

EVER TOWARDS THE SETTING SUN THEY PUSH US:  
AMERICAN INDIAN IDENTITY IN THE WRITINGS OF MARY ALICIA OWEN

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ABSTRACT

Mary Alicia Owen (1850-1935) is best known as a folklorist who studied and wrote about the culture, legends, and folkways of Missouri's African Americans and American Indians. While she is best remembered as the author of two major works of folklore and ethnography, *Olde Rabbit, the Voodoo and Other Sorcerers* (1893) and *Folk-lore of the Musquakie Indians of North America* (1904) she was also the author of several short stories and at least one novel and one play.

In her fiction Owen often portrayed American Indian people as a part of the lively ethnic melting pot that characterized her hometown of St. Joseph, Missouri in the mid nineteenth century. Yet, despite the years of contact Owen had with members of this vibrant mixed community, she ultimately resorted to many of the same stereotypical conventions that many European-Americans of the Victorian era relied on to portray native people. Many of these same stereotypes can be seen her ethnographic work as well. This thesis examines Owen's relationship with the American Indian people she studied and her use of stereotypes—most prominently the Noble Savage and the Vanishing Indian—in characterizing them.

The issue of 'American national identity,' reduced to exemplary aspects and illustrated with examples. In order to make an issue as complex and controversial as that of "national identity" teachable in the advanced EFL-classroom, it has to be reduced to exemplary aspects and illustrated with concrete examples. valid today, when someone's identity as a member of a particular nation is more difficult to define than ever before. towards defining nationhood in terms of descent, which is shown by the fact that blacks and Native Americans were excluded for reasons of race. We live in the United States of America, the greatest nation on earth and perhaps the greatest nation to ever grace this planet. Our nation has been one of the freest and most prosperous nations throughout recorded history. The power of our information technology gives us greater capacity for more freedoms and more choices than we've ever possessed. Given these opportunities, it's a wonder that we are moving away from greater freedom and opportunity and towards greater government control and fewer options. America has an identity; it stands for something. Americans know that their leaders ought to be out front, setting the example, not kicking them from behind, imposing upon them a system starved of freedom and opportunity. About half of the Indians in the United States live in large cities and rural areas throughout the country. The rest of them live in about 300 federal reservations (land set for their use). Today, there are about 1,4 million Native Americans, which is believed to be more than there were when the first European explorers arrived in the New World. True or False? 1. The story of the Native Americans is one of the funniest in the history of the mankind. 2. The Indians were the original inhabitants of the American continent. 3. The Native Americans have managed to retain their identity and culture. Interviewer: Simon, tell us about yourself. Simon: Well, like lots of kids my age, I've grown up taking my boat onto the rivers in this area. One of my favourite rivers is the River Stanton, which is fast with excellent white water- so things can get pretty dangerous but it's exciting and I'm experienced. Interviewer: Now, it was while you were on the River Stanton that you noticed something was wrong. There were often humans and animals working together in the pictures, and to me that was the message behind them. In one painting, for example, a girl was resting her head on an elephant. Some wildlife experts say this doesn't show animals as they really are in the wild, and I agree.