism and hatred of individual actors. In order to explain generations of structural violence in Texas and the disappearance of the social and political complexity that had previously characterized the region, the cultural work of the Rangers as an organization needs to be brought into focus—both as historical actors and popular culture models—rather than the individual racism of particular individuals.<sup>30</sup>

To understand the dramatic change brought about by the Rangers and those who commissioned them, it is necessary to understand the development of social, political, and economic conditions in Texas and the southern Plains. Tracing the advancement of the Comanche is key to understanding later development of the region. The Comanche constituted an aggressively expansionist indigenous empire, with distinct political and economic goals, that successfully manipulated European empires in the region to serve its own ends. As a polity, they did not follow a European colonial model of rigid incorporation of subject peoples or incorporative settlement of productive lands. The goal of the Comanche was not to develop a nation-state that could be clearly delineated on a map or even to build a lasting physical presence in their homelands that could serve as a visual reminder of their strength. Rather, they were interested in informal incorporation and alliances of subject peoples—indigenous and European—and in creating and maintaining economically advantageous conditions across the southern Plains. This they did with breath-taking success.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For Anglo-centric Texas Ranger histories, see Webb, *Texas Rangers*, or Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Justice: The First Century of the Texas Rangers*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002); T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); for revisionist, multicultural histories, see Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1958), or Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*.

<sup>31</sup> Pekka Hämmäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-6.

Key to the development of the Comanche was the horse. It seems that the availability of horse may have been what first drew the Numunu, a splinter group of Shoshone and ancestor to the Comanche, into the southern Plains in the late seventeenth century. Introduced to the Numunu by the Utes, who acquired them after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 left the Pueblo awash in abandoned Spanish property, horses soon became the engine of Comanche social, political, and economic development. By the 1710s, within a generation of acquiring horses, the Comanche had begun the mounted raids into northern New Spain that would come to characterize their reign. Initially, the Comanche economy was based on the production of buffalo hides or meat, and exchange with non-Native traders for material goods, specifically any metal or cloth, which they did not have the ability to produce themselves. With the adoption of equestrianism, they expanded their access to both new hunting grounds and new markets. This led to an increased premium placed on both horses, which fueled economic growth, and slaves, who in turn produced more economic goods. The Comanche expanded their economic influence throughout the eighteenth century, eventually coming to dominate trade along the Arkansas River valley to the north, the confluence of the Sabine River and the Red River to the east, and the Río Grande valley and the Taos fairs to the west. Through strategic alliances and exploitative relationships with other indigenous groups in these areas, the Comanche solidified their place at the center of Southern Plains trade.<sup>32</sup>

The basis and later the deadliest flaw of the Comanche economy was twin reliance on horses and buffalo—horses for wealth and buffalo for trade goods and subsistence. The two animals occupy an almost identical ecological niche; rapid growth in one population significantly

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<sup>32</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 18-106; Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Expansion, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 67.2 (April 2010) 173-208.

compromising the other. As Comanche horse wealth exploded in the early nineteenth century, the ability of buffalo herds to sustain themselves steadily declined. By the midcentury, New Mexican and Texan officials were commenting on the decreased size of the buffalo herds. First the animals abandoned the Arkansas River valley, which had become a trade thoroughfare as commerce along the Santa Fe Trail grew, bringing with it pollution, overgrazing, erosion, and a host of bovine diseases that jumped to the bison herds. A prolonged drought struck the *comanchería*—the Comanche homelands and the area most obviously under Comanche control—at the same time, lasting from around 1845 to 1850. This further increased pressure on the Comanche bison herds, which faced grazing competition from Comanche horses and water competition from the Comanche themselves. All of these factors spelled almost irreversible destruction for the bison herds of the lower midcontinent, as well as for the people who economically depended on them.<sup>33</sup>

The southern edge of the Comanche empire was significantly more politically and socially dynamic, and their economic relations were marked by extreme interdependence as well as outbursts of devastating violence. Borderlands historian Pekka Hämäläinen has characterized the relationship between the northern provinces of New Spain and, later, Mexico and the Comanche as one of reversed colonization—with the indigenous group as the colonizer and the European power as the colonized. Through raiding and trading practices, the Comanche manipulated northern Mexican provinces into an economically subservient position marked by extreme violence and destruction. The colonial Spanish government paid little attention to developing its northeastern extreme, and was primarily interested in Tejas as a buffer between the interior provinces and independent Indian groups. The Mexican government, in seeking

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<sup>33</sup> Hämäläinen, “Politics of Grass,” 201-208.

increased but not unfettered trade relations with the United States was more inclined to invest in the province. The battered and bleeding condition of the Texan and Coahuilan frontier, exacerbated by the failures of several governors of Tejas to secure a working relationship with the Comanche, led the newly formed Mexican government to open the province to Anglo American immigration and settlement in 1822. The northeastern province was seen as too violent to be settled by large numbers of Mexican citizens but crucial to maintaining distance between the interior provinces and the Comanche. Anglo American immigrants it was believed, with their record of anti-Indian violence, could possibly secure the land. For Tejanos, the potential profit to be made from increased Anglo settlement, physical security, and economic activity, seemed to outweigh the risk of allowing large numbers of foreigners into their midst. If Tejas could be made into a profitable province instead of quagmire of Native hostilities, Tejanos would gain more political sway in the central government, and perhaps, over time, the European descended immigrants might be incorporated into Mexican culture.<sup>34</sup>

One early historian of the Rangers describes the predicament at the dawn of the Lone Star Republic as a three-cornered fight between Indians, Mexicans, and (Anglo) Texans. While this does begin to capture the social complexity of the historical moment, it remains reductive. Class differences between elite Tejanos and non-elite *vecinos*, the disparate economic goals of Mexican citizens in Texas and those in Mexico city, the imperial ambitions of the Comanche, the trade prerogatives of Caddo middlemen, the land hunger of slave holding Anglo immigrants, and the political ambitions of the empresarios who brought in Anglo immigrants all complicated the social, political, and economic landscape. This fragile mosaic of interests fragmented even more after waves of immigrant Indians started moving into northeastern Texas after being forcefully

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<sup>34</sup> Brian Delay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," *The American Historical Review*, 112.1 (February 2007), 35-68; Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 15-60.

removed from their homes in the American southeast. These Indians—Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole, for whom what unity of tribal associations existed prior to removal had been compromised after years of political turmoil and war—moved in semi-autonomous bands into Indian territory and northern Texas throughout the 1820s and 30s. Looking for land and trade, they further destabilized the Comanche empire by pushing into lands held by the Comanche and sought after by Anglo immigrants. Furthermore, they tried to gain a foothold in commerce previously controlled by the Caddo or Comanche. This inflamed tensions between tribal groups and between all Natives and Anglo Texans.<sup>35</sup>

Comanche raiding and anti-Comanche vigilantism were central to the development of the Lone Star Republic. Through the early settlement of Texas, American immigrants came into the province through an empresario, who had received a charter from the Mexican government in exchange for a promise of several hundred families. Each family received one *sitio* for ranching, equal to 4428 acres, and one *labor* for farming, equal to 177 acres. Upon fulfillment of the contract, the empresario received significantly more land. The immigrant families were required to convert to the Catholic faith, obey the laws and customs of their newly adopted country, and provide proof of their good character, usually a letter from an American clergyman. Reacting to the Fredonian Insurrection and occupation of Nacogdoches, immigration into Texas through the empresario system was halted in 1830. Large scale Anglo immigration did not occur again until the Anglo-led rebellion and War of Independence in 1836, which reopened American immigration.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 81-96; Sheri Marie Shuck-Hall, "Borderlands and Identities in Imperial Texas: The Alabamas and Coushattas in the Anti-Comanche Union, 1820-1840," *The International History Review*, 25.3 (September 2003) 563-591.

<sup>36</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 81-101.

This system was designed to bring in families, not individual male traders, and to distribute huge amounts of land to Anglo immigrants, which would then be secured by the immigrants however they could manage. This unintentionally incentivized Anglo segregation in the eastern portion of the state. This system worked to bring large numbers of working households into the Mexican province, though laws restricting the use of slave labor were routinely flouted, as plantation agriculture, specifically cotton and sugar, were central to the immigrants' economy. After the Panic of 1837, financially ruined men and families from the American backcountry and the Old Southwest came to Texas in droves, looking to reestablish their fortunes. Many of these settlers stayed in East Texas, where the land was already broken into arable ground and where trade ties to the United States were the strongest. This accelerated Anglo self-segregation in eastern Texas, and increased militant resistance to perceived Mexican tyranny. After Texas declared independence, the government continually focused on expanding Anglo settlement and thereby the area controlled by the republic further out from this initial holding. The Texas Rangers quickly found a place in this future.<sup>37</sup>

This is the multicultural and multivalent world that bore the Texas Rangers. Comanche, Tejanos, and Anglo Texans were forced to share political, social, economic, and military power in Texas because no one group could claim complete control. This uneasy pluralism continued until around the early 1840s, when Anglo Texans began to more aggressively attack the Comanche and alienate Tejanos from emerging structures of power.<sup>38</sup>

The earliest instance of anything called “rangers” in Texas is in an address by Stephen F. Austin, the first and most successful empresario, who commissioned a group of ten local men, rangers, to track down a group of cattle rustlers in the lower Brazos valley. This group probably

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<sup>37</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 81-101; Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 43-58.

<sup>38</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 92-101.

disbanded after a few months or after they recovered the cattle—as they disappear from the record, it is impossible to tell. This group bore little influence on the later organization commissioned by the state, or of the revival of the Rangers in the 1870s, or on the modern organization, but it is frequently pointed to as the origin story of the Rangers. This is because of the connection to Stephen F. Austin, the “Father of Texas” for whom the state capitol is named, and also because of the group’s original purpose—to enforce Anglo property rights.<sup>39</sup>

It seems more likely that an ad hoc, locally organized system of ranger groups is what characterized the earliest history of the Texas Rangers, until 1835. These men would have been small landholders who grouped together for mutual protection, usually at the expense of local settled Indians, like the Tonkawa or Karankawa, or immigrant Indians. Comanche raids remained largely to the west of Anglo settlement, instead targeting Tejano ranches or heading further south into Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, or Nuevo Santander. The first Ranger company was officially chartered in November 1835 and assembled in January 1836.<sup>40</sup> There is some evidence that these early groups had both Anglo Texan and Tejano men in them. Since they tended to be local men fighting for local grievances, this could explain a certain amount of cross-cultural goodwill and cooperation, given mutual local concerns.<sup>41</sup> In this historical moment, when Tejano and Anglo Texan political and economic interests seemed aligned, the

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<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 50-58.

<sup>40</sup> Frederick Wilkins, “The Texas Rangers: Birth and Legend,” *Wild West* (August 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 170-191; For detailed lists of Ranger company rolls, see Stephen Moore, *Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1839-1841*, (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2007). Moore’s three-volume work compiles nearly all extant Ranger rolls to give a detailed description of Ranger activities. Though the work sometimes veers towards hagiography at the expense of other groups, like the Comanche or Lipan Apache, it is very useful for tracking down individual Rangers. Another resource is the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum’s list of Hispanic Texas Rangers drawn from their archival sources, see “Partial List of Republic of Texas Era Hispanic and American Indian Texas Rangers,” accessed March 19, 2012, [http://www.texasranger.org/ReCenter/hispanic\\_indian\\_rangers.htm](http://www.texasranger.org/ReCenter/hispanic_indian_rangers.htm).

existence of a multiracial police force tasked with the protection of communities and, more broadly, the state was possible. Unfortunately, this moment was short-lived, as increased immigration from the American backcountry led to increased social pressure against Tejanos, and as Tejanos were forced to choose between supporting the new republic and the old country.

The Rangers became almost exclusively an Anglo Texan dominated organization following the Mexican reinvasions of Texas in 1842 and the concomitant souring of Anglo-Tejano relations. This coincided with increased emphasis on border patrolling, which meant that individual Ranger bands were tied less to specific, local concerns and became more invested in protecting the nascent nation-state. Furthermore, as President Mirabeau B. Lamar (1838-1841) increased Ranger and volunteer militia actions, he frequently blending the two types of organizations together given similar lack of general training, loose organization, and self-supplying of weapons and other goods. In creating the military infrastructure of the budding nation, the Congress, Houston, and Lamar created several overlapping forces. These groups, which included the formally organized Rangers as well as local militias and the Texan army, were not clearly defined, and sometime blended together. Moreover, each of them benefited from local vigilante forces in the instance of retaliating against Indians raids or perceived Mexican 'bandits,' both of whom threatened Anglo power and property rights. Consequently, the general level of violence expected of Ranger units increased dramatically. In this way, the general deterioration of social conditions in Texas—mounting Anglo fears of Mexico, increased pressure on Tejanos to clearly demonstrate where their loyalties lay, and the growing ambitions but declining ecological stability of the Comanche—is reflected in the growing violence of the Texas Rangers, who were now tasked with the responsibility of securing Texas's future.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*, 177-191; Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 189-202.

Lamar's instrumentality in increasing and expanding Ranger powers and actions cannot be understated. Lamar, who came to the presidency after President Sam Houston's two handpicked successors committed suicide shortly before the election, strongly favored the complete expulsion of all Natives from Texas, harbored suspicions about the loyalty of Tejanos, and feared annexation to the United States on the grounds that it might impede Texas's ability to maintain African slavery. Some scholars have argued that Lamar pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing, in that he favored the complete removal of all communities of color from the republic.<sup>43</sup> Instead, a framework that emphasizes Lamar's interest in subjugating communities of color more fully captures his racial policies. While Lamar loudly championed the removal or extermination of Native peoples from Texas, he did not as doggedly chase Tejanos, and he certainly did not wish to remove African Americans, most of who had been forcibly brought and secured in the state. Rather, his actions are better understood to be a furtherance of his racial beliefs—that is to say that in order for white male dominance in Texas to be achieved, Indians must simply fade away, Mexican Americans must be economically subjugated, and African Americans must be physically subjugated.

Moreover, in order for all of these pieces to work in concert, the state needed a state police force that could sustain racial hierarchy. To extract white male dominance from a relatively multicultural milieu, Lamar needed to forcibly exert control over communities of color. This became the task of the Rangers, who moved from a culturally-mixed force primarily interested in protecting Texan property rights to a state constabulary who practiced racialized violence in order to secure white male power. Under Lamar, the volunteer militias, the Texas

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<sup>43</sup> This is the basic premise of Anderson's *Conquest of Texas*, on which I rely heavily, but skeptically. His analysis extends beyond Lamar, but does feature Lamar as an unparalleled villain of the Lone Star Republic.

Rangers, and the Texas Army rapidly expanded; they were mainly tasked with the subjugation, or failing that, the expulsion of people of color. To a certain extent, this seemed to reflect the desires of Anglo Texas, many of whom had been underwhelmed by Houston's Indian policies. Though many Texans had opposed Houston's policy of negotiation and mutual accord in dealing with Native groups, the financial burdens—crippling inflation and nearly worthless currency overwhelmed the state—brought by Lamar's military ventures were hardly welcomed.<sup>44</sup>

One example of the violent and purposeful split between Houston's stance towards Indians and his disregard for the Rangers and other vigilante, volunteer militias and Lamar's use of those forces for extermination, expulsion, and political gain is Lamar's treatment of a specific band of Cherokee immigrants. Though the Anglo-dominated republic favored American immigration, it did not extend this welcome to the waves of southeastern Natives who were pouring into Texas throughout the 1830s and 40s. One such group, led by Chief Bowles, originally settled in Texas under the auspices of the Mexican government in 1822, though they continued to receive refugees from the American southeast through the 1840s. Chief Bowles had been a longtime friend of Sam Houston, the two visited each other and exchanged gifts—in fact, Bowles frequently wore a hat, sword, and cane that Houston had given him. Though the land given to Bowles's group overlapped slightly with David G. Burnet's empresario grant, Houston assured Bowles that while he was in office, Bowles would have no reason to fear for his land.

However, when Houston left office and Lamar succeeded him, Bowles did have reason to worry. Fearing that the Cherokee group was conspiring with Mexico to weaken Texas's security, Lamar moved for their expulsion. He sent a letter to Bowles informing him of the Congressional act authorizing the Cherokee band's removal from the state. Bowles resisted, and eventually

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<sup>44</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 172-175.

made a stand against Lamar's handpicked generals, Thomas Rusk and Edward Burlison. Rusk and Burlison were both former and future Ranger captains, though in this particular engagement they were commanding Texan army forces—indicating the blurred institutional lines that defined early Ranger history, particularly under Lamar's administration. The Texans had significantly more firepower than the similarly sized group of Cherokee, and the battle was predictably short. Bowles spent most of the fight urging his men on, until he was wounded during the chaotic gunfight. Sitting near a small campfire, nursing his wounds, Bowles apparently remained unaware as a Texan soldier walked up and shot him in the head. Bowles's body and the bodies of his fallen men were left on the field, and their villages burned. His cane was returned to Houston, on Lamar's orders.<sup>45</sup>

Lamar used the Rangers to enact his vision of Texas, defined by violence against those who were perceived to be obstacles in the young nation's path. He also used them as a tool for political gain at the expense of Houston, and to the appeasement of his supporters, like David G. Burnet, an empresario and booster for land sales in Texas. This was not a covert or subtle tactic of his, rather he frequently referenced the Rangers in discussing the condition or the future of the Lone Star Republic—especially in relation to booming western and northern expansion from the original power base of the state in East Texas. Mirroring future cultural uses of the Rangers, which will be examined more closely in the following chapters, Lamar deployed the Rangers as images, as tropes, and as the shock troops who would make real his vision for Texas.

Like so much of Ranger history, the stories that are told in relation to the organization are deeply telling and influential, however true. In his first address to the Texas Congress, Lamar pointed to 'savage' attacks by Indians, the "wild cannibals of the woods," against rightful and

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 50-52, 177-179; Dorman H. Winfrey, "Chief Bowles of the Texas Cherokee," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 32.1 (1954) 29-41.

virtuous Anglo settlers, which necessitated “an exterminating war.” He sometimes pointed to the 1836 attack at Judge Parker’s Fort to make this point, even though the Parkers had settled well outside the bounds of empresario controlled lands. The Fort Parker Massacre, as it was called, served as a rallying cry and a physical rallying point for many Ranger expeditions in the late 1830s and early 1840s.<sup>46</sup> At the time of Lamar’s speech, two children, Cynthia Ann and John Parker, remained captives of the Comanche; their uncle, James W. Parker and another victim of the attack, Rachel Plummer, had started publicizing their stories, though they would not be published for another three years.<sup>47</sup> Many of the Parker men, including Silas Parker, the patriarch of the family, had served as Rangers before the attack and had used their homestead as a base of Ranger activity, perhaps explaining why an otherwise insignificant homestead was attacked by a group of several hundred Comanche. From Fort Parker, Rangers had been pushing further and further into acknowledged Comanche hunting grounds. After the attack, James Parker, the uncle of the two still-captive children, tried several times to organize official Ranger companies to search for his missing family, but had only limited success. He wrote in his narrative of the event of speaking to Sam Houston in pursuit of official designation of a Ranger company,

Having laid my plans before him for retaking the prisoners, he decided against it, and insisted that a treaty with the Indians would be the most effective and expeditious means of releasing the prisoners. I contended that such a thing as a treaty being formed with the hostile Indians until they were whipped, and well whipped, had never been known; and the more thorough the chastisement, the more lasting the treaty. All argument failed, however, and with a heavy heart and perplexed mind, I retraced my steps to the humble abode of my afflicted family. I then thought that Gen. Houston betrayed too great an indifference to the matter; though this impression, no doubt, grew out of the great anxiety felt on my part.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 128-130, 174-175, quote on 174.

<sup>47</sup> James Parker, *Narrative of the Perilous Adventures, Miraculous Escapes and Sufferings of Rev. James W. Parker, During a Frontier Residence in Texas, of Fifteen Years ... to Which Is Added a Narrative of the Capture, and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer* (Louisville: Morning Courier Office, 1844).

<sup>48</sup> Parker, *Narrative of the Perilous Adventures*, 17.

Whereas Lamar pointed to the family's struggle as proof of the need of an exterminating war, Houston preferred to negotiate for peace. Houston had refused Parker, which was probably a prudent decision, given Parker's admitted, inveterate hatred of Indians, his occasionally excessive use of alcohol, and his somewhat ignoble career as an itinerant preacher following the death of his family.<sup>49</sup> Lamar, on the other hand, celebrated the family's martyrdom as pioneer heroes, choosing to glorify their deaths and suffering in the pursuit of further violence. The family became a symbol explaining why the state needed to expand further west—in order to bring independent Indians to heel and prevent future depredations—rather than perhaps the warning that they might have been. Stories such as the Parkers' became a central part of Texan expansion, justifying the seizure of lands from Tejanos and from indigenous groups.

Like the Parkers, the Texas Rangers became a powerful symbol of American westward expansion in this era. The staggering ambition and concomitant violence that undergirded American westward expansion began, perhaps not inappropriately, with American political observers watching the actions of the Rangers. Lamar's justifications for violent wars of extermination caught the attention of American politicians who were increasingly turning their sights toward the Lone Star Republic and beyond. And the stories that they were telling themselves about Texas were changing. Rather than imagining all of northern Mexico as a wilderness, plagued by uncontrolled Indians and sparsely settled by an indolent and insignificant population, they were beginning to see northern Mexico as a place of unfulfilled potential. This shift in the narrative of northern Mexico created in the minds of American politicians and the American public a viable desire, if not right, to those lands. Andrew Jackson himself tried and failed to annex Texas; during his presidency, Texas was still seen as a mostly useless desert, not

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<sup>49</sup> Parker, *Narrative of the Perilous Adventures*, 1-8.

worthy of the high costs of expansion. But as perceptions of Texas and Northern Mexico shifted, the result, it would seem of Ranger activities, American ambitions followed suit. These were the first glimmers of manifest destiny.<sup>50</sup>

One of the reasons that American politicians understood Texas to be a wasteland was because of reports of widespread Indian violence against Mexican settlements—much of it at the hands of the Comanche. While undertaking their own project of southeastern Indian removal, incidences of Indians subjugating Mexican settlements belied the military prowess of their neighbor. However, what little information existed about the Comanche bespoke a populous and formidable people. More information regarding Western Native groups began to flood newspapers following the opening of the Santa Fe Trail. Through communications from Santa Fe and Texas, information regarding the Mexican north became more prolific and robust. And much of this information regarding security issues, namely Indian depredations, focused primarily on the Comanche. Few articles regarding conditions in Texas or New Mexico were printed in major urban centers like New York and New England before 1836.<sup>51</sup> Some of the earliest articles circulated after 1836 detail the experiences of Indian captives, specifically Rachel Plummer, who was taken captive at the Fort Parker raid, or the failure of the Mexican government to protect Anglo Texan settlements from Indian raids.<sup>52</sup>

These stories portray the Native groups present, usually Comanche but occasionally Apache, Kiowa, or Navajo, to be incredibly powerful and destructive forces. Some articles warned against annexing Texas or becoming involved in the Lone Star Republic's struggle for

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<sup>50</sup> Brian Delay, *War of A Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-9, 226-228.

<sup>51</sup> Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 231-215.

<sup>52</sup> For Rachel Plummer, see *Boston Courier*, December 18, 1837; for Indian raids and Texan settlements, *Daily Commercial Bulletin and Missouri Literary Register* (St. Louis), September 6, 1836.

independence, as it would open the United States up to a new Indian frontier, one which would require huge forces to secure. One such article warns again and again that becoming involved in the Texian rebellion would be an over-commitment of U.S. army forces, and that the region was nearly uninhabitable, given the levels of violence from independent Indian groups.

We also have information that the Indians on the Mexican frontier have risen up in great force; that one American had been killed, and that all was terror and confusion in that country. Gen. Gaines had advanced to the Sabine with about 700 men, and was collecting all the forces of the country to attempt to stop the advance of the Indians. Report estimated them at 10,000 strong.<sup>53</sup>

The paper also reports the fall of the Alamo and the deaths of the garrison at Goliad; this is not a flattering image of Texas. Indeed, from their reporting, the region seems to be rife with instability and violence, with few redeeming factors to be discerned. The Texian Army could not hold it, and the U.S. Army seemed similarly outmatched, or perhaps undersupplied. This was characteristic of much of the early reporting about Texas that was circulated in the East. However, even this dismal picture, described over a full page of the paper, held a glimmer of hope. The last article about Texas in this conglomeration was an excerpt of a letter from a Texian Army officer to a “gentleman” in Tallahassee. After detailing his comrades’ deaths at the Alamo and at Goliad, and bemoaning his company’s lack of supplies, the author pauses to comment upon the condition of the land in Texas. “This is a decidedly richer country than I expected to find, and much more healthy than any southern country.” He then returns to exalt the Texian soldiers who refused to surrender to Mexican authorities. This shift is an indicator of the larger turn in American discussions of Texas. Moving the focus from instability in the region and the desert-like conditions created by years of Indian raids, the reporters instead looked to the

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<sup>53</sup> *The Floridian* (Tallahassee, FL), April 30, 1836.

untapped potential of the land, which is only hinted at in the development of the Lone Star Republic.<sup>54</sup>

As the Texan's experiment with independence continued, American papers started reporting more on the military power of the Texans against the Comanche. Instead of a mighty, martial people who prevented the settlement and prosperity of northern Mexico, the Comanche were increasingly deployed as characters in narratives regaling Texian military might. This was manifested through both Texian army and Texas Ranger actions. One such article from 1838 claimed that after Texas Independence, the Comanche harbored an inveterate hatred of Anglo Texans and, by extension, Americans. Comanches attempted to attack white Texan settlements, only to be repelled by organizationally-mixed Texas martial forces. The article quoted a letter from General Rusk, then of the Texian army but also a Ranger captain, in which he described routing a force of several thousand Comanche with a few hundred Texas soldiers. While the ground ran red with the blood of fallen Indians for at least a half-mile, Rusk's company lost only eleven men and twenty-five horses. Though just a few short years before, a victory over the Comanche seemed unlikely and foolhardy; after Anglo Texans seized military control of Texas through their army, the Rangers, and local militia groups, the once impenetrable nation now seemed but one more surmountable obstacle in the path of progress.<sup>55</sup>

And the Texas Rangers would clear that path. Absent a civilizing force, Texas remained a wilderness in the eyes of American observers. But after the Anglo-led rebellion and their consolidation of political and economic power, maintained by a state police force, Texas showed itself to be akin to the United States, that is to say, civilized. Before 1836, Texas was a place where no one group could claim overwhelming economic, social, or political power. The only

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<sup>54</sup> Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 235-243.

<sup>55</sup> *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY), November 21, 1838.

group that could come close was the Comanche, who depended on alliances for military and political power, but also to feed themselves, particularly since their investment in horses meant that their investment in agriculture diminished. When American reporters and politicians looked to the Far West, they saw an absence—a lack of legible power structures that they could recognize and legitimate. As the Texan government increased attacks on Native groups and began to question the loyalties and therefore the citizenship of Tejanos, they created a power structure familiar to distant American spectators. And so the wilderness fell back. This idea of civilization then was scaffolded onto the actions of the Rangers—men alone, standing between society and their enemies. The advancement of this idea propelled annexation and laid the foundation for the state of Texas.

After annexation, the fate of the Rangers was somewhat uncertain. They had been a product of the Republic, and when that government was subsumed into the United States, it seemed unclear precisely what role the organization would fulfill, what their duties would be, and most importantly, who would pay them. Ranger units still existed, but the organization was largely defunded after the conclusion of the Mexican American War. Rangers were sent south with General Zachary Taylor's troops; former Ranger units commanded by Jack Hays and Benjamin McCullough became the Texas Mounted Volunteers. And the state government was still expanding settlement, and after the settlement of thousands of German and Czech immigrants in the areas north and west of San Antonio, known as the Hill Country and

comprising the southern edge of the main Comanche hunting grounds, Rangers were still needed to secure white settlements.<sup>56</sup>

But Indian wars and treaties were now the responsibility of the federal government rather than the Rangers. The U.S. Army patrolled the entire western frontier, not just Texas, and was more interested in negotiating with Indians than in costly battles. This created tension between the Army and the more violent Rangers that would not be resolved until the late nineteenth century. However, the fact that Indians were meant to be the responsibility of the federal government did little to stop Ranger attacks against Native groups in Texas. And by 1875, the dream of an Indian-less Texas was nearly complete and the Rangers seemed to be responsible. Of course, this is only partially true, given the external economic and ecological pressures that equally weakened the Comanche, who even in their nadir remained the largest and most powerful indigenous group in the Southern Plains.<sup>57</sup>

It seems unlikely that the Comanche would have been completely blindsided by the ecological changes—the decimation of the buffalo herds caused by a decade long drought as well as chronic overgrazing—that so badly shook their economic core. If New Mexican and Texas officials noticed them, then surely the Comanche, who made their living from these herds, would have noticed too. Short-term economic and subsistence concerns seem to have taken precedence for most Comanche at the time, and ceasing all bison hunting or reducing horse herds was simply not an option. Horses were the linchpin of their export economy, and buffalo were central to their

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<sup>56</sup> J. Frank Dobie, "Wallace, William Alexander Anderson [Bigfoot]," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fwa36>), accessed March 21, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; Thomas W. Cutrer, "McCullough, Benjamin," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fmc34>), accessed March 21, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 214-230

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *Conquest of Texas*, 235-245; Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 292-295.

subsistence economy, as they had traded meat and hides with agricultural tribes for produce and agricultural goods for generations. Moreover, a future without buffalo seemed incomprehensible; such widespread destruction had only been seen in humans, who lacked the spiritual or supernatural qualities of the buffalo. But inconceivable futures seemed to abound for people all over the Southern Plains, and the Comanche were neither the first nor the last to suddenly find themselves in a world they hardly recognized.<sup>58</sup>

Conditions for other Native groups around Texas deteriorated in tandem with the Comanche, as the economies that had supported them dried up. These pressures pushed many Native peoples out of Texas and into Oklahoma or onto the two reservations that Texas created in 1854 at the behest of the federal government. Starvation due to the interrelated collapses of the bison herds and indigenous trade networks drove first the remaining Wichita, Tawakoni, and Caddo bands onto the Brazos Reserve, in the upper Brazos River valley near Fort Belknap. Soon after the formation of the Brazos Reserve, the Texas Indian commissioner set up a similar reserve further north for the Comanche. By this time, many of the Comanche who had lived in Texas were moving further north to access what little buffalo remained, and to attempt to exploit bureaucratic gaps between Indian Territory and Texas, as they had done earlier in the century. A small and starving portion of the Penateka band of Comanche moved onto the newly formed Clear Fork Reserve located on the Clear Fork branch of the Brazos river near Camp Cooper. Like other reservations, the Texas Reserves were meant to civilize the Indians who lived there through the forced adoption of sedentary husbandry. The groups that settled in the Brazos Reserve had previously practiced agriculture, though not in exactly the way that the Indian commissioners wanted them to. The Comanche bands that settled in the Clear Fork Reserve had

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<sup>58</sup> Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, 291-299.

greater difficulty in adopting agriculture, as it had little cultural or economic relevance to them. In addition, the Comanche found it increasingly difficult to maintain their migratory economic practices as both the Rangers and the U.S. Army took actions to forcibly contain them on the reserve. Those who could escape these snares moved north to join the free bands that still practiced raiding and trading patterns.<sup>59</sup>

As the two Texas reserves were being organized, so were Parker, Erath, Young, Palo Pinto, and Jack counties. Anglo Texas settlement was increasing along the upper Brazos valley, in the wake of the collapse of indigenous groups. White residents of the settlements near the reserves blamed reserve Indians for most occurrences of violence and theft in the area. There is little evidence to support those claims; in fact, northern Comanches who were raiding these settlements were also raiding both reserves. When Rip Ford's Ranger unit, which had been watching the reserves for signs of raiding activities, led an expedition into Comanche country to the north, several Native men from the Brazos Reserve volunteered as well. After the successful battle that resulted, Ford praised the men from the Brazos Reserve; less than a year later though, a different Ranger unit attacked those same men.

In addition to the Ranger units, vigilante militias from neighboring counties formed to attack all Indians they encountered. The mob claimed that it was impossible to tell which Indians were helping Texas and local communities and which were destroying local communities. Consequently, as they argued, all Indians should be removed from the state. These groups blurred the lines between federal Indian policy, Texas institutional practices, and vigilante justice; and as long as the sentiment that all Indians were an affront to peace coexisted with the

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<sup>59</sup> Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 300-304; F. Todd Smith, *From Dominance to Disappearance: The Indians of Texas and the Near Southwest, 1786-1859*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 212-229.

muddling of Texas state military power, the peoples of both reserves remained under siege. For example, in March of 1859 John Baylor, a former Indian commissioner and at-the-time a Ranger captain, organized a group of 250 men with the intention of attacking the Brazos Reserve in a fit of extra-legal policing. The people on the reserve were able to successfully repel those forces. But their victory was in vain, as that same year the Texas Congress disbanded the reservations. With the failure of the Texas Reserves, the State Congress and the Rangers enacted the racial policies that had originally been the goal of the Rangers.<sup>60</sup>

The Civil War created a lull in actions against Texas Indians, as many of the local men who might have become Rangers became Confederate soldiers. Texas's Indians now formally lived in Oklahoma and many continued to make forays into northwestern Texas. After the Civil War, the U.S. Army turned its attention toward these raiding Indians in northern Texas and conducted most of the military actions against them. Federal attention then hastened the diminution of Ranger power. Federal forces occupying Texas were not keen on the idea of a state constabulary undercutting their authority. Nevertheless, after federal troops left Texas, the Rangers were enthusiastically revived as a symbol of state independence. Despite their symbolic import, the troops that were raised in this period, called The Frontier Battalion, played little of their previous role as the violent civilizers of the Texas frontier.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, by the time that they were re-commissioned, the Comanche and the Kiowa were defeated and confined to Oklahoma reservations, and the Apache to the west were increasingly compromised. Still, the fact that they were chasing the last flickers of a fading power did little to

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<sup>60</sup> Smith, *Dominance to Disappearance*, 229-246; George Klos, "‘Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe From Another:’ The 1859 Expulsion of the Reserve Indians from Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97.4 (April 1994) 598-619.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 5-50.

tarnish the reputation of the Frontier Battalion. Within five years, there was almost no reason to continue Ranger attacks against Native groups. Subsequently, the Rangers began to police frontier industries, protecting the interests of cattlemen and railroads, and thus indirectly sealing the fate of Native peoples on the Southern Plains. It was this historical moment though, that created the lasting institution of the Texas Rangers. With the creation of the Frontier Battalion, the Rangers became a formally organized constabulary, instead of an ad hoc militia. Significantly, this organization was founded on an image of the Rangers that came from the early, Republican institutional history.<sup>62</sup>

The Rangers of the Frontier Battalion were shadows chasing ghosts through dreams of empire. But this blending of myth and reality was only beginning for the Rangers. The Rangers as individuals and as an organization would spawn hundreds of popular culture homages. Dime novels, radio shows, movies, and television series used the Rangers as icons of frontier masculinity. Few of these creative ventures were undertaken with an eye towards historical accuracy; most seemed more invested in creating a sense of a place, that is to say, creating something that conformed to their sense of a historical time or place.<sup>63</sup> Usually this reflected more about the culture in which the work was created than about the time it depicted. The Rangers as an institution was particularly well adapted to this, as they are based on stories—stories of adventuresome Rangers, images of the stoic Comanche warrior, dreams of white male dominance across Texas. It's unclear where the institution stops and the game of cowboys and Indians starts. In the end, it does not matter. For it is in this seamless joining of mythology and history that the Ranger's legacy would be primarily located, and it is to these stories that I now turn.

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<sup>62</sup> Graybill, *Policing the Plains*, 50-63.

<sup>63</sup> Graybill, *Policing the Plains*, 16-22.

## Stranger Than Fiction: Nelson Lee's Narrative and Westward Expansion

Nelson Lee was the kind of man who didn't let facts get in the way of a good story. A monument to that prerogative is his narrative, published in 1859, less than two months after his supposed return to the United States following three years of captivity with the Comanche, fifty-six days wandering in the mountains, six weeks convalescence in Matamoros, a ship from Brazos Santiago to Havana, and a second ship from Havana to New York City. In the fifty one days between when his ship landed in New York City and when his narrative was published in Albany, so many of his friends begged and beseeched him to formally record his story that he had no choice but to submit:

I have yielded to their solicitations, and shall endeavor, in the progress of this narrative, to describe the adventures it had been my fortune to encounter, especially while a volunteer among the Texas Rangers, and afterwards a captive among the Comanche Indians, without color or exaggeration.<sup>64</sup>

He quickly described his early life in New York in one chapter, eager to get to the meat of his story—that which his many loving friends were so eager to see published. “The career upon which I then entered, as I said in the beginning, runs not in the ordinary current of existence. It has been ‘stranger than fiction,’ and as I look back upon it from the quiet I now enjoy, seems more like a feverish dream than a strange reality.”<sup>65</sup> By the end of the book, after he had outrun a fourteen-foot alligator and been “bellowed” at by remarkably vociferous nine-foot snakes, it seemed more like an artful fabrication, blending two types of western genre fiction and deeply

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<sup>64</sup> Nelson Lee, *Three Years Among the Comanche: The Narrative of Nelson Lee, the Texas Ranger* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>65</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 12. For the alligator, see page 29; for the snakes, or “flat headed adders,” see page 171.

reflective of a hardening sense of white male dominance in the West—a rhetorical strategy designed to appeal to his Eastern audience. Lee’s dominance is enacted and defended throughout the work, even in the face of slavery and sale to three Comanche chiefs, forced marriage, and the absence of white civilization, making his work a testimony to the resilience of white Texans and white men in the West generally.

Because of gaps in the historical record, it is difficult to tell exactly when Lee was telling the truth and when he was perhaps repeating stories overheard from other Rangers. He frequently described battles in which he acknowledged he had no part, for example the calamitous Ranger-led Mier Expedition, a failed response to the 1842 Mexican occupation of San Antonio. He also described the Plum Creek Battle, one of the first Ranger victories against the Comanche, in which a Comanche shot him. Though it is impossible to verify his exact account of these activities, Lee does appear on the 1842 Ranger rolls for Captain Cameron’s company, the regiment that would have fought at the time.<sup>66</sup> He also described other campaigns in which he claimed to have participated, but there is little evidence that these claims are true—most glaringly, the battle at Lipantitlan. Shortly after his arrival in Texas, Lee claimed to have joined the Rangers under Captain James Davis and fought at what he calls “Panta Clan,” most likely referring to the small Mexican settlement of Lipantitlan in the Nueces River Valley. His lack of general information about the settlement combined with his notable absence from relevant Ranger rolls indicates that Lee most likely heard about these battles secondhand, possibly from former Rangers. From such evidence, we must conclude that Lee’s description of the Rangers is at only somewhat based in fact, that is to say he was drawing from both his own experiences and from the experiences of others. This kind of slippage makes his work analytically challenging in

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Moore, *Savage Frontier: Rangers, Riflemen, and Indian Wars in Texas, 1841-1842*, (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2007), 107.

that it is unclear whether his descriptions are the complicated products of lived experiences, semi-mediated perceptions of others' experiences, or more straightforward fabrications shaped by broad social discourses.<sup>67</sup>

What is almost certainly not based in fact and thereby less theoretically thorny is his description of Indian captivity. There are numerous inconsistencies within his presentation of Comanches, especially regarding their use of technology—a highly visible marker of civilization. Moreover, his description of Comanche society bears little resemblance to both contemporary Texan understandings of the Comanche and modern scholarship that has further illuminated this vast North American empire. Lee's discussion of guns among the Comanche, for example, is illustrative of his overall ignorance of historical Comanche practices and the effects of his fabrications in creating a suitably flat and legible Indian Other. He listed items that the Comanche traded—primarily buffalo skins for hatchets and knives—and essentially repeats this list when outlining the material goods of hunting, war and burial.<sup>68</sup> While it is certainly true that the Comanche traded buffalo skins for metal goods like hatchets or knives, it is also true that the primary wealth source of the Comanche in the mid-nineteenth century was horses and secondarily, captives.<sup>69</sup> While the specifics of the Comanche's preeminence in the intertwined imperial and indigenous economies of the nineteenth century Southern Plains may have remained largely obscured from most outside observers, perhaps until more careful study

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<sup>67</sup> Lee, *Three Years*. For Lee's description of the Mier Expedition, see 18-19; for the Battle at Plum Creek, see 16-17; for "Panta Clan," see 15-16. For issues regarding the veracity of Panta Clan claims, see Gary Clayton Anderson, "Foreword" to *Three Years Among the Comanche*, Nelson Lee, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xii - xiv. Anderson concludes that Lee was almost certainly absent from all of the skirmishes he describes. Given Lee's presence in reprints of Ranger rolls, I demur to the complete rejection of his claims, though most of his accounts are dubious at best.

<sup>68</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 116-122.

<sup>69</sup> Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 239-291.

commenced in the last half of the twentieth century, the economic importance of the Comanche and other native groups to early Texas was acknowledged even by the most virulent Indian-haters of the time.<sup>70</sup> Thus Lee's treatment of the Comanche can be understood as influenced more heavily by cultural forces than by facts or lived experiences.

Though modern readers are privy to the wrinkles in Lee's fictionalizations, this skepticism did not characterize earlier readings of the narrative, which speaks to Lee's representation of a seemingly authentic West. Even into the mid-twentieth century, scholars and more general readers saw Lee's narrative as an accurate portrayal of early Texas. In his 1957 introduction to *Three Years Among the Comanche*, Walter Prescott Webb—influential chronicler of the Texas Rangers and author of a seminal work on Western history—lauded Lee's narrative as unquestionably authentic and inestimably valuable. “There is no better description of the lives of the Texas Rangers than that given by Nelson Lee ... The information he conveys about how the Comanche lived before they were affected by the white man is invaluable.”<sup>71</sup> Lee's narrative was also used as a primary source in Ernest Wallace and E. Adamson Hoebel's foundational ethnography, *The Comanches: Lords of the South Plains*, specifically citing information regarding the now-debunked mid-nineteenth century Comanche Green Corn Dance. Lee's inclusion in the historical record as a credible source further evinced his deft manipulation of prevailing notions and images of Indians and of the West. By teasing out those maneuvers,

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<sup>70</sup> For the development and consolidation of Comanche power, see Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*; or Brian Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). These works in particular argue for Comanche centrality in southern Plains imperial development. For acknowledgement of Comanche power in early Texas, see Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005) 172-184.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Prescott Webb, “Introduction” to Nelson Lee, *Three Years Among the Comanche: The Narrative of Nelson Lee, the Texas Ranger* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), xxi. Introduction originally prepared for the 1957 reprint of *Three Years Among the Comanche* for The Western Frontier Library, University of Oklahoma Press.

modern critics can reveal the rhetoric surrounding race and westward expansion in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup>

Still, it seems that the more threads you pull, the more the text unravels. Nelson Lee interjected his falsified narrative into debates about Western expansion, painting the West as a blank state for white male power to be inscribed upon, with the aid of the federal government. His characterization of Mexicans as lazy and indolent and his description of the unfulfilled fertility of northern Mexico played into a preexisting set of ideas; his narrative, presented as fact, gave weight to those ideas. His description of the Comanche as excessively masculine, warlike, but completely inept and primitive also supported emerging ideas about the Native peoples of the Great West. Furthermore, in outlining the material and economic world of the Comanche, he reinforces their intrinsically pre-modern status as well as their inability to engage with American capitalist markets. By weaving calls to the federal government and the army through these fictionalized vignettes of Comanche culture, he indicates that the American government has a responsibility to protect and defend the rights of its frontier citizens, that is to say, of white men. Lee draws on the conception of Texas as quintessentially a white man's republic, and later state, in all of these descriptions and in the construction of his narrative. Though he puts forward the

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<sup>72</sup> For the debunking of the Comanche Green Corn Dance in Wallace and Hoebel, see Melburn D. Thurman, "Nelson Lee and the Green Corn Dance: Data Selection Problems with Wallace and Hoebel's Study of the Comanche," *Plains Anthropologist* 27.97 (August 1982) 239-243. Thurman was most disturbed by Wallace and Hoebel's inclusion of Lee as a source on the Green Corn Dance since his other descriptions of Comanche life were so far-fetched that he seemed to not be a credible source. Indeed, Wallace and Hoebel did not give much credence to other claims of Lee's, including his claim that the Comanche celebrated something called a "festival of the roasted dog." Moreover, Comanche informant sources about the Green Corn Dance were often asked leading questions entailing the existence of a Green Corn Dance, and sources that directly refuted the existence of such a dance were not included in the ethnography. For Thurman, this privileging of a factually questionable but seemingly authentic source above more credible sources is what was most unsettling about Wallace and Hoebel's conclusions.

cause of white women captives, his extremely cursory treatment of their experience and instead solipsistic focus on his own prowess and cunning undercuts that supposition.

When easterners sought out information and entertainment regarding the West, a narrative like Lee's is what they would have turned to. These literary productions, though perhaps not glorified or beautiful, supported a foundation of racialized expansion that shaped the historical West and the fictionalized accounts and western novels that boomed in popularity in the early twentieth century. In this way, Lee's narrative, like many other pieces of western fiction, served as a bridge between Eastern and Western anxieties concomitant with the extension of American civilization westward into the wilderness and the potentially resultant erosion of society and order.

Almost as soon as Anglo Texans declared their independence from Mexico, American observers of this unfolding geopolitical drama came to the defense of their racial kin. They saw white men casting off the shackles of the Mexican government, and thereby asserting the rights of white American men to not be subservient to those they perceived to be racially inferior—a storyline mirrored in Lee's narrative, who claimed to be active as a Ranger during Texas's time as a Republic. Texas's racially legitimated insurrection seemed to speak to the conditions of white men as they extended their power westward, and appeared to be a template for further expansion. The set of ideas that coalesced around the birth of the Lone Star Republic and the annexation of Texas had been termed by historian Brian Delay "The Texas Creation Myth." This idea is particularly useful in analyzing the place of Lee's narrative in the broader national conversation about westward expansion, since even though the work was published well after Texas's admission to the Union and the resultant Mexican American War, it speaks to broader

impulses in constructing a national narrative of expansion and of Texas's place in that story. The myth, as Delay articulates it, can be summarized as such: Mexico, unable to control the incursions of hostile northern Indians, invited Anglo Americans into Texas to secure the province. Anglo Americans, successful in their economic use of the land and unable to submit to the capricious and corrupt Mexican government, rebelled, thus setting the course for Texan independence, annexation, the American conquest of northern Mexico, and American westward expansion.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, the multicultural reality of Texas in the mid-1830's does not easily fit into the mold stipulated by the Creation Myth. In fact, Texas was at the time a socially, economically, and politically diverse space. There were many and various groups of people who held multivalent, opposing, and overlapping interests in regards to the future of the state (later republic, later still state). The conditions that shaped the decision to allow Anglo American settlement in Texas were much more complicated than articulated by later American political observers or by Lee. The conditions that made Texas so difficult for the Mexican government to control were more complex than they or American observers could possibly recognize. Likewise, the conditions that sparked Anglo Texan rebellion were darker than Mexican bureaucrats would have predicted and more disastrous for Tejanos and Natives in Texas than perhaps any other moment in nineteenth century Southern Plains history. But this is exactly what makes the myth so powerful—that it collapses a maddeningly complex historical reality into the perfect explanation for past and future expansion. Moreover, the social pressures that compelled the Creation Myth's design influenced Lee's narrative, making his story yet another cultural product of westward expansion and cultural conquest. When Lee published his story, he was in some

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<sup>73</sup> Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 226-228.

ways recapitulating the strategies of earlier American politicians interested in the progress and development of Texas.<sup>74</sup>

Before the Texians, as the Anglo Texans called themselves, declared independence, American politicians paid little attention to the Mexico province. Though there was substantial trade between Texas and American traders through Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana for decades, the politics of the Mexican hinterland seemed unimportant to American politics. After the fall of the Alamo and the success at San Jacinto, Texas suddenly seemed relevant in creating a racial narrative of the North American West. American observers of Mexico found that country's perceived inability to repel or redeem its Indians sufficient grounds for annexation or conquest of all of northern Mexico. Constant raiding by the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache had devastated northern Mexico—specifically, the rural areas of Texas, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas—effectively turning northern Mexico into an unwitting colony of the Comanche. In Washington, expansionists saw in Mexico's receding frontier, a desert, barren of civilization, that threatened their own social and economic well-being. These desert-gazers could not have been more pleased when the Anglo American immigrants that had begun to settle Texas rebelled against the tyranny of Mexico--tyranny here meaning a mixture of symbolic manumission of already illegal Texan slaves and the political power of groups perceived to be racially inferior. Whereas Tejanos and the Mexican government failed to make substantial economic use of the land, Texans had greatly succeeded. Through the backbreaking work, frequently of illegal African and African American slaves, Texans built homesteads, ranches, farms, and plantations. They reclaimed the wilderness from the disuse of savages, and brought

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<sup>74</sup> Raúl Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Texas into the fold of American empire. When forest and prairie fell before cotton and cane, they knew they had made the desert smile.<sup>75</sup>

Drawing on the incredible signifying power of Indians, American politicians turned Texas into a symbolic battleground of empire. At the same time that the concept of Anglo-Saxonism was gaining political utility in Washington, debates were raging over the expansion of America into Texas. When the conversation turned to the rampaging Indians and their depredations of newly christened Anglo Saxon Texans, the annexation of Texas took the shape of racial purity and protection. Before the mid-1830s, there was little talk of an American, Anglo Saxon race as an entity. In 1837, the concept of the preeminence of Anglo Saxons within the American polity and, indeed, the world, enters the political debate through Benjamin Leigh, a senator from Virginia, and from there extends into the entirety of American political and social discourse. The supposed intellectual, physical, and moral superiority of Anglo Saxons translated directly into divinely ordained, joint American and English dominion of the globe. The inception of this new racial schema was in part precipitated by the rebellion in Texas, and American interest in claiming Texas, as well as other portions of the Mexican north. The same political observers who saw an expanding desert in Texas, caused by the inability of northern Mexican officials to control or repel hostile Indians, saw a similar disuse of land in Nuevo Mexico and Alta California. The insurrection of a racially kindred group—Anglo Texans—against racially mixed, “mongrelized” Mexicans dovetailed perfectly with increasing crystallization of Anglo-Saxonism in American politics. Indeed, the term “manifest destiny” was first coined to describe

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<sup>75</sup> Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 231-235.

the imperative of annexing Texas, and deployed again and again to give basis to the over-leaping ambition of American expansionists.<sup>76</sup>

One such example of blind faith in the divine right of “Anglo Saxon,” white men to hold power across North America was Mississippi senator Robert J. Walker’s thesis that annexation to Texas and thus proximity to Mexico would relieve the ongoing issue of slavery in eastern states. Westward expansion would allow slaveholders from the slave states to move into the Southwest, thereby serving as a release valve for the southeastern states, and the geographical proximity to Mexico would draw some of those slaves and free black people into Mexico, given the natural affinity of the two inferior races. While this may seem patently absurd to modern readers, this idea gained vocal and enthusiastic supporters at the time, including future Secretary of State and President, James Buchanan. Of the proposition of annexing Texas, Buchanan affirmed “the Anglo-Saxon blood could never be dominated by anything that claimed Mexican origin.” This may well be an extreme of expansionist rhetoric, but it shows that there was, at least for some, a kind of irrational exuberance surrounding the potential of the West.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, there were many politicians, journalists, and writers who felt that westward expansion would ultimately prove the undoing of the free, white, male republic that they had so carefully established. The natural destiny of white men to rule over North American was not frequently called into question, but the advantage of seizing the territories of northern Mexico became less clear after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The new territories had substantial Latino populations, who were not ready to immediately leave New Mexico or California because of one treaty. This complicated the otherwise glossy rhetoric of manifest

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<sup>76</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 208-219.

<sup>77</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 216-217.

destiny. Absorbing huge numbers of people who were racially incapable of assuming the rights of citizenship would surely prove disastrous, especially in the precarious frontier states, where the influence of civil society was weakest. To critics of expansion, the West represented a space where dominant American power structures were rendered illegible, due to the presence and power of large numbers of Latino people. The innate inferiority of these people would threaten the racial purity of the Union as well as American democratic structures. Whigs, and Free-Soilers were the most vocal opponents to expansion and the resultant incorporation of racially diverse groups. They feared the political and social corruption that could come from extending the institution of slavery as well as the possibility of a colonial relationship with the newly acquired territories.<sup>78</sup>

When white men moved en masse into the newly acquired territories, they worried about the absence of civilization in their communities. Susan Johnson's study of social conditions in the emerging societies of the California mines demonstrates the anxieties that white, male, Eastern emigrants held upon reaching the un-socialized space of the southern mines. These men flocked to California after the culmination of Anglo Saxon expansionism in the West opened up huge swaths of new land to American imperialism. Because of an absence of recognizably civilized, social features—women and obvious racial hierarchies—white men in the southern mines feared for their own claims to civilization and the future social development of the mines. In the absence of Eastern sociability, they constructed alternate ways to order their newfound surroundings, ways that incompletely but tellingly aped dominant American structures. By

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<sup>78</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 229-248; Joel H. Sibley, *Storm Over Texas: The Annexation Controversy and the Road to the Civil War*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005) 146-174.

imposing gendered and racialized order where none existed, these men created something more soothingly like the society that they came from and hoped to see once again.<sup>79</sup>

Unlike the Texians, who foregrounded expansion, white men in the mines were in many respects recreating a social structure instead of moving into a space in which there were already several competing social groups. However, their construction of social space speaks to Lee's narrative, inasmuch as Lee's work is a product of later waves of expansion, as through his arrival in Texas in 1842 to his arrival in New York in 1858, Lee's experiences and work were a product of one of the largest and most violent wave of western expansion. The Eastern mores that haunted the miners are the same ones that Lee tried to tap into with his work. Lee's work, a blend of captivity narrative and adventure memoir, was a response to both Eastern and Western pressures and concerns. Because he placed himself in dialogue with Western history and because he probably lived in Texas during its tumultuous transformation from multicultural province to Anglo-dominated state, he needed to address the perceived void of civilization in the West. Because his narrative was published in the East for a primarily Eastern readership, it also had to address Eastern concerns about the suitability of the West for incorporation. His choice of form reflected these dueling pressures.<sup>80</sup>

By casting himself as a Ranger-captive, Lee directly inhabited the form of the ideal American citizen—that is, of a white man; and his story invited the reader to directly place the idea of national expansion onto his form. In his foreword to Lee's narrative, Gary Clayton Anderson argues that Lee dressed up his story as a Ranger, and then tacked on the narrative about the Comanche in order to increase sales. While there certainly would have been

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<sup>79</sup> Susan Johnson, "Bulls, Bears, and Dancing Boys: Race, Gender, and Leisure in the California Gold Rush," *Radical History Review* 60.1 (1994) 4-37.

<sup>80</sup> Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995) 9-11.

significant financial incentives to produce a captivity story, if Lee was solely interested in making money, it would have been more time-efficient to only about the Comanche, or whatever Indian group seemed convenient at the time. Instead, he chose to write a hybridized Ranger-captivity narrative. While it is entirely possible that he was trying to diversify his potential audience by appealing to different trends in American popular literature, his choice was a significant one that likely reflects something of his experience. The two styles complemented each other: each are stories of the conquest of the West, one of police action and one of cultural conquest. Additionally, Lee spent some time in Texas, and as such would have known how the Comanche haunted the vulnerable republic and fledgling state. He returned to his hometown of Albany to publish the book (a breathtaking fifty-one days after he claims to have returned to the United States), from which we can discern that he meant the book for an Eastern readership. Consequently, Lee's narrative must reconcile both Lee's impressions of Texas and his understanding of Eastern sensibilities and interests. He chose to do this is by casting Texas as a space where traditional power structures were absent, as evinced by the condition of the land and the operations of trade, but which could be easily inscribed onto this primordial frontier, sparsely populated with primitive people. This transformed Eastern fears of the emptiness of the frontier, and the consequent gender and racial instability, into a positive view of Western expansion. Unlike the men of the California Gold rush, in Lee's narrative expansion strengthened domestic power structures by recreating white male dominance in new lands.<sup>81</sup>

The racialized and gender superiority that Lee wove throughout the descriptions of his captivity are most explicit in his calls to the United States government to take a stronger hand in

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<sup>81</sup> Anderson, "Foreword," xiv; Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999) 57-62.

the taming of the West. His editor claimed that he was writing for two reasons: to raise himself somewhat out of his post-captivity poverty, and draw the spotlight to “the unparalleled sufferings of a large number of white persons, principally females, now in captivity among the various Comanche tribes, with the view of inciting the benevolent and humane to adopt measures for their relief.” Though his editor-transcriber asserted that this is Lee’s goal, these claims only sporadically appear in the passages of his book, and even then seemed thin and dispassionate at best. Lee did, however, appeal on several occasions to the United State government and military to extend their reach further into Indian country in order to bring the aboriginal peoples into the service of the government. While in the last pages of the book, he cautioned that a full-scale invasion of Indian territory would likely prove deadly for the majority of captives there, his other calls to the government contradicted that addendum. In the longest such passage, Lee cautioned that if the current Indian policy were continued that the frontier settlements would perpetually be subject to depredations at the hands of the Indians, who “cherish an inveterate and undying hatred of the white race, whom they regard as usurpers.” Their hatred was not an offense within itself, only when it propelled them into delusions of power did it become an issue for Lee. “In their ignorance, they compare, favorably for themselves, their feeble strength with the whole power of the United States.” This presumptiveness of the Indians is more than Lee was willing to brook. “Send an army through their territories, giving them ocular demonstrations of its power, arresting their turbulent chiefs, and teaching them a lesson too impressive to be forgotten, that the rights of a citizen of the United States shall not be violated with impunity.” Unsurprisingly, Lee defined racial others as non-citizens.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 139-140.

Moreover, he referred specifically to the United States government as the proper authority in dealing with Indian matters. Since Lee was a Ranger during Texas's time as a semi-independent republic, and claimed to have been a captive contemporaneously with Texas's brief and ultimately unsuccessful experiment with reservations, this was a significant choice. Instead of calling on the Texas state government to expel Indians, he instead implored the U.S. government to lead the charge. This was a significant departure from Indian policy at the time Lee claimed to have been a Ranger and at the time that the narrative was published. As a quirk of annexation, Texas retained all land within its borders as state lands, and though nationally the federal government reserved the right to deal with Indian matters, this was complicated in Texas because of a lack of federally held land. Therefore, though the federal government claimed the power to deal with Indians across the nation, the Texas Rangers had the bureaucratic resources to fight—though, significantly, not the financial resources. The prime example of this overlap in power is Texas's brief experiment with reservations. The two state reservations ended when the State Congress cancelled the reserves and Texas Rangers expelled all the inhabitants of the Brazos and Clear Fork Reserves, without the consent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Texan Indian Commissioner, or U.S. Army.<sup>83</sup> Lee called especially for the federal government to act to address the presumptions of the Comanche. "If the hundredth part of the same outrages were committed by any enlightened nation, it would call upon the people to fly to arms. For my own part, I do not see why the arm of authority should not be stretched forth to protect the outraged

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<sup>83</sup> George Klos, "'Our People Could Not Distinguish One Tribe from Another:' The 1859 Expulsion of Reserve Indians from Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97.4 (April 1994), 598-619. One exception among Texas Indians is the Alabama-Coushatta, who maintained a small portion of land in eastern Texas, eventually to be turned into a reservation. They achieved this largely through their position in an indigenous anti-Comanche faction, which was viewed favorably by the Texas government. See, Sheri-Marie Shuck Hall, "Borderlands and Identities in Imperial Texas: The Alabamas and Coushattas in the Anti-Comanche Union, 1820-1840," *The International History Review*, 25.3 (September 2003) 563-591.

citizen.” According to Lee, it was the responsibility of the United States government not to indulge these primitive interlopers, but instead to use force to impose an American power structure onto the West, violently, if need be. The long arm of the law should, he argued, extend deep into the West to teach the inhabitants there “a lesson” about white, male American citizen’s rights, reaffirming the sanctity of white male American privilege, which could not be in anyway abridged or confronted and is fundamentally central to the nation.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, Nelson Lee took great pains to describe Texas as a place that deeply lacked the structures that Eastern readers would acknowledge as markers of legitimate national control, which is to say that it lacked civilization. One of the ways that he did this was by painting Texas as a vast and uninhabited land—a claim that he would have known to be at least partially false. This very first glimpse that the reader gets of Texas through the eyes of Lee was his description of the country as “in an unsettled state.”<sup>85</sup> Though the battered northern province of New Spain and later Mexico was less densely populated than it’s sister-province of Coahuila, it still had the three trade centers of Galveston, San Antonio, and Nacogdoches, each with substantial Tejano and immigrant Anglo populations at the time of Lee’s immigration. He described entering the busy port city of Galveston and the bustling, ethnically mixed San Antonio, thus undercutting any claim of Texas as unpopulated. In this light, “unsettled” is best understood to signify Texas’s lack of credible government, effective military or police forces, or productive trade—all institutions that were controlled by white men in America. Lee’s Texas is unstable, vulnerable, and most importantly, without a clear set of power relationships that would shape the emergent society. Into this chaotic frontier society, Lee placed his readership, and then built for them a vision of Texas’s natural future that mirrored the relationships back East.

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<sup>84</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 140.

<sup>85</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 13

Texas's complete absence of civilization at the time of Lee's arrival practically begged for an effective, ordering force. Lee valiantly offered himself and the Texas Rangers. "Marauding parties from beyond the Rio Grande kept the settlers of western Texas in a state of constant agitation and excitement. Besides these annoyances, the inhabitants of other sections were perpetually on the alert to defend themselves against those savage tribes which roamed over the vast region to the north." Initially, Lee defined the space of Texas in two significant ways: first, that it was a place with Mexicans and Indians on the exterior, that is to say, those groups did not legitimately constitute the populace of the country; second, that it was a space in need of forceful control. The space then, "necessarily resulted" in the birth of the Texas Rangers to bring acceptable order, Anglo American male dominance. "The extensive frontier exposed to hostile inroads, together with the extremely sparse population of the country, rendered any other force of comparatively small avail." The sparse population was again to be understood as those citizens who are recognized as useful and legitimate in the new republic—the privileged white males whom Lee represented—and the Texas Rangers who represented the coming of order to an otherwise chaotic and threatening space.<sup>86</sup>

Lee represented Texas as a primal space waiting to be built upon, and ready to receive the order of law, specifically of the Rangers. Rather than simply an eternal desert, the land was waiting to be improved. "The land was overrun with robbers and murderers who spread everywhere desolation and death, and who utterly laughed to scorn the authority of the law."<sup>87</sup> One of the consequences of the anomie that plagued Lee's Texas was that the people who would inhabit such an uncivilized space were likely not worthy of citizenship. The words "robbers" and "murderers" were part of a set of coded language used in Texas to refer to Mexican and Native

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<sup>86</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 13-14.

<sup>87</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 51.

peoples. The threat posed by these groups was that they are exerting control in Texas where Anglo Texans should be, and Lee asserted that this threat was greater and more immediate than an Eastern reader could understand.

In the midst of peace—protected by law—with none to molest him [the reader] or make him afraid—he will probably fail to comprehend the precise situation of a Texas citizen during the stormy period of which I write. ... Comparatively few in numbers—with tribunals powerless to protect him—he [a citizen of Texas] had no other alternative than to return blow for blow, and to demand blood for blood.<sup>88</sup>

The claim that Texas’s “sanguinary struggle” for independence was stormier than New York in 1857 was rather a remarkable one.<sup>89</sup> Mounting sectional tensions, the threat of gender and racial upset entailed with the dissolution of slavery and the greater prominence of women in abolitionist politics, the Panic of 1857, and the dissolution of the Whigs and the first rumblings of the emerging Third Party system all made New York and the United States generally a very turbulent place. Writing and living in the East at the time, Lee would have certainly known this. By asserting that Texas is in a greater state of confusion and disarray, he was claiming that the gender and racial unrest in the frontier country is a greater obstacle to the development of a functioning society than the threat of civil war or financial ruin, since the United States in 1857 had the benefit of governmental structures that could protect the citizen. In this way, Lee was asserting that the West held the future of the country, and that which that imperiled social functioning there, imperiled power structures in the East. Lee was connecting the civilization of the West to the progeny of the East. Lee made a significant rhetorical move when he defined the citizen of the East and of Texas as a male subject.

Though gendered citizenship was certainly present in the United States, the extension of that system of franchise remained important in Lee’s works, since it strengthened the connection

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<sup>88</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 51-52.

<sup>89</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 52.

between Texan and American citizenship. In doing so, he attached the responsibility of violence to male citizenship—that is, that when a presumably white male citizen was threatened and had no government or “tribunals” to protect him, he necessarily used violence to reinstate and reaffirm the natural order of the world, with him on top, unafraid, and unthreatened. The goals and conditions of the typical citizen of 1840’s Texas and of 1850’s New York aligned in the maintenance of a specific gender and racial hierarchy, bringing Texas and the West closer in alignment with Eastern social standards.

Lee made a stronger claim about the emptiness of the land in northern Mexico. Like Texas, he depicted it as dearly in need of the elevating influence of American-style government, but unlike Texas, he impugned the competency of the current inhabitants of northern Mexico. Whereas he defined Texas citizens as white men, he defined the citizens of northern Mexico as Mexican, even though both areas had significant populations of ethnically Mexican peoples. The American emigrants formed a relatively small population as compared to the entire area they claimed, including the eastern half of what is now New Mexico and the southeastern portion of Colorado; they contained themselves to a relatively small portion of the state that was closer to American markets and somewhat protected from Comanche raids. Politically, Anglo Texans relied on Tejanos to navigate complex Mexican bureaucracies and social channels. Economically, they were completely entangled in larger Mexican and indigenous markets, whether or not they realized it. Furthermore, from 1824 to 1835 Texas was not a separate provincial entity within Mexico; it was part of Coahuila y Tejas, joined with the province to the south. Because of this deeply entwined history, the budding Americanist, Anglo Texans had a

significant stake in separating themselves culturally and symbolically from Mexico. When Lee defined the citizens of northern Mexican provinces as Mexican, he furthered that work.<sup>90</sup>

Tied up in Lee's characterizations of the land were his representations and understandings of trade. "The people are a mixture of Mexican, Indian, ignorant, indolent, and filthy ... And yet there is not a land more fertile, or a climate more delicious on earth. With such cultivation as is bestowed on our northern soil, it would be capable of sustaining incalculable numbers." This was a salient difference between the land and the people. While the people were hardly worth describing beyond already established stereotypes, and manifestly unfit for the mantle of republican citizenship, the terrain sounded fit to eat. While Texas was an empty vessel to be filled with civilization and empire, northern Mexico was a cornucopia, waiting to be taken by Texans and Americans, who presumably were not too "indolent" to take advantage of what has been set before them. The claim that Mexico was failing to raise its northern provinces to their potential levels of civilization was hardly a new one; Lee was engaging in an ongoing series of national conversations that framed America's seizures of Mexico's northern states as the redemption of long neglected and withering spaces. The tandem claim was that the lack of observable improvements—productive agriculture or trade—was both evidence of Mexico's neglect and a call for American intervention.<sup>91</sup>

In this light, Lee's description of trade in Mexico seemed wholly damning. "The science of agriculture is little understood among the scanty population which inhabit this territory. Manufactures are almost totally unknown the nearest approach to it I witnessed was the making

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<sup>90</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 73; for cultural and demographic information, Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 33-36; for processes of ethnicities in Texas, see Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo*; for information about the joining and disjoining of Coahuila y Tejas, Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas*, 43-48.

<sup>91</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 73-74; Delay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*, 235-238.

of blankets by the women.” Trade was nearly absent, and the little trade that was observable was being done by women, an unacceptable inversion of American gender norms. Like the waves of Indian dispossession that characterized trans-Mississippi expansion, Lee saw a lazy, racially inferior people failing to utilize the land that they occupy. He stopped short of calling for American expansion into northern Mexico, but after deriding the work habits and racial traits of the citizens, he wrote, “I see not why Mexico should not become the paradise and garden of the world.” This implication was that the current inhabitants were unwilling or unable to create the paradise, and more capable Americans ought to intercede and make manifest the promise of this potentially productive land.<sup>92</sup>

If Lee’s description of the space of Texas and the people of northern Mexico argued for the construction of an American social power structure, one in which the reader could insert himself, Lee’s outlining of the trade practices of the Comanche created weaknesses in the indigenous empire that he begged the reader and the American government to exploit in their march westward. At the time that he was writing, the Comanche were collapsing as an empire, but remained a powerful disruptive force in Oklahoma and Texas; Lee’s false representations of childlike or primitive Comanche trade worked as a generalization for the reader about western Native groups place in the emerging frontier economies and an argument for displacement of these groups in favor of American businessmen. Furthermore, in addition to scaffolding dominant power relations onto the Comanche, Lee’s claims about indigenous trade networks in Texas obscured the multilayered, hybrid economy within the state. Instead of representing the

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<sup>92</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 73-74.

interconnectedness of Tejanos, Comanche, Mexican, and American tradespeople, he only assigned the privileged label of productive work to that of the Anglo Texans.<sup>93</sup>

As a captive, Lee claimed special familiarity with Comanche cultural practices. As a white man in Comanche society, he had a unique ability to relate Indian activities into white discourses—whether or not he actually had the experience to truthfully do that was less important the illusion of authority. The way that Lee described trade and trade practices of his supposed captors is telling, especially his attitudes towards their place within the West and their adherence to dominant American ideas towards trade and labor.

The buffalo robe is the principal, and indeed, so far as I know, their only article of commerce—their only source of wealth. At a certain season every year, they are transported to the confines of Mexico, and sold to parties of Mexican traders who annually meet them there, and receive in compensation hatchets, knives, and such other implements as are used by them, together with cheap calico and mescal, and a great variety of trinkets.<sup>94</sup>

This evidence speaks to four issues surrounding American understandings of Comanche economy, as well as Indian trade broadly. First, Lee located Plains Indians' wealth in buffalo hides, thus locating the tribal economic center in an animal already heavily tied into Indian imagery instead of in horses or captives, which were at least as valuable to the Comanche as buffalo. Thus, his information was not designed to actually give new insight, but rather to reaffirm pre-existing stereotypes. Second, Comanche trade was associated with Mexican traders, as opposed to Texan, French, American, Pueblo, immigrant Cherokee, or Caddo. This collapsed the intentional and intrinsic complexity of western indigenous economies and directly associated the Comanche with Mexico, thereby further damning the perceived failure of the Mexican

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<sup>93</sup> For pre-1848 Western trade economies, see Andrew C. Isenburg, "Market Revolution in the Borderlands: George Champlin Sibley in Missouri and New Mexico, 1808-1826," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21.3 (Autumn 2001) 445-465.

<sup>94</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 118.

government to repel Indians from the borderlands. Third, the list of goods that Lee claimed the Comanche traded hides for, “trinkets,” were represented as the valueless objects of a valueless people. If a group traded their only source of wealth for cheap cloth, alcohol, and worthless toys, then they could not be allowed to dictate or participate in American market economies the way that they had in the Mexican economy. Significantly, Lee failed to acknowledge in the importance of guns or captives in Comanche trade. Both of these commodities bespoke a group actively engaged in warfare, declared or not, with both Texas and Mexico. If he had been a captive of the Comanche for three years, especially if he had been sold three times as he describes, the role of captives in indigenous trade networks would have been painfully obvious. Also, since he claims to have been shot by a Comanche warrior at the Battle at Plum Creek, Lee should be somewhat familiar with their presence in Native groups. Fourth, all of these factors combine to completely obscure the true sources of wealth for the Comanche—horses and captives—as well as the crucial role that they had in shaping the geopolitical shifts that were being acted out in Texas at the time of Lee’s time in Texas. It would be an overstatement to assert that Lee fully understood the role of the Comanche in North American imperial politics; however, many Texans publically bemoaned the incomprehensible and seemingly uncontrollable power of the Comanche in early Texas. Presumably, Lee left these crucial details out of his narrative since they would shed too much light on the failings of white Texan men to enact an acceptable social structure in the frontier state, and he instead chose to present an image of the Comanche that fit with already held beliefs about the abilities and preferences of Plains Indians.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Pekka Hämmäläinen, “The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Expansion, and Indigenous Power in the Southwest Borderlands,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 67.2 (April 2010) 173-208.

Lee's continued and concerted omission of guns in indigenous trade deserves further attention. By not listing guns, Lee was not insinuating that the Comanche are not warlike; instead he was describing a group who were intrinsically outside of modern technology and whom that technology could easily subjugate. Lee took time to describe Comanche war tactics, mostly against the Apache, and in he emphasized the role of knives, lances, and hand-to-hand combat—completely leaving out guns. In his treatment of hunting practices, he remarked upon their incredible agility using bows and arrows to kill buffalo and deer. Furthermore, he claimed that when a Comanche man died, he was buried with his most honored possessions, “his saddle and bridle, his tomahawk, scalping knife, bows and arrows and lance, and all the inanimate property he owns.”<sup>96</sup> As false as it would be to assert that the Comanche didn't use bows and arrows or lances, it would also be equally as false to claim that they never used guns in their hunting or military activities. Moreover, in listing the items that Comanche men were supposedly buried with, Lee was not painting a picture of people who no had need of guns, due to their peaceful nature. Every item he specifically listed was characteristically involved in violence and warfare. In this way, he constructed an excessive but ineffective masculinity for the Comanche—one that was implicitly contrasted with his controlled masculinity, which he kept contained during his three years as a captive, waiting for the perfect moment to reassert himself and his racialized masculinity. This came one morning in the foggy hangover of his third owner, Rolling Thunder, who in his stupor knelt to drink some water from a spring, turning his back on Lee, who swiftly drove a hatchet into Rolling Thunder's head. Lee casually mentioned that he stole Rolling

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<sup>96</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 119.

Thunder's rifle as he was making his escape, a rifle that had been theretofore unmentioned. It seemed that what few effects of modernity that Rolling Thunder owns existed to serve Lee.<sup>97</sup>

As American eyes turned further westward, the idea of natural American racial and gender domination of Western lands and people solidified in the political imagination. Lee's narrative spoke to the Anglo-Saxonist racial constructions within mid-nineteenth century debates surrounding American westward expansion. Lee wanted to impose upon the West a legible and navigable social power structure that closely resembled that of the American East. Class issues among white men were noticeably absent from Lee's narrative; since Lee at the time of writing was, by the testimony of his editor, completely impoverished, he had little incentive to glorify those in Texas who had been able to accrue social standing and wealth. Between the time that Lee claimed to have arrived in Texas and the publication date of his narrative, Texas and westward expansion generally had come to occupy a place in American political debate nearly on par with the increased sectional tensions and slavery. The debates regarding Texas specifically had come to encompass increased scrutiny of Mexican lands, the pinnacle of Anglo-Saxonist rhetoric, and nativism.<sup>98</sup>

Some saw a promised land destined for white men, some saw a nightmare of racial amalgamation. In either case, the West represented the racial future of the country. Lee's representation of an irredeemably primitive people and land, created and sustained a hierarchical racial and gender order that cast white men forever atop the emergent Western social structure. In doing this, he depicted Texas as a space that was well suited to the extension of American hegemonic white masculinity, and thereby paved a conceptual route for westward expansion. This rhetorical move was particularly germane to Lee's mid-nineteenth century American

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<sup>97</sup> Lee, *Three Years*, 161.

<sup>98</sup> Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 229-248; Sibley, *Storm Over Texas*, 153-174.

readership for whom dominant social structures were threatened by mounting sectional tensions and increased westward expansion. Books like his helped found a sense of the West as a mythological space where the nation could be made or unmade and as a space that somehow reflected essential American characteristics. As the essential meaning of the West and of westward expansion grew in the American imagination—even to imperial heights—there would only be more demand for entertaining accounts of that space.

Wherever I Shoot, I Hit the Future:

White Western Masculinity in Zane Grey's *The Lone Star Ranger*

Published in 1915, Zane Grey's *The Lone Star Ranger*, is not a remarkably well-known or well-studied piece of Western fiction, but is perhaps one of the more influential works of that much-maligned genre. It is credited with later inspiring the incredibly prolific and indelibly significant radio and television series, *The Lone Ranger*.<sup>99</sup> Set in 1870's Texas, the story followed a young Buckley Duane, the son of a famous gunfighter, from his downfall into outlawry to his redemption as a reluctant Texas Ranger.

For Buck Duane, it was not so much a matter of if he would kill, but when he would kill. Son of an outlaw, skilled in violence himself, he was all but destined to inherit the mantle of bloody masculinity from his father. He fought his nature, but more and more men challenged him, hoping to make their own reputation, and soon he could no longer outrun his fate.

His thoughts were vague. But on the instant of that final decision, when he had settled with himself that he would meet Bain, such a storm of passion assailed him that he felt as if he was being shaken with ague. Yet it was all internal, inside his breast, for his hand was like a rock and, for all he could see, not a muscle about him quivered. He had no fear of Bain or any other man; but a vague fear of himself, or this strange force in him, made him ponder and shake his head.<sup>100</sup>

This decision, to meet a man hell-bent on challenging Duane not because of any particular grievance but only for the glory, a decision that resulted in Bain's death, precipitates Duane's damnation and eventual redemption. After killing Bain, Duane is forced to abandon his home

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The title of this chapter references the poem "To Roosevelt" By Rubén Darío.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Zane Grey, *The Lone Star Ranger*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1915) 7

and family and run to the outlaw-ridden borderlands of South Texas. Throughout his exile, he is forced to live with the dregs of humanity—the white outlaws of 1870s Texas. He is among them, but he is not of them. He maintains a certain distance from these men, who revel in deviance—swearing, drinking, gambling, and killing. Duane, though he is baptized in blood, is a strenuously moral man who never lowers himself to such hedonistic activities. He constructs and maintains a type of white masculinity that is fundamentally opposed to these lower class white men, casts them as illegitimate sources of civilization, cuts them off from a status replete with privilege, and through them, defines his own incarnation of white masculinity as the one true iteration of privilege.

After being backed into shooting Bain, Duane flees his ancestral home to save his life. He initially lands in a town on the borderlands of South Texas, best known as the home of two of the state's three most infamous outlaw gangs. There, he kills the two outlaw bosses, rescues a Mexican slave girl, and absconds into the desert with her. She is quickly captured by another outlaw gang and presumably killed. At this point, Duane begins to wander the West Texas wilderness, unable to settle while the law follows him. At his nadir, a Texas Ranger captain named MacNelly discovers him. Duane presumes that this is his ticket to the gallows, but resigned to his fate, he answers MacNelly's summons to his camp. MacNelly offers Duane a pardon in exchange for his help in capturing the leader of the famous West Texas Cheseldine gang. Duane accepts, is deputized, and heads west. His reputation as both an outlaw and an outlaw-killer precedes him, so he conducts himself undercover. While in West Texas, he falls in love with the daughter of the gang leader, Miss Ray Longstreth. In a whirlwind of righteous violence, he uncovers Cheseldine's identity, kills all of his supposedly unbeatable lieutenants,

captures Cheseldine alive, and finally delivers him to MacNelly. The book closes with Duane securely enshrined in domesticity after he marries Ray, and moves back home with his new wife.

The struggles of Buck Duane and the performance of white masculinity in *The Lone Star Ranger* represent a version of contested white manhood in the early twentieth century that parallels contemporaneous constructions of Western manhood, especially the imperialist Western identity donned by Theodore Roosevelt. Zane Grey's representation of white outlaws as misbegotten versions of whiteness and manliness simultaneously creates the central conflict of *The Lone Star Ranger* and belies white masculinity as an essentially fungible identity. The contestation of white masculinity was also a major feature in race and gender politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. The connections between Roosevelt's personal and nationalistic racialized masculinity and that which was being mass-produced by prolific Western writers like Grey can speak to the workings of early twentieth-century race, class, and gender.

Moreover, Grey used a Texas Ranger figure because of the Rangers' unique position in Western literature and history as men of quick action and tall tales. Grey wrote not long after the revived Frontier Battalion had come into its own as an organization, thus cementing the position of the Texas Rangers in the state's local police forces. Like Lee used the authority of the Rangers to comment of the state and future of racial and gender power in the West, Grey uses Buck Duane to create an idealized, moral white manliness in opposition to lower class, uncivilized, white manhood. Even though the fictions about the Rangers moved further from the actual organization, the symbolic power of the individuals of that institution grew in popular culture as guardians of moral, middle class, white maleness.

A New-Yorker-turned-backwoodsman, Theodore Roosevelt launched himself headlong into Western imagery and myth. Derided early in his political career for being weak and feminine, Roosevelt chose to align himself with the vitality and indisputable manliness of the Western man. He consciously and publically built a manly reputation through violence and through Western mythologies. First moving out to South Dakota—or as he called it, “Cowboy Land”—to live in the Western dream, he continued his manipulation of Western ideas throughout his political career, even turning them into a rationale for the imperialist expansion of the Spanish-American War. After close and careful study of outsized Western figures and the ordering power of observation in natural history, Roosevelt was able to enact and manipulate authentic Western performance to create an identity of power of privilege specifically built on white masculinity.<sup>101</sup>

Roosevelt was an avid consumer of Westerns, and his choices in creating a Western frontiersman persona are consistent with certain types of heroes portrayed in Westerns—those engaged in some kind of violence, especially hunting or Indian-fighting. Like other men in the early twentieth century, he referred to Westerns to find a more simple and legible kind of masculinity, upon which to model his own. One of Roosevelt’s favorite books, Mayne Reid’s *The Boy Hunters*, followed the same arc as many other Westerns and is remarkably similar to the path Roosevelt’s own life would take. Racial struggle and romantic, redemptive violence formed the basis of the book, derived from Western popular culture, as well as the pattern for Roosevelt’s construction of his masculine and therefore Western identity.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 172-177.

<sup>102</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 174-175.

Dime novels like *The Boy Hunters* proliferated during the middle of the nineteenth century, and were the literary and cultural predecessors to Grey's work. Many of the earliest dime novels were westerns, which related the story of western expansion to Eastern readers. Though not elevated to the status of nineteenth century "classics," dime novels were widely read and enjoyed, especially by working-class readers.<sup>103</sup> Many thousands of readers across the nation derived meaning from these books and used them to shape contemporary understandings of race, gender, history, and empire. Through them, popular conceptions of the frontier, expansion, and race filtered through American culture. They represented a popular history of the West and conveyed this story within a certain cultural framework more reflective of the time that produced them than of the time that they were ostensibly describing.<sup>104</sup>

Spurred by his love of Western imagery, supported by the mythology he learned from his dime novel Westerns, and seeking a way to differentiate himself from what he saw as the increasing softness of upper-class Eastern white men, Roosevelt took up "permanent" residence on a ranch in South Dakota in 1883. While in South Dakota, still bleeding from the Plains Wars and the violent conflicts between the Sioux and the U.S. Army, Theodore Roosevelt engaged in the democratic life of a cowboy. While in his ranch, he mingled with men from social classes other than his own—men who lived the "strenuous life" and could teach something to the "kid-glove element in politics," actually Roosevelt's main audience and social peers. By engaging in the work of the West, Roosevelt associated himself with obviously virile and powerful men. Furthermore, he established a negative for moral and potent masculinity, that is, men who did not engage in productive labor or redemptive violence. In emphasizing the work of herding cattle

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<sup>103</sup> Shelby Steeleby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002)

<sup>104</sup> Scott Simmon, *The Invention of the Western Film: A Cultural History of the Genre's First Half-Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

and putting down evildoers, Roosevelt created a template for proper white masculinity. This model transcended established class differences, predicated on native birth and familial wealth, and it demands continual performance of masculine identity through labor and destruction.<sup>105</sup>

Roosevelt's residence was only "permanent" until he completely built a new, deeply masculine reputation; after the West served its ideological purpose, he returned to the East, to writing and to politics. After his return to New York, he wrote several tomes celebrating Western culture and character based on his twenty-three months in South Dakota. Roosevelt's books specifically documenting his time in the West, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, and *The Strenuous Life*, all celebrated the frontier as the true font of American character and specifically lauded the systems of racial and gender privilege that the frontier demanded.<sup>106</sup>

Roosevelt also turned his attention to creating a common understanding of the origin of the West, detailed in his history, *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896), which tracked the advancement of the cutting edge of the frontier from its earliest New England incarnations through early expansion into the Southeast and the Appalachian backcountry at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The heroes of this history were very much the racially Americanized hunters who overran the continent in waves of masculine vigor. Roosevelt underscored the importance of Western work and Western violence in forging American racial stock out of European immigrant races. In a somewhat Lamarckian gesture, he insisted that the continual expansion and engagement in savage, anti-Indian war undertaken by earlier groups of Americans had transmogrified the blood and race of current Americans, thereby creating the basis for American Anglo-Saxonism and racial exceptionalism. Through settlement of virgin lands and

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<sup>105</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 175-182.

<sup>106</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 178-180.

opposition to Native peoples, early Americans created a heritable stock of manliness that need only be claimed through similar acts of violence.<sup>107</sup>

Roosevelt's ideas were strongly influenced by contemporary Social Darwinist concepts. Social Darwinism as a social science rationale for Anglo-Saxon dominance was an established school of thought, though at the time that Roosevelt was writing his history, it was undergoing something of a redefinition. Proponents of social Darwinism were losing confidence in their natural order—the idea that the fittest race, Northern European whites, would naturally secure and maintain power within every society. Instead they worried about the survival of the unfit and the dilution of white biological purity. This made both the increased presence of non-white people and the reproduction of “defective” poor whites a threat to white power. Instead of assimilating into mainstream whiteness, like northern European immigrants, poor whites were heading the opposite direction on the racial scale—becoming “white trash.” Middle and upper class white people began to understand poor whites as essentially, racially different—the runts of the litter; this distances middle and upper class whites from the biological imperfections of poor whites and it makes the temporary material condition of poor whites a biological fact, a natural effect of their being. Poor whites behaved in a way that was deemed unacceptable or abhorrent by middle and upper class, white observers, and were therefore seen as racially inferior.<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe seemed ready to further compromise ideals of white racial purity. It seemed to many observers that these immigrants were less willing or less able to engage in the activities that would allow them to assimilate into

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<sup>107</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 36-42; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 178-184.

<sup>108</sup> Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997) 64-89.

whiteness than earlier, Northern European immigrants. This racial backsliding was what Roosevelt referred to as “racial suicide.” He feared that by allowing these types of inferior white people to overwhelm native-born, middle and upper class whites, the entire American (white) racial stock would be compromised. They degraded American whiteness by being insufficiently industrious, which is to say, insufficiently manly. Through gendered Western violence and experience on the frontier, superior Anglo Saxon whites like Roosevelt distinguished themselves from the lower classes of white men.<sup>109</sup>

The conquest of the West was the destiny of unequivocally manly white men, the ultimate expression of American racial superiority, and the province of individual manly figures. This stands in contrast to Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous and contemporaneous Frontier Thesis, which emphasized the development of pre-industrial, agrarian communities as the true civilization of the West. The differences between Turner’s and Roosevelt’s construction of frontier history help to illuminate Roosevelt’s own construction of race and gender, and further his manipulation of Western mythology originally drawn from dime novels and Western literature.<sup>110</sup>

Delivered at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 before the American Historical Association and then published in 1926, in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Turner dramatically declared the Western frontier closed and eulogized what he interpreted as the historical source of American character. His history is built around a single European male figure, typically engaged in improving Western land, in his description of frontier character. This figure was initially overpowered by the wilderness, stripped of his European characteristics, and only then remade in the image of his creator, America. As more and more

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<sup>109</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 32-46.

<sup>110</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 31-36.

men like this flocked to the edge of civilization, the frontier, America was advanced and a new frontier was formed. “To study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part our history.”<sup>111</sup> These Western-moving white men conquered the wilderness and constituted the essential character of America.

These figures differed significantly from Roosevelt’s construction in that they were fundamentally engaged in improving the land and creating a society. Roosevelt, on the other hand, privileged aggression and violence as primary frontiersman characteristics. It was these figures, who were disinclined or disconnected from society, that through aggression tamed the frontier. Turner’s figures moved civilization forward through violence, but that was not their main goal. Instead, they established mining, ranching, agriculture, and urbanization—all tools of American capitalism. Roosevelt’s characters instead were only aggressors, never settlers. Moreover, it was these types of characters that were the protagonists of many classic Western stories. Because Roosevelt placed the mantle of American empire on these men, he also reaffirmed the centrality of Western fiction in American culture.<sup>112</sup>

What the two historians did agree on was the importance of racialized violence in creating a common American identity. Turner wrote, “the frontier stretched along the western border like a cord of unity. The Indian was a common danger, demanding untied action.”<sup>113</sup> Roosevelt adored men like Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, who made their careers as Indian fighters. In conjunction with the subjugation of the frontier landscape, the establishment of a racial hierarchy, naturally dominated by white men, was paramount in the development of

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<sup>111</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1920) 4.

<sup>112</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 34-35.

<sup>113</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier,” 15.

American civilization. Whiteness and masculinity went hand in hand, with violence in close step. “In this connection may be mentioned the importance of the frontier, from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman.” Roosevelt too believed in the military importance of the frontier, and later in his life wrote that he wished he could have extended his four-volume Western history to the Texas Revolution—the beginning of racialized westward expansion. He wrote essays about Davy Crockett and Sam Houston, both prominent figures in Texas history, and argued that Crockett’s death at the Alamo signified the movement of American racial history away from fighting “savage” races like Native peoples and on to fighting “semicivilized,” racially-mixed nations, like Mexico.<sup>114</sup>

Roosevelt’s ideas about the centrality of American racial purity and the imperative of expansion only grew as his political career took off, extending as far as Cuba and the Philippines. In Roosevelt’s argument, because America derived its unique character and masculine vigor from the pursuit of racialized violence against indigenous people, it followed that the white American race had the power and the obligation to expand further and acquire imperial holdings. This was central less for the uplift of debased (non-white) races and more for staving off softness or feminization for middle and upper class white men. Both Roosevelt and Turner agreed that the passing of the frontier as a physical place represented a potential crisis for American manhood. Men who might prove their racial and gender fitness through frontier life—be that the life of a violent hunter figure or of an agrarian—now had nowhere to undertake this rite of passage.

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<sup>114</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier,” 15; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 51.

Instead, middle and upper class men might pass into modernity feminized and weak progeny of a once-proud racial stock.<sup>115</sup>

Roosevelt brought the racialized warfare that he deemed the most important part of Western manhood to argue for American imperial holdings after the Spanish-American War. Whereas critics of westward expansion following the Mexican-American War feared that a colonial relationship with Western territories would degrade the Eastern United States into tyrants and despots, Roosevelt argued that empire was the key to securing American manliness, by establishing a racialized Other and instilling martial character into otherwise soft middle and upper class men. After the conclusion of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, Roosevelt maintained imperialism as the rationale behind the goal of American male work. “The old iron days have gone, the days when the weakling died as the penalty of inability to hold his own in the rough warfare of his surroundings. We live in softer times. Let us see to it that, while we take advantage of every gentler and more humanizing tendency of the age, we yet preserve the iron quality that made our forefathers and predecessors fit.” Like the heroes of Western literature, only through violence and sternness could American white men secure proper gender characteristics.<sup>116</sup>

Consciously or not, Roosevelt privileged characteristics of “proper,” early twentieth-century manhood that paralleled classic Western heroes from dime novels like Mayne’s *Boy Hunters* or Grey’s *Lone Star Ranger*. Many of these stories revolved around a single male figure, engaged in righteous violence against an immoral or racially inferior enemy. Through a test of

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<sup>115</sup> Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 51-54.

<sup>116</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) 133-155; for “the old iron days,” in Roosevelt, “Manhood and Statehood,” *American Ideals* (1901), quoted in Hoganson, *Manhood*, 144.

strength and mettle, these figures proved their racial and gender superiority. These figures operated within a strikingly similar racial, gendered, and class paradigm to Roosevelt's own construction of American manhood. An examination of these works of fiction can reveal something more about the ways that race and gender intertwined in the early twentieth century to compel men like Roosevelt to imperialism.<sup>117</sup>

Relying on a set of relatively flat character types, Western literature produced works with similar types of plots, characters, settings, and conflicts. Adherence to a set of genre norms served two ends: literarily, it authenticated the work as "Western," and historically, it demanded performance. This performance highlights contemporary gender, race, or class conceptions and conflicts. The novel's situation between popular history and mass-produced popular culture demands an outsized and immediately legible gender and racial tropes. Through this process, the self-reflexive and oft-contested nature of identity is revealed.<sup>118</sup>

This distances Westerns from the space that they ostensibly describe and move them toward the culture and time in which they were produced. Cultural historian Philip Deloria has argued "the authentic serves as a way to imagine and idealize the real, the traditional, and the organic in opposition to the less satisfying qualities of everyday life."<sup>119</sup> Westerns necessitate authenticity and by extension, do not seek to accurately represent the historical or contemporary "real." We cannot interpret Western literature or film as representing some kind of historical accuracy. This is not the goal of Westerns, even as it represents itself as authentic. Unlike Duane

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<sup>117</sup> Jefferson D. Slagle, "The Heirs of Buffalo Bill: Performing Authenticity in the Dime Western," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 39.2 (2009)

<sup>118</sup> Slagle, "Heirs of Buffalo Bill," 121-125.

<sup>119</sup> Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) 101.

and the outlaws, they are of the West, but not in the West—“a copy without an original.”<sup>120</sup> Thusly, Western literature like *The Lone Star Ranger* was a way for early twentieth century people to imagine an idealized past that more accurately reflected their own present.

Grey took advantage of this schism between the real and the authentic and located Duane’s identity conflict within the site of contested whiteness, much like Roosevelt used shifting definitions of white manliness to create a politically advantageous persona. Duane is chronically honorable, saving women from ruin, avenging the deaths of friends, and practicing manly self-restraint against the tainted blood he inherited from his gunfighter father. He is the paragon of manly behavior; his claim to the combined identity of white manliness is never in question. Because of this, he does not need to define himself against non-white actors to legitimate his claims of manliness—their claims of power are dismissed out of hand. He instead is mainly in conflict with other white men. As soon as Duane kills Bain, he becomes an outlaw—an exile from society that is proscribed from claiming the full measure of power that comes with white masculinity. These outlaws are criminals and therefore outside the protection of the state; they have less status and privilege than Duane, who previous to being provoked into a fight, was an unquestionably honorable man. The outlaws represent a negative form of white masculinity, and through his opposition to them, Duane defines and justifies his identity as the true character of white masculinity. He does this through active opposition to the several outlaw gangs he encounters, manly self-restraint against the “fiery blood” he inherited from his outlaw father, and his rescue and redemption of Ray Longstreth.

From the first page of the book, Grey puts Buck Duane in direct conflict with an outlaw. Before we learn anything about his character, other than that he has a “driving intensity to

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<sup>120</sup> Nathaniel Lewis, *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 6.

kill,”<sup>121</sup> we see that he is challenged by but greater than this type of outlaw. The man who has come into Duane’s hometown to kill him has done so for no other reason than,

He’s aching to kill somebody. He’s one of them four-flush gun-fighters. He’d like to be thought bad. There’s a lot of wild cowboys who’re ambitious for a reputation. They talk about how quick they are on the draw. They ape Bland an’ King Fisher an’ Hardin an’ all the big outlaws. They make threats about joinin’ the gangs along the Rio Grande, They laugh at the sheriff’s an’ brag about how they’d fix the rangers. Cal’s sure not much for you to bother with, if you only keep out of his way.<sup>122</sup>

Even in characteristically violent Texas, this is a petty and groundless reason to kill. Unlike Duane, who is more skilled than Bain and who strives to restrain his violent nature, Bain seeks out men to kill in order to heighten his reputation. Where Bain is indulgent to his violent nature, Duane, like Roosevelt, restrains his violence to either impose a proper order on the frontier or to defend his honor. What’s worse is that Bain is not alone in his bloodlust. He is but one of many cowboys turned outlaws in this environment who plague Texas in their pursuit of a reputation. They look for fights, mimic famous outlaws, disregard local law enforcement, and mock the Rangers. These men are beyond the scope of the kind of manliness that Duane represents. Theirs is an overwrought, uncontrolled, and uncivilized manliness. Ironically, killing Bain thrusts Duane into the position of these outlaws. However, he avoids fights, kills outlaws, fights corruption in local law enforcement, and joins the Rangers. His actions are the exact opposite of these outlaws. His actions are honorable where theirs fail.

Bain does not exhibit the type of manliness that Duane exemplifies. Duane goes into town to confront Bain, and when Bain sees him “At sight of Duane, he seemed to bound into the air, and he uttered a savage roar.”<sup>123</sup> Bain is bestial in his rage, hardly befitting an honorable

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<sup>121</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 3

<sup>122</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 4.

<sup>123</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 11.

white man. “Red, sweaty, disheveled, and hatless, his face distorted and expressive of the most malignant intent, he was a wild and sinister figure ... At every step he bellowed his rancor in speech mostly curses.”<sup>124</sup> Bain acts more like an enraged bull, to be corralled by Duane rather than treated as an equally privileged actor. Grey presents us with Bain as an inauthentic Western hero, or an authentic Western villain. His gender performance is dishonorable. Duane’s performance must then be opposed to Bain’s, if he is to retain his claim to true manliness. He does this, meets Bain as an equal, and is consequently damned as an outlaw.

Duane is forced to abandon his home and his family. He meets his uncle, who had urged to him to meet Bain and now urges Duane to remember himself while on the run. Here Grey lays out for the reader a stark explanation of proper manly behavior, remarkably similar to Roosevelt’s construction of his own identity. “Strike for the wild country, an’ wherever you go an’ whatever you do—be a man. Live honestly, if that’s possible. If it isn’t be as honest as you can. If you have to herd with outlaws, try not to become bad ... When you get among these men avoid brawls. Don’t drink; don’t gamble.”<sup>125</sup> In this instance, the connection between Roosevelt and Grey is clear and bright. Both reserve true Western manliness to those who are righteously and self-controlled. This model stands in contrast to the white outlaws of Grey’s Texas, who are wantonly violent and uncontrolled. After he leaves, he heads to South Texas and quickly finds himself in the company of one of the three main outlaws gangs, run by a man named Bland.

He spends much of his time in South Texas with outlaws but highly contemptuous of them. “These men lined up before Duane, and as he coolly regarded them he thought they could have been recognized anywhere as desperados.”<sup>126</sup> Grey signals here immediate audience

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<sup>124</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 14-15.

<sup>126</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 38.

dismissal of these men as outlaws; the evidence of their evilness and illegitimacy is written on their bodies. Duane observes them, distancing himself from their visible debasement. Grey does not list exactly what makes them so obviously desperados; the reader is instead sees them only through Duane's assessment. Unlike the outlaws, Duane does not display the physical markings or behavioral traits of inferior whiteness. As the observer, he is distant from their characterization, observes their inauthenticity, and retains his blemish-free status.

Duane becomes friends with one man, Euchre, who introduces him to the order of things on the border. "You'll be let severely alone by real gun-fighters an' men like Bland, Alloway, Rugg an' the bosses of the other gangs. After all, these real men *are* men, you know, an' unless [sic] you cross them they're no more likely to interfere with you than you are with them,"<sup>127</sup> unlike the bulk of the outlaws who don't have the luxury of a reputation. Like before, Duane is confronted by lower-class white men who want to fight him in order to improve their own social standing, but now he must also define himself against "real men," outlaw bosses, who have high social standing amongst the outlaws, and thereby might make a serious claim on the power of white masculinity.

It quickly becomes clear why men like Bland are not a threat to Duane's masculinity. Euchre mentions that Bland likes to keep women in the camp, instead maintaining the gang a specifically masculine space. Duane finds this peculiar though laudable, as it upholds dominant ideals of gender and domesticity in which women exist only through their connection to home. When Duane encounters Jennie, Bland's Mexican slave girl, the domesticity that might have existed in the outlaw camp, thereby connecting the outlaws to some sense of power and civilization, evaporates. Grey frequently points out to the reader that Jennie has yet to be

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<sup>127</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 52.

“ruined,” but the threat looms. In fact, it seems that Bland keeps her with the intention of ruining her. Duane secretly swears to protect her and help her escape, and when Bland threatens to rape and kill Jennie, Duane immediately bursts into Bland’s home and kills him. Bland then is proven to be an unsuitable bearer of white masculinity through his mistreatment of a racially and socially inferior woman.<sup>128</sup>

After this confrontation, Duane flees South Texas and convalesces in the desert. Jennie is kidnapped and presumably killed. Duane secludes himself in the desert, not returning to civilization for several years. When he does eventually venture into a small desert town, he finds that his reputation has grown remarkably in his absence. Crimes he never committed are being attributed to him, and a Ranger captain, MacNelly, has been trying to track him across the desert. MacNelly send word into town that he has invited Duane into his camp. Duane avoids him, but eventually meets up with him in a different settlement. Duane expects the worst, but surprisingly MacNelly offers Duane a pardon if he will take the Ranger oath and help him capture West Texas’s most famous outlaw, Cheseldine. Duane travels to the West Texas town of Fairdale to gather information about the insatiable but still unknown outlaw chief. MacNelly and Duane both worry about the power of Duane growing reputation. Grey presents us with a foil for Duane’s disguise. Duane conceals his famous identity and simply presents himself as an ordinary ranger; while Cheseldine, a true outlaw, masquerades as an upright citizen, as he is none other than the mayor of Fairdale, Colonel Longstreth.

The tension Grey creates between Duane and Longstreth illuminates the process by which Western authenticity and claim to the power of legitimate white masculinity works within the novel. Westerns rely on static character types who play into rather strict roles within the

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<sup>128</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 62-107.

canon. Disguise works to push the characters into types that they inauthentically fulfill. Through disguise, their true character, as well as the importance of their broad role in popular frontier history, is reaffirmed.<sup>129</sup> Duane never fits comfortably in the role of a hardened outlaw, either in South Texas or in West Texas. He never engages in the types of behavior traditionally indicative of an outlaw. His failure to properly play the part of an outlaw proves that he is not one. When he presents himself as a Ranger in Fairdale, he fits the part perfectly. Immediately outlaws are frightened of him. “A company of militia could not have had the effect upon the wild element of Fairdale that Duane’s presence had. It got out that he was a gunman lightning swift of the draw ... it was actually said of him that he had the gun-skill of Buck Duane.”<sup>130</sup> The power conveyed upon him by the Ranger service combines with his alternate reputation as the fearsome outlaw and outlaw-killer, Buck Duane. This combination of his assumed identity and his previous identity serves only strengthen his power on the frontier and his legitimacy as a white man.

Conversely, Longstreth is an outlaw disguised as an upright citizen. As mayor of Fairdale he is the representation of civic duty and the body politic of the town. He is a quintessentially inauthentic Western actor. Duane observes a trial at Fairdale, which Longstreth was overseeing, declares it a mockery of true justice, and impugns Longstreth’s honor. Longstreth is outraged at this accusation. “This ranger began shouting his insults. [He said] Law was a farce in Fairdale. The court was a farce. There was no law. Your father’s office as mayor should be impeached.”<sup>131</sup> This exchange reveals the tension between these two diametrically opposed characters. Duane, as an authentic character, is uniquely qualified to discern and identify inauthentic characters like

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<sup>129</sup> Slagle, “Heirs of Buffalo Bill,” 128-129.

<sup>130</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 265.

<sup>131</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 262.

Mayor Longstreth.<sup>132</sup> Longstreth, as an inauthentic character, cannot sustain his disguise as a proper source of white masculinity while he is still acting as an outlaw. Moreover, his power within the town is an unstoppably corrupting force, which can produce no true civilization. Instead, Duane as a covert agent of the state brings the weight and power of civilization to West Texas and to Longstreth.

Twin to the moral rectitude and virtuous violence that are core to Grey's and Roosevelt's gender and racial constructions, is manly self-control. In Roosevelt's gender structure, decadent, over-civilized men have no self-control because they have no manly vigor, and are therefore less powerful. Native men or Filipinos are uncontrolled savages, and are therefore less manly. Only civilized men who possess both virility and self-control can take up the mantle of empire. Grey uses contemporary cultural debates about manliness and self-control to undergird Duane's internal strife throughout the book, specifically in Duane's attempts to rise above the tainted blood he inherited from his gunfighter father. Unlike the outlaw bands, who are an easily identifiable, external enemy, Duane's fiery blood is within him, putting him in constant struggle with it, requiring him to exercise manly self-restraint against his more bestial and base urges. By exercising self-control and taking advantage of the uncontrolled manhood of the outlaws, Duane further claims the full power of white, middle class masculinity.<sup>133</sup>

Grey sets up Duane's internal struggle from the first words of the book. "So it was in him then—and inherited fighting instinct, a driving intensity to kill. He was the last of the Duanes, that old fighting stock of Texas."<sup>134</sup> Son of a famous gunfighter, Duane is all but bred for violence and criminality. He knows about his bloody birthright and tries to control it, but it is

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<sup>132</sup> Slagle, "Heirs of Buffalo Bill," 128-129.

<sup>133</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 192-196.

<sup>134</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 3.

what propels him to face Cal Bain, the first man he shoots. Before meeting Bain, Duane's uncle urges him to be careful of his inherited violent streak, as it will only lead to social and spiritual ruin. He reminds Duane of his father's terrible life and violent death. "If you have any such blood in you, never give it a chance."<sup>135</sup> He usually has control over his deadly nature, but it remains a powerful force in his life. His quest to control this impulse is one of the main themes of the book. Though his constant contact with and repudiation of outlaws is an important symbolic gesture throughout the work, both for Duane and for the audience. Duane's struggle with and eventual victory over this dark side of himself is what substantiates his claim to manliness.

The only means Duane has to suppress more bestial nature is his reason and his strength of will. "Sometimes he had a feeling of how little stood between his sane and better self and self utterly wild and terrible. He reasoned that only intelligence could save him—only a thoughtful understanding of his danger and a hold upon some ideal."<sup>136</sup> If he both understands himself and adheres to a certain standard of masculinity, he can secure victory over his biological stain. His masculinity is a powerful, violent, dangerous force within him, which becomes a civilized and civilizing power through the constant exercise of self-control and self-restraint. The dangerous and volatile nature of masculinity is not something unique to Duane; it is a basic shared quality of masculinity. The outlaws all have this force to contend with, but they fail to properly control themselves and are therefore inadequate masculine figures. Duane, who arguably has inherited from his father a greater and more terrible burden, derives his higher masculine status from his self-control.

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<sup>135</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 5.

<sup>136</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 122.

Duane's exercise of self-restraint, even in the face of such a heavy heredity, is another tool Grey uses to define Duane as essentially different from the outlaws. In his time with Bland's outlaw gang, he sees this lack of self-control as a blight among the men. "The merriest, idlest, most careless moment might in the flash of an eye end in ruthless and tragic action. In an assemblage of desperate characters it could not be otherwise."<sup>137</sup> Their masculinity is potent and dangerous, and it is an essential characteristic of outlaws, generally. These men, these desperate characters are criminals who were cast out of polite society; who drink, smoke, gamble, carouse and curse; who are unfit for the body politic. They were cast out of society precisely because they could not or would not control their more primal natures. Because they spurned the burden of manliness, they cannot claim social privilege. Duane, conversely, by maintaining a certain level of self-control, retains his claim to social standing. However, Duane's control over himself seems to be eroded by too much time spent away from society and with the outlaws. "He could not bear to be near them. He could not trust himself. He felt that any instant a word, a deed, something might call too deeply to that instinct he could no longer control."<sup>138</sup> If the only way for Duane to restrain his inner nature is through his reason and his representation of a controlled masculinity, then exposure to the uncontrolled masculinity of the outlaws is impeding his ability to keep his darker self at bay. As Duane delves further into outlaw society, his grip on proper white masculinity becomes more and more tenuous, and his ability to suppress his inherited violent tendencies less complete. In this way, Grey makes white outlaws a corrupting and polluting influence to civilized white manhood—Duane's temporary submission to his primal masculinity is direct result of the uncontrolled outlaws. Their failure to adequately represent Grey's standard of masculinity degrades all other men around them.

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<sup>137</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 78.

<sup>138</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 78.

Duane's violent nature and slippage into a less honorable form of white masculinity are only complicated by his entry into the Ranger service. He is duty-bound to fight white outlaws, but he is afraid that it will rouse something within him that he cannot control "He sensed the growth of a relentless driving passion, and sometimes he feared that, more than the newly acquired zeal and pride in his ranger service, it was the old, terrible inherited killing instinct lifting its hydra-head in new guise."<sup>139</sup> He wants to bring outlaws like Cheseldine and his henchmen to justice; after he is sanctioned by the state to pursue the outlaws, his want becomes a need. He is impelled, not just by literary dichotomies of authenticity, but also by the unbridling of a force within him. In living with and then pursuing outlaws, Duane's self-control and consequent moral substance have weakened, making a space for his father's bequest. "What he had feared for years had become a monstrous reality. Respect for himself, a certain honor that he had clung to while in outlawry—all, like scales, seemed to fall away from him."<sup>140</sup> His inner turmoil becomes manifest in his fight against outlaws and Cheseldine.

In his last stand against Cheseldine's henchmen, with MacNelly the Ranger Captain by his side, Duane can no longer control his base urges, and is driven to kill. "This abnormal and stupendous instinct, now deep as the very foundation of his life, demanded its wild and fatal issue."<sup>141</sup> He revels in the violence that as a Texas Ranger he is called to perpetrate. He is consumed by it, almost at the expense of his status as a proper white man. However, since his wrath is directed at outlaws, those deemed unfit by society, he is not completely stripped of his status. Duane kills all of Cheseldine's henchmen and turns Cheseldine into MacNelly—sparing his life for love of his daughter, Ray—but is nearly killed in the process. Ray nurses him back to

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<sup>139</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 212.

<sup>140</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 343-344.

<sup>141</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 348.

health, and they return to Duane's hometown. They plan to marry and leave Texas, and Ray swears that she, a moral and civilized woman, will always stand between Duane and his violent nature. "I saw the struggle between your passion to kill and your love for me. I could have saved you had I known then what I know now. Now I understand—that thing which haunts you. But you'll never have to draw again. You'll never have to kill another man."<sup>142</sup> Ray's explanation of Duane's affliction allows Grey to both retroactively frame Duane's violence as a redemptive act of behalf of Ray and to close this bloody chapter of Duane's life—reinstating, in perhaps externalizing, Duane's self-control. The book ends with Duane reinstated as a true hero of white masculinity, who temporarily succumbed to his uncivilized inner self only for the sake of protecting womanhood, and who now has complete control over that part of his nature.

Grey's construction of Duane's inner turmoil and struggles with the power and definition of masculinity reflected the contemporary debate over the true form of civilized masculinity. Gender, race, and class are not static transhistorical facts, but signifiers that are continually redefined. This is no less true today than it was for Theodore Roosevelt and Zane Grey. Historian Gail Bederman has argued that some of the debate surrounding lynching at the end of the nineteenth century turned on broader conceptions of race and gender—specifically, the two gender models of manly, Victorian, self-restraint and the growing appeal of the "natural man," a type of primitive manliness that resided within all men. The idea of the "natural man" implied that masculine violence and sexuality were natural, though it was the place of law and civilization with place limits of the expression of those qualities. These two competing

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<sup>142</sup> Grey, *Lone Star Ranger*, 356.

constructions of early twentieth-century masculinity influenced each other and informed contemporary gender politics.<sup>143</sup>

Grey's model of masculinity as depicted through Buck Duane seems to find some middle ground between these two models—as does Roosevelt's, though his veered more towards the “natural man” model. Duane practices manly self-restraint, but he contains within him a powerful, violent, primitive, biological masculinity that breaks the bonds of civilization and law. He embodies aspects of each version of manliness, and in each paradigm, he acts out all of the best qualities of manliness. Grey deployed a blended version of masculinity, and thereby legitimated Duane's superior masculinity in the dominant gender ideologies of the day. Moreover, the fact that Duane doesn't fit completely in either model of masculinity highlights the essentially malleable quality of gender and the power of Western literary tropes to respond to and evolve with broader cultural trends.

Furthermore, Grey's choice of a Texas Ranger story was a nod to the mythology of that institution as bastions of Western, moral, white masculinity. By making Duane's story of redemption the creation story of a Ranger, Grey further connected the privilege and power that the Rangers enforced in Texas to the privilege and power exemplified by Western heroes. As a historical organization, the Rangers carry with them the sense of historicity. Duane can access the seemingly stable past of the Rangers to ground his version of maleness and thus naturalize his privilege.

Duane's racial and gender performances fall in between broader, preexisting racial and gender ideologies. Grey located Duane into these contested spaces in order to create a more compelling character as well as remake the relevance of Western heroes, much as Theodore

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<sup>143</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 73-75.

Roosevelt and Frederick Jackson Turner used the same mythos and characters to articulate their own ideologies. By inserting Duane into these conversations, Grey created a Western fiction that both reused certain Western literary tropes and responded to contemporary revisions and applications of gender and racial politics.

Someday I'll Be Like the Man on the Screen

He rubbed his belly.  
I keep them in here  
[he said]  
Here, put your hand on it  
See, it is moving.  
There is life here  
for the people.

And in the belly of this story  
the rituals and the ceremony  
are still growing.

-Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*<sup>144</sup>

It's a special kind of irony that for everything that's been written about Cynthia Ann Parker, Texas's most famous captive, she never directly wrote or recorded anything about her experiences. What's more, few people who wrote about her, especially before recently, seemed interested in examining her experiences, but rather assumed that she would behave within their preformed expectations. She never published a narrative and left no diary or letters; we can only see her through others' eyes. She left white society when she was nine years old and grew up as a Comanche. She would have been taking her first faltering steps towards womanhood before she was captured, heading into a life that was significantly more constrictive than the one in which she quickly found herself.

We don't know what those first few years were like for her, a girl blossoming across the Southern Plains. A new language, a new culture, a new land—all required adaptation. We do know that she eventually married a young warrior named Peta, who became war chief of the Noconi band of Comanche. Together they had three children, two sons and a daughter. However happy she was as a Comanche woman, she ended her life in despair. That downward spiral began

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<sup>144</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, (New York, NY: Penguin, 2008) 2.

in 1860 when Sul Ross attacked her village, tied her husband to a tree, and had him executed. Her sons fled, and she never knew what became of them. She was taken prisoner with the other women of her village—women who probably helped her watch her children, who gossiped with her, who braided her daughter’s hair. A soldier in Ross’s company noticed her blue eyes, and soon identified her as a white woman, and thus the property of Texas. She was separated from the other women and sent her to Fort Belknap. It was soon discovered that she was the long-lost daughter of the prominent Parker family, and word was sent to her uncle Isaac Parker.<sup>145</sup>

She tried to escape several times. She refused to speak English. She wept. She had been allowed to keep her young daughter, Prairie Flower, but never knew what happened to her sons, whether they were alive or dead, whether they knew that their mother still loved them. She became something of a spectacle in Austin and in Tarrant County, where her uncle lived. She returned to the bosom of a family that didn’t know how to treat this imbecilic woman who they hardly knew and whom she felt were holding her prisoner. She eventually adjusted somewhat. She stopped trying to run away and cried less often, though she was prone to violent outbursts—at least, violent in the eyes of a society that prized above all things female obedience. This glimmer of hope was extinguished when Prairie Flower contracted pneumonia and died at the age of seven in 1864. With her daughter’s passing, so passed Cynthia Ann’s will to live. She slashed her arms and cut her hair, in the traditional mourning gestures of the Comanche. She began refusing food; six months later she died, some say of a broken heart.<sup>146</sup>

James Parker, her uncle who spent nine years and all his money looking for her, always assumed that she would want to return to her birth family. It is unclear why he didn’t ever visit

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<sup>145</sup> S.C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanche*, (New York, NY: Scribner, 2010), 173-180.

<sup>146</sup> Gwynne, *Summer Moon*, 182-193.

her after she was redeemed, but her complete lack of cooperation couldn't have been an incentive. All of white society assumed that she had been held against her will for twenty-five years; the idea that she would prefer Comanche life to Texan life was completely beyond comprehension. Her story became a parable of the heartiness of the Texan pioneers, and was constantly told and retold. It is commonly held to be the basis for John Ford's 1956 classic, *The Searchers*. In that movie, John Wayne's character, Ethan Edwards, searches for his captive niece, now the concubine of a Comanche chief named Scar, so that he can kill her and prevent her further ruin. In none of these stories is Cynthia Ann accorded a shred of agency. She exists in the historical and cultural record solely as a vehicle for other people's viewpoints. She was hardly the first returned female captive to be completely obscured by spectacle, or the first woman to be silenced by the voices of authoritative white men. Her story is valuable to modern readers not because we can see anything about her actions as a powerful agent in her own life, but because we can see how silencing worked to hide her deviant life from a culture that completely obviates her experiences.<sup>147</sup>

Westerns performed a kind of alchemy, linking contemporary social formations with the historical past. They wrote the present into the past, and in doing so shaped their audience's understandings of both the present and the historical. They gave writers a forum from which to express ideas about racial supremacy, gender dominance, or class privilege. They gave audiences modes of identity performance that are significantly more legible and accessible than the complex assertions of privilege that accompany daily life. The earliest Westerns served the dual purpose of entertaining audiences and describing a part of the country that was otherwise remote

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<sup>147</sup> Gwynne, *Summer Moon*, 120.

from Eastern society. They brought the frontier into the city, and in doing so, bent frontier realities to conform to urban sensibilities.

Overtly nationalistic, Westerns as a genre exorcised anxieties about the expanding nation-state and its influence on race, class, and gender. Some writers, like Nelson Lee, used their writing to describe and impose power structures onto Western lands, whether or not that reflected the reality they had purportedly experienced. In doing so they ideologically extended white male dominance into the West without compromising Eastern white male power or engaging with the historical contingencies on the ground. Others used Westerns to modify a broader national arena. Theodore Roosevelt drew from models and race and gender that he read in early dime novel Westerns as a child and revised those models in his adulthood. He both created a type of violent and powerful Western masculinity for his public persona and a schema of Western American masculinity and race that necessitated imperialism and colonial dominance of other (non-white) countries. Lee and Roosevelt both used Westerns as an external and supposedly natural or historical support for their constructions of white, male, middle class privilege.

By moving these productions of whiteness to a cultural product, Lee and Roosevelt gave their racial and gender constructions the appearance of stability. Rather than expose the minute details of their artifice, they named an external force as the writer of their privilege. This obscured both the forced nature of power structures and their own revisions of the past. Moreover, because Westerns are part of popular culture and not high culture, they are not intended for high audience scrutiny but rather for consumption. This makes the social messages they carry even more insidious. By tying these representations to ostensibly historical figures, they further naturalize these constructions.

Almost from their earliest inception, the Texas Rangers became as important symbolically as they were in policing. Cultural ideas about the inevitability of white Western ascendancy hardened in the early Republic, and white settlers and the Rangers pushed further against the rights of people of color in Texas. By subjugating Tejanos and African Americans and largely expelling Native peoples, the Rangers helped make real some politicians' dreams of a racially pure Texas. With the example of Mirabeau B. Lamar, these politicians then used stories of the Rangers to spur on more violence and bloodshed in the republic. The Ranger mandate to keep Texas as a space which privileges white men above all others was taken to its apex with the basically warrantless expulsion of the Texas Reserve Indians in 1857.

So powerful were the stories of the Rangers that men who made their careers as Ranger captains occasionally went on to public life and politics. Sul Ross, the Ranger captain who captured Cynthia Ann Parker went on to become governor of Texas and to found Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University. John Henry Brown, a Ranger captain who was involved with the expulsion of the Reserve Indians went on to write one of the first histories of Texas, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*. Thomas Jefferson Rusk commanded at least one Ranger militia unit and one month later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Texas. The interplay between the violence of the Rangers and state politics furthered the cultural influence of the Rangers as an agent of white male power.<sup>148</sup>

From their origin stories that link them to Stephen F. Austin, the first empresario in Texas, and thereby the earliest beginnings of an Anglo-dominated Texas to vengeance-inspiring

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<sup>148</sup> Priscilla Myers Benham, "Rusk, Thomas Jefferson," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fru16>), accessed April 12, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association; Erma Baker, "Brown, John Henry," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbr94>), accessed April 12, 2012. Published by the Texas State Historical Association

stories of murdered frontier families, the Texas Rangers were an institution dominated by myth. The suppression of the Rangers and their revitalization after the end of Reconstruction show the centrality of state power to the organization. As the state was divested of power and meant to adopt a more national identity, the Rangers were defunded and restricted. As the state tried to reclaim power separate from the federal government, the Rangers were reconstituted to assert state power. Moreover, their main objective was to chase and control Native peoples in the state—this very aim was a holdover from earlier incarnations of the Rangers and was completely disconnected from the reality of diminishing Native power in the Southern Plains and the West generally. The myth that propelled this version of the Rangers obscured those historical realities that actually led to the subjugation of Native peoples in Texas and Oklahoma and allowed the Rangers to once again enforce white male privilege.

Violently imposing white male middle-class privilege required a state police force because the power of that particular intersectional privilege is the power of exclusion. Each of the facets of that identity reinforces the power of the others in a way that no single category can. Middle class white male privilege is not natural or inevitable; it is not a fact. It is the result of innumerable, tiny, daily, assertions of power. Sometimes that power is extracted through violence and aggression. Other times it is connected, however tenuously, to historical or cultural sources that lend legitimacy to the artifice.

When the state is involved in enforcing that power, it is even more valuable to those who can claim access to it. When that power is naturalized through cultural symbols, it further obscures the working of privilege. Both of these processes are at work in cultural productions of the Texas Rangers. The characters associated with the Rangers in Westerns can manifest their

power hierarchy through their actions both as an individual and as someone supposedly connected to the state. This further essentializes the construction of this social hierarchy.

Whiteness and manhood as enacted through characters connected to the Texas Rangers carries an aura of historicity. When Western authors created characters that represent the ascendancy white maleness, they connected this construction to a seemingly fixed past and they gave the audience a route to that past. In some respects, the Texas Rangers as an organization contributed to this in their framing of their own history, but authors like Nelson Lee or Zane Grey extended that work further by completely disconnecting their writing from reality—historical or contemporary. Furthermore, Western constructions of white masculinity were used by figures like Roosevelt to build up new versions of privilege that served their own ends.

All of these actions silenced those without privilege—those like Cynthia Ann Parker. The entanglement of history, myth, and fiction led to the destruction of a more complex historical past. The stories we tell ourselves about the past and the history we write are intimately interconnected. The stories that got passed down through the generations are the ones that conformed to rigid ideas about race, gender, and class. Stories that transgressed those boundaries were conveniently left out of the cultural or historical record. Without these stories, we are left with a sanitized and pale imitation of a vibrant and complex past.

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