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Final Thesis

_Stagecoach, Fort Apache, Cheyenne Autumn. John Ford and His Representation of American Indians_

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Introduction

The image of American Indians is a central one in western cinema. Their representation has been subject to big changes, according to the historical moment and, of course, according to the personal perceptions that the various film-makers and directors had of them. This thesis is focused on the way Indians are depicted in three films by director John Ford, *Stagecoach* (1939), *Fort Apache* (1948), and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964).

John Ford is an extremely important figure in cinema. He is considered one of the greatest American directors, not only by the audience, but also by his colleagues. Orson Welles, for example, declared that he felt a special admiration for Ford, whom he considered a master, so much so that he watched *Stagecoach* more than forty times, because he believed it to be the best guide on how to make a movie.

Ford boasts a fifty-year career in cinema. Born in 1895, son of Irish immigrants (his real surname was O'Feeney), Ford approached cinema thanks to his brother Francis, who was an actor and director. He started to work for his brother as a property man; then, as a stuntman; in 1916, he was promoted to the role assistant director; in 1917, he realized his very first short as a director, entitled *The Tornado*. From that moment on, Ford worked tirelessly until 1966, when he realized his last movie (*7 Women*) and retired to private life. He died in 1973.

Although Ford shot some non-western movies, like war movies, and even documentaries during the Second World War, western genre remained his favorite, so much so that he considered himself an “artisan” of westerns.
Stagecoach, Fort Apache, and Cheyenne Autumn are just three of a great number of westerns made by Ford.

I have chosen these three, because each of them presents a definite and different image of the Indians, and, since they were shot in a twenty-five time lapse, they also show how Ford’s perception of the Indians has changed throughout his career.

In Stagecoach, Ford’s representation of the Indians suggests that he wanted to keep himself at a safe distance from them; in Fort Apache, it seems that Ford has partly overcome his need to be detached from the Indians; in Cheyenne Autumn the safe distance does not exist any longer, because in this movie Ford adopts an Indian point of view, thus inviting the audience to do the same.

In Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 3, the three movies are analyzed in the light of Ford’s personal perception of the Indians.

In Chapter 4, the movies are collocated in the historical and cultural context in which they were shot.

Chapter 5 consists of my translation into Italian of Massacre (1947), a short story by James Warner Bellah, on which Fort Apache is based.

The image of the Indians which Ford displays in these movies (and in his movie production in general) allows the audience to have a contact to the Indian world, although it is always important to be aware of the fact that it is an image filtered through a non-Indian eye (see Conclusions).

At the end of this introduction, I would like to focus the attention on the
concept of “Indian culture”, which I often mention in my thesis. I want to highlight that actually this “Indian culture” was formed (and is still formed) by a great number of different Indian cultures, each tribe having its own traditions, customs, religion, and language.

In my thesis, I talk about “Indians” in general, without making any tribal or cultural distinctions, because I want to stress the opposition and differences between the Indian world and the non-Indian/white world. But it is important to be aware of the fact that the Indian reality is a very rich and diversified one.
Stagecoach (1939)

Stagecoach is the first sound western by John Ford. It was shot in 1939, an important year for westerns, which marks the beginning of a revival of this genre after a crisis period (D'Angela 22). The screenplay for the movie was written by Dudley Nichols, and it is based on a short story entitled Stage to Lordsburg, by Ernest Haycox, published on the Collier's in 1937.

The movie was previewed in February 1939 and then released in March of the same year. It was greatly appreciated by the audience. Stagecoach has been studied by a great number of critics, and it is generally considered a classic of western cinema. In his essay The evolution of the Western, French critic André Bazin states that Stagecoach is a classic because it offers a perfect balance between the different themes that it presents:

Stagecoach is the ideal example of the maturity of a style brought to classic perfection. John Ford struck the ideal balance between social myth, historical reconstruction, psychological truth, and the traditional theme of the western mise en scène. None of these elements dominated any other. Stagecoach is like a wheel, so perfectly made that it remains in equilibrium on its axis in any position.” (149)

D'Angela agrees with Bazin, and adds that Stagecoach's classicism is due to the fact that this movie unifies traditional and canonical rules of Western cinema with some new themes (for example the social theme), thus establishing itself as a “magister” for other movies (not only westerns), also in terms of techniques.
Therefore, in this case, the term “classic” has to be perceived with its original Latin meaning “classicus”: something that creates students, pupils (who, together, form a class) (22-26).

Despite the fact that *Stagecoach* has been widely analyzed, its plot and structure are fairly simple and linear. The events appear in chronological order, without any flashbacks nor digressions that might interrupt the flowing of the story. Hence, the movie is quite easy to follow.

*Stagecoach* is set around the year 1880, and it is basically focused on the journey of a group of people traveling through a very dangerous territory, which in that period was subject to the incursions of the Apache Indians, guided by their leader Geronimo. The protagonists travel aboard a stagecoach, departing from Tonto (Arizona), and are headed to Lordsburg (New Mexico). The travelers are very different from each other, each of them having their own reasons to go to Lordsburg. The stagecoach leaves Tonto with six people on board: Mrs Mallory, the pregnant wife of an Army captain; Hatfield, a gambler; Dallas, a prostitute, and Doctor Boone, a drunk doctor, both banished from Tonto by the League of Social Order; Peacock, a whiskey drummer; Gatewood, a banker. In addition to them are Buck, the driver, and Curly Wilcox, the marshal of Tonto. At the beginning of their way, they meet the ninth traveler, Henry Ringo Kid, who has escaped from prison and wants to reach Lordsburg in order to take his revenge on the Plummer brothers, who had killed his brother and father and because of whom he was unjustly arrested. On the first part of the journey, the stagecoach is escorted by a Cavalry regiment, till the arrival at the first stop, Dry Fork. Here, the travelers learn that the Cavalry cannot escort them any further. Therefore, after eating, they decide to go ahead at their own risk. In the late evening they reach their second stop, Apache Wells, where Mrs Mallory gives
birth to her baby, helped by Doc Boone and Dallas. The following morning they leave Apache Wells, though worried by some signs which demonstrate the near presence of the Indians (the theft of the rested horses by the Apache wife of the owner of the trading post of Apache Wells and the presence of some smoke signals on the hills around them). The journey proceeds calmly, but the presence of the Indians is confirmed again by the discovery that the last trading post where the stagecoach was supposed to stop had been destroyed by the Indians. The travelers go on, but just when they are about to reach Lordsburg, the Indians appear, and the stagecoach is attacked. The fight is very hard, but when the travelers are realizing that they will lose against the Indians because their ammunition is almost gone, they hear a far sound coming closer and closer. It is the charge of the American Cavalry, which finally drives the Indians back and rescues the stagecoach and the protagonists (all except Hatfield, who is killed in the fight). After the battle, the stagecoach reaches Lordsburg, the group of travelers breaks up and each of them can go back to their normal life and business. Gatewood is arrested (he had stolen some money from his bank in Tonto and escaped to Lordsburg with the haul), and Ringo takes his revenge by killing the Plummer. Then, knowing that he has to go back to prison (since he had broken out), he surrenders to Wilcox. But, in memory of his friendship to Ringo’s father and aware of the fact that Ringo had been unjustly jailed, Wilcox sets him free to go to Mexico together with Dallas, since the two had fallen in love with each other during the journey to Lordsburg.

As is evident from the plot of *Stagecoach*, the Indians are one of the cornerstones of the story, because, although not seen, their presence is perceived throughout the whole movie. From the very beginning, there is a sort of separation between the Indians and the Whites, and the Indians are identified
as the antagonists of the story. This is deducible, for example, from the soundtrack of the initial credits; the frames running on the screen during the credits show the three main entities of the movie: the American Cavalry, the Apache Indians, and the stagecoach. When the Indians appear, the soundtrack becomes heavy and threatening. Moreover, at the beginning of the movie, the soldiers in the outpost receive a telegram reporting the name of the responsible for the attacks that the region was suffering: Geronimo. The name of the Apache leader resonates like a thunderclap inside the outpost, thus marking the opposition between the Whites and the Indians. This opposition is also underlined by the image of the raising of the American flag, which happens outside the hut of the outpost, just a few minutes before the reception of the telegram. The raising of the flag manifests a sense of Americanness and of patriotic belonging to white American society; the fact that immediately after this expression of patriotism there arrives the telegram which gives a name to the danger of the moment, creates an even clearer opposition between the white world and the Indian one.

This opposition, this division between the Whites and the Indians, is also deepened by a sense of distance between these two worlds, which is embodied by the Indian scout at the beginning of the movie. This character is inside the outpost and has just informed the soldiers of the movements of the Apaches in the region. What is striking is the fact that there is no direct communication between this Indian and the soldiers, because the Indian’s information is reported to the others by a third person, and not by the Indian himself. With regards to this scout, Edward Buscombe (21) focuses his analysis on the impassibility of the scout’s face, and states that it shows a sense of threat that seems to predict the inevitable future clash between the Whites and the
Apaches. In my opinion, this Indian scout is not characterized by an impassibility that shows menace; rather, his impassibility simply shows the incommunicability between the two groups. As is said above, the scout does not say a word, he stands still like a statue, his face is inexpressive and unperturbed, because he does not have any contact with those soldiers; it is not he who speaks directly to them, it is one of the soldiers who reports the scout’s information to the others. Of course, it is taken for granted that the Indian had previously spoken to an interpreter or to this soldier; but the fact that this previous conversation is not visible in the movie is extremely meaningful, because it underlines again the distance between the Whites and the Indians.

This distance is highlighted further on by the Indians’ absence/presence throughout the movie. Indeed, the Indians are hardly ever directly present; except for the scout of the beginning, they only appear in the fight scene, towards the end of the movie. Despite that, they float like ghosts from the very beginning, their possible attack being feared by the stagecoach travelers during the whole journey. Therefore, the Indians’ presence manifests itself through absence and silence, and on the base of this fact, it is clear that in Stagecoach much relevance is given to the white world, whereas the Indians seem to be relegated to the function of calamity and menace. In fact, in most of his movies, Ford gives more room to the white society than to the Indian one, often by stressing the Indians’ cruelty towards the Whites, rather than the Whites’ cruelty towards the Indians (Nolley 80/81). Nevertheless, it is wrong to consider that Ford had a hostile and racist attitude towards the Indians (he once declared he was sympathetic to them).

Although Ford’s position with regards to the Indians will be clearer in his later movie production, I believe that even an old movie like Stagecoach already
shows the germs of a balanced vision of the Whites and the Indians. Of course, as stated above, in *Stagecoach* the Indians function as antagonists of the story, but this does not mean that there exists a juxtaposition Indians/evil – Whites/good, because the opposition between the Whites and the Indians does not imply a clear definition of the categories “good ones” vs “evil ones”. There is no clear condemnation of the Indians on the part of Ford. At the same time, *Stagecoach* must not be considered a pro-Indian movie, since the Indians are never ennobled, their deeds are not rendered heroic. Therefore, beyond a first analysis of the movie, I believe that in *Stagecoach* a trace of objectivity in the representation of the White and the Indian worlds is already perceivable.

In fact, it is hard to detect this aspect in the movie, because the Indian theme, though important, is partly shadowed by the social theme. The social theme is central in *Stagecoach*, and it is the subject of a great number of reviews by different critics. Actually, through the analysis of this social theme, I believe it possible to learn some meaningful information that can cast a light on the actual image of the Indians which emerges from the movie. *Stagecoach* can be considered as a mirror of US society at the end of the XIX century, and it throws light on its hypocrisies and prejudices. There is an interesting parallel between *Stagecoach* and a short story written in 1880 by Guy de Maupassant, entitled “Boule de Suif”. This story is set during the Franco-Prussian war and it narrates the journey of a miscellaneous group of people, among which there stands out the figure of a prostitute. She is the victim of the prejudice of the other travelers, but when their coach is stopped by some Prussian soldiers, the passengers push her to give herself to one of them, so as to be allowed to proceed. After she does so, the coach can go on, but the others keep on looking at her with contempt and snobbishness, overlooking the fact
that it was thanks to her that they could continue their journey. By writing this story, Maupassant intended to highlight the hypocrisy and bigotry of the society of his time.

Some critics of *Stagecoach*, like Buscombe (36-37) and Wills (82-83), declare that Nichols' script was directly inspired by "Boule de Suif"; others, like Jon Tuska (50), claim that it was Haycox who was inspired by Maupassant when he wrote "Stage to Lordsburg". Either way, this connection between *Stagecoach* and Maupassant's short story underlines Ford's willingness to give emphasis to the social dimension in his movie. In confirmation of that, it is worth highlighting that there are some differences between the characters of Haycox' "Stage to Lordsburg" and Nichols' script for *Stagecoach*. The group of travelers in the movie is more miscellaneous in comparison to that in "Stage to Lordsburg" (Buscombe 36-37; Wills 82-83), and that creates a broader reflection of the US society which Ford wanted to represent. Moreover, two of Haycox' characters (a cattleman and an Englishman) are substituted in the movie by Doc Boone and the banker Gatewood, who carry an important ideological weight. Indeed, they are inserted into the story in order to stress the division of the passengers into two categories: the 'polite society' and the 'social outcasts' (Buscombe 36). The first category includes Gatewood, Mrs Mallory, Hatfield; the other includes the drunk Doc Boone, Dallas, and Ringo, all victims of the prejudice of the first group. The theme of prejudice is a central theme in *Stagecoach*, and it is manifested from the very beginning of the movie, when Dallas and Doc Boone are banished from Tonto by the ladies of the Law and Order League. The intent of the League was that of cleaning up Tonto from those people who were not considered worthy of living there and of mixing with the "good" citizens. Of course, a prostitute and a drunk doctor could not be tolerated by the League.
and the other conformists of the city. For that reason, they are forced to get in the stagecoach and depart. The prejudice towards them is evident even when Mrs Mallory is about to enter the Stagecoach. At that point, a friend of hers and one of the League ladies try to persuade her not to leave:

Lady: “Mrs Whitney, you’re not going to let your friend travel with that creature!” (‘creature’ is referred to Dallas).
Mrs Whitney (Mrs’ Mallory’s friend): “She’s right, Lucy. Besides, you’re not well enough for traveling”
Mrs Mallory: “It’s just a few hours, Nancy. I’m quite alright”
Mrs Whitney: “But you shouldn’t travel a step without a doctor”
Mrs Mallory: “There is a doctor, dear. The driver told me”
Lady: “Doctor? Doc Boone? He couldn't doctor a horse!”

(Stagecoach)

Despite this conversation, Mrs Mallory departs in order to reach her husband. However, on more than one occasion, she and the other characters of the ‘polite society’ show a sense of snobbishness towards the others, especially towards Dallas. This is mostly evident in the dinner scene when the travelers have stopped at Dry Fork. Here, they take a seat at the table; Mrs Mallory sits at the head of the table, and Ringo invites Dallas to take a seat between him and Mrs Mallory. The scene freezes: Mrs Mallory is visibly tense, and Dallas shows a hint of embarrassment as she knows that Mrs Mallory is bothered by her close presence. In order to sort out the situation, Hatfield approaches Mrs Mallory, asking her whether it would be better for her to take another seat, since in that position she might be bothered by the fresh air coming through the window.
Mrs Mallory accepts. An elegant way to move away from the prostitute and hide the prejudice towards her with the excuse of feeling cold. A prejudice which, nevertheless, is absolutely clear, mostly to Dallas. There are also other interesting moments when the prejudice towards Dallas is evident. For example, on the way from Dry Fork to Apache Wells, Dallas notices that Mrs Mallory seems not to be comfortable on her seat and cannot rest properly. Therefore, Dallas tries to be kind to her by suggesting Mrs Mallory take a seat next to her. The cold reply of Mrs Mallory grieves Dallas visibly:

Dallas: “Maybe you’d like to sit next to me. You could put your head on my shoulder”
Mrs Mallory: “No, thank you”

(Stagecoach)

Immediately after that, Mrs Mallory asks for some water. Hatfield gives her a little silver cup filled up with water, but he does not ask Dallas if she would like to drink as well. It is Ringo who asks her, but at that point Hatfield puts away his cup, because he thinks that Dallas is not worthy of drinking from it. Dallas always looks sorrowful when she feels she is being judged by the others, and she seems to be somehow resigned to this condition. The other two outcasts live their relationship with the ‘polite society’ in a different way to Dallas’. Doc Boone is not well seen by the good society either, but he does not seem to care about that. He is happy with who he is, and he is not ashamed of that. When Gatewood starts to soliloquize about the government control over the American banks, the drunk Doc Boone interrupts the solemnity of Gatewood’s speech,
and when Gatewood, in a reproachful tone, accuses him of being drunk (and therefore not in the condition to express his opinion) Doc Boone replies in a simple and disarming way:

Gatewood: “[…] What the country needs is a businessman for President!”
Doc Boone: “What the country needs is more bottle”
Peacock: “What?”
Doc Boone: “Bottle!”
Gatewood: “You’re drunk, sir”
Doc Boone: “I’m happy, Gatewood”

(Stagecoach)

As for Ringo, the ‘polite society’ manifests a kind of indifference towards him, rather than prejudice. Ringo is one of the outcasts because he is an escapee, but also because he does not raise any walls between himself and the other outcasts. He asks Dallas to marry him despite her job, and he always shows himself friendly to Doc Boone, praising his professional skills, without being concerned about the fact that Doc Boone is an alcoholic:

Doc Boone: “Seems to me I knew your family, Henry. Didn't I set your arm once when you were, oh... bucked off a horse?”
Ringo: “You Doc Boone?”
Doc Boone: “I certainly am”
[…]
Ringo: “That was my kid brother broke his arm. You did a good job, Doc, even if you was drunk”
Doc Boone: “Thank you, son. Professional compliments are always pleasing”

(Stagecoach)

In fact, it is remarkable that, throughout the movie, the outcasts show a great nobleness of soul: Doc Boone and Dallas help Mrs Mallory to give birth to her child, and Dallas stays awake whole night long in order to take care of the baby and let Mrs Mallory rest. It is a nobleness of soul which the ‘polite society’ lacks, not only because, as demonstrated, they nourish prejudices towards the outcasts, but also because they carry a high degree of hypocrisy. I believe that, apart from their prejudices, it is this hypocrisy which really underlines the negativity of these characters, and it is this aspect which highlights the relationship between the social theme and the vision of the Indians, which is mentioned above. Among the polite society, Hatfield and Gatewood are particularly connected to hypocrisy, in a more evident way than Mrs Mallory.

On the way to Dry Fork, Hatfield blames Doc Boone for not being a gentleman, because he is smoking in the presence of the pregnant Mrs Mallory. As a reply, in a veiled way Doc Boone accuses Hatfield of having shot a man in his back, thus underlying that Hatfield cannot talk about being a gentleman, because, despite his good appearance, he is the first one who does not behave as such:

Hatfield: “Put out that cigar. You’re annoying this lady”
Doc Boone: “Excuse me, madam. Being so partial to the weed myself, I sometimes forget it disagrees with others”
Hatfield: “A gentleman doesn’t smoke in the presence of a lady”
Doc Boone: “Three weeks ago I took a bullet out of a man who was shot
by a gentleman. The bullet was in his back!”
Hatfield: “Do you mean to insinuate...?!”

(Stagecoach)

Hatfield is certainly a negative and hypocritical character in *Stagecoach*, and his being a negative character has been strongly underlined by Peter Cowie, who defines him as a villain in the story, together with Gatewood (78). However, in my opinion, Gatewood is much more negative than Hatfield. He is a thief and nevertheless he acts all the time with the purpose of appearing an honest citizen, who pays taxes and lives according to the law. He even complains about the fact of not being safeguarded by the government. This emerges when the travelers have just arrived at Dry Fork and discover that the Cavalry is not going to escort them any further:

Gatewood: “Now wait a minute. You mean to say there are no troops at this station?”
Mrs Pickett (wife of one of the soldiers at Dry Fork): “There ain’t no soldiers here but what you see”
[…]
Buck: “Well, that means we got to go back”
Gatewood: “I can’t go back. See here, driver, this stage has started to Lordsburg and it’s your duty to get us there”
Gatewood (to Lieutenant Blanchard): “And it’s your duty, my boy, to come along with us!”
Lt Blanchard: “It’s my duty, Mr Gatewood, to obey orders. I’m sorry, sir”
[…]

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Lt Blanchard: “My orders are to return from here immediately. I can’t disobey orders.”

[...]

Gatewood: “I call this desertion of duty, young man. I’ll report you to your superior officers! And if necessary I’ll take it up with Washington!”

Lt Blanchard: “That’s your privilege, sir. But if you give us any trouble here I'll put you under restraint.”

(Stagecoach)

After the travelers leave Dry Fork, Gatewood goes on complaining:

Gatewood: “I can’t get over the impertinence of that young lieutenant! I'll make it warm for the shavetail! I'll report him to Washington! We pay taxes to the government and what do we get? Not even protection from the Army! I don't know what the government has come to! Instead of protecting businessmen, it's poking its nose into business.”

(Stagecoach)

In fact, Gatewood is the worst character in Stagecoach, since he embodies the highest level of hypocrisy. Not only is he a revered businessman, but he is even the husband of one of the League ladies. Despite all that, he is nothing else than a thief. Thus, what Buscombe states is very true: ‘respectability and morality are very far from being the same thing’ (37).

The presence of negative characters among the Whites shows the darkness within white society, exposes its shadows and demonstrates that actually this apparently perfect society is sick, as Doc Boone claims when he and Dallas are
forced to leave Tonto:

Doc Boone to Dallas: “We are the victims of a foul disease called social prejudice, my child.”

(*Stagecoach*)

The representation of these negative aspects among the Whites is extremely meaningful, because it shows that ‘[…] not all villains in the old West were unshaven outlaws or bloodthirsty Apache” (Cowie 76). After all, that is exactly what Dallas says in Tonto when she and the other passengers are asked if they want to travel despite the presence of the Indians in the region:

Dallas: “What are you trying to do… scare somebody? They put me in here. Now let ‘em try and put me out. There are worse things than Apaches.”

(*Stagecoach*)

The lowering of the white society indirectly raises the Indians, because it is clear that they cannot be considered the only villains and the only menace. Thus, through the analysis of the social theme, it is possible to become aware of the actual image of the Indians that Ford wanted to depict in *Stagecoach*.

If the depiction of white society shows that Stagecoach is not an anti-Indian movie, this is also demonstrated by another interesting theme: racism. Racism does not particularly emerges throughout the movie, but there are two key moments when it is evident, and in both situations it turns to be to be discredited by Ford. In the first situation, racism shines through Gatewood’s
words. When he is talking about the government, he utters a very incisive sentence:

Gatewood: “Why, they’re talking now about having bank examiners, as if we didn’t know how to run our own banks. I actually had a letter, from some popinjay official, saying they were going to inspect my books! I have a program, gentlemen, that should be blazoned on every newspaper in the country. America for Americans! The government must not meddle with business! [...]”

(Stagecoach)

Obviously, this sentence is part of an economic question that Gatewood is raising here. Some critics, like Buscombe, believe that Gatewood’s words against the government’s involvement in the US economy give voice to the criticism of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, which took place in the 1930s (30-31). However, if seen in relation to the Indian theme, this sentence sounds very racist. I am persuaded that beyond this economic dimension, Ford and Nichols wanted to give this sentence a slightly racist tone. After all, who are these Americans whom Gatewood is talking about? Of course, Americans like him, part of that WASP society. Racism is here expressed by Gatewood, and Gatewood is such a negative character that racism cannot be taken seriously.

The second situation happens during the second stop. Its protagonists are Peacock and Chris, the man who host the travelers at Apache Wells. As soon as he sees Chris’ wife, Peacock gets scared, because she is Apache:

Peacock: “Savages!”
Chris: “That's my wife, Yakima, my squaw”

Peacock: “yes, but she is... she is a savage”

Chris: “Si, señor, she's a little bit savage, I think”

(Stagecoach)

In this case, racism is mocked by the comic situation. Peacock is not a negative character, and his racist comment is neutralized by Chris' response. Chris does not get the racist tone of Peacock's comment, because he links the word “savage” to his wife's character, without even thinking that Peacock is referring to her being Indian (Buscombe 52).

These two situations do not give any credibility to racism, and that is another proof that Ford did not intend to arouse this feeling towards the Indians.

There are two further items of proof in support of the non-anti-Indian interpretation of Stagecoach. These two items of proof frame the whole movie. The first one consists in the fact that Ford inserted a little written introduction after the initial credits of the movie (which the production decided to delete), stating that around 1875 the Indians were trying to oust the white invaders (D'Angela 33).

The other proof is evident at the very end of the movie, when Ringo and Dallas are left free to escape together. “Let's save them from the blessing of civilization” (Stagecoach), says Doc Boone, thus suggesting once again the hypocrisy and shadows of the so called “civilization” vs the freedom and the authenticity of the wilderness. Therefore, an ultimate confirmation that the two categories Whites/good and Indians/evil are absolutely blurred and inconsistent.

However, it is also important to remember that Stagecoach is not a pro-
Indian movie either. Despite the fact that there are extremely negative characters among the Whites, it is also true that in *Stagecoach* the Indians represent the antagonists to the travelers.

A further demonstration that *Stagecoach* cannot be considered a movie that takes up the cudgels for the Indians is deducible from how Ford depicts the US Cavalry. The US Cavalry is an entity which, mostly for historical reasons, is always seen in opposition to the Indians. The US Army and Cavalry are recurring character in Ford’s movies. He had a deep respect for the army (he himself was signed up for the army during the Second World War); therefore, he always offers a positive image of it in his movie production. That happens in *Stagecoach* as well. As Cowie points out, here the Army represents safety for the travelers, because it intervenes just in time to rescue the stagecoach from the Indian attack. Moreover, the character of Lieutenant Blanchard represents the image of the model-soldier, and can thus be interpreted as a sort of romantic and nostalgic tribute to the Army (74-75). Hence, *Stagecoach* does not show any kind of condemnation towards the Cavalry, although it fights against those Indians who were ‘trying to oust the white invaders’ (see above).

In conclusion then, although it is a movie where the Indians are seen as the enemies, *Stagecoach* actually presents some hidden principles (anti-racism, a certain objectivity in depicting the Indians and the Whites), which are more evident in the next movies which are going to be analyzed: *Fort Apache* (1948) and, even more so, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964).
Chapter 2.

Fort Apache (1948)

Fort Apache is a very significant movie in the analysis of Ford’s depiction of the Indians. It was shot in 1948, in just three weeks, and it cost 700,000 dollars less than estimated (Anderson 93). Ford himself, when interviewed by Lindsay Anderson about the movie, declared that it was a “bungled story” (Anderson 36). Nevertheless, the movie was well received by the audience.

Fort Apache is set in 1864, and it starts with a stagecoach running through the desert, and leading Colonel Owen Thursday and his daughter Philadelphia to Fort Apache, where the Colonel has been gazzetted as new commander. Colonel Thursday is unhappy with his new command post; after he has served the Army for a long time, he would expect to be assigned to a honorable place, not to an isolated and desolated location like Fort Apache. Before reaching Fort Apache, the stagecoach stops at a house, where the two travelers can rest for a while, and after some time there arrive some soldiers from Fort Apache, with the order to escort the young Lieutenant Michael O'Rourke (who was in the house as well) to the fort. Colonel Thursday and Philadelphia leave the house with the soldiers and Lieutenant O'Rourke, with a hint of irritation on the part of Thursday, who feels resentful for the fact that an escort had been sent for the new Lieutenant, but not for him. When the convoy arrives to its destination, Thursday meets the other officers at Fort Apache: Captain York, Captain Collingwood (an old friend of his). In the next few days, Thursday reveals himself to be a very strict commander. He wants his men to conform perfectly.
to the Army rules, because, as he declares, he wants to be “proud of his regiment”.

One morning, his daughter Philadelphia and Lieutenant O'Rourke go out for a ride together, since they are starting to feel some sentiments for each other. During the ride, Philadelphia spots some smoke in the distance. They soon discover that it was an Army wagon which had been attacked by the Apache Indians. Meanwhile, at Fort Apache, Colonel Thursday receives a telegram from Fort Starke, warning Fort Apache that a group of Apache Indians had left their reservation. After a couple of minutes, Michael and Philadelphia arrive at Fort Apache, confirming the content of the telegram because they have found of the burnt wagon and the dead soldiers besides it. Thus, Thursday decides to go and get the bodies, but after they arrive where the wagon is, the Indians attack. There is a fight, after which Thursday and his men go to see Meacham, the Indian agent of that region, in order to talk to him about the escape of those Indians from their territory. Meacham presents himself as a victim, because he was left alone to manage a numerous group of Indians, but Captain York blames him for the situation, since Meacham, instead of giving the Indians food and blankets, gives them whiskey and weapons. Thursday orders his men to destroy all this dangerous material, and then they leave Meacham's hut.

Once they have got back to Fort Apache, the officers meet up, and Captain York proposes that they should go and talk to the Indians, because he believes that Cochise (the Apache leader) would listen to him and thus get back to the reservation without causing a war. In the evening, Captain York returns to the fort and happily informs Thursday that Cochise wants to meet Thursday, Meacham, and him the next day, to discuss for peace. Thursday decides that the next day they will leave for the meeting with the entire battalion, though York
disagrees.
During the meeting, Cochise affirms that he will return to the reservation provided that Meacham is dismissed. At that point, Thursday insults Cochise, and threatens him saying that he will attack the Indians the next day if they will not return to the reservation. But things go differently from what Thursday expected, because the next day it is the battalion going to attack the Indians which is attacked by the Indians themselves. Indeed, Thursday wants to pass through a rocky shaft, without paying attention to York’s warnings that there could be Indians hiding behind the rocks. As soon as the soldiers pass, the Indians (who were actually hiding there) start to shoot them. All the soldiers die, except York and his regiment, which was staying up on a hill with some supply wagons, on Thursday’s order.

After the battle, the scene shows Fort Apache again, at least two years after the clash with the Indians. York has become the Colonel of the fort, Philadelphia has married Michael O’Rourke, and the peace with the Indians has been settled again. There are some journalists, to whom York is telling the story of the massacre and depicting Thursday in a very good and positive way, as a model officer, although he obviously had not really been such.

As is evident from the plot, the Indians have a central role in *Fort Apache*. Of the three movies analyzed in this thesis, this is the one that shows a balanced vision of the Indians and the Whites in the clearest way. In *Stagecoach*, the story is focused on the travelers and their journey, and the presence of the Indians is mostly perceived rather than directly seen. As will be analyzed in the next chapter, *Cheyenne Autumn* offers an Indian point of view on the occurrences, with the identification of the Indians as the victims. In *Fort Apache*, Ford offers a balanced vision because, although the point of view is still white (meaning that
the audience is more acquainted with the soldiers and the life at the Fort than with the Indians), he outlines the positions of the two groups in a very objective way, making the two different points of view coexist in the movie. Therefore, the space Ford gives to the Indians in *Fort Apache* is much larger than in *Stagecoach*, and they can be considered co-protagonists in the story, together with the Whites.

William Darby states that *Fort Apache* gives psychological depth to the Indians, through the character of their leader Cochise (qtd. in Nolley 83). This psychological dimension of the Indians does not exist in *Stagecoach*. And in *Fort Apache* it is widened to all the main characters, thus demonstrating that in this movie Ford’s attention is concentrated on human beings (Anderson 136) and on their emotions.

Stanley Corkin states that the presence of these emotional dimension can be considered a melodramatic feature in this movie. Actually, he states that a high number of western movies of the postwar era include this melodramatic elements, that is to say, a peculiar attention to individuals and to the consequences, sometimes negative, that human impulses can provoke (62/64).

This psychological dimension allows one to analyze the main characters of *Fort Apache* quite deeply, since each of them represents a peculiar type of personality.

One of the protagonists of the movie is Colonel Owen Thursday. Thursday represents a kind of soldier in love with his uniform and with rules, but this love is so extreme that it leads him to develop a very strict mind, and hinders him from getting used to the new situation he has to face.

This strict mentality emerges in the whole movie, from the very beginning. This is evident, for instance, in one of the first scenes, when Thursday and
Philadelphia are in the house where their coach has stopped, and the soldiers arrive from Fort Apache in order to welcome Lieutenant Michael O'Rourke, and escort him to the fort. The soldiers are very surprised by the presence of the Colonel, because Fort Apache had not received any telegram announcing that the Colonel will arrive on that day; but the most disconcerted of all is Thursday himself, because he would expect the soldiers to have come to welcome him, not a simple new lieutenant. His caustic comment about that situation shows the extreme importance that he gives to military grades, which, further in the movie, will turn out to be so extreme as to culminate in arrogance:

Thursday: “I am Colonel Thursday. I presume you have been sent for me.”
Sergeant Beaufort: “No, sir.”
Thursday: “What are you doing here?”
Beaufort: “Escorting the ambulance from Fort Apache for Lieutenant O'Rourke, sir.”
Thursday: “Have you had no orders regarding me?”
Beaufort: “No, sir.”
Lieutenant O'Rourke: “They couldn't have known of your arrival, sir.”
Thursday: “That's obvious, mister. Unless it's the custom at Fort Apache to provide transportation for incoming second lieutenants...and leave a commanding officer to travel shanks' mare.”

(Fort Apache)

His meticulous attention to military grades often leads Thursday to refuse the
advice of his subordinates, even though they are more acquainted with life at Fort Apache and with the territory than him.

Indeed, as mentioned above, Thursday's strictness often turns into arrogance, which is particularly evident in the conversations between Thursday and Captain York, who is in fact far wiser than the colonel. The clearest example of that occurs at the end of the movie, just before the massacre. York tries to persuade Thursday not to pass through the rocks they meet on their way, because he is sure that the Indians are hiding behind them. Thursday does not want to listen to him, and he even accuses him of being a coward:

Thursday: “I don’t see them. Not a one.”
York: “Well, they’re down there, sir, among the rocks.”
Thursday: “Have you seen them, captain?”
York: “I don’t have to. I know.”
Thursday: “How?”
York: “Because if I were Cochise...that’s where I’d take up position.”
Thursday: “And that dust cloud beyond?”
York: “It’s an Apache trick. Probably squaws and children dragging mesquite.”
Thursday: “Very ingenious, captain. You make me suspect your Cochise has studied under Alexander the Great...or Bonaparte, at the least.
March your troops. We’ll charge in a column of fours.”
York: “ Mounted in fours? That’s suicide, colonel! I tell you, they’re down there.”
Thursday: “York! Captain York, you’re relieved of command of your troop. There is no room in this regiment for a coward.”
Thursday’s arrogance leads to disastrous consequences.
This attitude of superiority towards the rest of the soldiers and of pride is surely exacerbated by Thursday’s resentment at his transfer to Fort Apache. This bitter feeling about being relegated to such a desolate place is evident from the very beginning of the movie, when Thursday and Philadelphia are traveling to reach their new destination:

Thursday: “What a country. Forty miles from mud hole to mud hole. Mule Creek, Deadman’s Squaw, Schmidt’s Wells. Hangman’s Flats, Hassayampa. At end of the rainbow, Fort Apache. Fort Apache. Blast an ungrateful war department that sends a man to a post out here.”
Philadelphia: “Anyway, I’ll be with you. I hated all those years you were in Europe.”
Thursday: “Better there than here. I didn’t mean it that way, Phil. It’s just that after all I’ve done and been, to be shunted aside like this...”.

The grievousness felt by Thursday always accompanies him, and it leads him to develop a deep hunger for glory; it leads him to feel the desire of being remembered by posterity, no matter what. That is exactly what emerges from his conversation with Captain Collingwood, which occurs after the first meeting

Thursday: “Oh, by thunder. I’ve not wound up. Not by a jugful. They’ve pushed me aside, sent me up to this ten-penny post. But they’ll not keep me buried. I'll find something.”

Collingwood: “This isn’t a country for glory, Owen.”

Thursday: “I’ll take my risks. I always have.”

Collingwood: “Well, then all I can do is wish you good luck. And I wish you that sincerely.”

Thursday: “Thank you, Sam. Will you have a drink?”

Collingwood: “No, thanks, Owen. It's a little early in the day. Even for me.”

(Fort Apache)

In fact, this scene is extremely meaningful, since it really demonstrates how much Thursday is blinded by the discomfort fat having “wound up” at Fort Apache, to the extent of being persuaded to “find something” in order not to be forgotten. It feels as if Collingwood is aware of the fact that Thursday's dreams of glory are very unlikely to become true. And his refusal to drink with Thursday, declined with the words “It's too early” sounds kind of prophetical. The deluded and ignorant Colonel Thursday wants to drink, almost as to pre-celebrate his desired glory; the realistic and wise Collingwood declines the invitation, because the glory is not there yet and almost certainly it will not
manifest itself, therefore it is too early to taste it.

Thursday’s willingness to be remembered in history is also clearly evident in his conversation with the officers, after they have been at Meacham’s. York offers himself to talk to Cochise, in order to find a pacific solution to the Indian’s escape from the reservation:

York: “Cochise knows me, sir. I’ve never lied to him. And if you can assure him decent treatment for his people…”

Thursday: “I’ll confess he interests me. And these Eastern newspapers… I hadn’t realized Cochise was so well-known.”

Collingwood: “Oh, he’s known. He’s had the laugh on every troop in the Southwest these three years. Six campaigns, he’s outgeneraled us, outfought us, and outrun us.”

York: “That’s just the point, sir. There aren’t enough troops in the whole territory to make Cochise come back. But one man, a man he trusts, might persuade him.”

Thursday: “A carbine against his spine might be more persuasive.”

York: “Well, I’ll go in unarmed, sir. I can’t fight my way in. We either walk in or...”

Thursday: “A man who brought Cochise back… I’m for it, captain [...]”

(Fort Apache)

The prospect of being the man who has subdued Cochise is greatly seductive for Thursday.

These aspects, that is to say, Thursday’s mental strictness, its consequent
arrogance, and his hunger for glory, are deeply connected to each other, and they are also linked to another element which Thursday often manifests: racism. Several times Thursday refers to the Indians calling them “savages”, “cowards”, and when York, towards the end of the movie, states that he has given Cochise his word about meeting him without the presence of the whole regiment, Thursday replies that a promise made by a US soldier to a “breechclouter savage” does not have any value.

Of course, the moment where Thursday's racism is mostly evident is the meeting with Cochise. On that occasion, Thursday manifests a certain disdain towards the Indian chief; he even sits down while Cochise is talking. However, in addition to racism, what really emerges in this scene is a sense of extreme love for the Army and for US government. These sentiments are not negative in themselves (Ford himself was in love with his country and with the army), but they are so deep and exaggerated within Thursday, that they make him blind and incapable of discernment. This consideration can be clarified if we make a comparison between this meeting scene and the scene where Thursday and the others meet Meacham in his hut. During the scene in Meacham’s hut, Thursday gets mad at Meacham, after he discovers that he does not treat the Indians as he should, and therefore it is his fault that Cochise and his men have left the reservation. But during the meeting with Cochise, it is Cochise who blames Meacham, but he does so by mentioning the “great white father” (that is to say the US president):

Sergeant Beaufort (translating Cochise's words from Spanish): “[...] the Apaches are a great race, sir. They’ve never been conquered. But it is not well for a nation to be always at war. The young men die. The women
sing sad songs. And the old ones are hungry in the winter. And so I led
my people from the hills. And then came this man [Meacham] […] He is
worse than war. He not only kills the men...but the women, and the
children...and the old ones. We look to the great white father for
protection. He gave us slow death.”

(Fort Apache)

Cochise blames the US government of not safeguarding his people, and this is a
statement that Thursday cannot stand. It is a wound inflicted on his country
and its laws, which are sacred to him. The rage derived from Cochise's (true)
words make Thursday blind to Meacham's incompetence (which he had
previously condemned himself). This, together with Cochise's threat of making
a war in the case Meacham was not sent away, and together with Thursday’s
above-mentioned willingness to be glorious and to save his own reputation,
leads him to insult Cochise and to refuse any dialogue with the Indians:

Thursday: “They're recalcitrant swine. They must feel it.”

[...]

Thursday (to Sergeant Beaufort): “Tell him I find him without honor. Tell
them they're not talking to me but to the United States government. Tell
him that government orders them to return to their reservation. And tell
them if they’ve not started by dawn, we will attack. Tell them that.”

(Fort Apache)
All this will also lead him not to listen to York's warnings about the imminent Indian ambush, which will drive Thursday and the other soldiers to death.

Although it is important to underline that Thursday is not a coward (he chooses to die with his men), his behavior in the movie is certainly reprehensible. Hence, his conduct, due to his resentment, arrogance, and personal ambition, brings discredit on the Whites.

Thursday's behavior proves to be even worse if we compare Thursday himself with Cochise. Both are leaders, but their attitude is completely different. Cochise takes care of his people, and therefore he leads them away from the reservation, since Meacham had made their life hellish. Cochise, as York states, did what a good chief would do: he left the reservation, thus breaking a treaty with the government, in order to save his people from a wretched life. On the contrary, Thursday demonstrates that he is not a good leader, because he does not take enough care of the lives of his men. This comparison makes it clear that Cochise is much more noble and respectable than Thursday. The only reason why he would start a war would be that Meacham was not removed from his mandate as Indian agent. Even the final ambush occurs because Colonel Thursday was leading the troops to the Indian village, in order to force the Indians back to their reservation. The massacre is not a real attack; it is rather a way to prevent Thursday’s attack.

A confirmation to that, after the massacre, is the scene where Cochise and York approaches each other. It is a very lyrical scene, with York dropping his gun and proceeding towards Cochise, and Cochise riding towards him, holding the flag of the American regiment he had just defeated. The moment when the two reach each other is shadowed by dust, which forces the audience to watch this scene with deep attention, and that, of course, makes it very solemn. The
audience cannot hear if York and Cochise exchange some words or not, because the scene is shot from a distance, but what is possible to see is Cochise planting the flag into the ground and then riding away.

In his analysis of this scene, Cowie states that it really shows Cochise's magnanimity and honor, because he does not want to continue a useless massacre (136). These points are really meaningful, because they demonstrate that the Indians are not depicted in a negative way in this movie. They are not blood-thirsty murderers; they have simply reacted to an ill situation (caused by Meacham), and to Thursday's provocation. Ford does not condemn the Indians at all. On the contrary, as Anderson states, the justice of their undertaking is never questioned throughout the movie.

The reasons behind the Indians’ departure from the reservation are clearly pointed out by Ford. In fact, Ford decided to modify Bellah’s short story Massacre, by highlighting the Indians’ just cause. In Massacre, the Army intervention is required by Meacham, because the Indians were in turmoil for a question of leadership:

Mr Sitterding to Thursday: “Stone Buffalo has attempted to have himself accepted as medicine chief as well as war chief of all his nation. Running Calf contested the claim and took the Red Hill people and left the reservation. Stone Buffalo followed him to force him back into the fold. Mr. Meacham sent for us to stop the two factions from warring [...]

(Massacre)
Bellah’s Indians do not leave the reservation because Meacham is a scoundrel, but because they were having some trouble within the tribe itself. Therefore, their behavior is not justified by Bellah, as it is in Ford. In all his short stories, Bellah depicts the Indians as evil, while the Whites are those who fight against these villains. Bellah was a great supporter of imperialism and of Kipling’s concept of “the white man’s burden” (Cowie 92), according to which the Whites were in charge of civilizing the other peoples.

Imperialism was in fact a key-word in the period when *Massacre* was written and *Fort Apache* was shot. The US had had a decisive role in the Second World War; therefore, in the following years, there occurred a reinforcement of ideals like patriotism, imperialism (at least ideological), and America’s leading role in the world. At the same time, new immigrants started to move to the US, while communism was becoming a real threat to the country. All that did nothing but increase that patriotism and the need for preserving the American culture and mentality from the outside.

Some critics have interpreted *Fort Apache* in relation to this historical situation, and have analyzed it by relating the movie message to imperialism. Corkin, who states that post-war westerns are focused on imperialism and on the construction of national identity, declares that *Fort Apache* is a movie which defends imperialism and the American way of life. According to his analysis, Ford wanted to show that the clash with what is different from the US’s ideals (in this case the Indians), is necessary for the establishment of the US identity (24).

Corkin explains his point of view by analyzing the scene where Philadelphia and Lieutenant O'Rourke go out for a ride together. The two young men symbolize the possible stability of the US, because they are the representatives
for a family. In the riding scene, they are getting to know each other better, so they are taking the first step towards what could possibly be a future marriage life. But their ride, that is to say, the acquaintance process, is interrupted by the finding of the coach which had been attacked by the Indians. Hence, the Indians are the opposite force to the establishment of a US family, on which US society is based. It is therefore right to clash against the Indians: “The Apache must die because they pose a threat to a way of life and the future contours of that way of life” (Corkin 90). At the end of the movie, the family can be set up (Philadelphia and Lieutenant O’Rourke get married), and that can only occur when the Indian danger has passed (Corkin 90).

Corkin’s interpretation is interesting, but I find it too extreme. It is certainly true that Ford was a great supporter of the American way of life and that he was a fervent patriot, but his statements regarding imperialism, Americanness, and such themes, were often contradictory. Moreover, the interpretation of *Fort Apache* as a manifesto for imperialism departs from the balanced vision of the Indians and the Whites which is mentioned above, because it is a interpretation which supports the Whites to the prejudice of the Indians.

In fact, precisely because of this balanced vision, after underlining that Ford depicts the Indians in a positive way, it is necessary to prove that the image of the Whites is positive as well, despite Thursday’s negative presence. First of all, Ford gives the Whites moral dignity by showing their human side, through the numerous daily life scenes at Fort Apache. These scenes (like the dancing evenings, the encounter between Lieutenant O’Rourke and the soldiers at the beginning, the serenade for Mrs Collingwood) show the authentic relationships between the soldiers, based on friendship and regard, rather than on military titles.
However, a part from this highlighting of the whites humanity, what raises them morally is mostly the character of Captain Kirby York.

York carries a great ideological importance in the movie; he captures the audience's sympathy because he is able to find a connection between the White world (to which he belongs) and the Indians. He is the joining link between these two realities, and he can be considered a fair representative of that balanced position on the two groups, which Ford manifests in Fort Apache. York is indeed greatly respectful towards his uniform, his superior Thursday (even when he disagrees with him), and his country, but at the same time he understands the Indians' reasons, and search for a dialogue with them.

A very meaningful scene which shows York's understanding of the Indians is the scene at Meacham's hut. Here, York accuses Meacham of being the person really for the Indians' departure from the reservation:

Meacham: “I feed them [the Indians] and clothe them…”
York. “And fill them full of rotgut whiskey.”
[…]
Meacham: “I treat them well. I have goods for them to buy. Knives, calico, wool…”
York: “Cheap, shoddy trash”
Meacham: “No. Mist... Colonel Thursday, you know how children are. They like their bright toys.”
York: “Winchester seven-shot repeaters are not toys, Meacham.”
[…]
York: “May I say something, sir?”
Thursday: “What is it?”
York: “No troop or squadron or regiment's gonna keep the Apaches on this reservation, unless they wanna stay here. Five years ago, we made a treaty with Cochise. He and his Chiricahuas and some of the other Apache bands came on the reservation. They wanted to live here in peace, and did for two years. And then Meacham here was sent by the Indian ring.”

Meacham. “That's a lie. I been...”

York: “The dirtiest, most corrupt political group in our history. Then it began. Whiskey, but no beef. Trinkets instead of blankets. The women degraded, the children sickly, and the men turning into drunken animals. So Cochise did the only thing a decent man could do. He left. Took most of his people and crossed the Rio Bravo into Mexico.”

Meacham: “He broke his treaty.”

York: “Yes. Rather than see his nation wiped out.”

(Fort Apache)

This scene shows York's objectivity on the situation.

On the base of what has been stated about Captain York, if we consider Fort Apache in relation to the period when it was shot, it is possible to affirm that Ford's intent in this movie is not really to defend imperialism; it is rather to show the possibility of an encounter between the canonical US culture and the different realities (represented by the Indians in the movie) that were appearing in the US in that period. Captain York demonstrates that this encounter is possible. According to D'Angela, York is the representative of the good American, because his mind is open and he is ready to learn and to create a
relationship with what is different from his own world (231-234). While Thursday is stuck with his mental boundaries and is not able to take part in the new world where he was sent, York has the capability of doing so, by trying to find a dialogue to the others. Moreover, by his open mind, York is a promoter of American exceptionalism, which therefore has to be understood as the ability to go beyond appearances and to be open to the respecting of differences (D’Angela 234). The good American is not the person who stand still in his ideals without any consideration for the others (like Thursday); he is the person who is faithful to his ideals but at the same time tries to respect those of others (like York). Hence, in this perspective, what emerges from Fort Apache is that a dialogue is possible because, as Lenihan states, the clash with the Indians could have been avoided easily (Lenihan 26-27).

In the light of this relationship between Fort Apache and themes like imperialism, patriotism, and American ideals, the end of the movie is very interesting. It includes praise for the Army and Thursday, made by York while talking to the journalists:

Journalist 1: “He [Thursday] must have been a great man. And a great soldier.
York: “No man died more gallantly...nor won more honor for his regiment.”
Journalist 2: “Of course, you're familiar with the famous painting of Thursday's charge, sir.”
York: “Yes, I saw it when last in Washington.”
Journalist 3: “That was a magnificent work. There were massed columns of Apaches in their war paint and feather bonnets...and here was
Thursday, leading his men in that heroic charge.
York: “Correct in every detail.”
Journalist 3: “He’s become almost a legend already. He’s the hero of every schoolboy in America.”
Journalist 2: “But what of the men who died with him? What of Collingworth and...”
York: “Collingwood.”
Journalist 2: “Oh, of course, Collingwood.”
Journalist 1: “That’s the ironic part of it. We always remember the Thursdays, but the others are forgotten.”
York: “You’re wrong there. They aren’t forgotten because they haven’t died. They’re living. Right out there. Collingwood and the rest. And they’ll keep on living as long as the regiment lives. Pay is $13 a month, their diet, beans and hay. Maybe horse meat before this campaign is over. They’ll fight over cards or rotgut whiskey, but share the last drop in their canteens. Faces may change...and names...but they’re there. They’re the regiment. The regular Army. Now and 50 years from now. They’re better men than they used to be. Thursday did that. He made it a command to be proud of.”

(Fort Apache)

Obviously, Corkin and the supporters of Fort Apache’s imperialistic message have interpreted these words as an ultimate proof for their thesis. Personally, I believe that they have to be interpreted on the basis of Ford’s own comment to the end of this movie. During an interview by Peter Bogdanovich,
Ford was asked about this final praise in *Fort Apache*:

Bogdanovich: “The end of Fort apache anticipates the newspaper editor’s line in Liberty Valance, “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend,” Do you agree with that?”

Ford. “Yes, because I think it’s good for the country. We’ve had a lot of people who were supposed to be great heroes, and you know damn well they weren’t. But it’s good for the country to have heroes to look up to. Like Custer – a great hero. Well, he wasn't. [...]”

(from Tuska 54)

Ford’s words certainly show the importance that he gave to the construction of the American consciousness and national identity, thus underlining his love for his country. However, they also show the awareness of the fact that behind the legend there are true facts. Therefore, behind the legend of Colonel Thursday as a perfect commander, the true story is that he was not, and the clash with the Indians, in that situation, could have been avoided.

Therefore, if we go back to consider the movie in relation to the depiction of the Whites and the Indians, it is evident that Ford’s words give value to both groups. They give value to Thursday and the American identity, but also to the true facts, that is to say, that the clash could have been avoided and that the Indians’ reasons for their actions were right.

Therefore, in conclusion, the balanced vision on the Whites and the Indians is not contradicted by the end of the movie; on the contrary, it is reconfirmed.
Chapter 3.

*Cheyenne Autumn* (1964)

*Cheyenne Autumn* is one of Ford’s last movies. It was shot in 1963 and released in 1964. It is based on a novel by Mari Sandoz, entitled *Cheyenne Autumn*, and published in 1953.

When the movie appeared, it was not welcomed by the audience and by critics, who considered it too long, dull, and slow, in comparison to Ford’s earlier production. Mari Sandoz was not satisfied either, and accused Ford of moderating the rhythm of her novel excessively, thus making the story flat and not lively (Cowie 155).

However, *Cheyenne Autumn* has been recently revalued by both critics and public, because it offers several interesting causes for reflection.

First of all, the movie shows the events from Indians’ point of view, which does not occur either in *Stagecoach* or in *Fort Apache*. In the movie production notes for *Cheyenne Autumn*, Patrick Ford (Ford’s son) underlined the importance of focusing the movie on the Indian perspective: “The fundamental premise is to see the conflict from the Indians’ point of view. The Cheyennes must not be presented as fools, even less as ignorant savages without a guide... Their motivations must be expressed from the very beginning of the movie [...]” (Anderson 192).

Ford himself, interviewed by Bogdanovich about *Cheyenne Autumn*, declared: “[...] There are two sides to every story, but I wanted to show their [the

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1 Ford changed Sandoz’s plot by adding the final scene, in which Secretary of the Interior Carl Shurz meets the Indians and allows them to get back to their homeland. This change is very meaningful, because it demonstrates the great relevance that Ford wanted to convey to this moment. As will be explained later, this scene has a big ideological weight.
Indians’] point of view for a change. [...]” (Tuska 60). Indeed, *Cheyenne Autumn* is a movie by which Ford wanted to arouse a sympathetic feeling in the audience towards the Indians, through the depiction of their sufferings and, at the same time, of their dignity.

The movie opens with the image of a Cheyenne camp in the Cheyenne Reservation (South-West US). A narrative voice informs the public that it is the 7th September 1878. The Indians are singing prayers to the Spirits and playing drums, because on that day they will meet some Washington congressmen in order to discuss their difficult living conditions in the reservation. The meeting will take place in the white base of the reservation, inhabited by soldiers and some Quakers, who have settled there with the purpose of taking care of the Indians. The whole Cheyenne tribe goes to the meeting place, but the Washington congressmen do not appear. The Indians wait for them under the sun for more than five hours; then, the white command receives a telegram, informing them that the Washington committee will not arrive, because of a sandstorm. Disappointed at the missed meeting, the Indians go back to their camp. Early the next morning, they leave the reservation, in order to return to their homeland, in the North, which they had been forced to abandon one year before. They have got a very long way ahead, but it is less frightening than continuing to live in that reservation. Therefore, when the soldiers, lead by Captain Archer, find out that the Indians have departed, a big chase ensues, which will last several months.

On the first day of the chase, the soldiers and the Indians have a first clash, but the Indians manage to go on with their long journey.

As time passes by, the news about the Indians’ march spread throughout US, and panic starts to affect the white people. Newspapers distort reality by
depicting the Indians as bloodthirsty killers, who attack the Whites’ farms on their way. Therefore, a group of Eastern senators apply to Carl Schurz, the Secretary of the Interior, because they would like the army to take complete charge of the Indian issue, and they ask Schurz to solve the situation as quickly as possible. Schurz is quite worried; he knows that the situation is difficult and it should be brought under control, but he does not know exactly how to do that, because he wants to act as well as possible.

Meanwhile, the Indians are keeping on, though stricken by hunger and tiredness, and always pursued by Archer and his men. The buffaloes that they had hoped to find have been all killed by the Whites, so the Indians’ conditions grow worse and worse; but that does not stop their will to reach the North.

At this point of the movie, the attention is moved to Dodge City, where some soldiers are leaving in order to join the other Whites (soldiers and non), who are trying to capture the Indians. The mayor of Dodge City is very unhappy with this departure, because he fears that those Indians (of whom he reads in the newspapers every day) may attack the city. Therefore, the mayor goes to the saloon, to beg Marshall Wyatt Earp (who is playing poker) to do something to protect the city from the possible Indian attack. Wyatt Earp is not worried at all. He knows that all the bad news about the Indians is likely to be untrue. Nevertheless, pushed by the mayor’s pressure, Earp departs with several men from the city in search of the Indians. The group leaves Dodge City singing, as if they are going to have a party, and there are even some women wearing ostentatious dresses and carrying parasols. After some time, the Indians appear; there is a clash, but it is a very light one, without any casualties. Actually, it is a rather ridiculous fight.

In the meantime, Archer and his soldiers arrive at Fort Robinson, headed by the
Prussian Captain Wessels.

Winter is at the door, nevertheless the soldiers have to face it, still at the Indians’ heels. But winter is extremely harsh for the Indians as well. Therefore, Dull Knife proposes that they go to Fort Robinson, in order to ask the soldiers for shelter, because otherwise the children will die in the cold. On the other hand, Little Wolf is persuaded to keep on traveling, because he has received the chief emblem from the old chief (before his death, at the beginning of the journey), hence he believes it is his duty to lead the people to their destination. Moreover, he is confident that the soldiers at Fort Robinson will force them back to the reservation. Therefore, the group of Indians breaks up. Dull Knife, his wife Spanish Woman, the white teacher Deborah (who had departed with them from the reservation), most children and their families go to Fort Robinson.

Here, they are put into a warehouse. Captain Wessels receives the order to send the Indians back to the reservation, which Archer strongly opposes, because he knows that the Indians would die in the winter. But Wessels is firmly determined to obey the orders, no matter what. Therefore, Archer leaves Fort Robinson in order to meet up with Schurz and talk to him about the situation. Once arrived, Archer asks Schurz to help the Indians, and Schurz decides to depart with Archer and meet them himself.

Meanwhile, at Fort Robinson, the military doctor, pushed by Deborah and backed by the other soldiers who disagree with Wessels’s decision to obey the orders, imprisons Wessels in his billet. They exploit the fact that at that moment Wessels is drunk, hence, according to military rules, he cannot maintain his leading role. But it is too late: before the doctor can do anything, the Indians rush out of the warehouse and start to escape, firing with some weapons that they had previously hidden under their clothes. At that point, the soldiers start
to shoot as well, and a lot of casualties occur on both sides.

Later, the surviving Indians manage to rejoin Little Wolf’s group.

After some time, they are found again by the Army, but at that moment Archer and Schurz arrive. Schurz insists on talking with Dull Knife and Little Wolf, although the Colonel of the regiment wants to attack.

Hence, Schurz, Archer, and the two Indians meet, and Schurz tell them that he understands them and that they deserve to live in their homeland. Therefore, in the end, the Indians manage to achieve their aim, and can live peacefully in the land where they were born.

One of the first aspects which are evident in the movie is that the Indians are in close contact with the Whites. This is a big difference to both *Stagecoach* and *Fort Apache*, where the Indians and the Whites are two entities completely separate from each other, although sometimes in contact (attack in *Stagecoach* and meetings/fights in *Fort Apache*).

In *Cheyenne Autumn*, Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and Spanish Woman can speak English well, and the Indian children go to school in the reservation, where their teacher Deborah (one of the Quakers) teaches them how to write, read, and speak English.

In fact, *Cheyenne Autumn* is set in a period when US government was carrying out an integration plan for the Indians. Before this plan, Indian policy was based on the removal of the Eastern tribes from their original territories to the so-called “Great American Desert” (today Great Plains), because it was assumed that this territory would never be interesting for the white men to live in. But this forecast was wrong, because the quick westward movement of the frontier caused several clashes between the white settlers and the Indians. Consequently, that area, which had been meant to be Indian property, started to
be violated by the Whites. For that reason, from the fifties, it became clear that it was necessary to make a change in Indian policy. Therefore, the plan of the removal was substituted by what Henry Fritz calls “the only practical and humane answer to the Indian problem”, that is to say, “to assimilate the Indians into Anglo-American culture”. Fritz continues: “The central question was, How could this be done? […] Administrators of Indian affairs sought to deal with the problem within the old legislative framework. Provision in treaties for teachers, farmers, blacksmiths, and carpenters who were to educate the natives became common during the fifties and sixties. Agency posts were established within fixed reserves for the accommodation of the agents and their employees, who were made responsible for both the discipline and the instruction of the Indians.” (16-19).

Despite this contact with the Whites and their culture, the Indians of Cheyenne Autumn maintain strong identity and traditions, which Ford shows throughout the movie. Although, as some critics have underlined, Ford is sometimes imprecise in depicting them, the fact that in Cheyenne Autumn he wants to show the Indians’ customs to the audience is a significant novelty in his movie production. Indeed, before this movie he tended to represent the Indians with dignity but with a certain detachment (Anderson 192). Indian traditions are evident from the very first scenes, for example when the Indians are praying the Spirits using their language. Later, Ford shows the passage of leadership from the old chief to Little Wolf and, just after that, he shows the old chief’s funeral. Feeling that he is about to die, the old man gives Little Wolf a cloth bundle, the symbol for leadership. Then he dies. At that point, the Indians hold the funeral, singing mournful songs, and the old man is buried. It is interesting to notice that Deborah is not
allowed to approach the dead old chief, which demonstrates that Indian identity is very strong among the tribe, in spite of the Whites’ assimilation plan. Throughout the movie, Ford also shows, though indirectly, the Indian marriage customs: we learn that Little Wolf has got two wives. When Dull Knife decides to go to Fort Robinson, the youngest wife leaves Little Wolf and joins the other group because she and Red Shirt (Dull Knife’s son) were infatuated with each other. For that reason, at the very end of the movie, Little Wolf challenges Red Shirt and kills him. Immediately after that, he yields his leadership to Dull Knife, because, as the narrative voice states, if a Cheyenne spills Cheyenne blood, he cannot be a chief any longer.

A further tradition shown by Ford is the use of the peace pipe, which the Indians used to smoke together in sign of peace. The pipe appears during the journey in a scene where Dull Knife and Little Wolf are talking to each other, and it appears again at the end, when the two chiefs meet Archer and Schurz and learn that they can stay in their homeland.

In addition to the scene where Deborah is not allowed to approach the old chief, the distinction between the White and the Indian worlds is evident thanks to the Dodge City scenes as well.

Anderson states that these scenes were inserted into the movie for a matter of length (193). Ford declared that he decided to add them as a comic element inside a story which he considered tragic (Tuska 61). Aside from the reasons why they were shot, I believe that the Dodge City scenes point out the distinction between the Whites and the Indians because they show the difference between their conditions: the Whites in Dodge City are having fun in the saloon, playing cards, drinking. Women are portrayed as coquettish, in their colorful dresses, and get offended if someone calls them “Madame” instead of
“Mademoiselle”, as if these were the real problems in life. Such a different picture from that of the Indians, whose strains and struggle are not only directly visible, but also always underlined by the narrative voice.

In fact, the narrative voice highlights the Indians' sufferings and the injustice to which they are subject from the very beginning of *Cheyenne Autumn*:

“[…] Far from their homeland, as out of place in this desert as eagles in a cage, their three great chiefs prayed over the sacred bundle that, at last, the promises made to them when the white man sent them here more than a year ago would today be honored. […]”

(*Cheyenne Autumn*)

Later, the narrative voice says:

“Sometimes the hungry Cheyennes were able to pick up a few stray cows. And sometimes they even begged for charity from the tough trail-hands.”

(*Cheyenne Autumn*)

Immediately after these words, the movie shows two Indians meeting a group of white cattlemen and asking them for some food. The cattlemen manifest an extreme cruelty, by shooting them in cold blood and killing one of them. Not satisfied with the killing, the murderers scalp the poor dead Indian, so that they can brag about having killed him. Not only did the Indians suffer from
starvation and tiredness, but they also had to face the Whites' racism and lack of piety.

The narrative voice constantly underlines how bad situation is bad for the Indians:

“Always, they had to move through unwanted and desolate country, where the chances of detection and capture were fewer. And there the land was poor and wild game rare. Always, hunger baited their heels more fiercely than the soldiers.”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

All these words demonstrate that the Indians are the victims in the story. Actually, Ford seems to exploit any moment in the movie to underline this fact. There are several scenes where Ford shoots the multitude of the Indians walking slowly in the desert; men, women, and children traveling towards their promised land. These are scenes rich in pathos.

The depiction of the Indians' situation often reaches tragic tones, for example, when one little girl gets injured during the first clash with the army; or when Deborah wants to give her some water, but she finds that her canteen contains just a few drops, because the water reserve is almost gone. Or, again, when the little girl draws a buffalo and admits that she does not even remember well what a buffalo looks like, meaning that the Indians have been suffering from hunger for a very long time, since they had arrived at the reservation.

However, though he depicts them as victims, Ford always represents the Indians' strong dignity and sense of honor as well. This is evident at the
beginning of the movie, when, during the endless wait for the Washington congressmen, the old chief falls down but refuses any help in getting up, because he knows that he can do it on his own.

Of course, the Indians’ dignity is perceivable through their decision to react and depart, despite all the difficulties that they will have to face during their journey.

Also, they are always ready to fight, if necessary, for example at the beginning of the movie – when the first clash with the army occurs – or towards the end, when they jump out of the warehouse in order to leave Fort Robinson.

Before this event, Dull Knife and Spanish Woman give voice to the Indians’ dignity and honor during the conversation with Captain Wessels, who had entered the warehouse to inform the Indians that they have to go back to the reservation:

Wessels: “You, Dull Knife. You and your people will be prepared to start south in the morning.”
Dull Knife: “We will not go back.”
Wessels: “You have no other choice.”
Dull Knife: “If you try to force us, first I die. We will not go back.”

[...]
Wessels (to Spanish Woman): “[...] They must obey just as I obey.”
Spanish Woman: “They will not go back. Life there is not life. They will die here.”
Wessels: “Authority must and will be obeyed.”
Spanish Woman: “They will die here.”
Wessels: “There will be no more food, no more water. And... And no
more firewood, until they change their minds.”
Spanish Woman: “They will not go back.”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

This scene allows one to get to know Captain Wessels. He is one of the officers present in Cheyenne Autumn, and represents a specific kind of attitude. Indeed, as in Fort Apache, in Cheyenne Autumn most Whites are soldiers, and there are different kinds of them.

Captain Wessels is a very strict commander. His strictness consists of a maniacal will to obey the orders of his superiors, without caring about the consequences. The fundamental thing for him is just to obey.

This feature in Wessels's behavior is also underlined by Cowie, who states that Wessels is obsessed with the “chain of command”, and this a consequence of the iron military discipline to which he has been subject since the beginning of his military life. Wessels's strictness about orders is evident in the above conversation, but it is perceivable in a previous scene as well, when he receives a telegram with the order to send the Indians back to the reservation:

Wessels (reading the telegram): "Omaha. Cheyennes are to be kept under restraint and then returned south as soon as the escort troop has arrived."
Archer: “But they surrendered voluntarily.”
Wessels: “Oh, this is simply a military routine. They escaped from a reservation and are to be returned there.”
Archer: “Murder's not routine. These people could never survive that march in the dead of winter.”
Wessels: “Captain Archer, I feel as you do, but this is an order.”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

Actually, Wessels disagrees with the order, because he knows that Archer is right. But, despite his attempt to be allowed to make the Indians depart in spring – which fails – his obsession for orders never disappears:

Wessels: “This order came to me and to me is the responsibility.”

*[
...
]*

Wessels: “They have given me an order. An order. I questioned it once, it will not be questioned again.”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

It sometimes feels as if he uses obedience to orders as a mean to justify himself for sending the Indians to certain death, as is evident in the conversation with the military doctor, in which Wessler reaffirms that he disagrees with the order, but that he is bound to respect it:

Doctor: “The question is, do you want to be responsible?”
Wessels: “Responsible? I am responsible for nothing. None of them had to die. They could’ve walked out of there any time they liked. I have simply been the instrument of an order. An order I did not agree with.”
Doctor: “You say that as if you’ve memorized it.”
Wessels: “Why? Why do you talk to me? Why don’t you talk to those Indians? That is where the blame is. Any time. Any time they could’ve ended this.”

Doctor: “First, it was the order from headquarters. Now, it’s the Indians. Everybody is to blame but you.”

Wessels: “I will not stand for any more insubordination!”

Doctor: “The truth of the matter is that you’ve...”

Wessels: “Get out!”

Doctor: “...let this become a test of wills between you and the Cheyenne. You have made it your own personal fight.”

Wessels: “You are a liar. You lie! Nothing I have done is personal. I am a soldier. I was a soldier in Prussia, and I am a soldier here. All my life, I have given and taken orders. What would be this world without orders, huh? What would be? Chaos. Anarchy. That’s what would be. [...]”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

In fact, it is possible that Wessels acts that way as a matter of personal glory as well, since at the beginning, when the Indians arrive at Fort Robinson, he states happily that their arrival at his fort will make him a major. However, the strictness regarding orders seems to prevail over personal profit. Both aspects make this character similar to Colonel Thursday in *Fort Apache*. Indeed, Wessels is a type of soldier who carries out his duties without being able to balance the performance of them with his own good sense.

This is also what happens to the Colonel who appears at the end of the movie, when the soldiers are about to attack the Indians, but Archer and Schurz arrive
and prevent the fight:

Colonel: “You see those guns, Mr. Secretary?”
Schurz: “Yes.”
Colonel: “Well, in just about one minute now, sir...”
Schurz: “Yes, I know, I know. You’re all set. But not before I’ve had a chance to talk to those Indians.”
Colonel: “Well, now this is hardly a civilian matter, Mr. Secretary.”
[…]
Colonel: “I have my orders from General Sheridan, sir.”
Colonel: “Well, no, of course, sir, but I have...”
Schurz: “Then you’ll be pleased I came.”
Colonel: “The orders have been changed?”
Schurz: “The ground that you’re standing on is property controlled by the Department of the Interior. Now, I either parley with those Cheyennes, or I consider you and your troops trespassers.”
Colonel: “Well, that’s absurd, Mr. Secretary.”
Schurz: “Colonel, I know I may be on shaky legal ground, but that’s for the courts to decide.”
[…]

(Cheyenne Autumn)

The Colonel does not even consider the issue of being about to attack innocent
people; he has received orders, therefore he has to obey.
The same thing occurs at the beginning of the movie, just before the first clash, when the Major commanding the troops orders the attack, despite the presence of children and women among the Indians:

    Archer: “Stop! Major, I’ve got to tell you...”
    Major: “Go back to your troop!”
    Archer: “...the majority of those people are women and children! Maybe 50 or 60 warriors.”
    Major: “Archer, you’re under arrest!”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

The major’s arrogance again reminds one of Thursday, when, before the massacre, he dismisses York because he has questioned his orders.

    Therefore, it is clear that *Cheyenne Autumn* presents some negative soldiers, some “Thursdays”.

But, following the parallel with *Fort Apache*, it is true that there are some “Yorks” as well; that is to say, some soldiers able to use good sense and to understand the Indians somehow. These soldiers give the army much positive value.

    First of all, one of them is Captain Archer. He manifests a certain objectivity in the way he sees the Indians. It is often clear that he respects and somehow understands them, for example when in Fort Robinson he positively objects to their return to the reservation in winter, or when he decides to use part of his rest month to depart and talk to Schurz. During the meeting with the Secretary,
Archer takes the side Indians, and asks Schurz to help them.
Archer is able to go beyond racial prejudices and the simple and mechanical execution of orders, and to see the Indians in their humanity, not as mere objects to fight. I think that one of the most significant scenes in this sense is the one in which Archer goes to Fort Robinson infirmary, where the wounded little girl has just been operated on; he comes close to her and kisses her.
On the other hand, it is important to underline that, although he understands them, Archer does not see the Indians simply as victims; that is to say, he is also aware of their bellicosity and of their being warriors. He expresses this awareness during a conversation with Deborah, at the beginning of the movie, the day before the Indians depart from the reservation. Deborah has decided to stay inside the school, even though on that day the Indians have not let their children go to attend her class:

Archer: “Bunking in this schoolhouse won't help.”
Deborah: “It will show them that I'm on their side.”
Archer: “Not unless you can change color. You know what they call Whites? Vehos. And veho means...”
Deborah: “Means "spider"!”
Archer: “Means “spider”, that's right. That's what they think of all of us.”
Deborah: “And why shouldn't they? How many Cheyennes have you fought? How many have you killed?”
Archer: “Deborah, look, will you take the blinders off just for once? You claim no self-respecting Quaker could fall in love with a soldier... but you've fallen in love with a whole tribe of them. Have you ever seen a Cheyenne?”
Deborah: “Of course, I have.”
Archer: “No, you haven’t! All you’ve seen is reservation Indians, looking pitiful as fish out of water. But give them a chance, they’re the greatest fighters in the world. Will you listen to me? It takes a blue coat to make a white man a soldier. But a Cheyenne is a soldier from the first slap on his bottom. War is his life. He’s fierce, he’s smart. And he’s meaner than sin.”
Deborah: “Possibly you can only think of the past, but I’m here to think about the future.”
[…]

(Cheyenne Autumn)

Cowie states that this conversation, especially the claim that the Indians are meaner than sin, shows Archer’s racism towards them, which eventually fades away. In my opinion, talking about racism is too extreme. Rather, this conversation shows that Archer, as stated above, is objective in his vision of the Indians. He knows that they are victims, but he also knows that they are not poor helpless men.

Despite the fact that he objects to obeys orders when they are absurd, Archer is a person faithful to rules. This is evident at the beginning, when he does not want to attack the Indians because they have not passed the reservation borders yet, and therefore, as a rule, the army has no right to attack. This feature is Archer’s character, together with his understanding of the Indians, allows him never to act under the impulse of his personal interests or personal motives; that, of course, makes him a good soldier:
Archer: “Scott, tell me something.”
Lieutenant Scott: “Sir?”
Archer: “What put the blood in your eye?”
Scott: “It’s just a private matter, sir.”
Archer: “Nothing that affects an officer’s conduct is private.”
Scott: “My father died in the Fetterman Massacre back in ’66. Mother and I were at the fort when they brought his body in. I was only 10 years old. Until that time, I never wanted to be a soldier.”
Archer: “Well, that doesn’t give you a personal license to kill Indians. The job of this Army is to keep the peace.”
Scott: “I understand, sir.”
Archer: “You do, huh? Well, just make sure you understand... these Cheyenne broke no law when they left the Agency. And they won’t unless they cross the river. So if you provoke trouble, I’ll see that you lose those shoulder straps...even if I have to tear them off myself. Understood?”
Scott: “Understood, sir.”
Archer: “Mr. Scott!”
Scott: “Sir?”
Archer: “I knew your father.”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

After some minutes, the soldiers see the Indians crossing the river:

Scott: “Sir!”
Archer: “Yes.”

Scott: “Are you going to let them jump the reservation right bef-”

Archer: “They haven't jumped the reservation. They haven't crossed the river yet.”

Scott: “Sir, I most respectfully object to...”

Archer: “Put it in writing. Join your troop, mister.”

Scott: “Sir.”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

Of course, these two scenes show a big contrast between Archer and Lieutenant Scott. Scott is a young soldier, excited by the idea of fighting for his country. It is possible to correlate him to Red Shirt, who can be considered his Indian alter-ego. Both young men manifest a certain enthusiasm for fighting. Scott, as seen, wants to attack the Indians from the beginning of the chase, and eventually leads his troop against the Indians, in spite of Archer's order not to attack. This action will cause the loss of some army wagons and the injuring of Scott himself.

Red Shirt manifests his urge for fighting on the occasion of the first clash with the army, because it is he who starts to fire. He shoots cheerfully, laughing, as if he is taking part in a game instead of a battle. At the end of the movie, the young warrior shows the same euphoria when he shoots Archer and Schurz while they are approaching the Indians in order to parlay. In both cases, the young Indian is reproached by the chiefs, just as Archer reprimands Scott for his harmful initiative.

Scott and Red Shirt represent a superficial approach to war, because they lack
the good sense and wisdom which the older fighters obviously possess. Ford condemns the behavior of the two young men, and that is clear because, at the end of the movie, Ford makes this behavior dissipate, which means that he defends a less radical attitude. Indeed, when Archer and Schurz are going to talk to Dull Knife and Little Wolf, Ford frames Scott nodding his head as a sign of approval, which signifies that eventually Scott has understood that trying to find a pacific solution is better than fighting. And, after the Indians have arrived at their homeland, Ford shows the death of Red Shirt. As already said, he is killed because he had stolen Little Wolf’s wife, but I think that his death is also symbolic, since it is not just the death of this young Indian, it is also the death of what he represents – that is to say, that superficial and thoughtless approach to war.

Back to the positive white characters, a part from Captain Archer there is Sergeant Wichowsky. Wichowsky is in Fort Robinson; one night, Archer goes to him in order to make him sign his enlistment (since it had expired some time before). Wichowsky is tipsy, but what he tells Archer is very deep and meaningful:

[…]

Archer: “You’re re-enlisting as of right now.”
Wichowsky: “Oh, no, I ain’t.”
Archer: “Oh, yes, you are.”
Wichowsky: “You wanna know why?”
Archer: “Why?”
Wichowsky: “I’m a Pole.”
Archer: “Really?”
Wichowsky: “You know what they have in Poland besides Poles?”

Archer: “What have they got?”

Wichowsky: “They’ve got Cossacks. You know what a Cossack is?”

Archer: “What?”

Wichowsky: “A Cossack is a man on a horse, with a fur cap on his head and a saber in his hand. Now he kills Poles just because they’re Poles. Like we’re trying to kill Indians just because they’re Indians. I was proud to be an American soldier. But I ain’t proud to be a Cossack.”

Archer: “Wichowsky, you’ve fought Indians before.”

Wichowsky: “I fought Indians who wanted to fight me. Not just some poor, starving blanket-heads trying to go home!”

Archer: “All right, Mr. Wichowsky. Did you say you had a drink for me?”

Wichowsky: “Well, sure, Tom!”

Archer: “Thank you very much, Stanislaus.”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

Like Archer, Wichowsky sees the Indians’ humanity, and understands their point of view. Therefore, Archer accepts his decision not to sign the document. However, like Archer, Wichowsky feels his duty towards the army. That is why the next morning he presents himself in his uniform, and decides to take part in Archer’s troop. This is not a denial of what he had said the night before; it is a demonstration of the fact that Wichowsky, as well as Archer, is able to balance his duty with his respect for the Indians. That is the image of soldier which Ford wants to promote.

Another positive army character is the doctor. He is asked by Deborah to
do something in favor of the Indians. He is worried about doing anything, because he knows that disobeying Wessels’ order – to imprison the Indians in the warehouse without any food or fire – would risk his career in the army. Nevertheless, he decides to act by facing Wessels and imprisoning him in his billet, because he considers the Indians' lives more important than his job.

Among the white characters who do not belong to the army, some words must be said about Deborah, because she is one of the central characters of *Cheyenne Autumn*. Deborah manifests solidarity and love for the Indians from the very beginning of the movie, when she begs Major Braden and Captain Archer, who are going to Fort Reno after they have learned that the Washington congressmen will not arrive, to give voice to the Indians’ needs:

Deborah: “Friend major, please... will you tell them about the medicine and the food the Indians need? And all the things that were promised?”

[…]

Deborah: “You've been here from the beginning. You've watched them die of smallpox and measles and malaria. You've watched them starve. Haven't you anything to say?”

[…]

Deborah: “I'm asking you to plead for justice. I'm asking you to make them realize that over a thousand Cheyennes were brought here, and only 286 are left alive.”

[…]

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*
Deborah is completely dedicated to the Indians’ cause, and that is why she chooses to follow them in their long and weary journey, using her little wagon to transport the children, to whom she behaves like a mother.

Last but not least, there is Carl Shurz. I believe that Schurz is a fundamental character in Cheyenne Autumn, because he is one of those Washington politicians who usually prefer staying in the shadow, washing their hands of everything. Otherwise than the others, Shurz does care about the Indians’ situation and the problems that the army has to face because of that situation. He is an honest man and wants to find a fair solution. That is why he decides to go and talk to the Indians himself, together with Archer.

The depiction of such a positive character among white politicians is a way Ford uses in order not to discredit US leading political class completely. That, of course, reveals the deep love which Ford felt towards his country. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Ford is not heavy-handed on the faults of US government.

In fact, what emerges from the beginning, is that the people who can truly be blamed for the Indians’ bad situation in the reservation and for the following events are the big Washington chiefs. They miss the meeting with the Indians at the beginning of the movie, and they presume they handle the situation even though actually they do not even know what an Indian looks like. They act or intervene only for their personal and economic interests. The conversation between Schurz and the Eastern senators is highly illuminating in this sense:

Schurz: “Mr. Senator? Have you ever seen a Cheyenne? An Arapaho?
Any Indian? Have you ever been west of the Mississippi River?”
Senator 1: “What are you driving at, sir?”

Schurz: “Well, just this. Why are three eastern senators suddenly so concerned about Indians?”

Senator 2: “Well, it’s strictly a matter of economy. The Army has to be out there anyway.”

Schurz: “Oh, so that’s all it is. I was afraid perhaps that some of the dollar patriots who are sleeping on my doorstep might have been sleeping on yours.”

Senator 1: “Sir, are you questioning our honesty of purpose?”

Schurz: “No more than I question theirs. Their honest purpose is to grab every acre of land the Indians once thought they owned.”

Senator 2: “You can’t say that’s Army policy.”

Schurz: “Well, I can say it amounts to the same thing. The smaller the reservations, the easier they are to guard. You let the Army have its way and they’ll end up the size of postage stamps. Exactly what the land-grabbers want.”

[...] 

(Cheyenne Autumn)

What emerges in the movie is that the real blame for the Indians' conditions in the reservation and for the confrontations between the Indians and the Whites is not imputable to the army itself (even though not all the soldiers are positive characters), but to the people leading the game from the background. Besides, as Deborah tells Dull Knife, the army has to chase them, meaning that the soldiers have no direct responsibility in the chase.
Actually, the culprits for the situation which results from the Indians’ departure are not only politicians, but all those people who take advantage of the Indians’ circumstances, even by distorting reality. Journalists spread false news and, in order to sell their newspapers, they keep on publishing new articles even when the Indians are not traceable any longer. Other speculators encourage the spread of this false news because they would like to take advantage on the hatred and fears towards the Indians that the population is starting to feel.

The narrative voice evidences that from the beginning of the movie, after the first clash:

“The report from the Army’s field telegrapher to headquarters in Omaha listed only nine casualties incurred in the troop’s first encounter with the homeward-bound Cheyennes. But by the time it came off the press in Kansas City somehow it had mysteriously grown to 29. And suddenly it expanded to 59, 69, 109 when the news reached the tiny hamlets of the Western Plains. […] No one asked how many Indians had escaped. The word “Cheyenne” was enough. And in Washington heated words echoed through the Halls of Congress. The Department of the Interior was crowded with western railroad tycoons, mine owners and land speculators. […]”

*(Cheyenne Autumn)*

It is a situation in which any rumor can be believed, and the truth is impossible to find. That is what Wyatt Earp tells the mayor in Dodge City, when he is asked to do something to protect the city from the Indians:
Mayor: “Wyatt, have you read a paper in a week? Well, just listen to this: "Several herders murdered. Farmhouses burned down. Straggling bands of Indians raiding everywhere. Immigrant trains robbed." Wyatt! Wyatt!”

[...]

Wyatt Earp: “[...] Now, mayor, about all these things you read in the newspaper. Now, did you ever in your whole life read anything true in that paper?”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

And that is also what emerges from Schurz's words to Archer during their meeting:

Schurz: “I’d like to know why you're risking your career, your commission by questioning superior authority. I’d like to know, confidentially, the truth. I don’t often manage to hear it.”

Archer: “Well, sir. At Fort Robinson, I’ve seen respect for superior authority gone stark raving mad. Those Indians are dying of cold and starvation in that prison.”

[...]

Archer: “Sir, I only know what those Cheyennes have gone through. If the people had seen it, they wouldn't have liked it.”

[...]

(Cheyenne Autumn)
The last sentence pronounced by Archer is extremely important. He mentions the people, that is to say, those common white people who do not have personal and economic interests behind the events, and just read and believe the newspapers, because they do not have any other possibility to access the truth. They are not to be blamed, because if they just knew, they would not feel those negative feelings towards the Indians. That is remarked by Schurz as well, during the meeting with Dull Knife and Little Wolf:

Schurz: “Now, please listen to me. Please. You’ve made one of the most heroic marches in history. You deserve to go back to your homeland and stay there in peace. I’m sure that the people of this country will understand and will agree, when they hear the facts. […]”
Dull Knife: “The people? Who will tell them? Who will tell the people about Fort Robinson?”
Schurz: “I will. I promise you.”

(Cheyenne Autumn)

These statements regarding the people demonstrate that, although Cheyenne Autumn is a pro-Indian movie, Ford does not condemn white society as a whole, but just a specific category. He has faith in the white people, underlining how often it is misinformation and ignorance that lead common people to act in a certain way (in this case, to hate and fear the Indians).

I think that Ford’s trust in the Whites is also proved by the happy ending of the movie, because it does not correspond to what happened historically.
According to historical events, after their escape from Fort Robinson, Dull Knife and his group were chased again by the army for a long time, during which they had to face several battles. The few survivors, in the end, managed to reach the Sioux Reservation of Pine Ridge (South Dakota). Little Wolf’s group, instead, spent the winter in Montana's forests, where they could hide from the soldiers. Only in spring did Little Wolf obtain permission to stay in their land, where a new reservation was created. After some time, Dull Knife and the others who were with him were transferred to the new reservation as well.

In *Cheyenne Autumn*, Ford solves the situation through the character of Schurz, who prevents a further fight by promising the Indians a peaceful life in their homeland.

In his analysis of the movie, Lenihan states that Ford’s insistence on the expression of the Whites’ faults throughout the movie proves that Ford does not really believe Schurz’s final words about the possibility of a happy and quiet life for the Indians. Lenihan thinks that Ford shows this possibility without thinking that it could occur.

I believe that the end of *Cheyenne Autumn*, on the contrary, is an expression of trust by Ford, both towards the Whites and towards the possibility of a dialogue between them and the Indians.

Therefore, *Cheyenne Autumn* is a movie which takes the side of the Indians, but maintains a sense of optimism for white society and for a meeting ground between the two cultures.
Chapter 4.
Ford's Indians in History

As is evident from the first three chapters, Ford’s representation of the Indians changed considerably between the release of *Stagecoach* and the last period of his career, when *Cheyenne Autumn* was shot.

In *Stagecoach* the Indians are depicted as a menace; their world is completely separate from the white one. They represent the Whites’ enemies (although there is no absolute condemnation of them on the part of Ford), and their psychology is not developed.

*Fort Apache* displays a more positive image of the Indians. The point of view is still white, but the Indians’ reasons are stated clearly; the Indians’ psychological dimension is deeper, especially thanks to the character of Cochise, who is depicted as a wise and admirable chief, and whose figure elevates the Indians’ image in the movie, thus allowing a balanced and fairly objective vision on the Whites and the Indians.

In *Cheyenne Autumn* the Indians are the center of the story. The movie embodies their point of view, and they are depicted as the dignified victims of the white world. The Indian characters are well developed, and the main ones show their own personality. Indian traditions and customs are shown as well.

The way Ford pictures the Indians has been widely analyzed by critics. Nolley (80/81) states that the image of the Indians is quite negative in Ford’s movies, but that this feature started to change in his late production, especially in movies like *The Searchers* (1956) and, mostly, *Cheyenne Autumn*.

Indeed, *The Searchers* is a movie in which Ford depicts both the savageness of
the Indians and the cruelty of the Whites, thus offering an objective vision on both sides (Nolley 80/81). Moreover, as Cowie (99) and Baxter (152) underline, this movie acknowledges the possibility of a dialogue between the two parts, through the character of the mixed-blood Martin. Martin is both a white and an Indian, and he can find his place in society by marrying a white girl; thus, he embodies the convergence between the two cultures.

These critics highlight Ford's ability to shows the Whites' faults, if necessary, and to see that a common ground between them and the Indians is not impossible to find.

However, there are other critics, like Tuska (52-56), who believe that Ford’s movies express racist ideas towards the Indians. Tuska dedicated to Ford an entire chapter of his book *The American West in Film*, in which he analyzes Ford’s movie production on the base of this racist theme. According to him, Ford was completely ignorant about Indians and he was contemptuous towards them. When he talks about *The Searchers*, for example, Tuska states that this movie is the most anti-Indian among all Ford's movies, because Ford overemphasizes the cruelty of the Indians as much as he can.

As my personal analysis of *Stagecoach*, *Fort Apache*, and *Cheyenne Autumn* shows, I believe that Ford cannot be considered a racist. It is true that his personality was complex, and that he sometimes expressed discordant ideas with regards to different themes, for example politics or art. That makes it difficult to delineate a definite profile of him, but I think that his attitude towards the Indians is not surrounded by mystery, but is fairly clear. In fact, Ford once declared that his sympathy had always been with the Indians (Nolley 82), and he actually had a very good relationship with the Navajo tribe. As Cowie declares (162-168), the Navajos were often hired by Ford to play the
Indians' roles in his movies, even if the Indians of the story were not Navajos (nevertheless, he usually used white actors for leading Indian roles). For example, the Apaches of *Stagecoach* and the Cheyennes of *Cheyenne Autumn* were played by Navajo actors. That, of course, helped the economy of the Navajo Reservation (Arizona). Once, Ford saw that the Navajos received enough supplies from the U.S. Military during an extremely cold winter, and he even gave the tribe some buildings which had been part of the set for *My Darling Clementine* (1946) as a present. Therefore, as a demonstration of friendship, in 1955 the Navajos decided to give Ford a honorary membership in the Navajo tribe.

Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that Ford often (especially before the late forties) seemed to take the parts of the Whites in his movies; once he declared: “I've killed more Indians than Custer, Beecher, Chivington put together [...]” (Tuska 60). This sort of incongruity in Ford’s attitude towards the Indians has to be attributed to the historical moment when each movie was shot, rather than to a real personal contempt towards them.

Despite the fact that Ford had a very strong personality, which always emerges in all his movies, it is also true that his movie production, as well as Hollywood movies in general, could not disregard the political, social, and cultural situation of the moment.

Therefore, back to the three movies which have been analyzed in this thesis, it is possible to see how the depiction of the Indians partly depends on that situation, apart, of course, on Ford's personal point of view.

*Stagecoach* and the other movies which were shot during the thirties and until the Second World War, were influenced by two main events: the economic
crisis of 1929, and, with regard to the movies shot between the last years of the thirties and the beginning of the forties, by the outbreak of the Second World War as well. Both these events led movie directors and scriptwriters to depict the Indians as a threat, and as an entity in contrast to the Whites, from which the Whites needed to defend themselves.

After 1929, U.S. had to face a very harsh period, because the Country had to rise again and be reconstructed. Therefore, it was necessary to promote and divulge strong values, like patriotism and national identity, in order to strengthen the Country. That is why in this period most westerns (Stagecoach as well) show the Indians as threatening enemies to fight; the plots of these movies had to symbolize the fight between U.S. people and the difficulties and adversities which were striking the Country because of the crisis, and which are identified with the Indians in the movies. Thus, in that historical context, it was necessary that the Indians were depicted in that way; this is also the reason why, as stated in the first chapter, Ford had to eliminate the written introduction after the initial credits, which informed the audience that the Indians were trying to oust the white invaders (D’Angela 33). Calling the Whites “invaders” was a too filo-Indian act for that period.

Moreover, Stagecoach also reflects another fact, which was a consequence of the ’29 crisis. Indeed, after the crisis, a great number of Americans left the Eastern states in order to reach the western states, like California and Nevada, in search of fortune. The dangerous journey that these people had to make is mirrored in Stagecoach’s plot, which tells the story of a group of white people traveling through the desert, always threatened by the Indians’ presence, again a symbol for the problems and difficulties that the crisis had caused.

The outbreak of the Second World War, as already mentioned, affected the
westerns of the last years of the thirties and the very first years of the forties. In these movies, the Indians also represent the external dangers to the U.S., that is to say, the international enemies that the country would have to face in the following years. *Stagecoach* is one of these movies. It was shot two years before the U.S. entered the war, but, as well as other movies shot immediately before the war, its depiction of the Indians perfectly mirrors the sense of suspicion towards the external and towards all those people who, somehow, departed from the image and the values of the dominant (white) society.

After the Second World War the situation changed and, consequently, the way the Indians were depicted in movies. The end of the war produced the hope of living at peace, and the desire to find a pacific remedy to the possible future conflicts, either national or international. For that reason, in the westerns released in this period, the Indians are not depicted as sworn enemies to fight, but as enemies with whom it is possible to debate and avoid a direct clash. These movies were meant to show that it was possible and desirable to find a pacific solution between the two parts, and they had to defend the idea of a harmonious coexistence of different people. *Fort Apache* embodies this mood. Actually, this movie displays the clash between the Whites and the Indians, but its message is that this clash could have been avoided, if Thursday had been more humble and had listened to the Indians' reasons. Indeed, after the final massacre, Cochise moves away from York, meaning that carrying on the battle does not make any sense. Therefore, Ford underlines that to find a common ground between different cultures is possible.

The period between the release of *Fort Apache* and *Cheyenne Autumn* was a very peculiar one for the US and it led to a further change in the depiction of
the Indians in westerns. Indeed, at the very beginning of the fifties, the country started to face more and more the fear for communism. Events like the victory of the Communist Party in China (1949) and, moreover, the outbreak of the Korean War (1950) caused the raise of a growing fear for communism. Communism became the biggest enemy to fight, both inside and outside the U.S.; therefore it was necessary to convince the people that this fight was indispensable and just. That is why, in the westerns shot during the first half of the fifties, the Indians restarted to be depicted as cruel and heartless enemies whom the Whites had the right and the duty to fight; they were the symbols for communists, and the representation of their fights with the Whites was meant to justify U.S. national and international anti-communism policy of that period. Some movies shot in these years, like Rudolph Maté's *The Siege at Red River* (1954), even showed Yankees and Confederates helping each other to fight the Indians, meaning that the U.S. had to collaborate with some countries which had been enemies during the Second World War, in order to defeat communism, their common enemy (Lenihan 32).

Ford's movie *Rio Bravo* (1950) is a clear example of this mentality. It offers an awful representation of the Indians, so much so that Joseph McBride stated that in this movie Ford seems to consider the “Red Indians” more as “reds” (i.e. communists), than as “Indians” (Cowie 136).

In fact, it is important to underline that during this period Hollywood was strictly supervised by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), a committee of the House of Representatives, which had the function of investigating any suspicious activity that could be linked to communism. HUAC dealt with any sphere of American life, and its supervision of Hollywood directors, actors, and producers was extremely intense.
However, between the second half of the fifties and the sixties, there occurred a strong change in the representation of the Indians in movies. That happened because in this period there began to develop some different feelings among the population with regards to the communist issue. The aggressive international policy led by the government and, later, the involvement in the Vietnam War, created a deep malcontent among U.S. citizens. Therefore, some western movies started to give voice to these feelings, by the depiction of the Indians as victims and by a clear display of their reasons. *Cheyenne Autumn*, fits this new way of picturing the Indians and their stories, and that is clear because in this movie the Indians are presented as victims of the Whites. Nevertheless, that does not mean that here they are identified with the victims of the wars which the U.S. were fighting for defeating communism in the world. In fact, it is extremely important to underline that I am not stating that Ford condemns the fight against communism. Interpreting *Cheyenne Autumn* in that way would be a mistake; doing so would misrepresent the figure of Ford, who was not a communist and who, as already stated, never condemns the Whites completely.

In fact, this analysis of the image of the Indians in westerns, which I have developed in this chapter, must not be absolutized: doing so would mean to ignore all the other implications, personal ones as well, which have inspired the various directors in their own depiction of the Indians.

My analysis is meant to show how western movies, particularly *Stagecoach, Fort Apache*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the historical moment when they were shot.

Thus, it is clear that cinema often used the figure of the Indians in order to
display the historical situation of the moment. That made the Indians the undisputed protagonists of western cinema. But, at the same time, this also created and divulged among the white audience a distorted image of the Indians’ actual reality.
Chapter 5.

“Massacro” (1947)

Ci sono cose che nessun soldato dice. E così tutto il mondo, eccetto un tenente dalle labbra cucite, crede che il maggiore sia morto con gli uomini che aveva condotto al massacro.

Il vento soffiava dall’est, e può esservi una grande irrequietezza d’animo nel vento dell’est, uno spettrale fruscio di promesse non mantenute. Flintridge Cohill si svegliò di soprassalto e rimase sdraiato completamente immobile, come era solito fare, finché non si rese conto che si trovava al sicuro nel suo alloggio a Fort Starke. Fece scivolare una mano verso il fucile a ripetizione e tolse la sicura. L’orologio segnava le tre e tre quarti. E, appena il flebile trillo risuonò nel buio, Flint si ritrovò di nuovo bambino, a guadare suo padre, il capitano, mentre risaliva a passi rabbiosi il sentiero verso il loro alloggio a Sackets Harbor, sette anni prima di Sumter, spalancava la porta con una spinta e scagliava il cappello sul tavolo di palissandro nella sala. “Molly, alla fine hanno convinto Grant. Si è congedato... per il bene del servizio!”. Perché quelle cose dovevano tornargli alla mente anni dopo? Un amico di suo padre. Un certo capitano in servizio a Fort Humboldt. Un ufficiale che aveva combattuto a Contreras e Chapultepec con suo padre.

Flint si sedette dritto sul letto. “Buon Dio, scommetto che era il Generale Grant!”, disse a voce alta, e mugugnò. “E anche se fosse, che differenza fa alle quattro meno un quarto del mattino, vent’anni dopo?”. Poi sentì in distanza il
rumore cadenzato di piedi in corsa.
Gli stivali di qualcuno che picchiavano sul pavimento di legno del quartier generale. Il suono rimbombava attraverso il piazzale fino alla strada, trasportato dal vento dell'est. Da un momento all'altro avrebbero suonato l'allarme antincendio o qualcuno avrebbe chiamato a gran voce il caporale della guardia. Cohill si precipitò fuori dal letto e uscì sulla veranda adiacente al suo alloggio. Dall'altra parte dello spiazzo, nell'oscurità, c'era un carro accanto al quartier generale. Un carro attaccato a cavalli irrequeti che facevano cigolare i perni delle stanghe.

Ci vorranno ancora venti anni prima che io abbia a portata di tiro le stellette di ufficiale generale – come Grant e il Vecchio – e a quel punto non mi importerà più. Non sarà mai così importante come diventare capitano, tra qualche anno ancora. Ma vorrei essere un generale, prima di morire, il miglior generale del mondo -dannazione- nel posto giusto al momento giusto! Siamo solo a metà mese, e quello lì è il carro di un ufficiale pagatore. Riesco a vedere il vetro che luccica come argento alla luce delle stelle, come lo specchio di acqua che si crea quando viene rovesciata da un secchio.3

I calzoni che si era infilato erano freddi e gli stivali rigidi i denti gli battevano nel vento dell'est; correva veloce e silenzioso attraverso l'oscurità vivida del piazzale, pullulante di vita, e da qualche parte nell'anticamera della sua mente risuonava fastidioso il nome di Custis Meacham, agente indiano a White River. Cosa erano quelle associazioni misteriose?
Qualcuno gli correva incontro. Si voltò allargando le braccia e si chinò in modo da distinguere contro il chiarore relativo del cielo la sagoma di chiunque avesse davanti.4 “Brailey?”

3 La versione originale riporta l'espressione “bucket-flung water”; l'ho tradotta con una perifrasi, cercando di mantenere il più possibile l'immagine poetica che la versione inglese riesce a dare con due sole parole.
4 Il testo originale riporta: “He pivoted with flung arms, bending down to silhouette whoever it was
Brailey gli si avvicinò. “Signor Cohill, signore, ho ricevuto ordine di chiamare Voi, il Signor Sitterding e il Signor Topliff. Siete richiesti al quartier generale, signore”.

E Cohill disse: “Cos’ha a che fare con questo il carro dell’ufficiale pagatore, Brailey?”

“Il nuovo comandante è arrivato a bordo di quel carro. Ha viaggiato tutta la notte da Indian Wells”.

Owen Thursday era un uomo alto, dal fisico asciutissimo. Qualunque cosa facesse, si muoveva senza sosta, non in modo nervoso, ma guidato da un’irrequietezza istintiva; non in modo impaziente, ma con l’eco di un destino perduto. Maggiore Generale onorario Thursday, del reparto di Clarke, Thursday di Cumberland Station e di Sudler’s Mountain, a ventisei anni. Ora, a trentotto, un maggiore di cavalleria tornato nei bassi ranghi, con la fiamma della gloria che ardeva bassa al suo orizzonte (“Non so che cosa eravate abituato a fare in simili circostanze quando eravate al comando della vostra divisione, maggiore, ma finché avrete un battaglione nel mio reggimento, Voi dovrete...”), perché è infinitamente peggio elevarsi e ritornare giù in basso piuttosto che non elevarsi affatto. E le città del mondo dovrebbero rimanere solo una visione. Perché pochi uomini possono camminare per le loro strade e poi tornare a vivere con animo sereno nella tranquillità dei propri villaggi.

“Tenente Cohill, signore”; il buio era vivo e furtivo, come un grosso gatto. In esso vi erano un’umidità fredda e il debole sospiro della minaccia. Un cavallo emise un forte nitrito acuto. Vicino, quando il gruppetto passò accanto al carro dell’ufficiale pagatore, i finestrini di vetro luccicarono neri, come brillante ebano against the lighter darkness of the sky.” Inizialmente, ho optato per questa versione: “Si voltò con le braccia in alto, chinandosi in modo da distinguere contro l’oscurità più diradata del cielo chiunque avesse davanti”. Nella versione finale ho deciso di aggiungere la parola “sagoma”, per rendere meglio l’immagine offerta dal verbo “to silhouette”.

81
alla luce delle stelle.

“Siete stato maledettamente veloce ad arrivare, Cohill. Dov’è il comandante in carica? Dormite tutti con le coperte sulla testa a Fort Starke?”

C’era qualcuno che camminava con gli stivali, sulle assi della veranda del quartier generale. All’interno, una persona imprecava ripetutamente cercando di accendere una lampada. L’acre fumo del legno bruciato usciva basso da un comignolo e macchiava di grigio l’odore dell’alba bianca. “Vostro padre, il Generale Cohill, mi ha chiesto di portarvi i suoi saluti, Cohill, quando ho lasciato Washington”.

“Grazie, generale”

“Non ‘generale’” disse Thursday, tagliente. “Un uomo è ciò per cui viene pagato. Io ricevo la paga di maggiore”.

“Si, signore. Vi ricordavo come Generale Thursday”.

Poi Joplyn arrivò correndo sul pavimento di legno e si fermò di colpo.

“Capitano Joplyn, signore, attuale comandante”.

“Joplyn” disse Thursday “Sono venuto fin qui da Indian Wells in fretta e furia. Il Signor Meacham, l’agente a White River, vuole che diamo una dimostrazione di forza, all’istante. Teme che, senza di essa, Bisonte di Pietra gli sfuggirà di mano.”

“Bisonte di Pietra gli è sfuggito di mano da mesi. Sta cercando di capire fino a che punto il sentimento religioso di Meacham lo lascerà fare, signore. E Meacham è l’uomo più stupido ad ovest di Kansas City, e il più bugiardo. Prenderò mezza compagnia con me al suono della diana.⁵ Ci penserò io stesso”. “Vi faccio notare che il Signor Meacham è un agente governativo degli Stati Uniti. Radunerete due compagnie e una carovana di scorta prima della diana,

⁵ La diana è il suono della tromba al mattino, usato come sveglia per i soldati.
Capitano Joplyn. E le guiderò io stesso fino a White River. Ho dovuto far mandare dall’ufficiale della guardia un messo a bussare alla porta del Signor Sitterding e del Signor Topliff. Il Signor Cohill si è già presentato a rapporto. Conoscendo i loro nomi e i compiti svolti, li vorrei tutti e tre con me. E in futuro vi consiglio di tenere un ufficiale di guardia durante la notte al quartier generale, finché ritornerò a prendere il comando ufficialmente. Non mi piacciono i soldati che lavorano solo di giorno.”

“Sì, signore”. Joplyn si voltò deciso verso Flint Cohill, senza un cambiamento nel tono di voce, nessuna tensione nell’atteggiamento. “Signor Cohill, informate subito la A e la B. Che si diano da fare. Equipaggiamento da campo completo, e trecento munizioni da carabina per ciascun uomo. Prenderete otto carri di scorta, razioni e provviste per quindici giorni, e metà della C come a guardia dei carri a cavallo”.

“Sono molte munizioni... per uomini che dovrebbero essere addestrati a sparare”, disse il Maggiore Thursday. “Cento munizioni ciascuno dovrebbero essere sufficienti per ogni emergenza”.


“La diana è alle cinque e quarantacinque. La testa della colonna può oltrepassare il cancello principale alle cinque e trenta, signore. Quando arriveranno Topliff e Sitterding, potreste dire loro che io sarò a mettere insieme la carovana nella zona davanti alle stalle dei cavalli? Mi troveranno là. I loro sergenti maggiori saranno a conoscenza di tutto ciò che mi avete detto. ...Brailey, seguimi immediatamente come attendente”. Poi Flint Cohill si rivolse
deciso a Thursday: “Avete altro da aggiungere, signore?”

“Si, molte cose. Ho le mie idee sul modo in cui bisogna agire con gli Indiani. Voglio le insegne militari, con il loro corpo di guardia appropriato, guidoni e trombettieri. Fate portare agli uomini i loro attrezzi per la pulizia, la piastra per i bottoni e il lucido nero per gli stivali. Un po’ più di dignità militare in questo posto e un po’ meno modi e vestiti da cowboy porteranno a un maggior rispetto per l’Esercito. Vi incontrerò qui per prendere il comando, Cohill, appena passa la colonna. Fungerete da aiutante, in aggiunta agli altri vostri doveri. Gli ufficiali verranno chiamati e si metteranno in marcia a cavallo per ulteriori ordini, non appena la coda della colonna lascia il posto. Domande?”

“Nessuna, signore”

“Andate”.

Il sole in agosto è una sciabola incandescente. In un istante, ti brucia il collo e il dorso di una mano rendendola inservibile e piena di bolle. Riduce il labbro inferiore a una dolorante cicatrice secca, rende le camicie e i cinturoni fastidiosi e mollicci per il sudore, quando stai fermo.

La colonna si muoveva in direzione nord per attraversare il tratto superiore del Paradise, i sottopancia schiumavano di bianco, le selle erano calde e umide, le falde dei cappelli basse, e il blu dei pantaloni e delle camicie si era sbiadito trasformandosi nel grigio delle divise sudiste con la polvere che copriva tutto, tranne le pupille e il retro della lingua.

Owen Thursday cavalcava da solo, alla destra delle prime file, dove poteva voltarsi a guardare la colonna in tutta la sua lunghezza, con negli occhi il debole ricordo di colonne più grandi che aveva comandato, di reggimenti di fanteria con le insegne esposte e la musica da campo; di artiglieria che avanzava
inesorabile nella polvere pesante, con i gioghi tesi e con le catene che cigolavano, le ruote che scivolavano nei solchi con il suono lamentoso delle estremità delle travi che scricchiolavano; della cavalleria che fiancheggiava a destra e a sinistra il battaglione.

Tutto ciò si riduceva a centonove ufficiali e uomini e otto carri di scorta, il più grande distaccamento che il Signor Cohill, il Signor Topliff o il Signor Sitterding avessero mai condotto sul sentiero di guerra in tutto il loro servizio.

“Signor Cohill!”

Flint uscì dalla colonna e galoppò fino al fianco del Maggiore Thursday. Thursday disse: “Cavalcate lungo la colonna e fate in modo che tutti gli uomini si pieghino il cappello davanti e dietro come un cappello di feltro. La parte anteriore della falda può essere piegata in giù per proteggere gli occhi, ma tutto il resto della falda deve essere rivolto verso l’alto. Il cappello deve essere perpendicolare alla testa. Li guardi, Signor Cohill! Sembrano contadini malandati al mercato! Il cappello è parte dell’uniforme, non un accessorio per esprimere stravaganze personali!”.

Thursday aveva un obiettivo davanti a sé, rinforzi su ciascun fianco e una piccola retroguardia impegnata soltanto in una missione di ammonimento, ma in qualche modo sembrava più un’esercitazione, una manovra, che una marcia in territorio ostile.

D’Arcy Topliff, che guidava la B, non seppe mai da dove gli fosse venuto il pensiero. Ma eccolo lì, all’improvviso, nato da qualcosa che aveva letto anni prima o che aveva sentito dire da qualcuno: il maggiore ha meno anni da vivere di quelli che ha già vissuto, e quando questa consapevolezza colpisce la mente di un uomo egli può facilmente soccombere. Allora deve sbrigarsi, perché il suo tempo si sta riducendo. Deve cercare scorciatoie. E, nel cercarle, potrebbe
distruggere il valore delle proprie decisioni, il potere del proprio giudizio. Solo un carattere solido con un buon senso dell’equilibrio può affrontare i pochi anni che restano, e continuare a viverli con coraggio compiaciuto, fino a raggiungere la Porta.

Flint Cohill, alla guida dei carri e con la testa china rivolta alla polvere, pensò: “Che diamine, questo non è un distaccamento cerimoniale della Guardia d’Onore per il funerale di un governatore. L’unica cosa che ha ottenuto è di non piacere agli uomini fin dall’inizio, deliberatamente, per delle inezie”.

E poi Flint si ricordò di un nome che una volta fu pronunciato in una conversazione ad un ricevimento, e si ricordò anche della ghirlanda sulla tomba del vecchio Generale Malcolm Hamilton.

“Signora, solo quattro ufficiali nell’Esercito conoscono i fatti di quell’incidente e nessuno di essi parlerà finché la vedova del colonnello sarà in vita”.

Tre giorni a nord di Fort Starke, il distaccamento si fermò a bivaccare su un altopiano sopra le sorgenti del Crazy Man Creek, che è il ramo meridionale del White River, e si trovava a poco meno di trenta miglia dall’agenzia. L’ufficiale comandante mandò avanti Clay Sitterding per perlustrare e mettersi in contatto con Custis Meacham, l’agente.

Clay ritornò verso il tramonto.


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⁶ I “Dog Soldiers” erano un gruppo speciale di guerrieri.
“Avete contattato Meacham, Signor Sitterding?”

“Sì, signore. Dichiaro di avere la completa fiducia di Bisonte di Pietra. Bisonte di Pietra voleva essere accettato come capo medicina e capo di guerra di tutta la sua nazione. Vitello che Corre vi si è opposto, ha preso con sé la gente della Red Hill e ha lasciato la riserva. Bisonte di Pietra l’ha seguito per costringerlo a tornare all’ovile. Il Signor Meacham ci ha chiamati per impedire alle due fazioni di entrare in guerra, ma negli ultimi quattro giorni sembra che abbiano risolto la questione pacificamente”.

Il Maggiore Thursday strinse le labbra: “In altre parole, appena gli Indiani hanno saputo che stavano arrivando le truppe, hanno deciso di comportarsi bene”.

“Potrebbe darsi, signore. Bisonte di Pietra desidera fumare con Voi. Il Signor Meacham Vi invita a farlo. Io suggerisco fortemente di non fare entrare gli Indiani nel nostro campo. È consigliabile non far loro sapere di più sulla nostra forza di quanto già non sappiano”.

“Quando voglio un consiglio dai miei ufficiali, Signor Sitterding, lo chiedo. Vi prego di ricordarvelo”.

Un Indiano ha odore di resina, pungente e rancido. È per via del fumo legnoso del suo tepee e del suo alito fetido dovuto al mangiare le interiora degli animali ancora caldi. È colpa del tabacco non conciato e del sudore del corpo non lavato. Ha grasso di animale nei capelli e indossa vecchie pelli e pellicce, conciate con il vischio e passate sporche di generazione in generazione, appartenute a persone da molto tempo riunite nelle Terre Felici.

Il Maggiore Thursday vedeva le loro impassibili facce di bronzo, la loro dignità e riservatezza. Sentiva l’impatto sommesso del loro silenzio ma, essendo per lui una situazione nuova, non poteva sapere che essi si comportavano sempre così,
anche quando commerciavano le loro coperte: per nascondere la loro curiosità infantile e l’euforia di cui potevano essere preda.


Custis Meacham soffriva di una penosa miopia e di uno spaventoso fiato corto. Aveva la necessità di ansimare a bocca ben aperta mentre parlava. Aveva i palmi delle mani umidi e agitati. Le unghie erano concave, come dei cucchiaini blu. Era seduto, con gli orli del suo unto Prince Albert che gli drappeggiava la pancia cadente.

La pipa girava solenne verso sinistra, e ogni uomo aspirava facendola diventare rossa finché le guance gli facevano male, tirando dentro il fumo grezzo finché i polmoni non ne erano soffocati.

Custis Meacham tossì, con gli occhi rossi e completamente senza fiato. “Oh, diamine” disse “non sopporto di stare loro vicino quando fumano. Confido che non Vi concediate questo vizio per piacere, Signor Thursday?”

“Lo faccio sempre”, disse Thursday. “E io sono il Maggiore Thursday, Signor Meacham, non il Signor Thursday”.


Owen Thursday guardò Custis Meacham a lungo. Disse: “Avete richiesto l’intervento di questo distaccamento, ma ciò non vi conferisce il comando su di esso. Ogni futura azione da parte Vostra verrà effettuata tramite lo stesso mezzo
che avete utilizzato per la richiesta precedente: direttamente al quartier generale del dipartimento. Sono un Presbiteriano apostata, Signor Meacham. E intendo rimanere tale”.

“Non potete dirmi cosa fare”, disse Custis Meacham con voce stridula. “Sono assolutamente abituato al modo in cui l'Esercito fa le cose! Quando ero segretario dell'Associazione Biblica Internazionale, una volta ho detto al Generale Scott...”

Flint Cohill toccò il braccio del maggiore: “Bisonte di Pietra sta per parlare, signore”, e dopo un attimo, Bisonte di Pietra si alzò. Parlò, e per lunghi minuti Cohill restò in silenzio.

Poi disse: “Tutto ciò che ha detto finora è che è un uomo molto, molto coraggioso”.

Thursday annuì e Bisonte di Pietra continuò a parlare per molti altri minuti. Cohill disse: “Ora sta dicendo che è anche un grande cacciatore, lui e tutta la sua tribù”. Thursday annuì di nuovo, e Bisonte di Pietra raccontò di come la ferrovia e i cacciatori bianchi avevano sterminato i bisonti, e di come soltanto lui, in quanto uomo medicina, avrebbe potuto riportarli indietro.

D'un tratto, Cohill sussurrò: “Non mi piace per niente, signore. Sta guadagnando tempo. Credo che questo sia un vile tentativo per permettere ai suoi di fare ricognizione”.

“Allora interrompa tutto”, disse Thursday con voce dura.

“Deve giungere alla conclusione, lo dice il protocollo. Non si può interromperlo prima che abbia finito. Sarebbe un grave insulto”.

“C'è qualcuno a Fort Starke che sappia riconoscere un ordine quando viene dato?”.

Cohill si alzò in piedi. Bisonte di Pietra smise di parlare, vibrando di rabbia.
Thursday si protese in avanti: “Cohill, nessun preliminare inutile con lui, nessuna frase di circostanza. Siate esplicito e diretto come lo sono io, riuscite a sentirmi? Sono dei maiali recalcitranti. Devono rendersene conto”.

Cohill stava lì, con la faccia pallida. Disse: “Vi sento signore. Cosa volete che dica loro?”

“Dite loro che per me non hanno onore e non sono uomini. Dite loro che è scritto su un documento sacro che rimarranno nella loro riserva. L'aver infranto questo patto è un oltraggio per degli uomini combattenti e li rende delle donnette. Dite loro che non stanno parlando con me, ma con gli Stati Uniti. Dite che gli Stati Uniti ordinano loro di lasciare questo posto all'istante. Smantelleranno il campo all'alba e torneranno alla riserva, perché io entrerò nel loro campo quando sarà giorno”, e il Maggiore Thursday si voltò e, impettito, sparì nel buio, chiamando bruscamente l'ufficiale di guardia.

Clay Sitterding, D'Arcy Topliff e Flint Cohill erano accovacciati nella foschia bianca, sorseggiando un caffè fumante. La mattina era una vecchia donna nell'ombra, scarna, avvolta in uno scialle, che vedeva ciò che non avrebbe più visto. Una vecchia donna magra, con il viso triste, coraggiosa e con la soverchiante consapevolezza dell'inevitabile sconfitta della vita.

Più di dieci anni erano passati sotto i ponti di Sitterding, Topliff e Cohill. Dieci anni di esperienza, fatti di dura e amara cavalleria. Avrebbero potuto parlare. “Gli avevo detto di non riceverli, di non fumare con loro, e lui mi ha messo a tacere”. Avrebbero potuto dire “Cento munizioni invece che trecento!”. Ma prima ancora di imparare altre cose, si impara a non parlare.

Dietro di loro, nella foschia, c'erano molti uomini in movimento, ma non sufficienti, perché l'azione scioccante della cavalleria eseguita in un rapporto di
uno a tre è una follia suicida senza sorprese. Chi se ne importa di cosa hai comandato in passato, o di cosa la gente pensi di te, o in quali altre guerre hai combatuto? In guerra conta sempre cosa succede ora! Cosa succede tra un momento! Chi comanda...ora!

Sitterding finì il suo caffè amaro e per un breve istante sentì i forti venti di marzo sul viso, i venti che ululano nella Hudson River Valley e attraversano taglienti il piazzale all'Accademia, come un'arma automatica azionata ad alzo zero. C'era stato un tempo in cui il caldo cocente di Starke gli aveva fatto dimenticare la fredda aria di quei venti dell'est.

D'Arcy Topliff disse: “Vorrei aver sposato quella ricca donna che avevo incontrato! Stamattina sarei un banchiere a St. Louis, e ancora a letto”.

Cohill cercò di ridere, ma un qualche antico istinto dentro di lui gli aveva asciugato la sorgente delle risate. Il sipario era calato sul retro della sua mente, separandolo da tutto ciò che era stato, cosicché poteva soltanto andare avanti. Alcuni uomini in questo sono fortunati.

“Eccoci qui” disse piano, e brevemente premette entrambe le mani sulle spalle degli altri due. “Ricordatevi solo che la carovana di scorta è la nostra ultima risorsa e se scoppia una battaglia salvatemene una parte”.

Lo si è visto tante volte nel disegno di Jonathan Redfield. La traccia bluastra del Crazy Man Creek contro il giallo dell’erba bruciata sull’altipiano retrostante. I morti della Compagnia A spogliati e scalpati, le teste simili a urlanti facce barbute. Il Maggiore Thursday, con il fucile scarico in mano, che muore gloriamente con ciò che resta della Compagnia B, mentre cerca di recuperare e mettere in salvo la bandiera, ma ecco come andarono le cose. 

Ecco come andarono le cose.
La colonna si mosse quando la foschia del mattino era ancora fredda; si mosse in un’aria che odorava del sapone da sella utilizzato sulla pelle ancora rigida, di lana grezza, di umido non ancora traspirato, e dell’olio lubrificante per il fucile. Una cavalleria dalle sembianze feroci, di cui il mondo non conosce più l’aspetto. Sul pendio leggermente inclinato che andava dal bivacco alla cresta torreggiante sul Crazy Man Creek. Oltre la dorsale, sagomata contro la luce gialla che si diffondeva, orlava l’orizzonte orientale. Guidoni, carabine nei foderi, cappelli piegati davanti e dietro, schiene curve e le insegne che sventolavano. Ci sono cowboys che vi raccontano con tono solenne che a volte, quando un temporale tremendo infuria nella valle, è possibile vederli ancora attraversare quella cresta. Che si può sentire rimbombare il grido delle trombe della carica. Ma non è vero, perché i soldati passano solo una volta, e l’unica cosa che si lasciano alle spalle è la memoria. “Accorciate le distanze! Stringetevi!”

L’avanguardia attraversò la cresta per prima e scese a serpentina lungo il pendio dove il sentiero si insinua in un terreno rialzato e disseminato di rocce, prima di raggiungere il guado. L’avanguardia andò avanti, guadò il Crazy Man e dall’altra sponda fece segno di via libera al tenente Sitterding, al comando della A.

Sitterding diede l’ordine e la A attraversò la cresta e incominciò a scendere, seguita dalla B, guidata da D’Arcy Topliff, a trecento iarde di distanza e scaglionata a trecento iarde a sinistra, a ovest, e dietro. Il che era stato fatto su esplicito ordine di Owen Thursday. Questo per quanto riguardava il lato della cresta dove c’era il ruscello. Dalla parte del bivacco, c’erano ancora Flintridge Cohill, la carovana di scorta e le guardie a cavallo della C. Flintridge Cohill era stato trattenuto appena subito dopo la partenza da una coppiglia rossa.

Owen Thursday, stagliato contro il cielo, dall’alto del suo cavallo, era l’unico in
grado di vedere l’intero comando. Stava lì, contro l’alba che biancheggiava, come se avesse scelto quella posizione per sedersi ad aspettarla.

I soldati della Compagnia A scendevano lentamente nella gola, con la colazione ancora calda nello stomaco, le selle che si ammorbidivano sotto il sedere, i muscoli che si scaldavano pronti per il lavoro del nuovo giorno. Poi, furono sorpresi da un improvviso incendio davanti a loro e su entrambi i fianchi. Fuoco a centottanta gradi – metà dell’orizzonte che li circondava – che si scheggiava intorno a loro come legna secca e marcia, lacerandosi come una pesante stoffa strappata. Clay Sitterding e quarantadue uomini si trovavano giù. Metà dei loro cavalli, girando all’impazzata, galoppando, si divincolavano nel tentativo di andarsene e tornare sul pendio.

Flint Cohill, che non poteva vedere la scena perché era coperta dalla cresta, immaginava disperato quello che probabilmente stava accadendo. Fissò negli occhi il sergente maniscalco.

Disse: “Sergente Magee, aggiustate quella coppiglia e trattenete qua la carovana su mio ordine!”.

E come una furia si precipitò a cavallo verso la cima della cresta. Era quasi come se Owen Thursday stesse cercando di sfuggirgli. Sembrò aspettare finché non riuscì più a farne a meno, finché Cohill gli fu quasi addosso, poi affondò gli speroni nel cavallo e lo lanciò a capofitto nella parte opposta verso la Valley of the Shadow. Ma non abbastanza in fretta, poiché Cohill capì che cosa stava per fare. Cohill lo capì. Senza più nessuna avanscoperta e senza avere un’idea precisa di ciò con cui stava per scontrarsi, senza nessun ripiegamento veloce, con tutta la A che ora giaceva morta nella gola, visibile a tutti, Thursday gridò a Topliff di schierare la B e di attaccare i fianchi della gola al galoppo.

Cohill si voltò: “Magee” gridò, incanalando la voce attraverso le mani portate
alla bocca⁷ “mandate i carri quassù, presto!”

Poi Cohill si voltò di nuovo, e stavolta, dalle rocce, vide il micidiale incendio, a forma di semicerchio, e dentro di lui si generarono lacrime che praticamente mai, in tutta la sua vita, l'avrebbero abbandonato. In quel momento sapeva che la carovana e la guardia a cavallo erano tutto ciò che era rimasto; che lui da solo, su una cresta esposta, era tutto ciò che rimaneva della suprema dignità degli Stati Uniti, per centinaia di miglia tutto intorno. Ma lo diceva in questo modo, lo diceva a voce alta: “D'Arcy non c'è più... e neanche Clay... ma nessuno mi smuoverà da questa cresta... nessuno!”.

“Sergente Magee, tirate fuori le casse dei carri dai basamenti!...mettetene una a venti passi a sinistra!... Una laggiù dove vi trovate voi, e una qui a destra! Tutti al lavoro, a scavare le trincee tra le casse! Prendete tutte le borracce! Radunate tutti gli animali dall’altro lato del pendio!”.

Non è sempre scritto nei libri. È una cosa che esiste da centomila anni. È un’eredità, una maledizione e il fardello dell'uomo bianco. È Canne e Agincourt e Wagram e Princeton e il mattatoio di Shiloh. Con Flint Cohill c’erano trentun uomini su una dorsale e il pensiero, nella sua mente irata, che ora non avrebbe vissuto per diventare un generale, ma sarebbe morto da primo tenente di cavalleria, il primo tenente più dannato che il mondo avrebbe potuto trovare per svolgere il compito di quella mattina!

Stando sulla cima della cresta, perlustrando con i binocoli la spettrale valle sottostante, Flint vide ciò che era rimasto: un ufficiale e tre uomini e la bandiera sull'asta spezzata. Non poteva giurarlo, ma sembrava trattarsi di Clay Sitterding, del vecchio Sergente Shattuck, di Aiken e del Sergente Ershick. Solo

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⁷ Il testo originale riporta: “through cupped hands”. Inizialmente, ho optato per la traduzione “con le mani alla bocca”, perché volevo esprimere l'immagine con la stessa immediatezza del testo inglese. Poi, però, ho deciso di utilizzare una frase più complessa che riportasse in modo più chiaro l'azione descritta nella versione originale.
un minuto prima che venissero travolti dall’assalto finale. Poi i guerrieri di Bisonte di Pietra si misero a devastare i morti della A e della B, trafiggendo i corpi con le frecce. Portando via gli scalpi. Tagliando loro un piede e la mano destra, cosicché anche i loro spiriti sarebbero stati mutilati e non avrebbero mai più combattuto. Poi gli Indiani ripiegarono per porre l’attenzione sulla cima della cresta e, nella confusione del momento, stavano cominciando ad accerchiarla, ad isolarla dall’acqua, in modo da sferrare il colpo di grazia facendola diventare secca.


Così disse Cohill, perché in quel momento vide il settimo uomo, ancora molto
lontano da loro. “E dite al Sergente Megee che arriverò tra pochi minuti... pochi minuti dopo di voi”. E si mise a scendere nella gola, finché non fu chino accanto a Owen Thursday.

“Cohill, signore”

Thursday si voltò e lo guardò come se non l'avesse mai visto prima in vita sua. La luce se ne era andata dai suoi occhi, e l'orgoglio, infine, era morto dentro di lui.

Per tutti i suoi giorni il fantasma dell'oggi aveva cavalcato con lui, sbeffeggiando il suo orgoglio, additando con derisione la sua ambizione personale. Il Generale Thursday, del Reparto di Clarke, di Cumberland Station, di Sudler's Mountain, con la fortuna e il diavolo dalla sua parte, e una corona da eroe da accaparrarsi!

Ma oggi, il fantasma aveva preso vita al costo di settantadue uomini che giacevano morti, attraverso l'ignoranza che è la serva dell'orgoglio, la testardaggine che è la padrona dell'ambizione.

“Abbiamo creato delle trincee in cima alla cresta”, disse Cohill, “con le casse dei carri, con le feritoie e le buche per i fucili. Ho trentasette uomini, un ufficiale e un uomo gravemente ferito. Ho acqua e munizioni...”

“Preparatevi alla ritirata immediata” disse Thursday. “Dobbiamo provare a rientrare a Fort Starke”. Ma la voce si interruppe.

Flint Cohill scosse la testa. “Bisonte di Pietra sta già accerchiando la posizione. Non possiamo lasciare quella cima della cresta. Se ci proviamo, ci faranno a pezzetti prima che riusciamo a percorrere dieci miglia”.

“Preparatevi alla ritirata, Signor Cohill!”. La voce era un lamento acuto e discontinuo.

“Ho mandato un corriere a Starke, signore. Credo che ce la farà. Credo che il
Capitano Joplyn possa arrivare qui in cinque giorni. Posso resistere fino ad allora. D'altronde, non abbiamo altra scelta! Generale...

Cohill lo disse apposta, ma senza alcun tono di sfida, senza alcuna accusa. Era quasi supplicante: “Generale, ci sono due compagnie morte laggiù, tutti gli amici che ho al mondo da anni”. Estrasse la pistola dalla fondina, la fece ruotare finché il calcio non fu rivolto verso Thursday, la porse in avanti.

“Non dovete ripetermelo, ma la A e la B sono tutte presenti e a disposizione, e lo sono anch’io! Ripiegherò su vostro ordine, ma solo sotto arresto, signore! Solo sotto arresto!”

Thursday si alzò piano, con la pistola di Cohill in mano. “Ho avuto tutto quello che potevo avere”, disse piano; “questa è la fine della strada”. Quando Flint lo guardò negli occhi, questi erano completamente vuoti. La luce era sparita per sempre. “Signor Cohill, la vostra cresta. Io torno giù. Buona fortuna”.

“Il Signor Sitterding non può parlare, signore, e neppure Shattuck o Ershick, o Aiken, e avete la mia parola che io non lo farò...mai...per il bene del servizio”. Flint quasi parlò in un sussurro.

Ed ecco come ritrovarono Owen Thursday quando la scattante colonna proveniente da Starke giunse in soccorso del reparto di Cohill, il quinto giorno. Era morto con il gruppetto che aveva difeso le insegne – morto accanto a Sitterding, Shattuck, Ershick e Aiken – colpito all'orecchio destro, con la pistola così serrata in mano che il chirurgo non avrebbe potuto avere alcun dubbio sul fatto che lo stesso maggiore avesse premuto il grilletto.

Ma Flinteridge Cohill vi arrivò per primo, perché ci sono modi di vivere che sono migliori delle persone che cercano di viverli, e un reggimento ha un onore che nessun uomo ha il diritto di usurpare come fosse una sua proprietà personale. La gloria è una donna di strada, che può essere comprata da
chiunque la voglia. Thursday la voleva, ma aveva le tasche vuote, così Cohill gli prestò i due dollari per la posterità. Cohill prese la sua pistola dalla mano del defunto Thursday. Tirò fuori il tamburo e fece uscire le cinque cartucce e il bossolo nella mano sinistra. Lanciò la pistola lontano, nel Crazy Man Creek.

Le cinque cartucce le gettò a terra una ad una mentre se ne andava, ma il bossolo lo portò sempre con sé, per il resto della sua vita, perché toccarlo dentro la tasca gli dava sempre coraggio nei momenti di bisogno, quando la strada era buia e le decisioni non semplici.

E fu Cohill, anni più tardi, a ricostruire la scena perché Jonathan Redfield la dipingesse. “Il Maggiore Thursday” disse “era un ufficiale molto valoroso. Lo trovammo morto con il gruppetto che difendeva i colori, con il Tenente Sitterding e i Sergenti Shattuck e Ershik e il Soldato semplice Aiken. Nessuno avrebbe potuto desiderare di più”.

Ma anche quando fu molto vecchio, Cohill guardava sempre duramente chiunque dicesse “per il bene del servizio” e chiedeva sempre “Che cosa significa esattamente per Voi, signore?”. 
Conclusions

Ford’s representation of the Indians, seen through the analysis of *Stagecoach*, *Fort Apache*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, testifies to Ford’s gradual approach to the Indians, which led him to develop a more and more mature vision of them. The depiction of the Indians in his movies is thus the result of his personal perception, which has changed during his career, although it also depends on historical and cultural factors. However, this Fordian representation of the Indians is “filtered” through a white eye and mind. That is why, as is mentioned in previous Chapter 4, it cannot be considered an authentic representation of the Indians’ and of the reservations’ reality.

In fact, everything regarding the Indians, if told by non-Indians (be they directors, writers, journalists, scholars, etc.) is inevitably filtered through their culture and their vision of the world.

In cinema, this cultural and mental filter has generated the so-called “Hollywood Indian”, that is to say, “a mythological being who exists nowhere but within the fertile imaginations of its movie actors, producers, and directors” (Jojola 12).

According to critics like Ted Jojola, Wilcomb Washburn, John O’Connor, and Ken Nolley, Hollywood cinema has created a false image of the Indians, made of simple stereotypes which have settled with time, for example the savage and cruel Indian, the good Indian, the victim of the Whites. All these stereotypes have certainly influenced the non-Indians’ perception of the Indians, because cinema has always been the main contact to the Indians’ world for non-Indian people.
In fact, cinema influences very deeply people's knowledge and the perception of reality.

During my study period in Sydney at University of Technology (UTS), I attended a course on historical movies. Once, the lecturer said something that struck me much: “If we think about historical events which we have not experienced directly, it is often automatic that we recall images from movies that we have watched and that narrate that historical facts. Think, for example, about Gallipoli Battle. How many of you have just recalled some images from the movie “Gallipoli” [1981]? Nevertheless, those are fictional images; although they are based on real facts, they are just a reinterpretation of those facts. A great number of things that we know, or we think we know, about history actually are knowledge that we have derived from movies. Unconsciously, we take them for true, because we do not have any real memory or we have never lived a certain historical event or a certain situation directly”. In that moment, I realized that he was absolutely right.

This point is also valid for the concept of “Hollywood Indian”. People without a direct contact to the Indians have derived all they knowledge about them from indirect sources, first of all, from movies.

As Nolley (72-88) states, Ford has contributed much to the creation of the Hollywood Indian. That happened for some inaccuracies in showing their traditions or using their language. With regards to this, Nolley (79) declares that the language used by the Indians in Cheyenne Autumn is not authentic, since the characters were Cheyenne, but the actors were Navajo.

But a further important reason why Ford is responsible for the development of the Hollywood Indian is that he often inserted in his movies fictional white characters, who did not have any historical alter-ego, together with Indian
characters who, on the contrary, did have a real alter-ego in history. Nolley (76) explains this concept using Fort Apache as an example. In this movie, Colonel Thursday resembles General Custer, a person who really existed. But, as his names testify, Thursday is not Custer; therefore, it is easy for the audience to understand that Thursday is an invention of Ford; he just recalls a historical figure, but he cannot be identified with it. On the contrary, the character of Cochise has a historical alter-ego: the real Cochise, who lived in Arizona between 1810 and 1874 and was one of the Apache leaders. Ford's Cochise has the same name of the real Apache leader, therefore it is difficult for the audience to distinguish the two. The result is that the audience identifies Ford's Cochise with the real Cochise, believing that Ford's character is a perfect and historically accurate representation of the real Cochise.

Moreover, the frequent use of non-Indian actors for playing Indians (although Ford often hired real Indians) offered the audience a slightly misrepresented interpretation of Indian reality, because it was conveyed by a non-Indian person.

In fact, during the second half of the twentieth century, Indians have started to take action in order to weaken the false image of the Hollywood Indian and have the possibility to participate in cinema industry directly, so as to tell their own story with their own voice. In this sense, some goals have been reached thanks to the efforts of different pro-Indian movements and organization, like the the American Indian Movement (AIM), still much active in the defense of the Indians’ rights, and the Indian Registry for the Performing Arts, which does not exist any longer. However, at least until the nineties, cinema was dominated by white voices narrating and interpreting Indian history and culture.
One must be careful, then, to the representation of the Indians in western movies (and in movies in general). Nevertheless, I believe that the great virtue of these movies is just that they do depict the Indians, even though imprecisely and, often, in a wrong way.

The virtue of Stagecoach, Fort Apache, Cheyenne Autumn, and of all the other movies showing the Indian world is that they have made it enter the houses and realities of people who, otherwise, would have hardly had a contact with it. Sometimes, these movies might have aroused someone’s interest and curiosity towards the Indian world, thus functioning as a springboard for a mindful study of this fascinating culture and of these people, who still exist and are part of the United States.
Appendix

The main purpose of this appendix is to offer a space to the Indians’ representation of themselves and of the way they have lived their relationship with the Whites. After focusing the attention of the Indians’ image in *Stagecoach*, *Fort Apache*, and *Cheyenne Autumn*, and after stating that several things we know about the Indians are filtered through a non-Indian mind, I thought that it would be important to give a space to their voice.

Unfortunately, there are no written sources dating from the period prior to the encounter with the Whites: Indian cultures were oral. Once the Indians learned how to read and write, some of them started to write, or sometimes to dictate, their story and memories.

Indian sources, both old and modern ones, are very precious, because they are a direct and authentic expression of how Indians saw (and see) themselves and their own history.

In the second part of the appendix, I have reported some non-Indian sources (texts and speeches) covering a period from the settlement of Jamestown (1607) – first permanent English colony in America – and running days, so as to give a more general picture of how the Indians have (and are) perceived by people not belonging to their world.

**Ohiyesa, from Indian Boyhood, 1902:**

“The Indian boy was a prince of the wilderness. He had but very little work to do during the period of his boyhood. His principal occupation was the practice
of a few simple arts in warfare and the chase. Aside from this, he was master of
his time. [...] Our sports were molded by the life and customs of our people;
indeed, we practiced only what we expected to do when grown. Our games
were feats with the bow and arrow, foot and pony races, wrestling, swimming
and imitation of the customs and habits of our fathers. We had sham fights with
mud balls and willow wands; we played lacrosse, made war upon bees, shot
winter arrows (which were used only in that season), and coasted upon the ribs
of animals and buffalo robes. [...] Occasionally, we also played "white man."
Our knowledge of the pale-face was limited, but we had learned that he
brought goods whenever he came and that our people exchanged furs for his
merchandise. We also knew that his complexion was pale, that he had short hair
on his head and long hair on his face and that he wore coat, trousers, and hat,
and did not patronize blankets in the daytime. This was the picture we had
formed of the white man. So we painted two or three of our number with white
clay and put on them birchen hats which we sewed up for the occasion;
fastened a piece of fur to their chins for a beard and altered their costumes as
much as lay within our power. The white of the birch-bark was made to answer
for their white shirts. Their merchandise consisted of sand for sugar, wild beans
for coffee, dried leaves for tea, pulverized earth for gun-powder, pebbles for
bullets and clear water for the dangerous "spirit water." We traded for these
goods with skins of squirrels, rabbits and small birds. [...]
ever heard a real hearty laugh away from the Indians’ fireside. I have often spent an entire evening in laughing with them until I could laugh no more. There are evenings when the recognized wit or story-teller of the village gives a free entertainment which keeps the rest of the community in a convulsive state until he leaves them. However, Indian humor consists as much in the gestures and inflections of the voice as in words, and is really untranslatable.”

**Geronimo, from *Geronimo’s Story of His Life*, 1906:**

I was born in No-doyohn Cañon, Arizona, June, 1829. In that country which lies around the headwaters of the Gila River I was reared. This range was our fatherland; among these mountains our wigwams were hidden; the scattered valleys contained our fields; the boundless prairies, stretching away on every side, were our pastures; the rocky caverns were our burying places. […] As a babe I rolled on the dirt floor of my father’s tepee, hung in my tsoch (Apache name for cradle) at my mother’s back, or suspended from the bough of a tree. I was warmed by the sun, rocked by the winds, and sheltered by the trees as other Indian babes.

When a child my mother taught me the legends of our people; taught me of the sun and sky, the moon and stars, the clouds and storms. She also taught me to kneel and pray to Usen for strength, health, wisdom, and protection. We never prayed against any person, but if we had aught against any individual we ourselves took vengeance. We were taught that Usen does not care for the petty quarrels of men. My father had often told me of the brave deeds of our warriors, of the pleasures of the chase, and the glories of the warpath. With my brothers and sisters I played about my father’s home. Sometimes we played at
hide-and-seek among the rocks and pines; sometimes we loitered in the shade of the cottonwood trees or sought the shudock (a kind of wild cherry) while our parents worked in the field. Sometimes we played that we were warriors. We would practice stealing upon some object that represented an enemy, and in our childish imitation often perform the feats of war. Sometimes we would hide away from our mother to see if she could find us, and often when thus concealed go to sleep and perhaps remain hidden for many hours [...].

All Indians smoked — men and women. No boy was allowed to smoke until he had hunted alone and killed large game — wolves and bears. Unmarried women were not prohibited from smoking, but were considered immodest if they did so. Nearly all matrons smoked. [...] 

The Indians knew what herbs to use for medicine, how to prepare them, and how to give the medicine. This they had been taught by Usen in the beginning, and each succeeding generation had men who were skilled in the art of healing. In gathering the herbs, in preparing them, and in administering the medicine, as much faith was held in prayer as in the actual effect of the medicine. Usually about eight persons worked together in making medicine, and there were forms of prayer and incantations to attend each stage of the process. Four attended to the incantations and four to the preparation of the herbs. [...] 

Small children wore very little clothing in winter and none in the summer. Women usually wore a primitive skirt, which consisted of a piece of cotton cloth fastened about the waist, and extending to the knees. Men wore breech cloths and moccasins. In winter they had shirts and leggings in addition. [...]”

Standing Bear, from *Land of the Spotted Eagle, 1933*: 106
“By 1879, my people were no longer free, but were subjects confined on reservations under the rule of agents. One day there came to the agency a party of white people from the East. Their presence aroused considerable excitement when it became known that these people were school teachers who wanted some Indian boys and girls to take away with them to train as were white boys and girls. Now, father was a "blanket Indian," but he was wise. He listened to the white strangers, their offers and promises that if they took his son they would care well for him, teach him how to read and write, and how to wear white man's clothes. But to father all this was just "sweet talk," and I know that it was with great misgivings that he left the decision to me and asked if I cared to go with these people. I, of course, shared with the rest of my tribe a distrust of the white people, so I know that for all my dear father's anxiety he was proud to hear me say "Yes." That meant that I was brave. […] On our way to school we saw many white people, more than we ever dreamed existed, and the manner in which they acted when they saw us quite indicated their opinion of us. It was only about three years after the Custer battle, and the general opinion was that the Plains people merely infested the earth as nuisances, and our being there simply evidenced misjudgment on the part of Wakan Tanka. […] At last at Carlisle the transforming, the "civilizing" process began. It began with clothes. Never, no matter what our philosophy or spiritual quality, could we be civilized while wearing the moccasin and blanket. […] Our accustomed dress was taken and replaced with clothing that felt cumbersome and awkward. Against trousers and handkerchiefs we had a distinct feeling—they were unsanitary and the trousers kept us from breathing well. […] Almost immediately our names were changed to those in common use in the English language. Instead of translating our names into English and calling Zinkcaziwin, Yellow Bird, and
Wanbi K’leska, Spotted Eagle, which in itself would have been educational, we were just John, Henry, or Maggie, as the case might be. I was told to take a pointer and select a name for myself from the list written on the blackboard. I did, and since one was just as good as another, and as I could not distinguish any difference in them, I placed the pointer on the name Luther. I then learned to call myself by that name and got used to hearing others call me by it, too. By the time we had been forbidden to speak our mother tongue, which is the rule in all boarding-schools. This rule is uncalled for, and today is not only robbing the Indian, but America of a rich heritage. The language of a people is part of their history. Today we should be perpetuating history instead of destroying it, and this can only be effectively done by allowing and encouraging the young to keep it alive. A language unused, embalmed, and reposing only in a book, is a dead language. Only the people themselves, and never the scholars, can nourish it into life. […]"

**Flying Hawk, from Firewater and Forked Tongues. A Sioux Chief interprets U.S. History, 1947:**

“That Virginia venture was a gold-hunting expedition like when Cortez went to steal from Montezuma the Indians’ gold and silver and land. They were a lot of fellows out of a job who wanted to live without work by cheating and robbing the native people who did not have guns. Powhatan was kind to them when they came. He gave them food and helped them to make houses to live in. They stayed a long time and did not work and raise food but got it from the Indians. Then when the corn was not plenty for all, Smith told Powhatan that they had been wrecked and soon ships would come from England and take them back
home. Ships came and put more English people on the land but did not bring
food for them. They were hungry and asked for more corn from the Indians, but
there was not enough for all, and so Powhatan told them he had food only for
his own people. The white men had guns and swords and told Powhatan he
must give them the corn or they would kill his people. Then there was trouble.
They took the food from the Indians and the Indians killed some of them and
then they became enemies. […]"

**Gerald Vizenor, from Manifest Manners: The Long Gaze of Christopher
Columbus, 1992:**

“President Ronald Reagan told students in Moscow, "Maybe we made a mistake
in trying to maintain Indian cultures. Maybe we should not have humored
them in wanting to stay in that kind of primitive lifestyle." Reagan is a master of
felicities and manifest manners, but he must have been talking about simulated
Indians in the movies. Many of his friends played Indians on screen. Maybe he
made a mistake in trying to maintain the movies as a real culture; he should not
have humored so many of his friends to play Indian in western films. Reagan
embodies the simulacra of the mannish western movies. "Long gaze" Reagan
might have been thinking about his many sooner friends at the University of
Oklahoma. He honored the mannish manifest manners of the frontier more
than he would even remember the beleaguered tribes that lost their land to
thousands of neocolonial sooner. H. L. Mencken wrote in *The American
Language* that the sooner were those "people who insist upon crossing bridges
before they come to them," the people who "sneaked across the border before
the land was thrown open to white settlement." These were the "long gaze"
sooners who stole tribal land in the name of manifest manners. Richard Van Horn, president of the University of Oklahoma at Norman, was concerned about a "better learning environment" and asked students to be more friendly toward minorities, according to a letter and a report in the Daily Oklahoman. "Saying hello to minority students on campus... will help to create a better living and learning environment for all." Van Horn's manner is simple enough, his statements are generous over brunch, even romantic overseas, but he does not seem to understand the nature of institutional racism. Such academic salutations, the measures of manifest manners, would burden minority students with even more blithe simpering, and ironic atonements; the sooners maintain their "long gaze" of racialism and neocolonial domination. How would students be taught to recognize the minorities on campus so that they might please the president by saying hello? Would recognition be made by color, class, manners, humor, gestures, the sooner "long gaze," or by being the obvious "other," the outsider? "Long gaze" Columbus says "hello" to Ishi.

"Hello, hello, hello at last," said an eager white fraternity student to a crossblood Native American Indian. That casual interjection is not an invitation to a discourse on tribal histories, miseries, or even the weather on campus; the gesture is a trivial cue to turn the other cheek to a western gaze and manifest manners. Moreover, racial salutations and other public relations snobberies serve those who dominate minority students rather than those who liberate the human spirit from institutional racism.

"Go out on the campus and say hello to our tribal neighbors," sounds too much like the basic instructions given to missionaries. Never mind, it would seem to the president, that treaties were violated, tribal lands were stolen, and that the
crimes continue to be celebrated in state histories as a beat in sooner civilization. The University of Oklahoma and other state institutions were founded on stolen tribal land; such moral crimes are not revised with salutations and manifest manners. The University of California was founded on the receipt of stolen tribal land.

Native American Indian scholars hired to teach in various academic departments on the campus would create a better "learning environment" than a new order of pale sycophants saying hello to minorities. "Long gaze" Reagan and Van Horn must have learned their manifest manners with other presidents at the western movies. […]"

Sonny Skyhawk, “What Are the Challenges of Walking in Two Worlds?”, published on Indian Country Today Media Network, 27 April 2012:

“It is the realization that, at one time, this was only one world, and that it belonged to our people. That having been said, today we find ourselves in a complicated position. The full cost of mainstream assimilation for the American Indian has yet to be determined. Today, five hundred years later, we are still in the process of assessing what has been lost.

Collectively, we have paid a very dear price. Ours has been a culture that has relied on the oral transmission of our history and values. Our languages have suffered tremendously, and therefore our cultures have suffered tremendously, and we find ourselves struggling to hold on as much of both of them as possible. Obviously, we have lost almost all of our lands – what is less obvious is the lingering cost of the occupation and holocaust we have experienced
remain to this very day. These haunt us in a more subtle, even subliminal, way. Yet we have evolved and are dealing with the hand we have been dealt, so to speak. We are and remain a viable, vibrant and proud people, with the same dreams and aspirations as anyone else. Today, having retained our values and beliefs, we are doctors, lawyers and every other profession that is found in mainstream society, and we are moving ahead in many constructive ways.

We are distinctly unique from other ethnicities, simply because we are the original land holders, and because of lands ceded to the present government through sovereign recognized treaties. We are proud Americans, and have shed our blood to prove and defend this land. We continue to walk in both worlds with pride, determination and hope – hope that our future generations appreciate the price that has been paid and value what has been achieved. It has been a difficult path, no doubt, but one that we walk with the belief that we can co-exist. I truly believe that our ancestors would be proud of our ability to sustain ourselves through the challenges of change we have had to undergo in the last five hundred years”.

John Smith, from Narratives of Early Virginia, 1607:

“As at this time were most of our chiefest men either sicke or discontented, the rest being in such despair, as they would rather starve and rot with idlenes, then be perswaded to do any thing for their owne relief without constraint: our victualles being now within eighteene dayes spent, and the Indians trade decreasing, I was sent to the mouth of the river, to Kegquouhtan an Indian Towne, to trade for Corne, and try the River for some Fish, but our fishing we could not effect by reason of the stormy weather. The Indians thinking us neare
famished, with carelesse kindnes, offred us little pieces of bread and small handfuls of beans or wheat, for a hatchet or a piece of copper: in like maner I entertained their kindness, and in like scorne offered them like commodities, but the Children, or any that shewed extraordinary kindness, I liberally contented with free gifte, such trifles as wel contented them. Finding this colde comfort, I anchored before the Towne, and the next day returned to trade, but God (the absolute disposer of all heartes) altered their conceits, for now they were no lesse desirous of our commodities than we of their Corne: under colour to fetch fresh water, I sent a man to discover the Towne, their Corne, and force, to trie their intent, in that they desired me up to their houses: which well understanding, with foure shot I visited them. With fish, oysters, bread, and deere, they kindly traded with me and my men, being no lesse in doubt of my intent, than I of theirs [...].”

**Thomas Jefferson, from Notes on the State of Virginia, 1787:**

“[…] The Indian of North America being more within our reach, I can speak of him somewhat from my own knowledge, but more from the information of others better acquainted with him, and on whose truth and judgment I can rely. From these sources I am able to say, in contradiction to this representation, that he is neither more defective in ardor, nor more impotent with his female, than the white reduced to the same diet and exercise: that he is brave, when an enterprize depends on bravery; education with him making the point of honor consist in the destruction of an enemy by stratagem, and in the preservation of his own person free from injury; or perhaps this is nature; while it is education which teaches us to honor force more than finesse: that he will defend himself
against an host of enemies, always chusing to be killed, rather than to surrender, though it be to the whites, who he knows will treat him well: that in other situations also he meets death with more deliberation, and endures tortures with a firmness unknown almost to religious enthusiasm with us; that he is affectionate to his children, careful of them, and indulgent in the extreme: that his affections comprehend his other connections, weakening, as with us, from circle to circle, as they recede from the center: that his friendships are strong and faithful to the uttermost extremity: that his sensibility is keen, even the warriors weeping most bitterly on the loss of their children, though in general they endeavor to appear superior to human events; that his vivacity and activity of mind is equal to ours in the same situation; hence his eagerness for hunting, and for games of chance. The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. With such, force is law. The stronger sex therefore imposes on the weaker. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality. That first teaches us to subdue the selfish passions, and to respect those rights in others which we value in ourselves. Were we in equal barbarism, our females would be equal drudges. [...] They raise fewer children than we do. The causes of this are to be found, not in a difference of nature, but of circumstance. The women very frequently attending the men in their parties of war and of hunting, child-bearing becomes extremely inconvenient to them. [...] To form a just estimate of their genius and mental powers, more facts are wanting, and great allowance to be made for those circumstances of their situation which call for a display of particular talents only. This done,
we shall probably find that they are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the “Homo sapiens Europæus”.

President Andrew Jackson, from his speech to Congress on Indian Removal, 6th December 1830:

"It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation. Two important tribes have accepted the provision made for their removal at the last session of Congress, and it is believed that their example will induce the remaining tribes also to seek the same obvious advantages. The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual States, and to the Indians themselves. The pecuniary advantages which it promises to the Government are the least of its recommendations. It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. […]

It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and
Christian community. What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion?[...] Doubtless it will be painful to leave the graves of their fathers; but what do they more than our ancestors did or than our children are now doing? To better their condition in an unknown land our forefathers left all that was dear in earthly objects. Our children by thousands yearly leave the land of their birth to seek new homes in distant regions. Does Humanity weep at these painful separations from everything, animate and inanimate, with which the young heart has become entwined? Far from it. It is rather a source of joy that our country affords scope where our young population may range unconstrained in body or in mind, developing the power and facilities of man in their highest perfection. These remove hundreds and almost thousands of miles at their own expense, purchase the lands they occupy, and support themselves at their new homes from the moment of their arrival. Can it be cruel in this Government when, by events which it cannot control, the Indian is made discontented in his ancient home to purchase his lands, to give him a new and extensive territory, to pay the expense of his removal, and support him a year in his new abode? How many thousands of our own people would gladly embrace the opportunity of removing to the West on such conditions! If the offers made to the Indians were extended to them, they would be hailed with gratitude and joy. [...]”
President Ronald Reagan, from his speech at Moscow State University, 31st May 1988:

“Let me tell you just a little something about the American Indian in our land. We have provided millions of acres of land for what are called preservations – or reservations, I should say. They, from the beginning, announced that they wanted to maintain their way of life, as they had always lived there in the desert and the plains and so forth. And we set up these reservations so they could, and have a Bureau of Indian Affairs to help take care of them. At the same time, we provide education for them – schools on the reservations. And they’re free also to leave the reservations and be American citizens among the rest of us, and many do. Some still prefer, however, that way – that early way of life. And we’ve done everything we can to meet their demands as to how they want to live. Maybe we made a mistake. Maybe we should not have humored them in that wanting to stay in that kind of primitive lifestyle. Maybe we should have said, no, come join us; be citizens along with the rest of us. As I say, many have; many have been very successful. And I’m very pleased to meet with them [a group of American Indians who traveled to Moscow], talk with them at any time and see what their grievances are or what they feel they might be. And you’d be surprised: Some of them became very wealthy because some of those reservations were overlaying great pools of oil, and you can get very rich pumping oil. And so, I don’t know what their complaint might be.”

President Barack Obama, from his speech at Standing Rock Indian Reservation, North Dakota, 13th June 2014:
Hello Dakota Nation! [...] When I was first running for President, I had the honor of visiting the Crow Nation in Montana. And today I’m proud to be making my first trip to Indian Country as President of the United States. I know that throughout history, the United States often didn’t give the nation-to-nation relationship the respect that it deserved. So I promised when I ran to be a President who’d change that – a President who honors our sacred trust, and who respects your sovereignty, and upholds treaty obligations, and who works with you in a spirit of true partnership, in mutual respect, to give our children the future that they deserve. [...] You see, my administration is determined to partner with tribes, and it’s not something that just happens once in a while. It takes place every day, on just about every issue that touches your lives. And that’s what real nation-to-nation partnerships look like. [...] We’ve made major investments to help grow tribal economies – investments in job training and tribal colleges; roads and high-speed Internet; energy, including renewable energy. And thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Native Americans -- like all Americans -- finally have access to quality, affordable health care. [...] So let’s put our minds together to build more economic opportunity in Indian Country – because every American, including every Native American, deserves the chance to work hard and get ahead, everybody. That means creating more jobs and supporting small businesses in places like Standing Rock – because young people should be able to live and work and raise a family right here in the land of your fathers and mothers. Let’s put our minds together to advance justice -- because like every American, you deserve to be safe in your communities and treated equally under the law. [...] Before we came here, Michelle and I sat with an amazing group of young people. I love these young people. I only spent an hour with them. They feel like my own. And you should be proud of them –
because they’ve overcome a lot, but they’re strong and they’re still standing, and they’re moving forward. And they’re proud of their culture. But they talked about the challenges of living in two worlds and being both “Native” and “American.” And some bright young people like the ones we met today might look around and sometimes wonder if the United States really is thinking about them and caring about them, and has a place for them, too. And when we were talking, I said, you know, Michelle and I know what it feels like sometimes to go through tough times. We grew up at times feeling like we were on the outside looking in. But thanks to family and friends, and teachers and coaches and neighbors that didn’t give up on us, we didn’t give up on ourselves. Just like these young people are not giving up on themselves. And we want every young person in America to have the same chance that we had – and that includes the boys and girls here in Indian Country. […]
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