


American Indian stereotypes in early western literature and the lasting influence on American culture.



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Abstract

This thesis commits to highlighting three major stereotypes concerning Native Americans, found in early western literature between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The three defining stereotypes of Native Americans are the bloodthirsty savage, the Noble Savage, and the Halfbreed. These gross misrepresentations of the indigenous people of North America not only reflect the popular opinion of minority cultures held by dominant white society during the time of their publication, they also contribute to the development of casual desensitization in white culture to the injustices heaped upon minority groups today. Though the study of these stereotypes in this thesis is focused primarily in the past, concentrating on the works of major western novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper, Zane Grey, Charles Brockden Brown, and Owen Wister, as well as on pulp fiction and Beadle dime novels of the era, the influences of the fictional depictions persist into present media. These stereotypes also extend to the national perspective of miscegenation between the white and Native American races, and are just one of the multiple ways in which stereotyping is used by white dominant culture to label and limit minority cultures within their own society.

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