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“LIVE FREE, READ HARD:” MASS-MARKET WESTERNS, MAINSTREAM READERS, AND THE FAR RIGHT, 1970-1999

A Dissertation

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Indigo Paris Ierulli Recker

August 2023

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Indigo Paris Ierulli Recker

2023

"LIVE FREE, READ HARD:" MASS-MARKET WESTERNS, MAINSTREAM READERS, AND THE FAR RIGHT, 1970-1999

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ABSTRACT

“LIVE FREE, READ HARD:” MASS-MARKET WESTERNS, MAINSTREAM READERS, AND THE FAR RIGHT, 1970-1999

By

Indigo Paris Ierulli Recker

August 2023

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Greg Barnhisel

This dissertation analyzes mass-produced western novels and their readers from the years 1970 to 1999. At the end of the twentieth century, when mass market western novels were sold at a rate indicating consistent readerships, the US was seeing a rise in far-right politics with events like the 1992 Ruby Ridge standoff, the 1993 WACO siege, and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. This readership, and these political movements, are the focus of this dissertation, exploring how readers situated themselves into political discourse, how political meanings embedded in mass-market fiction aligned with racial, class, gender, and regional identities in contemporary US culture and whether the consumption of these meanings shaped the political self-conceptions of readers.

I use a mixed-method approach beginning with a corpus analysis of seventy-five western novels analyzing what meanings were encoded in them, and how these meanings functioned ideologically. I then trace these ideological contours onto the political landscape of the far right in this period, analyzing key primary documents using western-coded discourses around race, gender, and settler colonial structures to articulate grievances and frame violence as an answer to perceived problems. In the last chapters, I explore how readers encountered and interacted with the ideological content in the western genre and where these encounters overlapped with the far right. Readers used identity as a lens to connect to a way of life that was inaccessible in their modern experiences. The 1980's to 1990's marked an important moment for the western reader, often feeling anxiety around the evolving genre and interpreted this as a threat to their identities. I argue readers with the most investment in systems of power were the most susceptible to an oppositional decoding position that overlapped with far-right politics. These readers had the most to lose and saw far-right groups acknowledging and reciprocating their felt grievances. Extreme politics explained what these readers saw happening, who was to blame, and offered solutions to protect what they were losing. This dissertation places texts alongside both readers and political contexts demonstrating prescience within the field of cultural reception studies at the intersection of literature and politics.

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Introduction: The "Weirdness" in the West

This dissertation is about western[1] novels and readers, the political environments in which readers read western novels, and how they conceptualize themselves in relation to both the novels they read and the environments they read them in. While scholars often point to the last decades of the twentieth century as a period in which the western saw a decline in popularity, mass market western novels were still being published and sold at a rate that indicates a consistent and continuing, if not smaller, readership.[2] This readership, however small, is the focus of this dissertation and specifically how these readers situate themselves into their contemporary political discourse. Additionally, in the last three decades of the twentieth century when popular mass-market authors like Elmer Kelton, Richard Wheeler, Matt Braun, Loren Estleman, Ralph Compton, and countless others were publishing mass-market westerns, the United States was seeing a rise in far-right extremism connected to broader movements in conservative politics that culminated in several violent events including the death of the Order's Robert Matthews in Washington in 1984, the standoff between Randy Weaver and US Marshalls at Ruby Ridge in 1992, WACO in 1993, and the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.[3] Is it possible for these two moments (one cultural and one political) to have shared certain discursive properties? And if so, what was the nature of this overlap?

---

[1] In this project, I use the lowercase "western" to refer to literary genres, narrative elements, or aesthetic qualities and I use the uppercase "West" to refer to actual geographic regions, inhabitants, or experiences.

[2] As John Mort explains in *Read the High Country: A Guide to Western Books and Films,* the year 1970 marks a "precipitous drop in the number of Westerns published and the number of films made" and with the exception of some of the more commercially successful authors like Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy, "the market for Western novels declined gradually" so that the "late 1980s, the early 1990's represents the nadir for Westerns" (9-10). Mort goes on to claim, however, that the traditional Western novel still being published tended "to be mass market paperback…aimed at a niche audience" (10). These sentiments are especially prevalent in library and information studies as librarians struggled with the quandary of whether or not to continue purchasing "a dying genre" even as it plays a "role in meeting the needs of readers" (St. Andre 33; Blake 4). These sentiments are mirrored in discussions from Western authors as well. John D. Nesbitt notes in a 2008 interview that "it is clear that the western genre is not as strong as it once was (through the 1960's or so), and I believe, as do many writers, that it is not likely to regain its earlier status. On the other hand, I do not believe that the readership is a shrinking group of people who are getting older and dying. My feeling is that the western is not going to vanish but that it will maintain a low level of popularity" (Boulden *Saddlebums Western Review*)

[3] While these high-profile events certainly brought widespread attention to militia groups in the West, the SPLC identifies the last decade of the Twentieth century as "virtually unprecedented in the history of the American radical

In the 1997 Spring issue of *Western Historical Quarterly,* historian Richard White poses a question in the opening lines of his essay about these intersecting discourses, asking: “what are we to make of the current outbreak of weirdness in the West?” (4). The ‘weirdness’ that White refers to in this question, and that he tries to answer over the course of this article, is what he describes as the “western turn to the political Right” in his contemporary moment, chiefly the prevalence of events like the “Unabomber and the Freeman bombings in Oklahoma City and Nevada…the county independence movement, the Aryan Nations, and the more extreme fringes of Wise Use” that had captured the interest of national media (4). White analyzes how these extreme events and ideologies could be explained through the regional dimensions of the “West”[4] and its specific histories, tensions, and relationships as contributing to the conditions through which this

---

right” (SPLC *Intelligence Report*). In 1996, the SPLC estimated around 441 armed militia groups in all fifty states and 858 “Patriot” groups; additionally the Aryan Nations saw an increase from three to twenty chapters in a single year in the early 1990s and wider adherence to “Christian Identity” ideologies are estimated at 50,000 people (*False Patriots* 5; *Intelligence Report*). As Kathleen Belew notes in her analysis on broader white power movements in the US, the militia movement reached its peak in the mid-1990’s counting “some five million members and sympathizers, according to one watchdog analysis…plac[ing] the militia movement in line with the largest surge of the Ku Klux Klan, whose membership peaked in 1924 at four million.” (5).

[4] The “West” is used throughout critical scholarship to refer to a variety of geographic places, concepts, processes, and histories, and is often used, as argued by Richard Aquila, in the late-19th and early 20th century amongst critics interchangeably with the American “frontier” as a signifier of US expansion across North America. As Robert Athearn notes, the “West” was not just the “West of geography. It was also the West of the mind, of the spirit, as a concept that for generations had reassured Americans of a future, a place to go… in the general direction of the Pacific Ocean lay a depository of unending resources, imperfectly described or understood, and a sources of Lebensraum that often was one more of imagery than of substance, yet dreamers thought of it as being real” (Athearn 10). Most recently, however, debates over the terminology of the “West” often bifurcate into the “mythic” West referring to specific socio-cultural constructions employed to reinforce narratives of American exceptionalism and individualism, and the geographical space of the US between the “Midwest” and the “West Coast” often defined by its agricultural and rural communities, experiences, and histories. While scholars like Susan Kollin and Steven Tatum foreground these competing definitions as an entry point into discussions of theories of space/place and regionalism, others seek to tease out the differences between representations and that which is represented, often paired, as in the work of William Handley, with discussions of authenticity. These definitions are often complicated and contested in the field of Western American Literature in ways that I don’t feel my proposed lines of inquiry are significantly challenging or deviating from, except perhaps to think about the ways in which this discussion itself (and the drawing of particular boundaries around what is “West” and what isn’t) is subject to processes of ideological positioning that seek to validate or invalidate lived experiences, material realities, or knowledges.

weirdness developed, including a "hatred of the federal government, obsession with guns, a particularly bleak view of the future" that fuel specific "self-conceptions" especially prevalent in the rural West (White 7-8; 14). In some ways, this project was born through my own resonance with White's question of weirdness and feeling the need to try and answer it myself. What I hope to show is that by inserting discussions of culture, and the political dimensions of the reception of culture, into White's framework of the "western turn to the political Right," we might better understand this "weirdness" even as it extends and develops beyond White's initial question. Additionally, I feel part of answering this question necessitates a push back against his usage of "weirdness" as a political demarcating of "normal" or "acceptable" perspectives from those perceived to be as extreme, radical, or seemingly without explainable phenomena.[5]

The guiding questions for this project come from these complex relationships between reader, text, and context—who reads mass market novels and why? Who reads westerns and why? How do they identify with the stories in them and what do they get out of the process or experience of reading? How do the texts we read carry political meanings and how do readers then act on those meanings or change their ideas or worldview because of those meanings? How do our political contexts inform, or influence, how we interpret a text? The project begins with a corpus analysis of seventy-five western novels from 1970-1999, exploring what we know about westerns in this period, what kind of meaning was encoded in them, and how these meanings functioned ideologically. I argue that the genre conventions of setting, character, and patterns of action in the western are intertwined with ideologies of gender, race, and settler colonial logics. Specially, that these novels present a hegemonic masculinity that prioritizes male agency and subjectivity, that reinforces whiteness through logics of elimination by naturalizing whiteness as a form of power, and finally, that legitimizes settler colonial structural relationships by coding conquest through the personal narratives of settling (in various economic and social capacities). The second chapter analyzes the political discourse from this same period, focusing specifically on the political discourse of far-right extremist groups and how these groups utilized the same ideological constructions of race, gender, and settler colonial logics in the western genre. This chapter argues that far-right extremist groups were deeply invested in the western mythos to articulate their political grievance and proposed violence as a solution to these grievances. I argue that these groups narrativized their ideologies by connecting the land of the western US to both the white nation and the people that occupy it, coding them according to various gendered characters and into relation to community. Additionally, I argue that these narratives are effective because they provide a framework that readers are familiar with and are already invested in through various regional identities. The third and fourth chapters further explore these identities, asking how these ideologies encoded in the western genre resonated with readers and how they overlapped with the far-right political discourse. In the third chapter, I argue that readers used identity as a lens through which they navigated the western genre without having to reckon with the ideological violence at its heart. In this period, western readers sought entertainment, but they also sought a connection to history, to the land they lived on, and to themselves. The final chapter explores the crucial moment in the 1990s that this identity lens fails, and I analyze the role that readers' political context played in this failure. In this last chapter, I trace the confluence of culture and politics in this period. I argue readers were at the heart of this confluence, demonstrating anxiety around the changing of the genre and what it meant for their own self-conceptions. In each chapter, I pursue the answers to these questions born from an interest in this Western "weirdness" and piece answers together to better understand this moment (both culturally and politically) but to also better understand how the fabric of a genre as a linguistic-cultural system could be interwoven with the language of power, with far-reaching implications.

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[5] I think, for the most part, this is a stylistic choice on White's part, and that he believes these events do have very explainable, and specifically historical, phenomena which, indeed, makes up the bulk of his own argument. But I think it still raises questions about how scholars frame discussions of political mainstream/fringe discourses and that his coding of weirdness as strange/foreign/inexplicable/etc. is worth engaging with at face value because White's stylistic choice depends upon the "weirdness" of these events resonating with his academic audience.

Methodology:

This project utilizes a mixed-method approach that combines textual analysis and archival research to draw conclusions about both texts and readers. Rather than relying on close readings of a few westerns, the first chapter makes connections between genre conventions and ideology by using distance reading methods of corpus analysis and critical discourse analysis on a representative selection of western novels from 1970 to 1999. While corpus linguistics is an emerging methodology in the field of literary studies, corpus analysis and critical discourse analysis are frequently used together in rhetoric and applied linguistics to understand the "relationship between language and ideology" (Orpin 38). Corpus linguistics (CL) refers to the analysis of language patterns that "investigates various linguistic phenomena from the corpus, identifying 'probabilities, trends, patterns, co-occurrence of elements, features, or grouping of features from which generalizations about language can be made" (Nartey and Mwinlaaru 205) and is an emerging method for analyses of popular culture and genre fiction. Similarly, critical discourse analysis (CDA) refers to a series of overlapping methodologies whose foundational theoretical framework is that "texts, embedded in recurring 'discursive practices' for their production, circulation, and reception which are themselves embedded in 'social practice' are among the principal ways in which ideology is circulated and reproduced" (Johnstone 93).[6] As Duff and Zappa-Hollman argue, CDA is an emerging method for cultural critics studying how popular culture encodes dimensions of hegemonic power (2). CL's scope and CDA's focus on the political dimensions of popular culture offer important frameworks for thinking about how the language and genre conventions of mass-market westerns constitute recurring discursive practices that do specific ideological work.

Corpus analysis and critical discourse analysis are also common methodologies for scholars analyzing white supremacist or extremist discourse[7] and recent scholarship like Bucur's "Gender Homophily in Online Book Networks" which uses corpus analysis and data mining to explore genre fiction and gender in large scale book markets and how they act as a mediating space for both author and reader. As Paul Baker argues, the combination of corpus linguistic methods and critical discourse analysis can offset traditional criticism leveled at CDA that it allows for researchers to 'cherry pick' data which "appear to prove a preconceived point" (248). Similarly, Mahlberg cautions against the overreliance on corpus analysis noting that "quantitative research can only provide insights when it is linked to qualitative analysis" (Mahlberg "Corpus Linguistics"

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[6] Corpus analysis has been used in literary analyses before like in Montoro and McIntyre's analysis of grammatical subordination as a marker for literary complexity, Michaela Mahlberg's many works on corpus stylistics in nineteenth century literature, and Puurtinen's analysis of ideology and syntax in literary translation.

[7] See, Brindle's "The Language of Hate" (2018) and Kyrala's Corpus Cools and the Linguistic Study of Ideology: Searching for Fascism in *Atlas Shrugged* (2009).

292). For these reasons, I pair these CL/CDA methods in the first chapter with textual analysis of political discourse in the second chapter and use archival materials in the third and fourth chapters to document the material structures and processes that connected western novels to readers and analyze historical self-reporting from readers themselves to draw conclusions about the reception of the genre.

In my third and fourth chapters, I utilize "reconstruction" methodologies to build knowledge about readers outside of the historical record, including their reading practices. This methodology is informed by scholars like Elizabeth McHenry[8] and Erin Smith[9] who focus on communities of readers at a specific historical moment and wrestle with how to understand readers when there is very little material to trace in the first place. They argue that by asking broader questions about the infrastructure that supports, encourages, and places texts in the hands of readers, we can learn more about readers themselves and learn more about how texts operate as "social processes, economic, political, and psychic transactions among writers, editors, publishers, distributors and the reader who encounter printed materials" (McHenry 7-10; Smith 5) Smith, in particular, reconstructs a genre reader's experience by exploring the surrounding contexts (librarians, social workers, teachers, government agencies, publishers, writers, advertisers, etc.) that facilitated the reader's access to literary texts and that often documented their practices (16). These communities have a vested interest in their readership as paying customers and so often worked to understand who they were and what they wanted. Smith also traces how the genre evolved as reader trends evolved into the interwar period, including literacy rates during the Depression and how those coincided with the "readability" of genre fiction as well how the influx of marginal writers in genre fiction after World War II highlights how the genre is wrapped up in contradictions even as it reflects and informs the identities of its readers (135; 168). These works are crucial to this project's methodology as they highlight how the information surrounding readers can help us understand the readers themselves, but also how these methodologies can be used to make arguments about readers in relation to their socio-political contexts. In my third and fourth chapters, I reconstruct the western reader using archive materials that document brief moments of self-reporting, but that also analyze the social and economic infrastructure, including publishers, authors, editors, and literary agents, that would yield the most accurate picture of the western reader.

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[8] *In Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (2002), McHenry analyzes several prominent literary societies and the wider Black women's club movements in the 1890's, arguing that these literary societies "were formed not only as places of refuge for the self-improvement of their members but as acts of resistance to the hostile racial climate that made the United States an uncomfortable and unequal place for all black Americans, regardless of their social or economic condition" (17).

[9] Erin Smith's *Hard Boiled: Working Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* analyzes the relationship between genre (in this case detective pulp fiction) and its readers (predominately white working-class men) between 1923 and the early 1950's.

Cultural Studies, Myth, and Reception: Key Scholarly Frameworks and Conversations

The guiding theories for this project stem from the field of cultural studies, how it conceptualizes the interplay between culture and politics and the work of Stuart Hall in particular. In his seminal essay, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," Hall puts forth a theory of communication that, along with his other writings on culture, ideology, and society, influenced methodologies and analyses of contemporary critics wanting to better understand the reader and their processes of reading. Hall stresses that the purpose of this theory is to highlight the "interconnection between societal structures and processes [and]…symbolic structure" and the resulting communication, often between systems of elitist culture ‘gatekeepers’ and their readers constitutes a specific form of “systematically distorted communication” (257). This process of communication is made up of several moving parts but is fundamentally made up of the ‘object’ of production (or text) that is encoded with certain symbolic or discursive properties that produce the message and then is decoded by the audience (or reader) with varying levels of communicative efficacy whereby the set of decoded have some kind of “effect”—they “influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences” (260). While Hall writes specifically about television and media discourse, I believe popular fiction can be characterized in similar ways. Indeed, Hall uses the western genre to model this theory—the “TV Western, modeled on the early Hollywood B-feature genre Western: with its clear-cut, good/bad Manichean moral universe,” the western represents a transformative process that move history to myth with a “stylized set of codes” (261-2). Ultimately, this transformative process defines the western genre as a “set of extremely tightly coded rules…whereby stories of a certain recognizable type, content, and structure” can be encoded with both denotative and connotative meanings (262-3). And, far from being constraining, the “sedimentation” or “ritualization” of these tightly coded genre conventions work to routinize certain meanings to “free the foreground for new, innovative meanings” and “redistribute the focus of ritual performances from one domain (e.g., the emotional or personal) to another (e.g., the cognitive, cosmological, or social) domain” (266). The first two chapters of this project explore encoding as it exists in both cultural and political texts thinking specifically about what ideological connotations exist within these tight coded genre conventions of the western, about how these connotations help narrativize political positions. encoding provides the linguistic “means by which the domains of social life—the segmentations of culture, power, and ideology—are made to signify” referring to the “‘maps of social reality’ [that] have the whole range of social meanings, practices and usages, power, and interest ‘written in’ to them” (269).

But these encoding processes, by which genres like westerns make meaning, only represent one side of a very complex feedback loop between producers and consumers of cultural texts. Indeed, Hall notes that the fundamental polysemic qualities of these “signifying elements” means that how an individual decodes these elements is not “set” nor are there any means through which encoders can “ensure that the receiver will take the preferred or dominant meaning…in precisely the way in which it has been encoded” (265). For these reasons, I use the last two chapters to explore how readers decode meaning as they read westerns, and crucially how they interact with the ideological structures at their heart. Hall argues that viewers can occupy three main decoding “positions” with varying relations to the “preferred” meanings intended by a text’s encoders that structure the polysemic potentiality in each reader’s experiences with a text. The “dominant” or “hegemonic” code is when a reader takes the “connotated meaning” from a particular discourse in the way in which it was intended, carrying within its message the legitimacy of what appears “coterminous with what is ‘natural,’ inevitable,’ and ‘taken for granted’ about the social order” (272-3). The “negotiated” code is when readers identify and accept some aspects of the dominant-hegemonic code but mixes these aspects with various “adaptive or oppositional elements.” The negotiated code “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions…while [in a situational level] it makes its own ground rules, operating with exceptions to the rules” (273). For these reasons, decoding within a negotiated position might appear to have various contradictions because those within it operate with “particular or situated logics” that arise from their differential position in relation to power hierarchies or spectrums. And finally, Hall describes an “oppositional” code as one in which it is possible for a reader to “understand both the literal and connotative inflection…but to determine to decode the message in a globally contrary way” (274). In this position, the reader “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” The third chapter explores the moments readers (or surrounding stakeholders) demonstrate dominant hegemonic decoding positions, while the fourth chapter explores moments when readers move into both negotiated and oppositional decoding positions including how specific social or political conditions might operate as situated logics or alternative frames of reference to encourage readers to move between these codes and what the implications are for this shifting.

Additionally, Hall’s theories of hegemony, class struggle, and ideology in relation to race are important not only for theories of reception and decoding, but to this project as a whole that connects larger political and cultural moments in the United States. As he argues in “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” the lived experience of class relations and the social function of culture must be considered through race, as both the “modality in which class is ‘lived’” and the “dominant means of ideological representation” (Hall “Race, Articulation” 341). These representations are key to understanding the best approach for “those who seek…to disarticulate some of the existing syntaxes of class struggle” (341). Hall argues and demands that any analysis that approaches this kind of framework must first start with examining “the specific forms which racism assumes in its ideological functions…[as] the site of capital's continuing hegemony" (341). The implications for Hall's work on the ideological functioning of race in relation for my analysis of mass-market westerns and political discourse is enormous. Indeed, I argue that an analysis of western fiction in the twentieth century is not complete without this theoretical framework, and each chapter explores the capacity of cultural texts like the western to function ideologically in support of systems constructed upon the white supremacy and processes of settler colonial dispossession.

The other theoretical conversation that informs this conversation is discussion of "myth," it's relation to both ideology and genre. The term itself comes from Aristotle's *Poetics,* in which *mythos* is described as the "imitation of the action" or the "sequence of events," within the tragedy genre, which fundamentally represents (*mimesis*) an aspect of life that is "serious, complete, and possessing profound implications" (Aristotle). Myth is not only about narrative, but narrative in relationship to reality; and even when scholars like Roland Barthes engage with theories of myth in the modern world, what remains is myth as "a type of speech…a system of communication…a message" (218). When literary critics approach ideology and genre in Western literature, they gravitate towards a characterization of the "myth" of the West as a system of interconnected stories. As Richard Slotkin argues, the naturalization of these mythic narratives is the fossilization of genre conventions within the production of popular culture and that myth:

> expresses ideology in a narrative, rather than discursive or argumentative, structure. Its language is metaphorical and suggestive rather than logical and analytical. The movement of a mythic narrative, like that of any story, implies a theory of history (or even of cosmology); but these ideas are offered in a form that disarms critical analysis by its appeal to the structures and traditions of story-telling and the clichés of human memory (Slotkin 6).

While this dissertation doesn't offer any theoretical interventions into conversations on myth, I would like to build on Slotkin's definition to prioritize a political understanding of myth that highlights the affective components of one's belief in myths as being relevant to an analysis of the reception of ideological components in cultural texts. According to Christopher Flood, political myths are "narratives of past, present, or predicted political events [that] relate stories which can often be grouped in broadly similar categories to those which have been applied to the myths of traditional societies—such as stories of origins and founding, stories of the exploits of culture heroes, stories of rebirth or renewal" (Flood 51). When I use "mythos" throughout this project to refer to the narratives or narrative patterns in the western genre, in political discourse, or in readers' experiences, I refer to narratives that are "more or less constant in a number of instances of narrative discourse" existing in culture, both historical and modern. And I imply that this discourse is "ideologically marked," meaning it invites "assent to a particular ideological standpoint" or family of ideologies (Flood 52). As I will discuss in the later chapters, the family of ideologies most important to the political functions of the myth of the West include race and constructions of whiteness, hegemonic masculinity, and settler colonial replacement logics.

What is often missing from theoretical engagement with myth, especially in cultural texts like westerns, is how these myths are received, what their impact is on an individual level, and how they potentially contribute to a reader's self-conceptions, including the development of a political identity in relation to consuming or interacting with ideology. It is here that scholars often turn to *thymos,* another concept with classical origins, that when, combined with myth, could offer a key theoretical framework through which to approach questions of encoding, decoding, culture, politics, and identity. In *The Republic,* Plato describes *thymos* as “spiritedness,” and describes it as the part of the soul that “invests objects with value” and that “seeks recognition” in relation to how they view and value themselves (Fukuyama 165-6; Ganesh 4). Additionally, this self-valuation possesses the potential to seek “redress of the injustices done to it” if others do not recognize them in the ways that they recognize themselves (Ganesh 4). For these reasons, *thymos* is a topic of discussion for many contemporary political scientists, the most thorough of which is Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Fukuyama and others take up the importance of *thymos* in political spheres and the specific affective qualities that come with seeking both recognition and redress. One of these qualities is anger, or rage, born from “a desire for a desire, that is, a desire that the person who evaluated us too low should change his opinion and recognize us according to our own estimate of our worth…indeed, he is driven into a bloody rage when that sense of self-worth is denigrated (Fukuyama 165-6). Additionally, Peter Sloterdijk makes connections between the rage of *thymos* and what he calls “hate culture” whereby “the seeds of rage are consciously dispersed, and the fruits of rage are diligently harvested” (59). This cultivation creates a “tension between then, now, and later” where one’s *thymos* can not only “live in history but also makes history” as someone continually invests and reinvests in their “desire for gratification,” discover the world purely “as the realm of constructing future projections…[and their] rage becomes the momentum of a movement into the future, which one can understand as the raw material for historical change (Sloterdijk 60). In the interplay between the internal (how one feels about themselves) and the external (how one’s self-conceptions is built through ascribing value in objects) and whether these internal and external self-conceptions are recognized and validated by others, *thymos* becomes a valuable framework to not only think about the reception of myth, but the connections between myth, ideology, identity, and political movements. Some scholars are already doing this work, like Bharath Ganesh's "Weaponizing White Thymos: Flows of Rage in the Online Audiences of the Alt-Right" which analyzes rhetorical elements of "white *thymos*"[10] present in certain types of online discourse. Ganesh argues that the "connective flows" of white victimhood weaponize affect towards white supremacist ideological goals, again building off cultural studies concepts like Raymond Williams' "structures of feeling" (3). These theories offer exciting paths forward in the connection between myth, reception studies, and political identity. *Thymos* could measure the implication of myth in relation to a reader's identity, and specifically for this project, could highlight how the reception of a western might be dependent upon a reader's engagement or recognition of the myth as something they value in themselves. *Thymos* thus offers a vocabulary to not only describe recognition as it occurs in reader experiences as they engage in western myths but explains the affective response (anxiety, fear, or rage) felt when the "myth" fails to reflect what a reader feels is owed to them, or when others fail to recognize the myth as both part of themselves and worthy of praise. I return to these ideas in the third and fourth chapters when I explore how readers decode the western genre and how they see themselves in it and feel threated when it begins to change.

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[10] According to Ganesh, white *thymos* "describes a complex of pride, rage, resentment, and anger that is created through informational and affective circuits that creates the perception of a loss of white entitlement" (3)

The critical scholarship surrounding the reception of cultural texts is immense, especially considering that this project threads a methodological needle between several theories and approaches to both reception and reader response. As a subfield of literary studies, reader response and reception studies both involve looking at cultural texts from the perspective of those that consume them and focuses on the myriad ways these texts are received with the assumption that culture is a process informed by multiple sites of "production, representation, identity, consumption and lived experience" (Willis 1; Benwell 148). Originally pioneered by critics like Hans Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish,[11] reception studies began in response to New Critical approaches to literary analysis that focused on the text as the primary driver of meaning. Instead, reception critics theorize the reader as an active participant in constant dialogue with the text and as producer of meaning in their own right, not merely as an empty vessel who absorbs the text's objective meaning as established by the author (Goldstein and Machor xii). In addition to this active and dialogic theorizing of the reader, current reception studies critics often operate with an understanding of the reading process itself as both collective and social as much as a solitary pursuit driven only by the reader and the study of this process can help illuminate "how people create meaning and how individuals negotiate, resist, and are constrained by forms of symbolic power" (Luther 2) From this perspective, reading isn't just a linear interaction between reader and text, it also includes the relationships between reader and author, between readers, and across multiple texts. This process of reading is fundamentally dynamic; it can "endorse social meanings" and is mediated by social infrastructure (Light 8). As Elizabeth Long argues, this social infrastructure of readers and texts is made up of publishing companies, libraries, schools, and large communities of readers that fundamentally "shape reading practices by authoritatively defining what is worth reading and how to read it [that] has effects on what kinds of books are published, reviewed, and kept in circulation" (Long 192). And so, reception studies and reader response, as broadly defined fields of literary study, also involve the analysis of contexts that surround the reader as they can help us better understand the reader themselves and what they get out of their unique mode of reading. As Gelder and Machor argue, examining a reader's "changing horizons and sociohistorical contexts, [reception] criticism reveals literature's historical influence or reception" (Gelder and Machor xii). Critics approach this collective process from a variety of different frameworks and methodologies but for the purposes of this project, I will outline the scholarship that uses reception theory to analyze popular culture including genre fiction as well as those that prioritize intersections of race, gender, or political implications of reception in American literature and culture. I then briefly highlight the limited scholarship that analyzes the reception of the western genre specifically.

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[11] See, Jauss' *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), Iser's *The Implied Reader* (1974) and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), and Fish's *Is There a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (1980).

Several key trends emerge in scholarship surrounding the reception of popular genre, their readers, and reading practices. The first is that since the early twentieth century, scholars have responded to perceptions of genre fiction as a part of "low" mass-produced culture that exists within a profit-driven capitalist system and is thus not worth studying. Seminal works like Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide,* argue that these high/low culture divides are crucial to understanding the cultural landscape of the US in the twentieth century and analyze how these tensions shape the arguments that we can make about various literary movements and genres (viii-ix). Additionally, readers of mass cultural texts like popular genres are often stereotyped to reflect this low culture label of the texts themselves, characterized as unintelligent, seduced, and addicted to the cheap thrills of writing that lacks literary merit (Gelder 13). In countering these assumptions, reception studies critics claim that popular genres create and depend on high levels of reader specialization and complexity, with readers often becoming as knowledgeable (when it comes to the genre) as the authors themselves, and argue that genre conventions play an important role in this collective process of reading and are a primary reason for readers' enjoyment of genre fiction (Gelder 13). In this way, reception approaches to popular genres often focus on the conversations that readers have with authors, and each other, through reading genre fiction, referencing other texts, bucking conventions and argue it is this broader conversation that "'junk fiction' readers most enjoy" (Jenkins 88).

One of the bigger trends in genre fiction reception studies includes analyzing how the readers of popular genres navigate questions of gender and gender identity. Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984), perhaps the best-known of these works, revolutionized the study of readers and their reading practices through an analysis of self-reported experiences of women romance-novel readers. Radway pioneered a methodology that shifted critical attention almost exclusively on the reader and the reading process. While the romance genre and its various texts and thematic content are important, Radway leverages this information into an argument about the romance reader and specifically what they got out of the process of reading itself. With this methodological approach to the reader, Radway fuses reader response and cultural theory and articulates how women readers challenge their gendered social lives through the act of reading romances. As Radway argues, women readers view the act of romance reading:

> from within a belief system that accepts as given the institutions of heterosexuality and monogamous marriage, it can be conceived as an activity of mild protest and longing for reform necessitated by those institutions' failure to satisfy the emotional needs of women. Reading therefore functions for them as an act of recognition and contestation whereby that failure is first admitted and then partially reversed. Hence, the…readers' claim that romance reading is a 'declaration of independence' and a way to say to others, 'this is my time, my space. Now leave me alone' (Radway 213).

A seminal text in reader response criticism, *Reading the Romance* opened new lines of inquiry within reader response approaches to "mass-produced" art that help us learn more about the "ideological power of contemporary cultural forms" (222). Since *Reading the Romance,* scholars continued to think about how readers respond to, and receive, texts—especially in popular fiction. The scholarship around genre fiction following Radway's seminal text is characterized by its continuing engagement with questions of gender and its commitment to theoretical frameworks informed by Marxist cultural theory.[12] Approaching the reception of popular genres from these theoretical perspectives is useful because it builds on Radway's ideas of the reader as someone who is shaped by their social systems but who can also push back against them as "social actors" trying to discuss these cultural networks (i.e., popular genres) “in their own terms” (Driscoll 428). Continuing this tradition of fusing reception studies with cultural theory and affect especially in the relationship between audience in media theory and ideology is important for understanding first how the western reader consumes novels, what they get out of them (in an affective sense), and then how these experiences intersect with the reader’s encounters with political discourse.

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[12] As Amy Luther notes in *Men Reading Fiction,* most of this scholarship has focused on "female readers and/or of 'women's genres' including romance and women's magazines (for examples see Christian-Smith 1993, Cohn 1988, Dixon 1999, Fowler 1991, Hermes 1995, Modleski 1988, Owen 1997, Radford 1986, Taylor 1989) and more recently, studies on modern women's fiction also referred to as 'chick lit' (Ferriss and Mallory 2006, Whelehan 2005)" (2-3)

While much of the scholarship in reader response and popular genres focus on women readers, the study of male readers and how gender informs, or is informed by, their reading practices is also crucial to this analysis. Critics like Reed, Luther, and Summers all acknowledge that male readers pose some challenges for reader response approaches.[13] One of these challenges is the assumption that men do not even read and so perhaps are not worth studying; as Jason Pinter contends though, men do read: “tons of them. But they’re not marketed to, not targeted, and often totally dismissed” (qtd in Summer 245). The full-scale ethnographies on male readers that do exist often find that the reading practices of male readers reflect how culture plays a significant role in the development of gender identity especially against larger hegemonic constructions of masculinity even if gender isn’t the only factor that influences readers (Reed 180-1; 197).[14] Amy Luther’s qualitative study of 38 interviews and 13 book group session with male fiction readers is geared towards these intersections, analyzing “how men discursively articulate their gendered identity in relation to this cultural practice [i.e., reading]" (1). Ultimately, Luther found that the "symbolic power of gender" acted as an "organizing principle" for participants as they discussed their own reading practices across genre especially in relation to the "discursive construction of identity," arguing that "linking genre to gender as a system of cultural difference can elucidate the workings of the symbolic power of gender" (4; 220-2). The scholarly precedent for examining the relationship between reader, gender, and genre informs this analysis as it tries to understand how western readers construct identities through the consumption of mass culture and how assumptions by publishers about what a predominantly male readership wants out of their western novels can shape the genre itself.

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[13] Adam Reed’s 2002 “Henry and i: An ethnographic account of men’s fiction reading” traces men’s fiction reading in a UK literary society; Amy Luther’s 2010 doctoral thesis, *Men reading fiction: A study of the relationship between reader, (con)text, consumption and gender identity* is based on 38 interviews with male readers and 13 book group sessions; Kate Summers’ 2013“Adult Reading Habits and Preferences in Relation to Gender Differences,” surveyed 58 adult readers both male and female.

[14] According to the Luther, the studies that do exist often focus on magazines, pornography, comics or exist within autobiographical self-reporting (3). This approach is also seen in Bethan Benwell’s “‘Luck this is Anonymous:’ Ethnographies of Reception in Men’s Magazines” (2006)

Reception studies scholars also implement new methods that answer some of these same questions about genre, reader and reading practices using large data sets from both the publishing industry and digital spaces. As mentioned previously, scholars like Beth Driscoll, DeNel Rehberg Sedo, and Mike Thelwell[15] use self-reporting data from *Goodreads* to draw conclusions about readers and the reception of certain texts. Driscoll and Denel's "Seeing the Intimacy in Goodreads Reviews" focuses specifically on how the use of emotional language within reviews offers insights into what readers get out of reading certain texts. As far back as *Reading the Romance,* reader response analyses of genre fiction highlight the importance of using theoretical frameworks attuned to questions of power and gender, and while ethnographies of readers are still important, more contemporary scholarly analyses showcase how new methodologies are being implemented that analyze different kinds of data to draw similar conclusions about readers and their reading without talking to them.

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[15] For more on scholarship that uses Goodreads self-reporting as a dataset, see Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo's "Faraway, So Close: Seeing the Intimacy in Goodreads Reviews" (2019) and "Reader and Author Gender and Genre in Goodreads" (2019).

Additionally, critics have analyzed how culture intersects with political discourse often focusing on the texts themselves to draw conclusions about how people consume them. Works like Laura Jeffries' "The White Meme's Burden: Replication and Adaptation in Twenty-First Century White Supremacist Internet Cultures" and Shannon O'Sullivan's recent dissertation, "Frontiersmen are the 'Real Men' in Trump's America: Hegemonic Masculinity at Work on U.S. Cable's Version of Blue-Collar Reality," analyze how political discourse circulates and how cultural and political discourse inform each other. O'Sullivan also uses Hall's encoding/decoding theories of reception to draw conclusions about the "interlocking systems of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, and capitalism" and fusing cultural and political discourse analysis to highlight how these popular television programs function ideologically (9: 224).

These scholarly approaches inform this project in numerous ways. First, there is a scholarly precedent for thinking about the reception of cultural texts through a political lens and indeed, that perhaps it's impossible to separate the cultural from the political. Additionally, this work shows how, like some of the analyses of popular fiction, reception approaches to political discourse offer valuable insights into questions of identity formation and affect and how they interrelate. And finally, in addition to literary approaches to reception that reconstruct readers, those that fuse political and cultural discourse highlight how an analysis of various primary materials can be used to draw conclusions about readers or how cultural texts are received but also how they can be used to make an argument about the relationship between culture and politics. These elements are crucial to this project's reconstruction of the western reader and how this reconstruction demonstrates anxiety around threats to reader identity.

Although there has yet to be a comprehensive analysis of contemporary western readers, some scholarship does delve into the reception of the western genre, including book history studies on the western genre in the early twentieth century, audience media analysis of western films and television in the twentieth century, and studies on how the identities of people living in the Western US are shaped by cultural representations of the West. Christine Bold analyzes how the genre was shaped by authors' relationship with the publishing industry as well as the friction when western authors resisted the genre's prescribed formulas, what role readers played in this dynamic (*Selling* xvi-xvii; 4-7; 32). Bold's analysis prioritizes how the genre was shaped by the various market forces of the publishing industry and has more recently pushed these ideas further to consider how popular print culture like dime novels can be reimagined as a site of resistance for indigenous cultural producers, especially as the western has historically been couched in their objectification and caricature (Bold "Did Indians" 135-6). Critics who take a broader approach to popular culture in the US often address these questions when they discuss the role of the western in twentieth century consumption practices. Gary Cross highlights how the western genre has an inherent nostalgic function especially in relation to its "mythic" qualities arguing that nostalgia binds together a widespread community of individuals who share the same desire to get back the things that they believe society has lost (Cross 15; 126; 10-1). The community function of nostalgia especially in relation to the western television audience is interesting because it makes connections between the reception of the western genre (why people watch it and what they get out it) and the broader social and economic realities of contemporary US society. In a similar way, JoAnn Conrad's takes up the western film audience to think about their role as consuming subjects in the US in the 1950's (arguably the "golden era" of western film) and how western film reflect a midcentury American society dominated by consumerist ideologies of the nuclear family while also modeling how the audience might fit into this wider social narrative (72). Other scholars take this approach to the western but focus on a single text instead of how the genre functions as a whole, using its reception to make an argument about that text. This is the case in works like Marisa Mazart's thesis "Breaking Bad: On the Western Genre and Audience," where the production and consumption of a single text, the television series *Breaking Bad,* are analyzed together to show how the show subverts the traditional conventions of the western genre. Mazart also uses Hall's theories of encoding/decoding, and half the project focuses on how meaning is constructed by the show's viewers through an analysis of IMDB reviewer demographics, online forum comments, and the purchasing of merchandise (64). Mazart's decoding methodology highlights how the audiences watched this show for a variety of reasons and experienced gratification in watching like the need to escape, the desire to form relationships with other fans of the show, as well as reinforcing values or specific aspects of their personal identity that then also shape their viewing (64-7). These analyses offer some valuable starting points in thinking about a reception studies approach to the western and raise important questions about why people read or watch westerns and what they get out of them. Audience is a crucial component of critical media studies, especially in the analysis of film, and so is a vital component of the critical work that analyzes westerns film and television. However, I believe the reader plays just as much of a role within the production of western fiction and similar critical attention should be paid to their processes of consumption as ritualistic practice and especially how these processes are tied to larger social, economic, or political landscapes of American life.

And finally, while not strictly reception studies or ethnographic reader response of the western genre, several critical works explore the connections between the West as it is represented in culture and the identities of those that are both the audience and the people being represented. Similar to Bold's strategic questioning of whether "Indians" read dime novels, Dulce Kersting's thesis "Deciphering Myth and Masculinity in Cowboy Memoirs" and Nicolaas Mink's "A (Napoleon) Dynamite Identity: Rural Idaho, the Politics of Place and the Creation of a New Western Film" both take on, as their objects of study, the identities of people living in the Western US and the impact of watching their own represented occupational or regional identities within the signifying practices of the "mythic western" cultural imaginary. Kersting's findings highlight how the relationship between the representations of cowboys in westerns and the real cowboys they represented is deeply complicated. The memoirs show how these men were preoccupied with the idea of "truth" as it related to their own authentic portrayal, but also refused to be "passive recipients" and often "internalized, perpetuated and sometimes challenged" their own identities in relation to their popular representations, especially when it came to how they understood their masculinity (iv; 80). In similar way, Mink's analysis examines the coming-of-age film, *Napoleon Dynamite* through the lens of its New West backdrop in rural Idaho and the effect it had on the identities of the people it represented, arguing that the film forces audiences to see the rural West in new ways as it chronicles the "tensions between region and nation, myth and reality, and dominant and marginal groups” even as it links itself to the long tradition of place-based cultural production (154-5; 172-5) Although both critical works use cultural texts to make historical arguments, I think they offer useful models for thinking about the complicated relationship between representations and represented subjects in the western, especially as it relates to the western reader and reader identity.

This brief overview of the theories, methodologies, and criticism pertinent highlight some of the important elements of reception approaches to the western that inform this project—chiefly that western readers are drawn to the genre for specific reasons and prompting critics to find out where readers leave traces of these reasons and responses and make connections between these traces and the genre itself. Additionally, as others have argued, attention must be paid to the relationship between the affective reception of westerns and the identity of its readers as they navigate the representations of certain values, of the past, and of themselves. Conversations of identity are at the heart of the scholarship dedicated to the reception of the western and I hope this project not only contributes to these conversations but ties disparate conversations together to better understand the interplay between the cultural and the political.

Chapter 1 “A lone man in a wild, lonely land:”

Encoding Naturalized Settler Violence in the Western Genre

Part One: Literary Conventions and History of the Western Genre

In his literary memoir, *The Accidental Novelist,* western author Richard Wheeler recounts a memorable experience at the 1982 Western Writers of America conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico. While attending a panel on the historical cowboy, Wheeler watches as the presentation is interrupted by a group of local activists who “commandeered the podium and mic and began denouncing us [western writers]” (46). According to Wheeler, the protestors laid several accusations at the doorstep of western authors and their writing: “we were, they said, celebrating cultural genocide. We were racists. We were celebrating the triumph of white men over Indians. We were, in essence, fascists and authoritarians. We were imposing our values on people who didn’t want or accept them” (46). This is one of many moments in the memoir which Wheeler describes western literature as being “under siege” on multiple fronts. He notes again later in the text that literary critics, including John Cawelti, Richard Slotkin, Leslie Fiedler, Richard Etulain and others, came to similar conclusions as the protesters, arguing that the genre was “racist, sexist, and imperialist” (193). Wheeler takes issue with these accusations, claiming that while some of these critics engage with examples to support these claims, “it was plain that the critics had scarcely sampled this vast array of literature and were drawing conclusions that had no solid basis in research.” (193). Wheeler’s articulation of these criticisms highlights an interesting tension regarding the western novel, and even disagreement about what the genre is, at the end of the twentieth century.

At the heart of this disagreement is the claim that westerns have perpetuated certain harmful ideologies, and the rejoinder that these novels, especially those written in the early to mid-twentieth century, were simply “of their time” and now defunct. If some westerns are racist and sexist, goes the argument, they are either the exception to the rule and not representative of the genre as a whole or simply a product of the historical circumstance. At stake in this disagreement, it seems, is the often-concomitant idea that the western story is the story of American character and that if these stories are racist, sexist, and imperialist—then the “national” story must be also racist, sexist, and imperialist and the larger implications of this for certain groups of people and identities. In this chapter, I explore these issues and analyze whether the western genre (as represented by the seventy-five novels in the corpus) does carry ideological meanings, and how these meanings are encoded with the linguistic patterns of the genre’s conventions. In the first part of the chapter, I overview the genre’s conventions but also briefly trace how, and why, the genre changed throughout the century. Then, in the second part of the chapter I explore how the genre’s conventions of setting, character, and patterns of action were encoded with ideologies in the loosely assembled families of gender, race, and settler colonialism. What this analysis shows is that contrary to what Wheeler (and others) claimed, the western genre was deeply ideological, in ways that support dominant relations of power including hegemonic masculinity, white supremacy, and settler violence.

This issue, of what symbolic meaning the western carried, has preoccupied scholars for three quarters of a century. The “myth and symbol” school of American studies, arising in the 1950’s, argued that the key themes in American literature were based, in part, on a tension between industrialized society and an Edenic “untamed wilderness” that occurred most often in the “frontier” spaces of the American West (Smith 4-5; Lewis 100; Marx 4-5). In the 1970s and

1980s, Slotkin, Cawelti, and Will Wright applied this broader approach to the "mythological" components latent in the western genre, arguing that it often reflected the social, cultural, and political dynamics of the time. Slotkin especially is a prominent voice in these conversations; his trilogy of critical work on the "myth of the frontier," starting with *Regeneration Through Violence* (1972) and ending with *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), provide an exhaustive overview of American literature and its use of frontier discourse. Slotkin presents a theoretical framework that employs the concepts of myth, ideology, and genre to analyze mass culture (specifically film) and how mass media "provide the broadest-based and most pervasive means for canvassing the world of events and the spectrum of public concerns, for recalling historical precedents, and for translating them into the various story-genres that make up a public mythology" (8). Recent trends towards revisionist frameworks of analysis have prompted scholarship to move away from, and potentially exclude, contemporary mass-produced novels as worthy of scholarly analysis. So, while there has been much analysis of nineteenth century mass fiction and pre-World War II popular genre touchstones like Owen Wister's *The Virginian* or Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage* and extensive work with the more "high literary" western novels in the latter half of the century, there is little scholarly work examining popular western fiction beyond that of commercially successful authors like Louis L'Amour. The mountain of contemporary scholarly work in western American culture often focuses on television and film or excludes mass market fiction in favor of "literary" authors like Cormac McCarthy, Larry McMurtry, Annie Proulx, E.L. Doctorow, Wallace Stegner and others who subvert or criticize the popular formula.

What's missing here is critical attention to contemporary popular westerns, often found in mass-market and paperback formats, from 1970 into the twenty-first century. Any analysis of these texts needs to supplement a “mythic” theoretical framework with theories of culture and ideology that situates these texts in systems of capitalist production. The story of the western genre exists within a wider story of publishing companies, commercial markets, and the matrix of editors, agents, authors, and reader relationships that make up these industries and that have shaped what a western novel is and isn’t. While some critics like Christine Bold have taken up questions of book history when studying the ideology of early westerns, these stories have continued to play a role in the western genre in the last few decades. What is missing is an understanding of what the trajectory of the popular western novel was after scholars moved on to film and to the ‘literary’ revisionist western. In this chapter I ask if these ideologies function on the level of language and if indeed these questions of ideology are a matter of genre and not just specific authors or historical circumstance. It is here that I utilize Hall’s theories of encoding as a theoretical framework, approaching the western genre as an ‘object’ of production (or text) that is encoded with certain symbolic or discursive properties that produce a message, or system of messages. Encoding as a process, according to Hall, provides the linguistic “means by which the domains of social life—the segmentations of culture, power, and ideology—are made to signify” referring to the “‘maps of social reality’ [that] have the whole range of social meanings, practices and usages, power and interest ‘written in’ to them” (269). In this chapter I explore how the conventions of setting, character, and patterns of action are encoded with the ideological connotations that help narrativize political positions.

To accomplish this, new scholarly methods can draw conclusions about ideologies latent in the genre as a whole and not a case of a citing a few extreme examples. While close readings are useful in thinking about the complexity of a text in relation to its context or readers, the nuances of mass culture and genre call for a different kind of reading, one that separates itself from arguments about individual texts or others even if it means losing something. As Franco Moretti notes in his seminal text *Distant Reading,"* if we want to understand the system in its entirety, we *must* [emphasis added] accept losing something" (49). For these reasons, this chapter utilizes the hybrid distant reading methods of corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze mass market western novels published at the end of the twentieth century and to explore how the fabric of the genre as a system is interwoven with the language of power. Distant reading, according to Moretti, is a "condition of knowledge" that "allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" and the inevitable loss of the text between the small and large is acceptable if, in exchange, you can construct knowledge about the system as a whole (48-9). Thus, the primary question this chapter tries to answer is whether and how the western genre's conventions (and not just certain authors or texts) are dependent upon specific ideological frameworks, and whether and how the language employed within the standardized conventions of the western genre constructs discourses around race, gender, and settler colonial structural relations.

Western Genre Conventions: Setting, Characters, Patterns of Action

Like other genre fiction, the popular western is defined, in part, by its highly recognizable conventions—the glue that holds it together instead of the notable texts that deviate and experiment (although both are necessary and present). Lee Clark Mitchell characterizes the western as a set of problems and the history of the genre tells the story of how various texts at various points in time have approached or handled these problems. The narrative that we recognize as the western is a narrative that wrestles endlessly with the "problem of progress, envisioned as the passing of frontiers; the problem of honor, defined in a context of social expediency; the problem of law or justice, enacted in a conflict of vengeance and social control; the problem of violence, etc." (Mitchell 3). The genre's conventions provide the tools that the western uses to wrestle with these problems in perpetuity, evolving as the problems and their surrounding contexts evolve and ultimately, the narration of these contradictions and this endless wrestling, is, as Mitchell claims, what makes the western. This is consistent with what other scholars including John Cawelti, Jane Tompkins, Jeffrey Wallmann, and others have articulated about the essential function of the genre. Cawelti's revised structural study *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999) offers three helpful categories that the western utilizes specifically: setting, character, and patterns of action or situations. While not all-encompassing, and indeed, these categories overlap and interact in important ways, most other critics after Cawelti keep this structure when defining the popular western and exploring its conventions. This is consistent with the early western novels by authors like Owen Wister, Zane Grey, Max Brand and others as well as the mid-century writers like Jack Schaefer, Luke Short and Louis L'Amour. The revisionist or anti-western's relationship to these generic categories become more complicated as they often parodied their own formula to approach these similar problems and their new significance in times of social and political upheaval like the 1960's and 1970's (Jaupai 1). This is where revisionist works like Doctorow's *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) or Ishamael Reed's *Yellow-Back Radio Broke Down* (1969) often use the conventions of setting, character, or situation to narrativize the problems of the western in a different way.

As its name suggests, the western is often defined by place—a matter of geography and time. The frontier setting is where civilization meets a "savage" wilderness, and the setting often provides a "fictional justification for enjoying violent conflicts and the expression of lawless force without feeling that they threatened the values or the fabric of society" (Cawelti 22).

Especially with the advent of visual media like film and television, the western narrative has utilized the imagery of inhospitable mountains and arid deserts, especially the Great Plains regions, Rocky Mountains, the desert Southwest, and Texas. These topographical features create a backdrop for the western plot that can dramatize the "thematic conflict between civilization and savagery and its resolution" (24). And while some western novels did have very specific topographical features and were explicitly set in certain states or territories, some were more overtly ambiguous. Additionally, specific location was less important than the presence of the "frontier" as a dynamic transitory boundary (Wallmann 21). If authors hit some of these dramatizations, the western setting could be as specific or as general as one liked. The geographic setting is also related to the various characters that exist and move within it. In particular, the negation of setting (the absence of resources) is a challenge directed at the characters to survive. As Jane Tompkins articulates, the setting calls the character to "be brave, be strong enough to endure this, it says, and you will become like this—hard, austere, sublime…the landscape challenges the body to endure hardship…It says, this is a hard place to be; you will have to do without here. Its spiritual message is the same: come and suffer (71).

This physical setting is often paired with a historical moment in the mid to late nineteenth century—as much as the western setting is about place, it is also about time. Although in the later part of the twentieth century, novels started to deviate from these strict nineteenth century timeframes to explore both earlier and later historical time periods including the early colonial fur traders and post-war ranching, the traditional historical setting of the western was prevalent in the late 19th century. As Cawelti notes, the genre gravitated towards 1870-1880s because it reflects "a certain moment in the development of American civilization, namely at that point when savagery and lawlessness are in decline before the advancing wave of law and order but are still strong enough to pose a local and momentarily significant challenge" (23).

The other important aspect of the western genre conventions is character. According to scholars, most characters in the western fall into three central categories: "the townspeople or agents of civilization, the savages or outlaws who threaten this first group, and the heroes who are above all 'men in the middle,' possessing many qualities and skills of the savages but fundamentally committed to the townspeople" (Cawelti 29). It is the dynamics and variations between these subjectivities that allow for the patterns of action that make up each narrative's plot—creating and resolving conflict, drawing boundaries, and entering into relationships, etc. For example, in the "revenge western" the 'hero' rejects the civility and pacifistic aims of the townspeople to enact vengeance on either outlaws or 'Indians' that have wronged him. One of the more important aspects of the 'townspeople' characters is a gender dynamic in which women and pioneer families often symbolized civilization. The female pioneer characters, especially, offered additional complications to this matrix of relationships: while resembling the hero in terms of survival and virtue, they don't just attempt to survive the environment or setting they find themselves within, but also seek to change it. Pioneer characters "are a collective force which seeks to transform the wilderness into a new social order…instead of individual honor, they value hard work, mutual loyalty and political and economic achievement; in the short, the conventional American canons of success" (Cawelti 31).

The relationships between these characters, especially the "savage" villains and the noble townspeople, is what drives the conflict of the western narrative beyond simple oppositions of good and evil and into a dialectic between different ways of life; and it often falls to the hero to resolve or temper these oppositions. In this way, the most basic definition of the western protagonist is “as the character that resolves the conflict between pioneers and savages. Because there is a considerable range of complexity in the definition of this conflict, there is also a considerable range in the characterization of the hero” (Cawelti 36). Additionally, the ‘hero’ character is often more complex because they internalize some of these larger tensions, especially between the wilderness of the frontier and the civilization of the town, between lawlessness and order, etc. While the hero recognizes, and often acts to protect the town, “he also senses that his own feelings and special quality as a hero are bound up with the wilderness,” (seen in films like *Shane*) and ultimately, the hero succumbs to this tension and resigns himself to his own destruction, his inability to live fully and belong within the world of civilization (36). This hero trope is also present in *The Virginian* where East and West meet and wrestle within the hero character himself. And as with the feminized symbolic dimensions of the townspeople and pioneers, the hero is wrapped up in a specific American manhood and its intersections with questions of violence. As Tompkins notes, the western is fundamentally about “men’s fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the western tirelessly reinvents” (Tompkins 45). The long masculine hero protagonist, who belongs nowhere but relentlessly protect what others think of as “home” persists well into the twentieth century western.

The final aspect of the western genre conventions is what Cawelti calls “types of situations”, or “patterns of actions” and I’ve sketched out above what conditions create these patterns. But these typified situations become the narrative arc or “formula plots” of the western, tensions or problems that attempt to resolve themselves. According the 1971 version of *The Six-Gun Mystique,* there are several different formulas patterns that have emerged depending on how the characters within each narrative interact, there is:

> 1) the Union Pacific story centering around the construction of the railroad, telegraph, or stagecoach line or around the adventures of a wagon train; 2) the ranch story with its

> focus on conflicts between rangers and rustler or cattlemen and sheepmen; 3) The Empire story, which is an epic version of the Ranch story; 4) the revenge story; 5) Custer's Last Stand, or the Cavalry and Indian Story; 6) the Outlaw story; and 7) the Marshal story" (Cawelti *Six-Gun* 35).

Obviously not every western novel adheres to one of these plots but the categorization of these patterns of action allows for a more specific understanding of how the characters (and their representative ways of life) interact and how these tensions are addressed or resolved. The western is driven by the testing of character that necessitates both perilous circumstances and adventure; westerns are the "legacy of an intrepid immigrant stock [whose] constant moving and struggling, and the mixing of a nation in the making…and the narrative requirements of conflict and growth necessary for adventure stories" (Wallmann 23).

What must be addressed, and what I hope this analysis will show, is that for all their complexities and nuance, for all their evolutions and revisions, the one constant in the western conventions of the western is a relationship between language and power, and specifically settler colonial power. "Settler colonialism" is the term often used to define the power dynamics in places like the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada that experienced distinct forms of colonial projects driven by a logic of elimination and replacement in which Anglophone settlers work to "replace Indigenous peoples on their land both physically and politically, and to naturalize this replacement" (Strakosch 19). As Patrick Wolfe famously claimed, the invasion of settler colonialism is "a structure not an event" implying not just a process of dispossession over time, but one that is continually renewed and relevant today as these structures persist even as democratic states replaced European colonial authority (388). Additionally, for scholars of settler colonialism these processes are intrinsically rooted in whiteness as a function of power. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues in *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous*

Sovereignty, settler colonialism is a mode of rationalization in which the "possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty are operationalized, deployed, and affirmed" (xii). Moreton-Robinson defines whiteness in two ways—one building off the bulk of scholarship in African-American studies in which whiteness is "theorized conceptually as a form of power, as supremacy, as hegemony, as ideology, as epistemology and ontology" in addition to the various "social constructions of white identity" (xviii).[16] Ideologically speaking, settler colonialism operationalizes white possessive logics "within discourses to circulate sets of meanings about ownership of the nation, as part of commonsense knowledge, decision making and socially produced conventions" (xii). The naturalizing (and oftentimes valorizing) nature of conquest involves not just social policies and material relations but also the production of culture and history. As Patricia Nelson Limerick notes in comparing the historical legacy of slavery with the legacy of US settler colonialism, "conquest [of the West] took another route into national memory. In the popular imagination, the reality of conquest dissolved into stereotypes of noble savages and noble pioneers struggling quaintly in the wilderness…an element of regret for 'what we did to the Indians' had entered the picture, but the dominant feature of conquest remained 'adventure'" (19). What this analysis will show is that especially in processes of settler conquest, whiteness is naturalized to justify and glorify the dispossession of land while the systematic delegitimization of indigenous sovereignty transforms into of tales of adventure narrativize conquest as simply the stories of intrepid pioneers settling the land in the name of civilization.

Additionally, as Cawelti and others hint at in discussions of character, the violence of conquest in the western is directly related to a specific construction of masculinity and therefore crucial to the ideological underpinnings of the genre. In particular, the performance of masculinity constructs around a self-reliant, stoically moral protagonist engaging in various forms of violence that ultimately sets the standard for manhood as “ideal.” As Jane Tompkins argues, westerns insist on manhood as not just an ideal, but the ideal regardless of the character’s specific story or context: “it doesn’t matter whether a man is a sheriff or an outlaw, a rustler or a rancher, a cattleman or a sheepherder, a miner or a gambler. What matters is that he be a *man* [original emphasis]” (18). Male reticence is an important component this ideal and specifically a reticence that constructs the self around the masking or internalizing of emotion and the refusal to show vulnerability. A man who is in touch with his emotion and communicates these emotions “admits parity with the person he is talking to, but it jeopardizes his status as potent being, for talk dissipates presence, takes away the mystery of an ineffable self which silence preserves. Silence establishes dominance at the same time as it protects the silent one from introspection and possible criticism by offering nothing for the interlocutor to grab hold of” (Tompkins 60). The ideal masculinity thus becomes a visual expression of the reserved dominant self, always holding the cards and able to wield that power for good or ill. The image of the western hero exudes this power, the “leathery wall of noncommunication written over by wrinkles, speaking pain and hardship and the refusal to give in to them, speaking the determination to tough it out against all odds, speaking the willingness to be cruel in return for cruelty, and letting you know, beyond all shadow of a doubt, who's boss” (Tompkins 65). The connections between the ideal maleness as both performance and power reinforce the way that critics talk about “hegemonic masculinities.” Lydia Cooper notes in *Masculinities in Literature of the American West,* hegemonic masculinity refers to definitions of masculinity that “enforce a power differential or that link masculinity to the practice of power over other constituent identities” (181). Cooper argues that performances of masculinity in the western genre usually engage with three primary themes:

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[16] For this chapter, I will focus mostly on the first construction of whiteness as a form of hegemonic power and will explore how these ideologies become salient in social identity in the following chapters.

> racial politics and assumptions about the innate connection between white men and centers of power or possession of idealized manhood; the gendered politics of space and possession of idealized manhood; the gendered politics of space and nation—in which the cowboy hero serves as a metonym not just for his geographic location but also for the nation represented by the region; and finally gendered performances of ethics and the public practice of ethics, in which the cowboy embodies and exemplifies the codes of justice and punishment to which his society aspires (16).

While Cawelti and others note the significant role that masculinity plays in the development of character, what the ideological components of this construction shows, and this analysis explores, is how these depictions within westerns reflect “the challenge of being human in a place where ‘being a man’ is so strictly coded, so unachievable, so complicit in atrocity, and so desirable that it is worth dying for, worth killing for, or perhaps worth nothing at all” (Cooper 7). These ideologies that congregate around settler colonial logics and a white masculine hegemony that naturalize and valorize conquest are intertwined and difficult to talk about in isolation. However, what I hope to show in the following analysis is that this intertwining underpins the genre’s engagement with character, setting, and patterns of action. And even when we start to see more contemporary novels incorporate diverse voices or historical accuracy in the attempt to subvert these settler paradigms, they still reinforce them.

While these elements emerged as the standardized conventions of the western, they certainly aren’t static nor apply to every text that would fall within the genre. Lee Clark Mitchell’s recent *Late Westerns: The Persistence of a Genre* (2018) takes up these complexities of genre theory and addresses the theoretical process of retrospection that ‘standardizes’ western conventions in the first place claiming the “paradox of genres is that the longer they survive, the more they fool us into thinking they have always had a single ‘classic’ form” (4). Instead of presenting a monolith of form, discussions of setting, character, and patterns of action highlights places where these texts’ ideological components become salient and, in particular, offers an insight into the conditions necessary to be considered a western text by the gatekeepers whose opinions matter. While genre theorists, and literary critics using genre theory (like Mitchell), caution against characterizing genre through strict rules and boundaries, it’s important to note that publishing companies and editors did set strict rules. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, editors and publishers demanded certain constraints on setting, character, time period, and theme in order to consider a manuscript for publication. What I hope to do by outlining the genre’s frameworks at the beginning of this project is map terrain through which both western authors and western readers often navigated and made decisions within. The goal is not necessarily to evaluate the success or failure of the genre’s internal politics but to show where these ideologies might come to bear on a text’s reception or what it might tell us about the genre’s readers. In addition to having a foundational understanding of what these conventions are, it’s important to understand where they came from and how they became the narratives that we see at the end of the twentieth century.

Publishing History of the Western: From Pulp to Paperback

The western as a literary genre—as opposed to a frame for narrating and processing a particular set of historical circumstances—emerged primarily in pulp magazines at the beginning of the twentieth century and was dependent on the established traditions of mass-produced dime novels of the previous century. As Christine Bold notes in *Selling the Wild West: Popular Western Fiction, 1860-1960,* the conventions of the western in both dime novels and pulp magazines were a result of a variety of constraints and relationships within the publishing world. In the 19th and early-20th century, dime novels emerged in response to cheaper printing technologies and growing literacy at a low cost; dime novels were "high production, low cost" serial adventure stories "intended to excite, astonish, and arouse, providing readers sensationalism and escapism" (Agnew 3). After the First World War, however, pulp magazines replaced dime novels as the primary format of mass-produced western stories. Pulp magazines often contained more material than dime novels including "miscellanies of short and long fiction with various features like quizzes, letters pages, and factual articles" (Bold 7). The authors who wrote within these constraints of both these formats "always worked according to general rules of imitation and reproduction. To greater and lesser degrees, they had to negotiate with their publishers over details of plot, characterization, and scene, while the publishers, in turn, might be busy negotiating with both the overwhelming authorities and the audience" (9-10). The result of this negotiation emerges as a "western formula" that builds on James Fenimore Cooper's "Leatherstocking" adventure tradition and that places the Eastern "civilized" states and the western frontier territories in tense relation (Bold 10). Looming large in this early period of the western is Owen Wister's *The Virginian* which is often called the first "modern" western novel. Wister's novel set the model for the ideological work that the western has done since its modern inception. In *The Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power 1880-1924,* Christine Bold analyzes Wister's social networks and how the publication of *The Virginian* at the turn of the century was a strategic move in support of a network of wealthy politicians, sportsmen, conservationists, and developers who utilized the genre to shore up their own socio-economic interests. Bold recovers "the cultural baggage carried by the genre…[and] makes newly visible how, in whose interests, and at what cost a central trope of U.S. culture was made" (xix). And so, while western authors may argue that the western can't be racist, sexist or imperialist because they are simply stories of "intrepid pioneers making a life for themselves," others argue that indeed the early literary history of the western shows has the genre never been anything else except ideological.

In the years after Wister's seminal text, the fading popularity of the pulp western magazines after World War I and the growing trends in paperback publishing after World War II brought some of the dime novel elements of sensationalist adventure into the twentieth century but with significant upgrades. The most popular of these early novels whose influence on the western fundamentally changed the western literary market came from early authors like Zane Grey, Frederick Faust (known as "Max Brand"), and Ernest Haycox and then later Alan Le May, Jack Schaefer, and Louis L'Amour (Bold *Selling the Wild West* 76; 125). The "adult" western novel emerges in the 1970's in conjunction with the popularity of original mass market paperbacks and the rise of "adventure/thriller" fiction as its own genre. In comparison to the traditional, revisionist or historical western novel, the adult western, made successful by authors like Jake Logan, Tabor Evans, Zeke Masters, and George Gilman, is an offshoot of the western formula that prioritized explicit sex and violence over literary merit or complex thematic issues.

Louis L'Amour plays a significant role in the history of the western novel in the mid to late-twentieth century and remains one of the most consistently read western authors to this day. Indeed, in the last half of the century L'Amour's novels became the commercial model that contemporary westerns were expected to emulate. Wheeler notes in his memoir that L'Amour's popularity severely limited the creative potential of western authors and helped contribute to the narrowing of the genre as publishers sought to recreate this financial success; his "massive sales at Bantam became the gold standard for all mass market publishers… they were stories of good guys and bad guys who happened to be wandering around an unsettled country… he came to dominate the whole field for a third of century, and the result was that every other mass-market house tried to imitate Bantam's line" (91). Additionally, Wheeler points to this gold-star standard that shifts the western away from a general readership towards one that was primarily male.

Alongside the success of Louis L'Amour and the popularity of the adult western that coincides with other 'men's adventure' mass fiction, the 1960's and 1970's saw a turn towards a revisionist approach to the genre especially within the realm of higher quality "literary works." These texts are also called "anti" or "post"-westerns and were widely popular in films as well as literature. As both Slotkin, and later David Evans argue, this revisionist turn was defined by an era of social and political upheaval that destabilized some of these "mythic" understanding of national purpose and identity. This prompted western novelists to "look beneath the myth to find the reality that it had suppressed" (Evans 407). Both John Cawelti and Christine Bold give space at the end of their comprehensive studies on the western to discuss and analyze some of these revisionist texts. They both argue that the revisionist western vacillates between parodic or absurd retellings and the genre's break with its traditional moral framework offered more nuanced representations of violence and the protagonist hero characters (Cawelti 101, 120-1; Bold 159). Revisionist westerns also used the conventions of the genre to critique or point towards its problematic nature. This is seen in the works of Larry McMurtry and Cormac McCarthy, both of whom take on the mythic figures of the cowboy but work to expose the falseness of its romantic imaginings often through the demise of failures of the characters themselves. As Sara Spurgeon argues about the main character in McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses,* the cowboy "slowly begins to recognize the fragility and falseness of his life [and] seeks to return to the imagined innocence of the scared cowboy of the mythic past, only to discover no such return is possible" (42). This type of breaking down of the genre by using the genre is argued to have a restorative function, to make amends for the damage done by the national myths; but as Evans notes, despite "its aspiration to rectify the violent distortions of popular mythology, inevitably winds up introducing violent distortions of its own" (408).

Part Two: Reading the Western Genre from a Distance

One way to approach the question of encoding is to look at the western titles that have come out in the last forty years *en masse*. But absent a team of research assistants or speed-reading prowess, that had not, until recently, been possible. Distant reading as a methodology, that utilizes computational analysis of data to draw conclusions about literary history or literary texts, offers a way forward from this quandary. Although not a new methodology, recent analyses of race and power within fields of literary studies and book history have taken up these distant reading methods to help understand what patterns, trends, or features are widespread and make inferences about the kinds of literary texts that succeed or fail within publishing systems. Critics like Lauren McGrath analyze datasets of comp titles to tell a story of “value and influence” within publishing markets and “systems of exclusion” that not only prioritize white writers, but that value the “universal” appeal towards white readers (McGrath). In a similar way to Bold’s claims about the Frontier Club, McGrath argues that publishing systems perpetuate and reinforce discrimination more than any one author or text; analyzing comp titles offers a bird’s eye view of this system and how it operates. Comp titles (or comparative titles) are the “books that most frequently influence editors’ decisions about what to acquire, the books to which new titles are often compared, the books whose effects the industry longs to reproduce. In other words, comps are evidence of what the publishing industry values” (McGrath).

McGrath touches briefly on how these processes work in genre fiction by looking at the success of N.K. Jemisin, a Black woman author writing within the historically white science fiction genre. Jemisin claims that her first novel was rejected because editors couldn’t envision a readership within the genre that would make the novel profitable. And while Jemisin breaks this mold and goes on to be one of the most celebrated contemporary science fiction authors, McGrath is quick to point out that this success story shouldn't be taken as a victory for meritocracy or that the publishing industries have successfully diversified. Instead, Jemisin's story is one of a truly exceptional writer set against a "system hell bent on keeping her out" (McGrath). How, then, might these analyses contribute to discussions about the state of the western genre in recent history? Perhaps it might shed some light on the recent trends at the end of the century towards historical accuracy and the inclusion of more female and indigenous voices and perhaps how even as the genre makes conscious moves towards inclusion, its conventions and its measure of value can still be mired in traditional, and often problematic, worldviews. Additionally, McGrath's analysis about white readership, especially in relation to genre fiction, highlights the potential for genres to appeal and value whiteness even while they actively try to appeal to new readers. Utilizing computational methods allows us to better see that matrix of relationships between publisher, author and imagined reader that makes up these literary industries and how they often work to reinforce whiteness.

Critics also use computational methodologies to think about the content of literary texts themselves and their intersections with questions of genre, race, and political discourse. This is seen most recently in Richard Jean So and Rowland's "Race and Distant Reading," which studies the similarities and differences between two corpora of novels written by white and Black authors, and Algee-Hewlitt, et al.'s "Representing Race and Ethnicity in American Fiction, 1979-1920" which analyzes the semantic properties of racialized language and how it relates to a US cultural imaginary. These recent works show how distant reading, as a methodology, can be a useful tool in thinking about the relationship between literature and racial discourse, or other discourses of power. Additionally, works like Matthew Wilkens' analysis of postwar literary fiction and genre and Frederica Bologna's analysis of urban space within twentieth century science fiction novels highlights the benefit of approaching questions of genre fiction from distance. These conversations also pose important reflexive questions about distant reading as a methodology and the complexity of gathering and analyzing quantitative data about race and relations of power; this is why I think it is important to critique my model of analysis after discussing its results to understand what it captured, why it captured what it did, and what it potentially leaves out.

Methodology and Corpus Design

The recent combining of distant reading and cultural-literary analysis of texts is a valuable methodology that hold potential for new ways to think about ideology, the political dimensions of genre and its relationship to readers, both imagined and actual. In particular, combining corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a hybrid "methodological synergy" brings out the strong points of both and sidesteps criticisms leveled at each—that CL lacks context and CDA lacks representativeness and qualitative rigor. As Baker, et al. notes in their analysis of refugee and asylum seeker discourse, this approach is taken up to best "realize the aims of CDA-inspired research," specifically that it is "fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control, as they are manifested in language" (Baker et al. 280). This goal stems from understanding that language "gains power by the use people make of it" and views "discursive and linguistic data as a social practice both reflecting and producing ideologies in society" (280). Baker, et al. proposes this methodology can be undertaken in nine stages beginning with establishing research questions through "context-based analysis" of a topic and identifying a pre-existing *topoi* of discourses that provide a foundation for a CL/CDA analysis, establishing research questions and corpus building procedures, analyzing the patterns of language use in the corpus, and formulating new questions or hypotheses based on the analysis (Baker, et al. 295).[17] While Baker, et al. notes that all stages are potential entry points for an analysis, identifying primary research questions through an analysis of preexisting topoi makes sense for this specific project for several reasons. First, because the immense amount of scholarship concerning western American literature and western genre conventions provide what Baker describes as the "preexisting topoi" of discourse analysis that can initially guide a corpus researcher towards specific lines of inquiry—what keywords, patterns, and relationships to look for and for what reasons. And secondly, because the goal of this chapter is not just to produce new knowledge about the western genre, but to use distant reading methods to highlight the ideological work these texts do as a means of better understanding their readers.

In this analysis, I start by first sketching the broad patterns in the corpus' metadata and then use the concordancer tool Antconc to highlight the ideological dimensions within language usage across texts through keyword, collocate, and concordance analysis. I use a qualitative analysis of language in context, making sure to pause between steps to contextualize data and to form new questions or hypotheses. The guiding questions for this strategy are the following:

1. How are the genre conventions of character, setting, and patterns of action present in the language of western novels from 1970-1999?
2. How are these conventions encoded with ideologies of race, gender and settler colonial relationships and have these political dimensions changed over a thirty-year period?

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[17] Baker's "nine-step" method is also recreated in Sarah LuAnne White's "Applying Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis to an Unrestricted Corpus" highlighting its applicability to a diverse range of corpuses and research questions.

3. What are the affordances and limitations of a CL/CDA approach to literary-cultural analysis of genre fiction?

The first step towards answering these questions was to design and compile a corpus of western novels to analyze. This type of corpus constitutes what Baker calls a DIY "specialized corpus," or a group of texts that are much smaller than general written or spoken language corpora and often used to "study aspects of a particular variety or genre of language" (Baker *Using Corpora* 26). These corpora are based on specific sets of criteria to reflect representative patterns of language use and often offer valuable insights without necessitating large sets of data. In all, the 6.4-million-word corpus[18] used in this analysis was compiled from 75 novels across a thirty-year period. While this might not be as large a dataset as is normal for corpus analysis, I believe it is enough to draw conclusions about the genre's conventions at a specific point in time and to build a foundation towards a more comprehensive argument about these book's readers and their wider contexts. In building the corpus of representative popular westerns, there were several criteria for inclusion. First, only texts that were originally published between the years 1970 to 1999 were included and a distinct effort was made to select as equal number of texts as possible from each decade as well as an equal distribution across the primary western publishing imprints.[19] I only included texts that would be considered "novels" or "long fiction" (thus excluding short story collections and poetry) and made an effort to prioritize original paperbacks although the nature of the western publishing market especially in the early part of the date range made it harder to exclude hardcover novels.[20] I purposely excluded reprints of earlier novels but did include texts that were reprinted from hardcover to paperback or from a UK to US publisher within the thirty-year scope. Additionally, because this project seeks to analyze texts considered to be "low culture" mass fiction, I excluded canonical titles and authors of the literary strain of western American literature such as Larry McMurtry, Wallace Stegner, Cormac McCarthy, and others. While I was at first hesitant to include multiple texts from the same author as I thought overrepresentation of individual writing styles could potentially affect the results of the analysis, I ultimately decided to include no more than three texts from the same author. I then chose titles and authors that had one of three representative qualities: critical recognition, commercial success, and reader engagement. If I couldn't find the specific title or if the mentioned title was outside of the specified date range, I chose a similar text by the same author published in the same decade. To include texts that had been critically recognized by other western writers and organizations, I included a sampling of Western Writer's Association Spur Award Winners from 1970-1999 or other titles from authors who had won a Spur award during that year. The Spur Awards are given by western writers to western writers and include several different award categories. In the early years of the award, there was only one award for novels, but they have now expanded to include the Western Novel, Historical Novel, Novel of the West, and the Mass Market Paperback Original. All these awards were considered for the selection in the corpus.

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[18] The actual approximate word tally is 6,397,964.

[19] There is a slight overrepresentation of texts from the decade 1990-1999 but because that decade held the most interest to me as the end of the genre's evolution in the twentieth century where we start to see the rapid decline of the Western publishing markets, I felt it would still work well.

To gauge commercial or popular success, I analyzed the bestseller lists and articles from three publications within the specified date range including *The New York Times, Publisher's*

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[20] At first, I wanted to exclude hardcover or trade paperback novels altogether and focus specifically on mass market paperbacks but especially in the earlier years of the scope (1970's), often the popular paperbacks were a mix of both paperback originals and reprints from different formats. Additionally, there wasn't always publication or sales data specific for mass market paperbacks. Ultimately, I decided that prioritizing a mass-produced title of any medium especially if it was important to communities of readers, writers and publishers was more important to include within the corpus instead of excluding them because they weren't original paperbacks.

Weekly, and *USA Today.* These publications use sales figures for each month and year from a variety of booksellers across the nation to determine which titles make their respective bestseller lists.[21] While westerns did not often make the bestseller lists in general fiction categories, supplemental articles in each publication (especially *Publisher's Weekly's* "The Red and the Black" March special issue) often gave more detailed information about bestselling titles in genre fiction. And finally, with an understanding that critical and commercial success is not always indicative of reader engagement, I drew titles and authors from self-reporting discussion boards on the social engagement site *Goodreads.* I drew primarily from the largest and most active group, "American Westerns" which was started in 2008 and has 475 members. I looked at the various "Currently Reading" conversations as well as threads like "Obscure Western Writers," "Which author writes the most engaging Westerns," "21 Western Novels Every Man Should Read," and "Best Western Novel of All Time." (*Goodreads*). Each of these threads were started by a *Goodreads* user who identified themselves as a reader of westerns and included contributions from other readers. Using these methods, the corpus included texts that are representative of the period and the primary stakeholders of popular western fiction. To determine keywords and keyness within the specialized corpus of western novels, I used the 8.9-million-word sample Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as a reference, and specifically their "Fiction" subcorpus which includes around 1.4 million words from a selection of novels, short stories, plays and film screenplays. The limitation of this reference corpus of general American English is that it only captures general language usage from 1990 to 2017 and so might not catch the nuance of midcentury language within these novels (if there are distinguishing markers). However, I also ran some brief keyword analyses against the Brown Corpus as a reference which includes samples of written American English (including fiction) from 1961 and didn't find any immediate discrepancies in keyword results. Ultimately, I believe that comparing the specialized western corpus again the COCA sample will yield a good foundational understanding of how the western genre utilizes language in a way that is unique when compared against general fiction. Additionally, to gather comparative data that could potentially answer the question about the evolution of conventions, the western corpus could be compared against itself by separating titles by decade searching for both positive and negative keywords (which words continued to be important in the thirty-year scope and which words didn't).

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[21] At first, I thought that using sales data/figures from major publishing imprints would be the most effective way to gauge 'popularity' but quickly found out that this data is not easily available and is not, and has not been, collected in a standardized system across the industry. Additionally, from the data that I was able to find, there weren't always bestselling lists for genre fiction and very rarely for the 'bestselling' novels within the Western genre. If a Western made the bestselling lists, it was included in 'format' categories (paperback, hardcover, etc.) and you had to recognize the writer as someone who consistently wrote within the genre (like Louis L'Amour or William Johnstone). What was more helpful was finding special issues or articles within these publications (like NYT Books and PW) that spoke directly to the performance of the Western genre and the new/upcoming titles that were performing well and generating chatter amongst editors and agents.

The next step in the analysis was to compile a set of keywords that represented the genre's distinguishing language—what types of language use set it apart from other types of written texts. As Baker notes, keyness refers to the "statistically significantly higher frequency of particular words or clusters in the corpus under analysis in comparison with another corpus" (Baker et al. 278). The purpose of finding keywords is to point "towards the 'aboutness' of a text or homogeneous corpus; its topic and central elements of its content" (Baker et al. 278). Keyness as a reflection of "aboutness" is an important starting place because it allows for reasonable inferences to be made about how the list of keywords represents the genre's conventions at the level of language, especially when compared against other works of fiction. Working off this assumption, and in accordance with what scholars have already extensively documented as the primary elements of the western genre, the keyword list of 1373 words was then roughly categorized according to their relationship to the conventions of the western genre outlined and analyzed by Cawelti and others within the major categories of ‘setting,’ ‘character,’ and ‘patterns of action.’ I also noted when a keyword could potentially fit into more than one of the categories and further categorized each of these conventions by the syntactic attributes that I thought might be important in moving towards the qualitative stages of the analysis including lemmas and various parts of speech.

The next step in the analysis was to think about how these keywords function in relation to each other and to the rest of the corpus, primarily through the collection of keyword collocates and n-grams. As Baker notes, collocations are the “*above chance frequent* co-occurrence of two words within a pre-determined span and frequency,[22] usually five on either side of the word under investigation (node)” (Baker et al. 278). The keyword list shows the statistically important words or “nodes” within the corpus and collecting collocations of these keywords can further specify how they are important. Because collocates contribute to the meaning of the node, they can also convey patterns of semantic preferences that help further highlight the speaker or writer’s stance or attitude towards a particular idea (Baker et al. 278). If we can assume that the keyword list of the western corpus is an accurate representation of the genre’s conventions on the level of language, we can start to analyze how often these conventions are clustered together in specific ways and think about the implications of this clustering, whether it indicates further qualitative analysis to determine the attitudes or orientations of these clusters. N-grams are another way to assess patterns of language use within a corpus, but unlike collocations where you search for a particular keyword and its surrounding language clusters regardless of sequence,

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[22] For this analysis, I fluctuated between collocations that had at least 15-20 minimum collocate frequency, meaning that to be considered for the list and for the analysis, a collocate had to appear with the node at least this many times. This is to help the concordancer prioritize patterns of language use.

Antconc can assess when a sequence of words functions as a single linguistical unit (i.e., “white man” is a bigram or 2-word n-gram, “white and red” is a trigram or 3-word n-gram). For the purposes of this study, collecting collocations and n-grams of keywords can help us determine where the conventions of the western (as expressed in the three keyword categories of character, setting, and patterns of action) are statistically inclined towards discourses of race, gender and settler colonial relationships and told me where to go to find more detailed information about the nature of this relationship.

All of this work in assessing what words and patterns of words most commonly appear in the corpus helped me make decisions about what kind of qualitative analyses needed to happen in order to answer the research questions. The final stage was to look at these keywords and keyword clusters in context through concordance line analysis. As Baker notes, concordance lines are longer than collocations and can display the “words on either side of the word/cluster in focus…to fit the researcher's needs” (Baker et al 279). For example, if a keyword or phrase felt particularly important in making a connection between the semantic prosody of character as a genre convention and ideologies of gender (looking at he/she verb pairings and man/woman adjective pairings), the concordance lines could be sorted to both the left and right of the node and could potentially reveal certain attitudes about both character and gender that would reflect on the genre as a whole. As Baker notes, the benefit of concordance line analysis is that it allows for the “examination of language features in co-text, while taking into account the context that the analyst is aware of and can infer from the co- text” (279). The process of moving from broad linguistic patterns and clusters to concordance lines of where and how these patterns occur within the text helps showcase the salient linguistic features of the corpus and the prosody of these features. After these steps were completed for each of the genre’s topoi, I briefly contextualize these results with both the critical scholarship of the western genre but also its publication history, thinking about how the results might point towards a diachronic change over time or reveal something about the author or editor's imagined reader—the kinds of people they were, the kinds of things they valued, and/or the things they needed out of the western they were reading.

Keyword Analysis

To start thinking about how the corpus communicates encoding patterns in the western genre, I collected basic information about each text as I built the corpus and noted how they followed the conventional genre rules of character, setting, and patterns of action. This was to provide a framework for the keyword, collocate, and concordance analysis as well as a reference point to contextualize some of the patterns or observations made in the analysis. When possible, I noted when and where each novel was set, the names and general info of each text's protagonist or main characters, and whether the novel followed any of the standardized formula plotlines outlined by Cawelti. The methodology for this glossing depended on what information could be found within the text itself but also by how the novel was marketed with jacket copy and promotional descriptions. Initial patterns emerged that help us better understand the corpus data. First, the majority of novels (sixty-two of the seventy-five) were set in the nineteenth century with the most popular historical setting being between the 1860's and 1890's. Additionally, when a specific year was not given to place the novel in historical time, texts would use the end of the Civil War (or "War between the States") to signal a specific temporal setting. This demarcation was also often used to establish character by introducing soldiers, veterans, or ex-confederates as they moved Westward to "postwar" lives. The next most popular historical time was the early nineteenth century with nineteen texts set before the year 1860. The majority of these novels followed "Indian War" or "Texas Independence" military narratives, mountain man or fur trading plots or immigrant narratives that documented pioneer experiences. Novels set before 1800 were infrequent but those that did often covered narratives of historical figures or events. And finally, only four novels were set in the early twentieth century and two were set in the contemporary time in which the novels were written. This is consistent with what we know about standard genre conventions that sought to narrativize a national transition into the modern age as well as the "settling of the frontier" to explore tension between civilization and wilderness. The other trend that was immediately noticeable was the variation of time periods that became more pronounced as the corpus moved into the later part of the scope ranging from the 1500s to contemporary times. In the earlier works in the corpus (1970's to the early 1980s), there was very little variation from the late nineteenth century conventional standard. This might indicate a 'loosening' of genre rules where publishers or authors felt more comfortable experimenting with settings outside the traditional formula or could also reflect the growing popularity of the "historical western" that not just incorporated time and place as a generic backdrop but engaged with a specific time and place within history.

In a similar way, the geographic settings of each text coincided with what scholars already knew about the genre. Out of the seventy-three texts that had identifiable geographic settings, the corpus was evenly split between two regions: the desert Southwest and Great Plains with 29 and 26 novels set in these areas (respectively) with Texas being the single most frequently occurring state (twenty novels). After these specific settings, there were seven texts set in Colorado or the "Rocky Mountain" regions and only four set in either California or the Pacific Northwest (also referred to the "Columbia Territory"). And finally, we see four novels set in the Eastern parts of the US that track the “moving frontier” of westward expansion. These texts often coincided with the earlier colonial time frames (especially the late 18th and early 19th centuries) as they followed characters through the Carolinas, the Ohio River Valley and the “Northwest Territory” that extended through the Great Lakes region into Canada. While some texts would reference “Indian Country” in passing, only a single novel was explicitly set on the Navajo Reservation and was also the only text set in its contemporary period. Additionally, the initial gloss of settings offered interesting insights into how authors situated their reader geographically using the vocabulary of territory, states, ‘county seats,’ towns and border crossings which I hope will be reflected in the following analysis.

Determining if each novel in the corpus followed a particular formula plot was more complicated than simply finding out where and when it was set. However, there were some immediate patterns that helped shape interpretation of the corpus. Most of the early texts of the corpus are focused primarily on ranching and lawman/outlaw narratives but similarly (and perhaps in conjunction with) the trends seen in the time periods, but plots in the 1990s were more varied. While there are still a fair amount of novels that focus this tension between the “law” as embodied by various occupations and the lawlessness of robbers, bandits and murderous gunslingers, there are significantly more narratives situated within real historical events—especially the Great Sioux War of 1876 culminating in the Battle of Little Big Horn, the Texas Revolution and Apache Wars in the Southwest, Bleeding Kansas in the years before the Civil War, the early mountain men stories of the Rocky Mountain Trading Company and others. This is also indicative of what we know about publishing trends, especially thinking about the incorporation of more accurate historical research by western authors. In addition to the historical variations, there are also wider scopes in terms of purpose or conflict. Novels more frequently were listed or advertised with genre “crossover” especially historical, mystery or romance overtones. As discussed below, this initial overview of the texts helps establish a framework to understand the corpus data and draw conclusions about the ideological underpinnings of these narratives, beginning with keyword analysis.

Listed below (tables 1-3) are the top sixty keywords for each of the established conventions of character, setting, and patterns of action excluding proper places and character names. These keywords represent the most statistically significant words within the corpus when compared against a reference corpus of general contemporary American fiction (COCA). As outlined in the methodologies section, what can be reasonably assumed from these lists is that, in some capacity, they reflect what makes the genre what it is, and highlights the narrative moves made most consistently by authors when working within the genre. There were a similar number of total keywords across each category (between 321 and 373) with a slight emphasis on patterns of action. However, the ‘character’ category held the most keywords with the highest instances of frequency (how many times the keyword occurred within the corpus) which indicates a different kind of priority for the author—while there is an emphasis on the variety of possible ‘doing things’ within the corpus, there is also an emphasis on ‘who’ is doing things. Additionally, there are keywords that appear on multiple lists, traversing the boundaries between setting, character, and patterns of action, showing not only how these conventions are built through language but how they are built together and within each other. For example, the keyword ‘wild’ exists within the corpus as a feature of landscape and so contributes to establishing setting but also functions in relation to humans (“wild bunch”; “wild eyes”) and so can also contribute to character.

Keyword	Frequency	Keyness
horse	6760	1623.92
horses	4673	1007.49
river	5325	924.44
fort	3102	725.61
buffalo	2640	720.43
rifle	2432	661.52
camp	3442	578.31
creek	2361	547.27
trail	2578	499.8
smoke	3473	490.01
wagon	2380	486.86
colt	1453	405.24
lodge	1495	360.77
fire	4198	343.04
cattle	1420	323.68
medicine	1313	301.25
land	2623	298.54
village	1870	293.58
wolf	1335	289.59
rat	1239	288.69
town	4193	278.99
elk	946	265.22
rusty	1003	258.5
pony	1219	251.72
tomahawk	756	246.73
west	2153	232.68
territory	981	230.81
bull	1207	228.79
ground	3105	224.87
ranch	958	223.91
ponies	808	221.75
coyote	691	214.22
south	1854	207.78
north	2053	206.31
mules	757	205.76
crow	799	201.31
miles	2158	196.52
valley	1215	193.61
prairie	820	192.27
country	2365	180.15
wagons	681	176.14
lodges	557	170.92
canyon	597	161.91
cabin	1241	158.09
frontier	661	154.34
saloon	773	152.5
yards	1052	151.74
edge	2311	149.25
haven	630	145.09
mule	698	143.08
east	1438	139.45
settlers	418	136.42
law	1466	131.56
brush	979	130.89
eagle	588	128.11
plains	597	126.42
mountains	1051	125.45
wild	1219	121
far	3842	113.89
mare	567	113.7

Table 1 Top 60 "Setting” Keywords

Keyword	Frequency	Keyness
men	11589	1559.95
he	121850	1368.13
his	80945	1222.57
indians	4098	1181.55
man	17661	833.01
indian	3483	777.99
warriors	2225	674.17
him	35815	609.13
saddle	1978	544.45
them	23166	539.3
soldiers	2150	437.22
sheriff	2016	427.58
general	2197	321.29
army	2086	310.42
wanderer	911	297.32
mexican	1094	292.59
raider	866	282.63
they	39207	281.27
warrior	1424	263.38
fight	1892	258.94
kill	2418	252.41
chief	1994	240.12
colonel	1334	235.18
white	6542	233.34
pistol	1192	232.14
tribes	828	228.04
mister	1045	210.03
captain	1428	206.82
marshal	657	203.23
himself	5931	198.85
enemy	946	193.81
chiefs	648	191.92
council	862	186.33
scout	786	182.1
preacher	801	177.29
cavalry	616	174.43
knife	1741	173.95
riders	613	173.48
crook	644	170.49
scouts	718	161.88
replied	1672	159.14
rascal	462	150.78
sir	1609	143.97
others	2707	143.92
guns	1173	141.96
treaty	466	141.58
rifles	565	140.51
rider	592	138.52
settlers	418	136.42
deputy	616	136.33
lieutenant	662	132.8
cowboys	399	130.21
doc	778	129.08
wild	1219	121
outlaws	424	120.51
rangers	368	120.1
moccasins	443	119.95
gun	2295	119.77
whites	655	116.04
outlaw	386	115.84

Table 2 Top 60 "Character" Keywords

Keyword	Frequency	Keyness
rode	2967	730.12
rifle	2432	661.52
smoke	3473	490.01
wagon	2380	486.86
killed	2891	378.93
fire	4198	343.04
reckon	1245	316.25
army	2086	310.42
war	3024	298.51
ride	2002	267.27
fight	1892	258.94
kill	2418	252.41
will	9660	239.99
pistol	1192	232.14
riding	1359	231.79
gonna	717	222.64
shot	2940	208.46
fired	1068	183.6
lay	2304	176.85
knife	1741	173.95
toward	5131	173.93
goin	830	172.8
powder	825	159.47
replied	1672	159.14
reins	632	155.65
many	4645	146.7
guns	1173	141.96
treaty	466	141.58
rifles	565	140.51
bullet	812	138.15
tied	1124	137.74
dismounted	437	132.24
battle	1027	132.14
law	1466	131.56
brush	979	130.89
wounded	793	126.69
some	11896	125.16
damn	1759	124.45
wild	1219	121
gun	2295	119.77
mounted	786	115.9
ambush	418	112.13
against	4608	111.44
brought	2636	110.7
attack	1023	109.87
winchester	333	108.68
hunt	744	108.13
trade	880	107.13
hunting	902	102.76
arrow	675	102.17
nodded	2409	99.83
mount	488	99.17
lone	552	98.38
dead	3154	97.63
ridden	382	95.3
more	12223	94.65
scalps	289	94.32
reined	357	93.17
timber	336	92.72
carried	1369	91.86

Table 3 Top 60 "Patterns of Action" Keywords

Even a brief look at the keyword lists reveals important patterns that highlight the "aboutness" of the corpus and that indicates how the genre conventions of setting, character and patterns of action are constructed through language. The setting keywords are made up of both directional and distance markers (north, west, far, miles, etc.) as well as place emphasis on geographic elements (mountains, prairie, valley, river) and nature specifically in the form of animals (horse, eagle, coyote, wolf). There are also more abstracted terms that define or demarcate land in relation to its value or its use by humans (territory and frontier) and the various communities that live on it (ranch, town, camp, cabin, etc.). There are also initial patterns in the character keywords that are perhaps unsurprising but worth mentioning. Occupational roles are prioritized, and often traditionally male occupations (sheriff, preacher, scout, cowboys, etc.) At the same time, references to specific groups of people (Indians, Mexican, whites, settlers, tribes etc.) highlight the corpus' need to "name" specific characters according to racial or national categories either in narration or dialogue. Significant attention is paid to martial characters or military roles that indicate conflict (warriors, soldiers, general, army, raider, cavalry, etc.). And finally, character keywords that don't reference a specific group or occupation instead highlight a commitment to characterization based on relationships with others or that indicate specific interior moral qualities (outlaw, rascal, crook, enemy). The patterns of action keywords show similar dynamics and priorities to both the setting and character keywords. Emphasis is placed on violence and military conflict (army, war, fight, kill, battle, ambush, etc.) but also on movement and processes of survival through verbs (ride, tied, hunt, trade, carried). And finally, across each keyword list, objects or tools wielded in violence that often contribute to the development of all three categories of convention—that characters use within specific settings towards specific situational ends (rifle, pistol, knife, Winchester, powder, gun, bullet, arrow, tomahawk, scalps, etc.)

I then identified places on each list where qualitative analysis of these genre categories might help demonstrate linguistic attitudes towards ideologies of race, gender, and settler colonial relations of power and determine what conclusions can be drawn about these attitudes. In this stage, I looked for patterns that occurred across a larger number of the texts as starting places for closer qualitative analysis, excluding linguistic features that were specific to a single novel. I first analyze these keywords and their collocates and then analyze their usage in context in relation to what scholars already know about the ideological dimensions of the western genre (which is, according to Baker's methodology, our pre-existing topoi of discourse).

Gender: Masculinized Agency as Moralized Violence

To think about how the genre approaches constructions around gender, and specifically hegemonic masculinity, I began by comparing the top pronoun collocates for both "he" and "she" (tables 4 and 5) as they construct knowledge along traditional gender binaries. What we see in this comparison is that within the corpus, male characters are afforded high levels of both agency and subjectivity. Distinct emphasis is placed on the interiority of "he" characters in which the reader is given insight into their thoughts, feelings, and goals but very little outward or external actions. This is seen specifically in the verbs with the highest instances of frequency (knew, wondered, realized, wished) that indicate an active construction of self without revealing too much to their external world or to their interlocuters. This is also made clear in the verbs that do reveal communicative moves or interaction with other characters (leered and swore) that reinforce an active reticence. As discussed previously, this is consistent with scholars' assessment of the hegemonic masculine ideal that builds the masculine self around a performance of power—processing information while giving nothing back. This dynamic is especially visible when compared against the “she” collocates. If the “he” collocates construct a masculine interior subjectivity, the “she” collocates present a self in relation.

Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
17	3	14	5.62799	owes
16	6	10	5.54053	reviewed
16	3	13	5.54053	leered
38	9	29	5.40379	believes
415	184	231	5.24755	wished
17	7	10	5.21295	unprepared
17	3	14	5.21295	opens
625	250	375	5.18118	realized
138	48	90	5.16792	doubted
121	42	79	5.16171	thinks
17	9	8	5.15406	groggy
582	193	389	5.15218	wondered
19	14	5	5.15102	option
21	10	11	5.14857	spyglass
23	8	15	5.14655	preoccupied
23	4	19	5.14655	brooded
24	6	18	5.12549	learns
22	13	9	5.12549	options
16	3	13	5.12549	aims
32	9	23	5.09574	fathom
43	7	36	5.02819	owed
108	20	88	5.0224	recalled
16	9	7	5.01001	disgustedly
3558	1299	2259	5.00248	knew
104	42	62	4.99304	swore

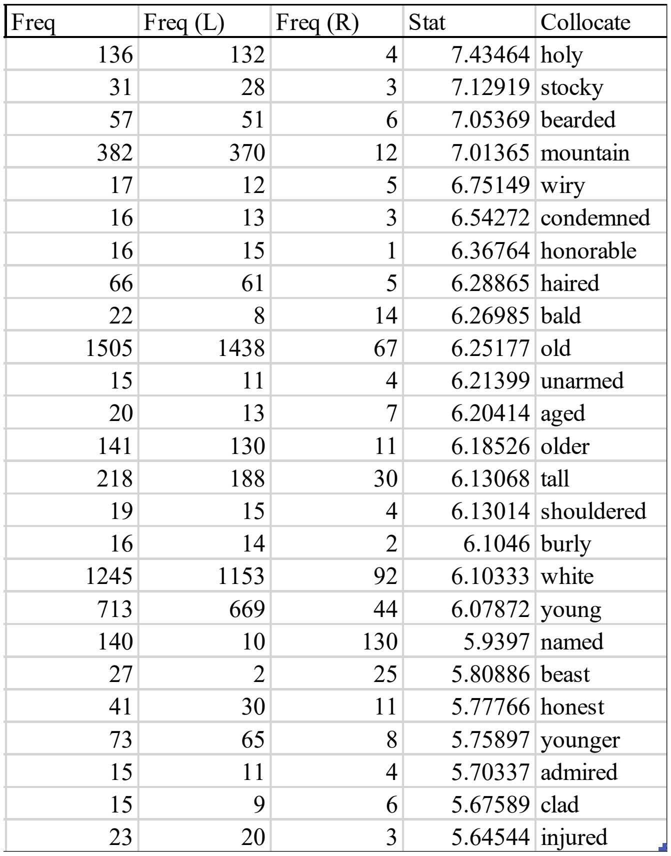
Table 4 Top 25 "He" Collocates

Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
31	5	26	7.36512	laughs
712	216	496	6.9889	herself
36	7	29	6.74591	pregnant
35	5	30	6.44588	giggled
30	8	22	6.43981	blushed
17	3	14	6.35029	snuggled
27	1	26	6.33087	sobbed
57	7	50	6.32399	favored
15	4	11	6.06784	deserves
17	12	5	5.97992	maiden
29	14	15	5.9548	sobbing
16	5	11	5.94795	whimpered
148	45	103	5.93805	loved
38	9	29	5.92579	hugged
18	5	13	5.90766	scolded
20	0	20	5.83378	longed
23	12	11	5.7689	doll
45	9	36	5.75468	prayed
35	8	27	5.71624	clutched
8864	5096	3768	5.71488	her
22	4	18	5.70477	wept
37	18	19	5.65991	lovely
20	10	10	5.63853	towel
30	9	21	5.62038	shivered
57	8	49	5.60778	kissed

Table 5 Top 25 "She" Collocates

Verbs like kissed, clutched, hugged, loved, and snuggled indicate that women characters are often defined in relation—who they’re kissing, loving, clutching, etc. Specific words are also used to code “she” characters with traditional female roles of purity, motherhood, and sexuality (lovely, pregnant, maiden, scolded, blushed, etc.). Additionally, the collocates reveal a tension between giving emotional and physical affection (blushed, loved, giggled) and vulnerability, especially the type of vulnerability that need protecting (clutched, shivered, sobbed, whimpered, etc.). This relationship offers an opening to analyze how the corpus approaches questions of gender and especially how it constructs dominant male subjectivity.

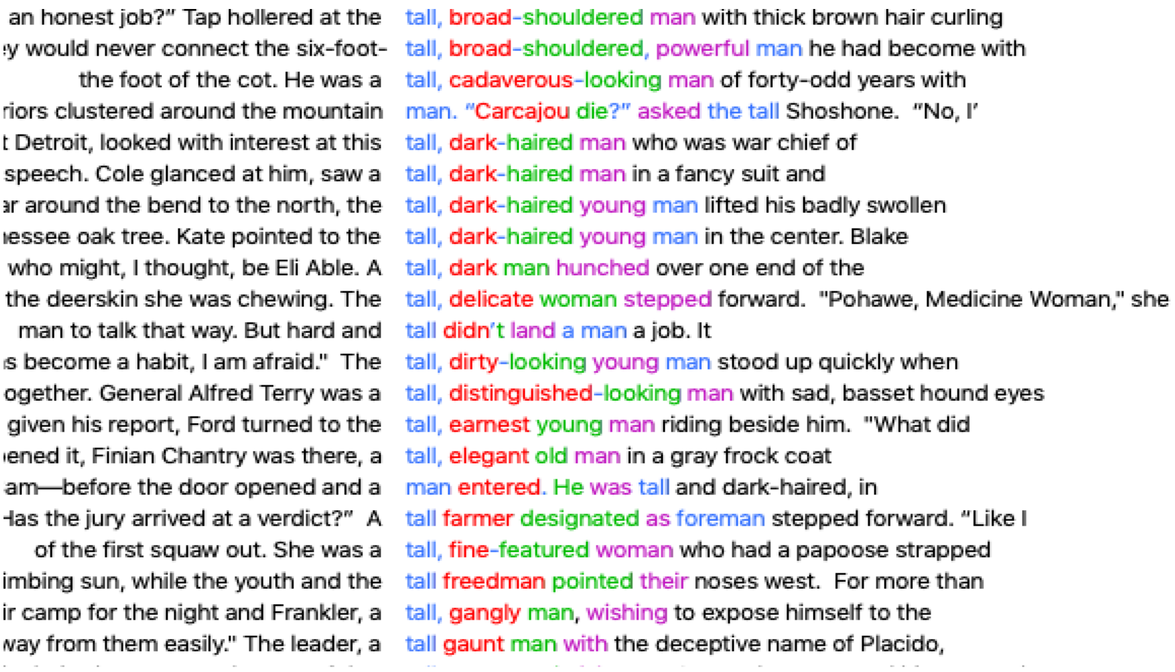
To dig deeper into this, I moved towards analyzing collocates of the noun “man” (table 6) to see specifically how men are described, especially thinking about the discussions around the construction of specifically visual masculine ideal. As seen in the initial list, men are described in two ways: physical appearance and character qualities. There is a definite emphasis on physical appearance with adjectives like stocky, bearded, wiry, tall, burly, injured etc. There is also an emphasis on age (both young and old occur frequently) but also race with the highest occurring collocate of “man” being “white.” As we see in the concordance lines of “tall” (figure 1), men are often described in relation to how they appear to others (tall, dark-haired young man) or their ability and strength (“six-foot tall, broad-shouldered, powerful man”). Men are also described in relation to their levels of social standing (“dirty-looking” vs. “distinguished-looking”) or occupation (“tall farmer”). Incidentally, the two concordance lines



Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
136	132	4	7.43464	holy
31	28	3	7.12919	stocky
57	51	6	7.05369	bearded
382	370	12	7.01365	mountain
17	12	5	6.75149	wiry
16	13	3	6.54272	condemned
16	15	1	6.36764	honorable
66	61	5	6.28865	haired
22	8	14	6.26985	bald
1505	1438	67	6.25177	old
15	11	4	6.21399	unarmed
20	13	7	6.20414	aged
141	130	11	6.18526	older
218	188	30	6.13068	tall
19	15	4	6.13014	shouldered
16	14	2	6.1046	burly
1245	1153	92	6.10333	white
713	669	44	6.07872	young
140	10	130	5.9397	named
27	2	25	5.80886	beast
41	30	11	5.77766	honest
73	65	8	5.75897	younger
15	11	4	5.70337	admired
15	9	6	5.67589	clad
23	20	3	5.64544	injured

Table 6 Top 25 "Man" Collocates

that describe “tall women” both focus on their “fine” and “delicate” features.



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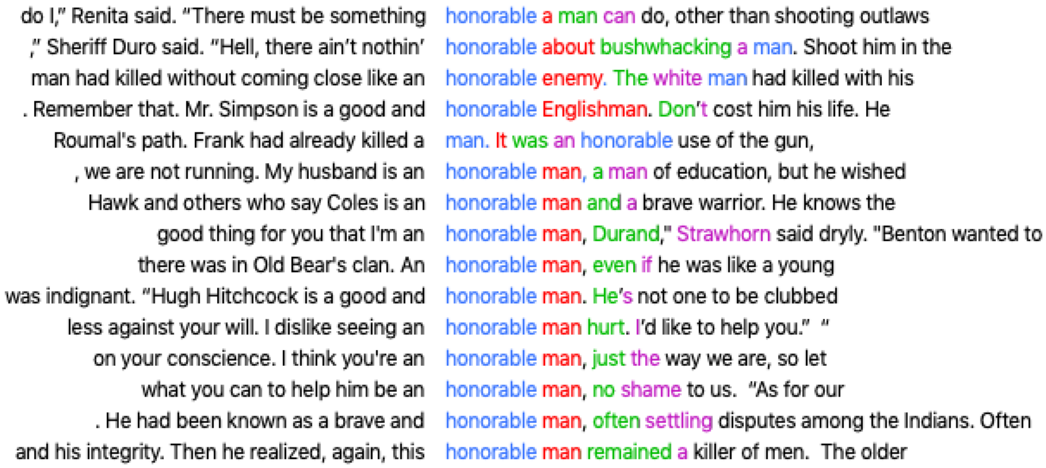
 an honest job?" Tap hollered at the   tall, broad-shouldered man with thick brown hair curling
y would never connect the six-foot-    tall, broad-shouldered, powerful man he had become with
         the foot of the cot. He was a  tall, cadaverous-looking man of forty-odd years with
riors clustered around the mountain    man. "Carcajou die?" asked the tall Shoshone.  "No, I'
 Detroit, looked with interest at this tall, dark-haired man who was war chief of
speech. Cole glanced at him, saw a     tall, dark-haired man in a fancy suit and
r around the bend to the north, the    tall, dark-haired young man lifted his badly swollen
essee oak tree. Kate pointed to the    tall, dark-haired young man in the center. Blake
 who might, I thought, be Eli Able. A  tall, dark man hunched over one end of the
the deerskin she was chewing. The      tall, delicate woman stepped forward.  "Pohawe, Medicine Woman," she
  man to talk that way. But hard and   tall didn't land a man a job. It
s become a habit, I am afraid."  The   tall, dirty-looking young man stood up quickly when
ogether. General Alfred Terry was a    tall, distinguished-looking man with sad, basset hound eyes
 given his report, Ford turned to the tall, earnest young man riding beside him.  "What did
ened it, Finian Chantry was there, a   tall, elegant old man in a gray frock coat
am—before the door opened and a        man entered. He was tall and dark-haired, in
as the jury arrived at a verdict?"  A  tall farmer designated as foreman stepped forward. "Like I
    of the first squaw out. She was a  tall, fine-featured woman who had a papoose strapped
imbing sun, while the youth and the    tall freedman pointed their noses west.  For more than
ir camp for the night and Frankler, a  tall, gangly man, wishing to expose himself to the
ay from them easily." The leader, a    tall gaunt man with the deceptive name of Placido,
```

Figure 1 Concordance Lines for "Tall"

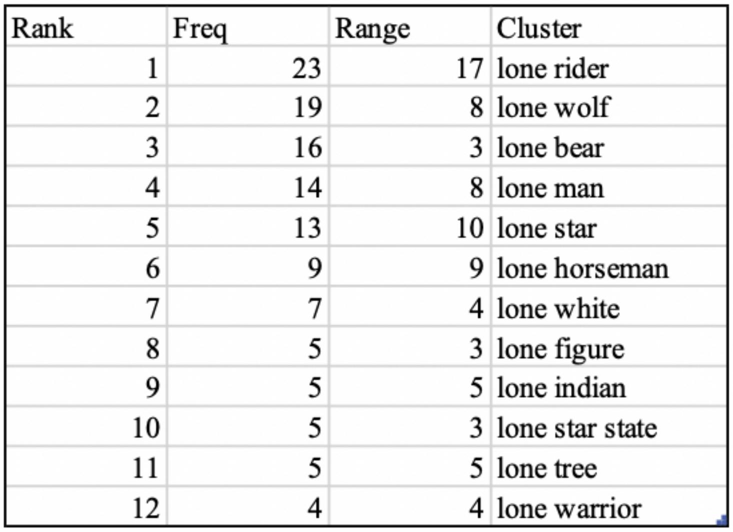
Additionally, there are collocates that characterize men based on their relations to moral and legal frameworks. This is seen in collocates like honorable, honest, and admired in which men are evaluated based on their moral code or their failure (condemned). If we look at the concordance lines for “honorable” (figure 2), we can see there are distinct connections between men’s moral characterization and their actions. There is a specific attitude towards the “honorable man” that connects him other values like goodness and bravery but also to a specific form of reluctant violence (“Frank had already killed a man, it was an honorable use of the gun”). And so, while much of western’s construction of masculinity is hidden and silent, as we’ve seen in both the “he” and “man” collocations, his interior self is made known, not through his vulnerability, but through his actions as an agent of violence (“he realized, again, this honorable man remained a killer of men”).



do I,” Renita said. “There must be something honorable a man can do, other than shooting outlaws
,” Sheriff Duro said. “Hell, there ain’t nothin’ honorable about bushwhacking a man. Shoot him in the
man had killed without coming close like an honorable enemy. The white man had killed with his
. Remember that. Mr. Simpson is a good and honorable Englishman. Don’t cost him his life. He
Roumal's path. Frank had already killed a man. It was an honorable use of the gun,
, we are not running. My husband is an honorable man, a man of education, but he wished
Hawk and others who say Coles is an honorable man and a brave warrior. He knows the
good thing for you that I'm an honorable man, Durand," Strawhorn said dryly. "Benton wanted to
there was in Old Bear's clan. An honorable man, even if he was like a young
was indignant. “Hugh Hitchcock is a good and honorable man. He’s not one to be clubbed
less against your will. I dislike seeing an honorable man hurt. I’d like to help you.” “
on your conscience. I think you're an honorable man, just the way we are, so let
what you can to help him be an honorable man, no shame to us. “As for our
. He had been known as a brave and honorable man, often settling disputes among the Indians. Often
and his integrity. Then he realized, again, this honorable man remained a killer of men. The older

Figure 2 Concordance Lines for "Honorable"

In addition to these physical and ethical characteristics, male characters in the corpus are often defined by how they exist in solitary exclusion. Several patterns emerge in how the adjective keyword “lone” modifies specific nouns. As we see in the listed “lone” clusters (table 7), men or nouns that are traditionally coded male (like “warrior”) are linguistically constructed around the ideal of solitude. This is especially noticeable in “lone horseman” and “lone man” but

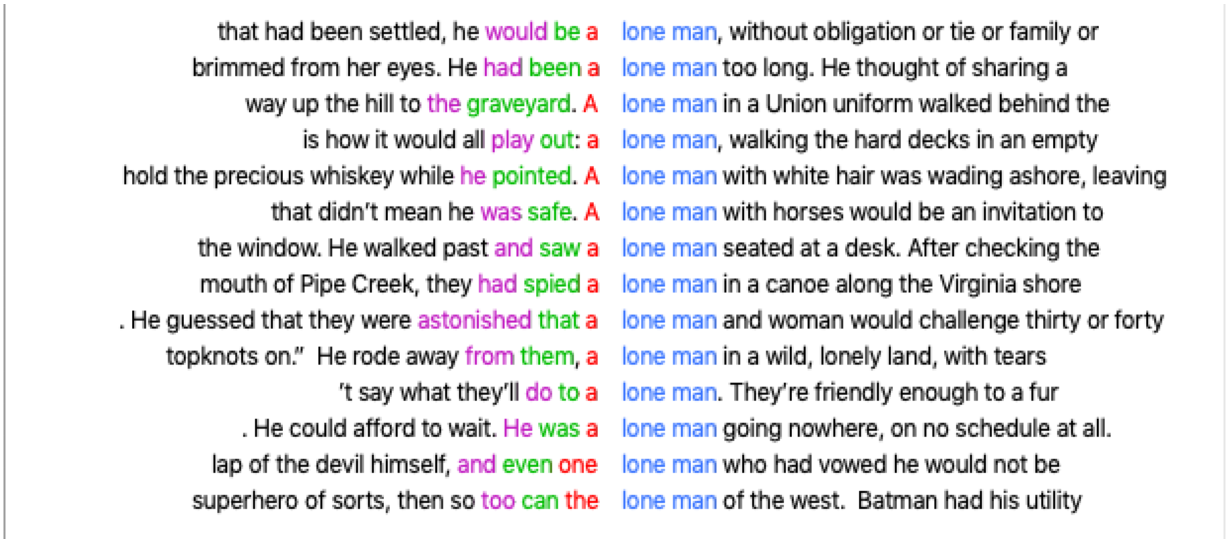


Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	23	17	lone rider
2	19	8	lone wolf
3	16	3	lone bear
4	14	8	lone man
5	13	10	lone star
6	9	9	lone horseman
7	7	4	lone white
8	5	3	lone figure
9	5	5	lone indian
10	5	3	lone star state
11	5	5	lone tree
12	4	4	lone warrior

Table 7 Top 12 "Lone" N-Grams

also in “lone wolf” which, in context, exclusively refers to male characters and not actual wolves.

Additionally, in the concordance lines of “lone man” (figure 3), we see a distinct connection between the lone male character and the world that he inhabits. He chooses to be alone and separate from what we might consider “civilization” (“a lone man without obligation or tie or family”) but also feels unfilled by this isolation (“he had been a lone man too long”). Additionally, there is a connection between the loneliness of the man and the land he traverses alone (“He rode away from them a lone man in the wild, lonely land”) and it is this connection that makes the solitary man “of the west.” This dynamic hints at Cooper’s “gendered politics of space and nation” in which the solitary male figure (and often white male figure) functions metonymically for both the region and for the nation’s growth in relation to the West (Cooper 16).



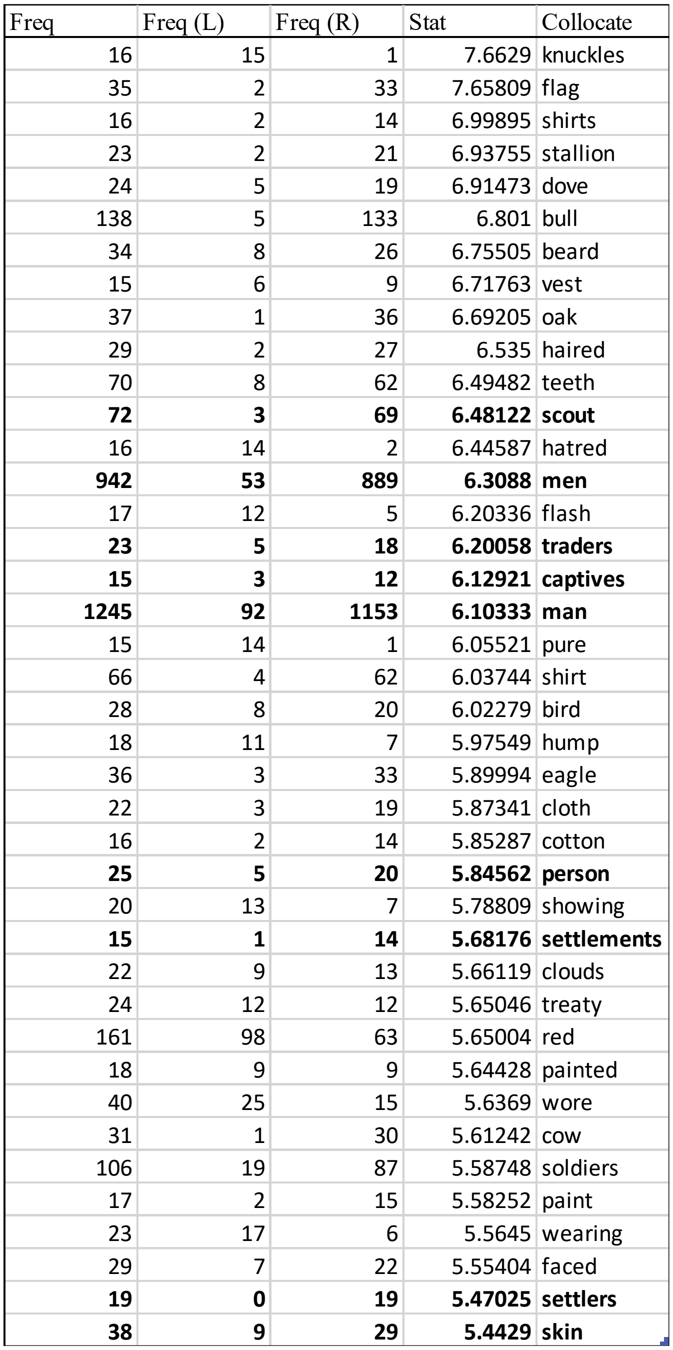
that had been settled, he would be a	lone man, without obligation or tie or family or
brimmed from her eyes. He had been a	lone man too long. He thought of sharing a
way up the hill to the graveyard. A	lone man in a Union uniform walked behind the
is how it would all play out: a	lone man, walking the hard decks in an empty
hold the precious whiskey while he pointed. A	lone man with white hair was wading ashore, leaving
that didn’t mean he was safe. A	lone man with horses would be an invitation to
the window. He walked past and saw a	lone man seated at a desk. After checking the
mouth of Pipe Creek, they had spied a	lone man in a canoe along the Virginia shore
. He guessed that they were astonished that a	lone man and woman would challenge thirty or forty
topknots on.” He rode away from them, a	lone man in a wild, lonely land, with tears
’t say what they’ll do to a	lone man. They’re friendly enough to a fur
. He could afford to wait. He was a	lone man going nowhere, on no schedule at all.
lap of the devil himself, and even one	lone man who had vowed he would not be
superhero of sorts, then so too can the	lone man of the west. Batman had his utility

Figure 3 Concordance Lines for Bigram "Lone Man"

All these elements, from the reticent masculine ideal to the performance of ethics through violence and the solitary rider traversing the land offer interesting insights into how gender in the western functions ideologically. Hegemonic masculinity in the western novel functions as an interior subjectivity and external agency emerging in a moralized violence that is separate from the social world of "civilization" but perhaps more in touch with a fundamental aspect of the nation (the "land"). As others have argued, but what I think this analysis makes clear is that the western genre is invested in the innate connection between masculinity and power that is also reflected in the corpus' portrayal of both race and settler colonialism.

Race: Whiteness as Settler Power

As perhaps is already evident, discourses of whiteness are present within the corpus and make explicit connections to discussions of masculinity. However, looking at how the western navigates discussions of race shows that white identity is particularly salient as a racial category in conversation with the settler colonial relationships, especially thinking about the semantic prosody of both "non-white" groups and groups that are coded white to naturalize whiteness as a form of settler power. As seen in the top collocates for "white" (table 8), the collocates with the highest frequency use white to modify nouns towards specific racial categories with "white men" and "white man" outpacing all other collocate by large margins. From this alone, one could infer that white men play a particularly large role in these stories. In context, these bigrams are both used (in addition to "white person" and "white people") to categorize character from a variety of perspectives including, but not limited to, narratives from indigenous points of view. While the collocate and concordance analysis are limited in their ability to capture the nuance of some of these characterizations, what I believe is important to note is that regardless of who is speaking or from what perspective, the corpus as a whole indicates that whiteness is a meaningful (and perhaps the most meaningful) category of description.[23]



Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
16	15	1	7.6629	knuckles
35	2	33	7.65809	flag
16	2	14	6.99895	shirts
23	2	21	6.93755	stallion
24	5	19	6.91473	dove
138	5	133	6.801	bull
34	8	26	6.75505	beard
15	6	9	6.71763	vest
37	1	36	6.69205	oak
29	2	27	6.535	haired
70	8	62	6.49482	teeth
72	**3**	**69**	**6.48122**	**scout**
16	14	2	6.44587	hatred
942	**53**	**889**	**6.3088**	**men**
17	12	5	6.20336	flash
23	**5**	**18**	**6.20058**	**traders**
15	**3**	**12**	**6.12921**	**captives**
1245	**92**	**1153**	**6.10333**	**man**
15	14	1	6.05521	pure
66	4	62	6.03744	shirt
28	8	20	6.02279	bird
18	11	7	5.97549	hump
36	3	33	5.89994	eagle
22	3	19	5.87341	cloth
16	2	14	5.85287	cotton
25	**5**	**20**	**5.84562**	**person**
20	13	7	5.78809	showing
15	**1**	**14**	**5.68176**	**settlements**
22	9	13	5.66119	clouds
24	12	12	5.65046	treaty
161	98	63	5.65004	red
18	9	9	5.64428	painted
40	25	15	5.6369	wore
31	1	30	5.61242	cow
106	19	87	5.58748	soldiers
17	2	15	5.58252	paint
23	17	6	5.5645	wearing
29	7	22	5.55404	faced
19	**0**	**19**	**5.47025**	**settlers**
38	**9**	**29**	**5.4429**	**skin**

Table 8 Top 40 "white" Collocates

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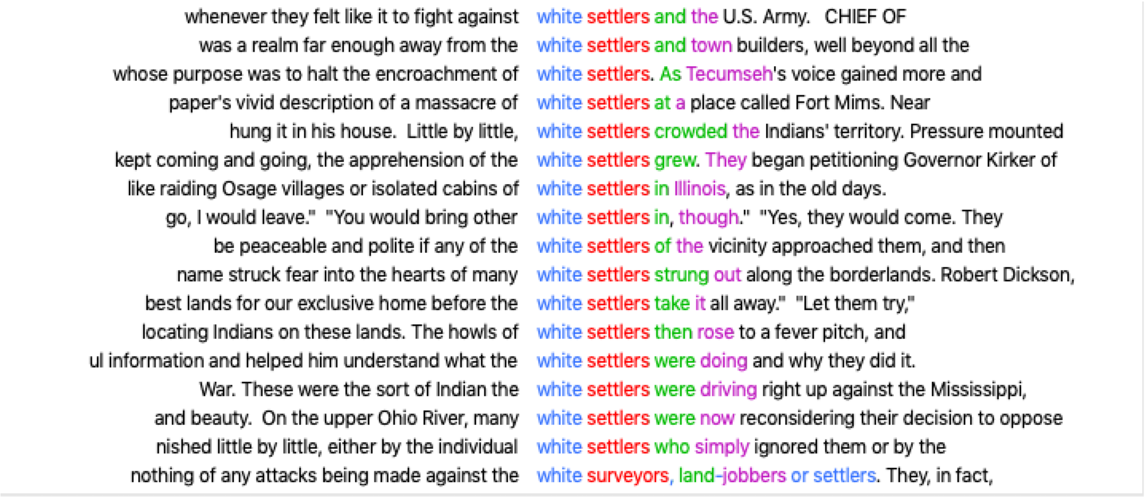
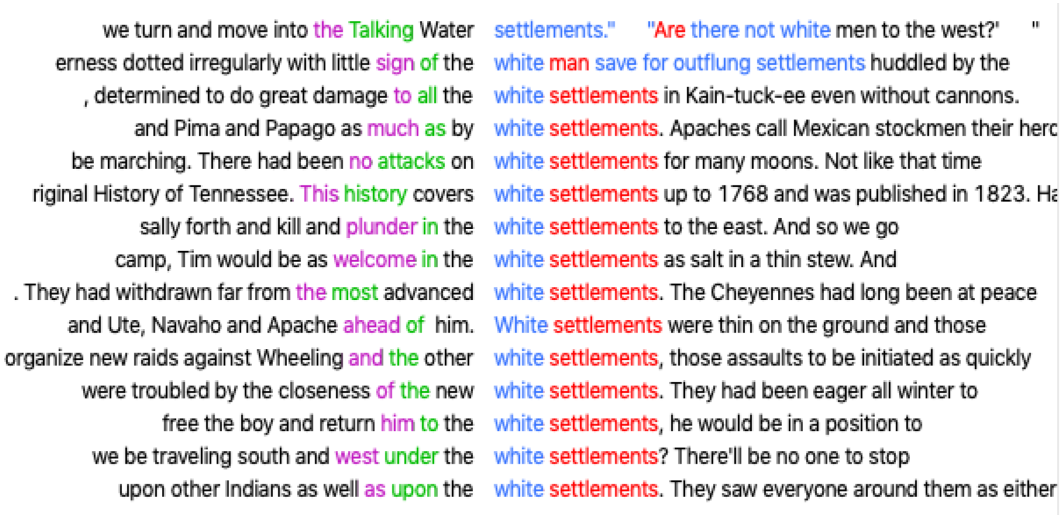
[23] I think there’s also an added complexity of white authors who write about whiteness and white identity from the perspective of indigenous perspectives, that would be present here in a “me looking at you looking at me” narrative dynamic.

But even beyond the collocates of man, men, and person as forms of racial identification, the corpus also places emphasis on whiteness as it relates to the process of westward expansion. This is seen in the concordance lines of the collocations “white settlers,” “white settlements” and the bigram “white scout.” In these situations, both the process of settling and the martial conquering of the West are coded white and with attitudes towards that whiteness. As we see in the concordance lines of the collocations “white settlers” and “white settlements” (figures 4 and 5), white settlers are described in relation to their occupation of land (“white surveyors, land-jobbers, or settlers”) and crucially this occupation is precarious: the white settlers both “encroach” and exist under threat (“vivid description of a massacre of white settlers”/“name struck fear into the hearts of many white settlers”



whenever they felt like it to fight against	white settlers and the U.S. Army. CHIEF OF
was a realm far enough away from the	white settlers and town builders, well beyond all the
whose purpose was to halt the encroachment of	white settlers. As Tecumseh's voice gained more and
paper's vivid description of a massacre of	white settlers at a place called Fort Mims. Near
hung it in his house. Little by little,	white settlers crowded the Indians' territory. Pressure mounted
kept coming and going, the apprehension of the	white settlers grew. They began petitioning Governor Kirker of
like raiding Osage villages or isolated cabins of	white settlers in Illinois, as in the old days.
go, I would leave." "You would bring other	white settlers in, though." "Yes, they would come. They
be peaceable and polite if any of the	white settlers of the vicinity approached them, and then
name struck fear into the hearts of many	white settlers strung out along the borderlands. Robert Dickson,
best lands for our exclusive home before the	white settlers take it all away." "Let them try,"
locating Indians on these lands. The howls of	white settlers then rose to a fever pitch, and
ul information and helped him understand what the	white settlers were doing and why they did it.
War. These were the sort of Indian the	white settlers were driving right up against the Mississippi,
and beauty. On the upper Ohio River, many	white settlers were now reconsidering their decision to oppose
nished little by little, either by the individual	white settlers who simply ignored them or by the
nothing of any attacks being made against the	white surveyors, land-jobbers or settlers. They, in fact,

Figure 4 Concordance Lines for Collocation "White Settlers"



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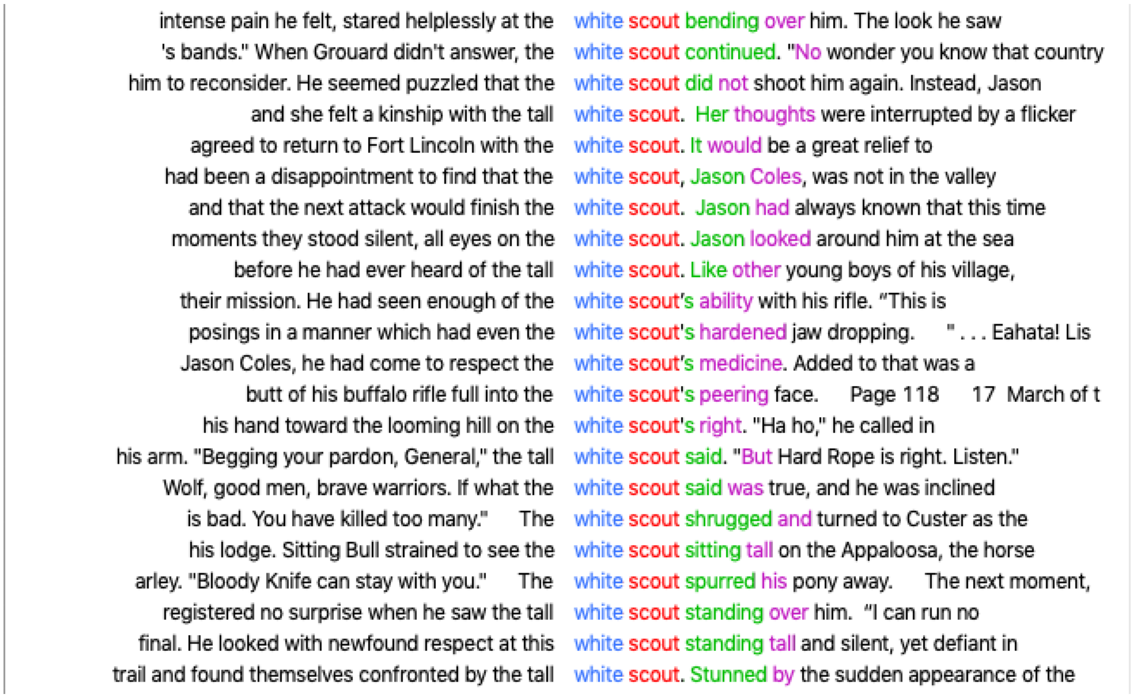
             we turn and move into the Talking Water   settlements."    "Are there not white men to the west?'    "
      erness dotted irregularly with little sign of the   white man save for outflung settlements huddled by the
       , determined to do great damage to all the   white settlements in Kain-tuck-ee even without cannons.
           and Pima and Papago as much as by   white settlements. Apaches call Mexican stockmen their her
       be marching. There had been no attacks on   white settlements for many moons. Not like that time
  riginal History of Tennessee. This history covers   white settlements up to 1768 and was published in 1823. H
            sally forth and kill and plunder in the   white settlements to the east. And so we go
        camp, Tim would be as welcome in the   white settlements as salt in a thin stew. And
  . They had withdrawn far from the most advanced   white settlements. The Cheyennes had long been at peace
       and Ute, Navaho and Apache ahead of  him.   White settlements were thin on the ground and those
organize new raids against Wheeling and the other   white settlements, those assaults to be initiated as quickly
        were troubled by the closeness of the new   white settlements. They had been eager all winter to
              free the boy and return him to the   white settlements, he would be in a position to
        we be traveling south and west under the   white settlements? There'll be no one to stop
          upon other Indians as well as upon the   white settlements. They saw everyone around them as either
```

Figure 5 Concordance Lines for Collocation "White Settlements"

This presents an interesting tension between the saliency of white identity and its precarity which is consistent with discussions of settlements as the negotiated space of the frontier at the forefront of US advancement but that also describes a process of change ("dotted irregularly with little sign of the white man save for outflung settlements"). In a similar sense, the concordance lines of the bigram "white scout" (figure 6) offers an interesting dynamic between whiteness and the military conquering of the West especially in conflict with indigenous tribes, and in conjunction with the rise of historical narratives of the Great Sioux War of 1876 (see reference to Custer, Sitting Bull, and Sioux). In these lines, the white scout represents the furthest most front of expansion and the figure most in contact with "hostile" indigenous tribes.

What is interesting and perhaps surprising about these lines is the prosody isn't necessarily valorizing or celebratory towards these figures, but instead shows a tense respect for his power and ability ("found themselves confronted by the tall white scout"/ "stared helplessly at white scout bending over him") Again, there is a tension in this coded representation of



intense pain he felt, stared helplessly at the	white scout	bending over him. The look he saw
's bands." When Grouard didn't answer, the	white scout	continued. "No wonder you know that country
him to reconsider. He seemed puzzled that the	white scout	did not shoot him again. Instead, Jason
and she felt a kinship with the tall	white scout.	Her thoughts were interrupted by a flicker
agreed to return to Fort Lincoln with the	white scout.	It would be a great relief to
had been a disappointment to find that the	white scout,	Jason Coles, was not in the valley
and that the next attack would finish the	white scout.	Jason had always known that this time
moments they stood silent, all eyes on the	white scout.	Jason looked around him at the sea
before he had ever heard of the tall	white scout.	Like other young boys of his village,
their mission. He had seen enough of the	white scout's	ability with his rifle. "This is
posings in a manner which had even the	white scout's	hardened jaw dropping. " . . . Eahata! Lis
Jason Coles, he had come to respect the	white scout's	medicine. Added to that was a
butt of his buffalo rifle full into the	white scout's	peering face. Page 118 17 March of t
his hand toward the looming hill on the	white scout's	right. "Ha ho," he called in
his arm. "Begging your pardon, General," the tall	white scout	said. "But Hard Rope is right. Listen."
Wolf, good men, brave warriors. If what the	white scout	said was true, and he was inclined
is bad. You have killed too many." The	white scout	shrugged and turned to Custer as the
his lodge. Sitting Bull strained to see the	white scout	sitting tall on the Appaloosa, the horse
arley. "Bloody Knife can stay with you." The	white scout	spurred his pony away. The next moment,
registered no surprise when he saw the tall	white scout	standing over him. "I can run no
final. He looked with newfound respect at this	white scout	standing tall and silent, yet defiant in
trail and found themselves confronted by the tall	white scout.	Stunned by the sudden appearance of the

Figure 6 Concordance Lines for Bigram "White Scout"

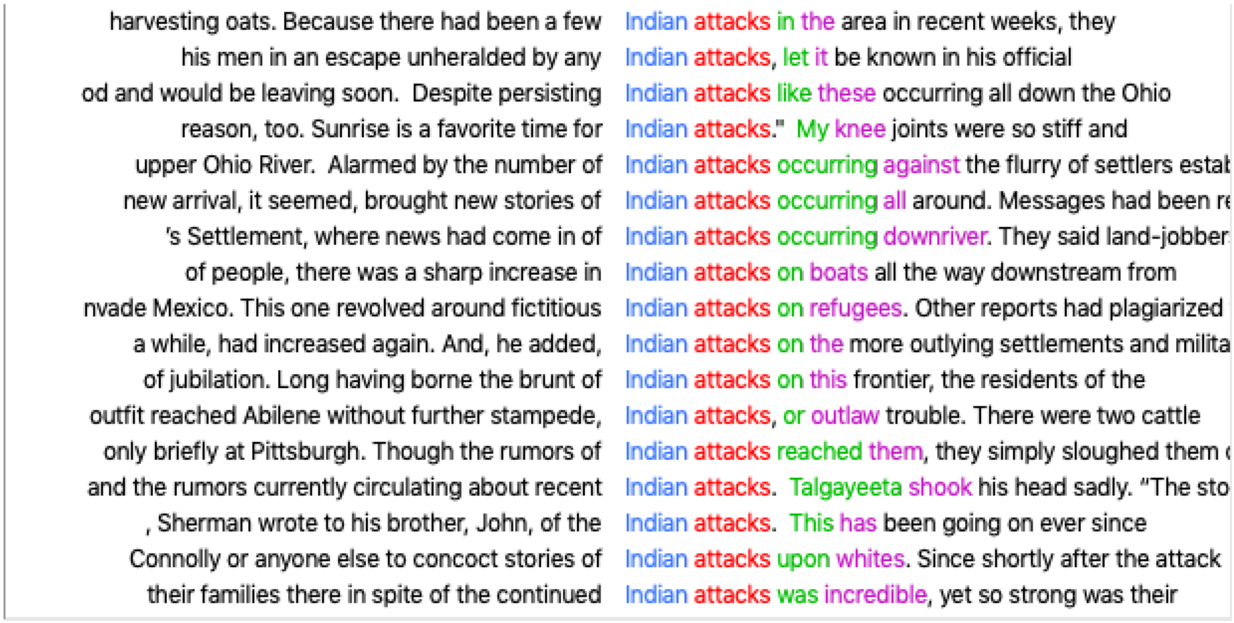
westward expansion but instead of “inevitable settlers under threat,” the white scout inhabits the masculine tendency towards violence (“he had seen enough of the white scout’s ability with his rifle”) and the military conquering of the West is coded with a white male identity that demands respect (“He looked with newfound respect at this white scout standing tall and silent, yet defiant”). These patterns indicate the process of settler colonialism as a mode of rationalization in which processes of “patriarchal white sovereignty are operationalized, deployed, and affirmed” (Moreton-Robinson xii). How these patriarchal sovereignties are operationalized however, includes the characterization of both a deeply powerful and precariously vulnerable project, in which violence must continually be enacted on those that would threaten to project to ensure its survival.

Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
27	9	18	9.92155	bureau
69	0	69	8.81318	agent
235	7	228	8.77749	territory
17	1	16	8.53423	agents
20	0	20	8.47451	fighter
21	0	21	8.32451	affairs
31	0	31	8.24639	attacks
15	1	14	7.86333	encampment
18	1	17	7.09612	nations
21	7	14	6.90497	reservation
22	3	19	6.83091	towns
30	4	26	6.76584	lands
18	0	18	6.7098	villages
45	4	41	6.67273	ponies
20	2	18	6.61027	nation
41	4	37	6.50315	tribes
27	24	3	6.37238	plains
32	6	26	6.35124	scouts
46	5	41	6.11116	pony
46	11	35	6.05203	sign
26	4	22	5.97537	fighting
25	9	16	5.86455	scout
27	23	4	5.7834	american
15	6	9	5.77156	discovered
26	2	24	5.75816	trade
30	4	26	5.74738	attack
16	11	5	5.73056	lone
62	7	55	5.58566	country
15	5	10	5.48153	cross
48	1	47	5.41422	girl
33	6	27	5.40977	party
79	11	68	5.39383	camp
21	2	19	5.36104	force
20	17	3	5.34723	british
16	13	3	5.2845	pa
22	10	12	5.28171	custer
16	10	6	5.20791	wounded
45	12	33	5.12575	creek
88	7	81	5.10345	woman
56	6	50	5.0842	war
15	7	8	5.05947	named

Table 9 Top 40 "Indian" Collocates

In relation to these elements of whiteness and white-coded keywords, the semantic prosody of “non-white” groups offers additional insights into how the corpus constructs knowledge about race in relation to structures of settler colonialism. The two most frequently occurring “non-white” racial or ethnic groups in the keyword lists are “Indian” and “Mexicans,” both of which offer interesting commentary when placed alongside each other and discussions of white settler masculinity. Immediate patterns emerge in the top collocates of “Indian” (table 9). First, the collocates emphasize community (both physical and social) as seen in terms like “encampment,” “nations,” “towns,” and “villages” but there is also an emphasis on the dispossession, relocation or oppression of these communities in relation to the settler state seen in terms like “bureau” and “agent” and in geographic markers like “territory” and “reservation” which refer to the forces that mediated the relationship between the federal government and indigenous tribes in the nineteenth century.

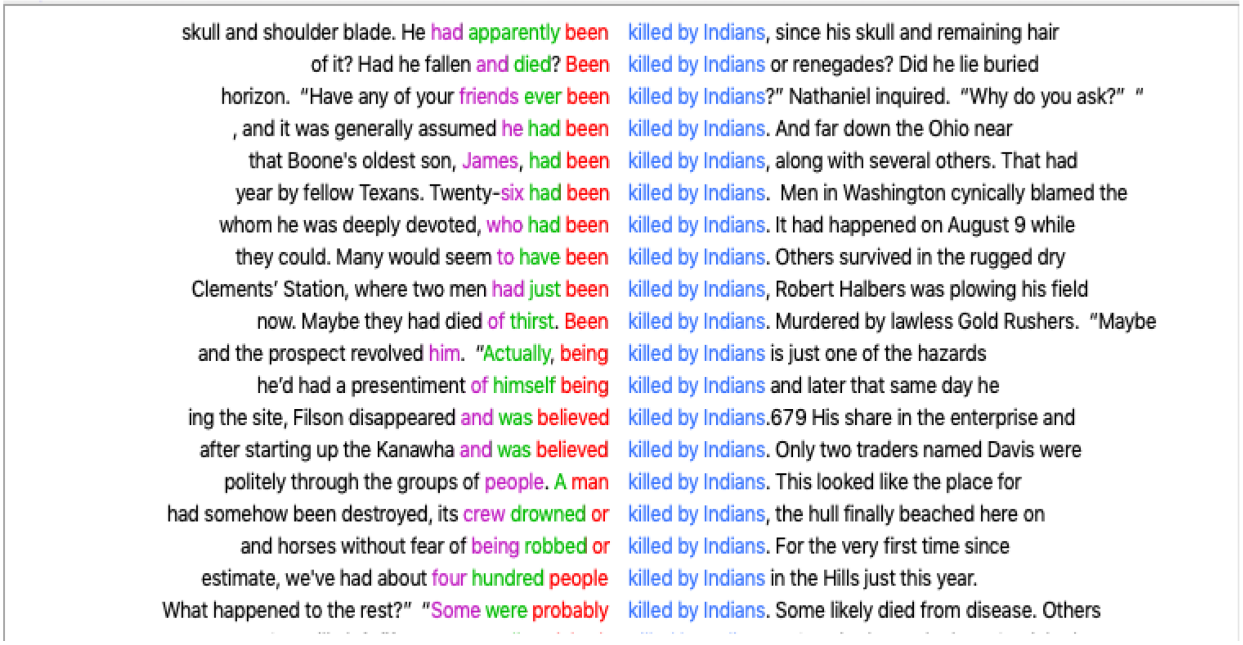
The other broad pattern that is identifiable in the initial collocate list is the characterization of “Indians” with conflict and violence. This is seen in terms like “war,” “wounded,” “attack,” and “fighting.” Especially in relation to questions of white settlers and settlements under threat, it might be productive to look closer at some of these relationships. In the concordance lines for the collocate “attacks” (figure 7) we can see that “Indian attacks” (either real, rumored, or imagined) constitutes a pattern of action in relation to both settlers and the negotiated terrain of the frontier. These attacks are described as “persisting” and “all around,” linked to the terrain of negotiated space of the frontier (“long having borne the brunt of Indian attacks on this frontier”) and directed both towards settlers and settlements (“alarmed by the number of Indian attacks occurring against the flurry of settlers”/ “Indian attacks on the more outlying settlements”). In these ways, “Indians,” within the genre, are categorized and defined as characters in relation to their violence as a pattern of action ("attacks") towards settlers (which, as previously noted, are coded as "white").



harvesting oats. Because there had been a few Indian attacks in the area in recent weeks, they
his men in an escape unheralded by any Indian attacks, let it be known in his official
od and would be leaving soon. Despite persisting Indian attacks like these occurring all down the Ohio
reason, too. Sunrise is a favorite time for Indian attacks." My knee joints were so stiff and
upper Ohio River. Alarmed by the number of Indian attacks occurring against the flurry of settlers estal
new arrival, it seemed, brought new stories of Indian attacks occurring all around. Messages had been r
's Settlement, where news had come in of Indian attacks occurring downriver. They said land-jobber
of people, there was a sharp increase in Indian attacks on boats all the way downstream from
nvade Mexico. This one revolved around fictitious Indian attacks on refugees. Other reports had plagiarized
a while, had increased again. And, he added, Indian attacks on the more outlying settlements and milita
of jubilation. Long having borne the brunt of Indian attacks on this frontier, the residents of the
outfit reached Abilene without further stampede, Indian attacks, or outlaw trouble. There were two cattle
only briefly at Pittsburgh. Though the rumors of Indian attacks reached them, they simply sloughed them
and the rumors currently circulating about recent Indian attacks. Talgayeeta shook his head sadly. "The sto
, Sherman wrote to his brother, John, of the Indian attacks. This has been going on ever since
Connolly or anyone else to concoct stories of Indian attacks upon whites. Since shortly after the attack
their families there in spite of the continued Indian attacks was incredible, yet so strong was their

Figure 7 Concordance Lines for Collocation "Indian Attacks"

Additionally, if we look at clusters around the situational keyword "killed," we find that the trigram "killed by Indians" (figure 8) situates a specific pattern of action within broader discussions of the frontier as negotiated space between wilderness and "civilization." As "Indian attacks" become a racialized threat against settlers, the potential of being "killed by Indians" becomes one option of demise among many for those unable to survive the elements of the West ("being killed by Indians is just one of the hazards"). Additionally, the trigram situates "non-white" groups against a moral framework that places them outside of constructions of civilized social and lawful behavior. This is seen specifically in the situating the threat of violence at the hand of "Indians" in relation to the "being robbed," being "murdered by lawless Gold Rushers," “outlaws” and “renegades.”



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  skull and shoulder blade. He had apparently been   killed by Indians, since his skull and remaining hair
             of it? Had he fallen and died? Been   killed by Indians or renegades? Did he lie buried
      horizon.  "Have any of your friends ever been   killed by Indians?" Nathaniel inquired.  "Why do you ask?"  "
    , and it was generally assumed he had been   killed by Indians. And far down the Ohio near
        that Boone's oldest son, James, had been   killed by Indians, along with several others. That had
      year by fellow Texans. Twenty-six had been   killed by Indians.  Men in Washington cynically blamed the
      whom he was deeply devoted, who had been   killed by Indians. It had happened on August 9 while
       they could. Many would seem to have been   killed by Indians. Others survived in the rugged dry
 Clements' Station, where two men had just been   killed by Indians, Robert Halbers was plowing his field
         now. Maybe they had died of thirst. Been   killed by Indians. Murdered by lawless Gold Rushers.  "Maybe
    and the prospect revolved him.  "Actually, being   killed by Indians is just one of the hazards
          he'd had a presentiment of himself being   killed by Indians and later that same day he
   ing the site, Filson disappeared and was believed   killed by Indians.679 His share in the enterprise and
     after starting up the Kanawha and was believed   killed by Indians. Only two traders named Davis were
       politely through the groups of people. A man   killed by Indians. This looked like the place for
had somehow been destroyed, its crew drowned or   killed by Indians, the hull finally beached here on
       and horses without fear of being robbed or   killed by Indians. For the very first time since
    estimate, we've had about four hundred people   killed by Indians in the Hills just this year.
What happened to the rest?"  "Some were probably   killed by Indians. Some likely died from disease. Others
```

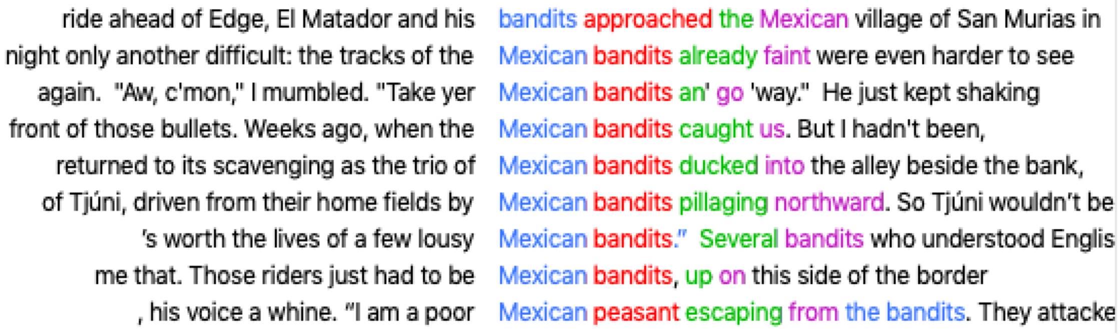
Figure 8 Concordance Lines for trigram "Killed By Indians"

There is a similar prosody in reference to the keyword “Mexican” which also functions as a racialized category within the corpus. As seen in previous collocates, top collocates of “Mexican” (table 10) prioritizes military or conflict based situational conventions with high levels of frequency (officer, army, soldiers, troops, raider, war) but also references both “Texas” and “Houston” that might point towards historical patterns of action especially the Texas Revolution. Additionally, collocates like “border” and “bandit” occur at a higher frequency with the node word than any other words in the corpus and similar to the trigram of

Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
52	0	52	11.75081	showdown
10	1	9	8.21702	bandits
18	5	13	7.97929	border
11	2	9	7.96361	cannon
21	2	19	7.24391	officer
48	2	46	7.06824	army
19	9	10	6.94716	american
44	4	40	6.89911	soldiers
10	0	10	6.88629	government
10	1	9	6.74427	troops
13	2	11	6.58819	soldier
10	4	6	6.07351	raider
19	6	13	5.96169	houston
18	12	6	5.86114	texas
19	3	16	5.34569	women
19	2	17	5.19549	war
12	1	11	5.08494	girl
25	3	22	4.95859	woman
11	2	9	4.86791	general
28	5	23	4.85108	people
10	5	5	4.62716	charlie
18	6	12	4.57939	side
14	1	13	4.52477	boy
15	9	6	4.47454	most
48	7	41	4.4595	who
25	8	17	4.42319	came
14	12	2	4.4212	young
12	7	5	4.35709	because
11	6	5	4.34627	dead
12	3	9	4.34573	camp
11	7	4	4.33669	both
10	6	4	4.33438	killed
50	20	30	4.26463	or
15	10	5	4.24677	against
12	1	11	4.23912	hands
23	20	3	4.23267	old
15	14	1	4.19873	few
15	11	4	4.18098	big
41	25	16	4.12042	an
73	31	42	4.07016	were
12	4	8	4.061	town
53	39	14	4.01931	by
19	16	3	3.99389	any

Table 10 Top 40 "Mexican" Collocates

"killed by Indians," their semantic prosody offers an interesting insight into the perspective from which these ideas are viewed. For example, in the listed concordance lines for the collocation "Mexican bandits" (figure 9), these groups of characters are shown against a moral framework constructed through language (especially seen in the use of "scavenging," "pillaging northward" and "lousy").



ride ahead of Edge, El Matador and his	bandits approached the Mexican village of San Murias in
night only another difficult: the tracks of the	Mexican bandits already faint were even harder to see
again. "Aw, c'mon," I mumbled. "Take yer	Mexican bandits an' go 'way." He just kept shaking
front of those bullets. Weeks ago, when the	Mexican bandits caught us. But I hadn't been,
returned to its scavenging as the trio of	Mexican bandits ducked into the alley beside the bank,
of Tjúni, driven from their home fields by	Mexican bandits pillaging northward. So Tjúni wouldn't be
's worth the lives of a few lousy	Mexican bandits." Several bandits who understood Englis
me that. Those riders just had to be	Mexican bandits, up on this side of the border
, his voice a whine. "I am a poor	Mexican peasant escaping from the bandits. They attacke

Figure 9 Concordance Lines for collocation "Mexican Bandits"

The geographic references to "northward" and the establishment of a narrative perspective "on this side of the border" also highlight the positionality of the corpus that prioritizes certain experiences or nationalities. What these trends suggest, including a linguistic emphasis on whiteness in relation to coded keywords and the semantic prosody of "non-white" racial categories is that the western genre often constructs race around the naturalization of a colonial project that is driven by a logic of elimination in favor of white settlers and by a moral legitimization of settler sovereignty. Thus, these questions of race are intrinsically connected to deeper questions of settler colonialism, as will be discussed in the final section of the analysis.

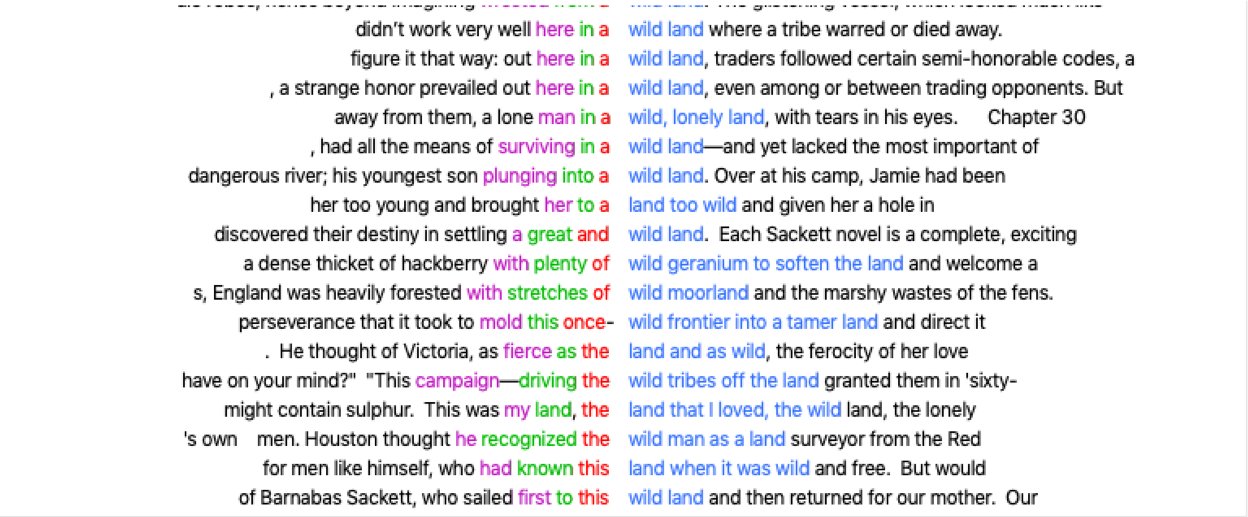
Settler Colonialism: The Discursive "Fighting For"

As discussed earlier, settler colonialism refers to not just a moment of contact or event, but a structure made up of relations of power, histories, and processes conquest that seek to naturalize or valorize settler presence on occupied land. The western genre approaches (and constructs) this structure in three distinct ways: through the ‘taming’ of a wild land through acquisition and ownership, through the “settling” of this land towards social “order,” and the legitimization of this process through a discourse of “fighting for” which connects the broader strokes of settler conquests to the needs of its members or communities. To begin, I examined collocates from “land,” one of the more frequently occurring setting keywords (table 11) thinking initially about how it highlights attitudes towards the West as geographic location.

Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
27	24	3	8.51123	acres
29	21	8	8.03472	vast
23	12	11	7.90757	owned
28	12	16	7.80762	claimed
27	2	25	7.71307	rush
29	17	12	7.30528	claim
19	13	6	6.78532	rich
20	14	6	6.76277	bought
19	15	4	6.58923	sell
15	9	6	6.3381	rolling
25	24	1	6.32981	piece
21	19	2	6.25465	buy
17	16	1	6.21672	promised
31	4	27	5.95447	company
19	12	7	5.87407	settled
23	18	5	5.8724	empty
19	13	6	5.85588	strange
28	21	7	5.70682	free
48	30	18	5.66323	lay
28	10	18	5.58388	cattle
29	18	11	5.56315	ohio
38	26	12	5.51598	upon
17	11	6	5.39755	territory
37	8	29	5.38552	west
19	15	4	5.24464	wild

Table 11 Top 25 “Land” Collocates

What is immediately clear from the collocate list is that land is associated primarily with its initial ‘openness” which allows for the acquisition, ownership, and development of this land. The majority of the collocates describe the land as opportunity couched in a certain sublime awe (vast, rich, rolling, empty, strange, wild). Then there is an attempt to quantify or measure the land (acres, piece, territory) and eventually acquire or possess it as a resource (owned, claimed, bought, sell, buy). These dynamics highlight how the corpus approaches the West as a geographic region in terms of its value as a resource. The concordance lines of the collocate "wild" (figure 10) highlight the tension between how the land is first encountered and its economic potential. There is a specific process in which texts approach "wild land"—there is a sense of pride or love specifically for its wildness ("this was my land, the land that I loved, the wild land") and also an elegiac appreciation for its wildness with the acknowledge that its wild properties were worth saving but also fading ("a strange honor prevailed out here in a wild land"/"men like himself who had known this land when it was wild and free").



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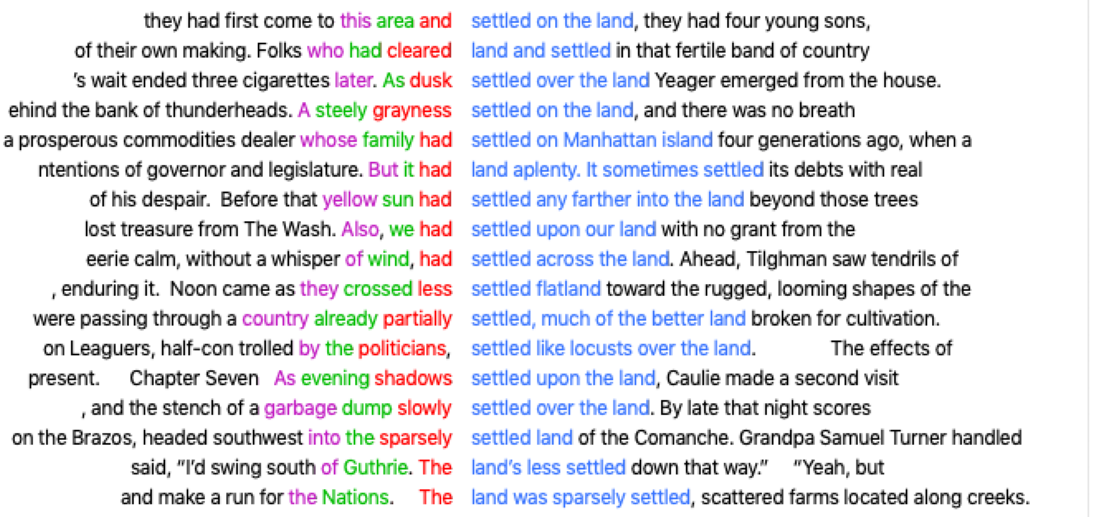
                  didn't work very well here in a   wild land where a tribe warred or died away.
                 figure it that way: out here in a   wild land, traders followed certain semi-honorable codes, a
          , a strange honor prevailed out here in a   wild land, even among or between trading opponents. But
                 away from them, a lone man in a   wild, lonely land, with tears in his eyes.     Chapter 30
            , had all the means of surviving in a   wild land—and yet lacked the most important of
  dangerous river; his youngest son plunging into a   wild land. Over at his camp, Jamie had been
              her too young and brought her to a   land too wild and given her a hole in
    discovered their destiny in settling a great and   wild land.  Each Sackett novel is a complete, exciting
        a dense thicket of hackberry with plenty of   wild geranium to soften the land and welcome a
   s, England was heavily forested with stretches of   wild moorland and the marshy wastes of the fens.
      perseverance that it took to mold this once-   wild frontier into a tamer land and direct it
          .  He thought of Victoria, as fierce as the   land and as wild, the ferocity of her love
have on your mind?"  "This campaign—driving the   wild tribes off the land granted them in 'sixty-
      might contain sulphur.  This was my land, the   land that I loved, the wild land, the lonely
's own    men. Houston thought he recognized the   wild man as a land surveyor from the Red
        for men like himself, who had known this   land when it was wild and free.  But would
      of Barnabas Sackett, who sailed first to this   wild land and then returned for our mother.  Our
```

Figure 10 Concordance Lines for Collocation "wild land"

There is also a distinct understanding that this fading wildness is the result of settler interaction and ownership, seen in the process of dispossession ("driving the wild tribes off the land") but most importantly in a process of settlement that tames the wild towards fulfilling its potential as natural resource ("perseverance that it took to mold this once wild frontier into a tamer land").

This process of taming, semantically linked with wild, becomes the process of permanent settling, and specifically the movement of Anglophone settlers westward displacing indigenous tribes and seizing their land for their own economic purposes.

This dynamic is visible in the concordance lines of the collocate "settled" (figure 11). Not only is the land a wild thing to tame and be owned, but it is to be settled upon as a form of possession ("we had settled upon our land"). And there are distinct references to the permanence of this settling through the presence of both ancestry and the beginnings of family ("A prosperous commodities dealer whose family had settled on Manhattan island four generations ago"/"they had first come to this area and settled on the land, they had four young sons").

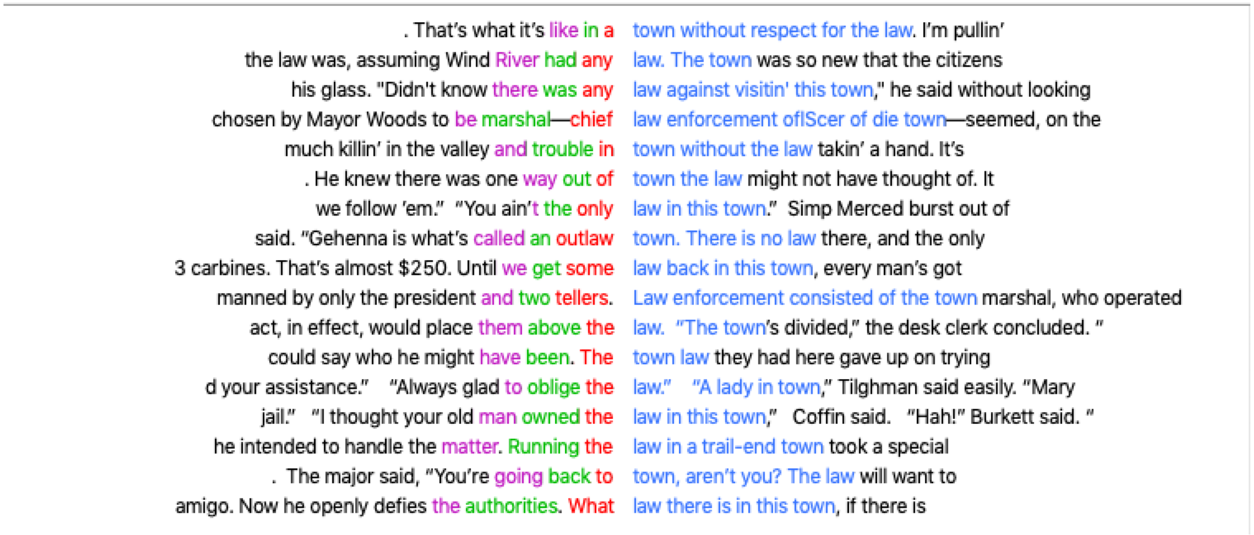


they had first come to this area and	settled on the land, they had four young sons,
of their own making. Folks who had cleared	land and settled in that fertile band of country
's wait ended three cigarettes later. As dusk	settled over the land Yeager emerged from the house.
ehind the bank of thunderheads. A steely grayness	settled on the land, and there was no breath
a prosperous commodities dealer whose family had	settled on Manhattan island four generations ago, when a
ntentions of governor and legislature. But it had	land aplenty. It sometimes settled its debts with real
of his despair. Before that yellow sun had	settled any farther into the land beyond those trees
lost treasure from The Wash. Also, we had	settled upon our land with no grant from the
eerie calm, without a whisper of wind, had	settled across the land. Ahead, Tilghman saw tendrils of
, enduring it. Noon came as they crossed less	settled flatland toward the rugged, looming shapes of the
were passing through a country already partially	settled, much of the better land broken for cultivation.
on Leaguers, half-con trolled by the politicians,	settled like locusts over the land. The effects of
present. Chapter Seven As evening shadows	settled upon the land, Caulie made a second visit
, and the stench of a garbage dump slowly	settled over the land. By late that night scores
on the Brazos, headed southwest into the sparsely	settled land of the Comanche. Grandpa Samuel Turner handled
said, "I'd swing south of Guthrie. The	land's less settled down that way." "Yeah, but
and make a run for the Nations. The	land was sparsely settled, scattered farms located along creeks.

Figure 11 Concordance Lines for Collocation "settled"

The white settler naturalizes their presence through the use of neutral terms like "folks" for people who tame the land by preparing it for agricultural use ("folks who had cleared the land and settled in that fertile band of country") and the transition from "wild" to "settled" in the breaking of the land itself ("passing through a country already partially settled, much of the better land broken for cultivation"). As this process of settling continues, what becomes clear is that its goal is a specific form of settler social order, one that is defined by permanent settler communities bound by specific codes of behavior.

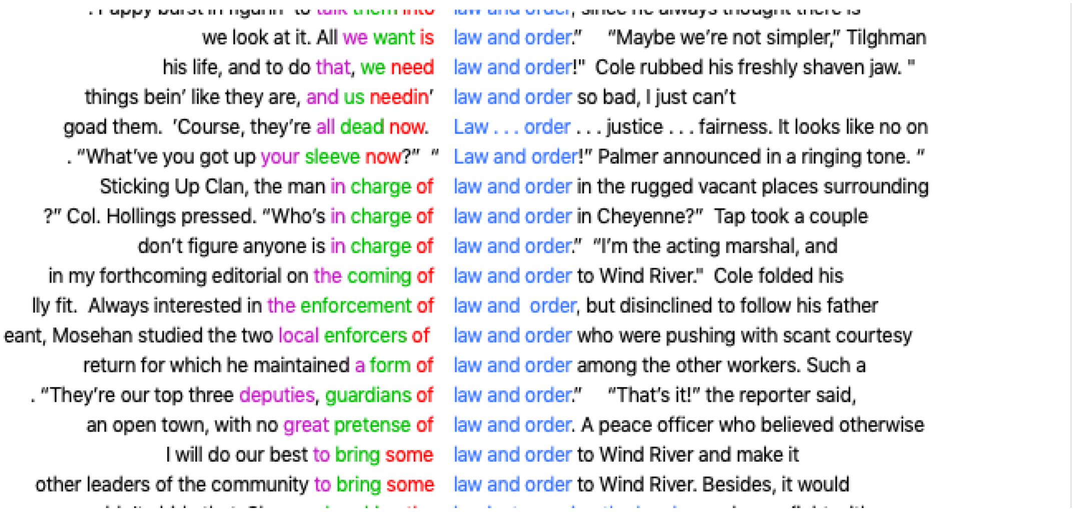
These goals are visible in how the keyword “law” works within the corpus to establish both setting and patterns of action. First, in the concordance lines that display the collocate “town” (figure 12), we can see the relationship between the town as a settler community and the “law” as it regulates the boundaries of the settler community, to varying degrees of success (“Gehenna is what’s called an outlaw town. There is no town there”).



. That’s what it’s like in a	town without respect for the law. I’m pullin’
the law was, assuming Wind River had any	law. The town was so new that the citizens
his glass. "Didn't know there was any	law against visitin' this town," he said without looking
chosen by Mayor Woods to be marshal—chief	law enforcement oflScer of die town—seemed, on the
much killin’ in the valley and trouble in	town without the law takin’ a hand. It’s
. He knew there was one way out of	town the law might not have thought of. It
we follow ’em.” “You ain’t the only	law in this town.” Simp Merced burst out of
said. “Gehenna is what’s called an outlaw	town. There is no law there, and the only
3 carbines. That’s almost $250. Until we get some	law back in this town, every man’s got
manned by only the president and two tellers.	Law enforcement consisted of the town marshal, who operated
act, in effect, would place them above the	law. “The town’s divided,” the desk clerk concluded. ”
could say who he might have been. The	town law they had here gave up on trying
d your assistance.” “Always glad to oblige the	law.” “A lady in town,” Tilghman said easily. “Mary
jail.” “I thought your old man owned the	law in this town,” Coffin said. “Hah!” Burkett said. ”
he intended to handle the matter. Running the	law in a trail-end town took a special
. The major said, “You’re going back to	town, aren’t you? The law will want to
amigo. Now he openly defies the authorities. What	law there is in this town, if there is

Figure 12 Concordance Lines for Collocation "town"

Moreover, a “newer” town that is more in touch with its wildness is thus further from the law (“assuming Wind River had any law. The town was so new”) while violations of the settler order were meant to be managed by their enforcers (“much killin’ in the valley and trouble in the town without the law takin’ a hand”). In a similar way, the concordance lines for the trigram “law and order” (figure 13) show just how salient this connection between the maintenance of the settler order and the legal structures of settler state are. Law and order is not just something that exists in the West but is fundamental to its successful “settling” and demanded by settlers (“All we want is law and order!”/“we need law and order”/“things being like they are, and us needin' law and order so bad"). And so "law and order" is not something that just happens over time, instead it is brought about by power of the enforcer, the coded male agent who wields violence to ensure the "natural" process of settlement towards order—if a town is lacking, an enforcer steps into make it right and if law and order exits, enforcers ensure it remains ("don't figure anyone is in charge of law and order, I'm the acting Marshal"/ "They're our three top deputies, guardians of law and order").



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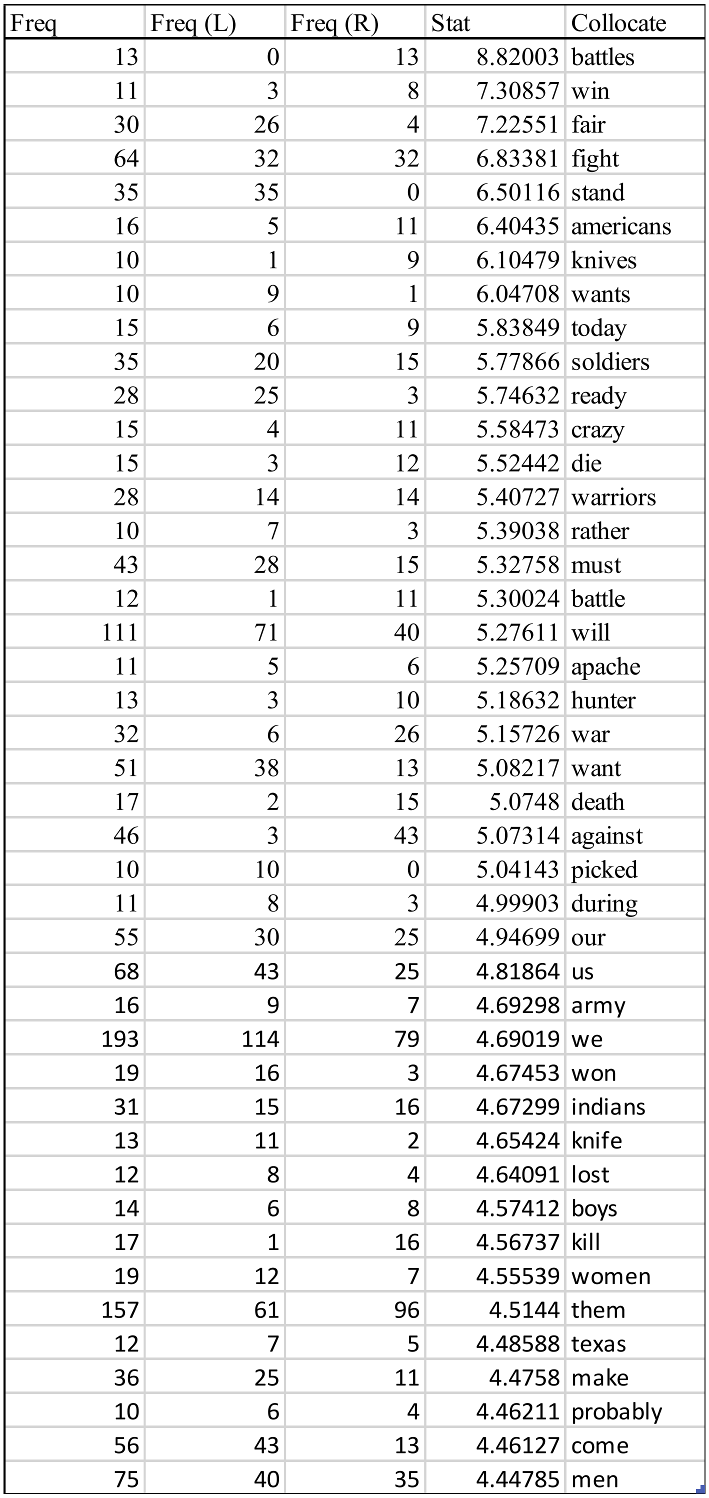
                 we look at it. All we want is   law and order."    "Maybe we're not simpler," Tilghman
               his life, and to do that, we need   law and order!"  Cole rubbed his freshly shaven jaw. "
      things bein' like they are, and us needin'   law and order so bad, I just can't
       goad them.  'Course, they're all dead now.   Law . . . order . . . justice . . . fairness. It looks like no on
      . "What've you got up your sleeve now?"  "   Law and order!" Palmer announced in a ringing tone. "
        Sticking Up Clan, the man in charge of   law and order in the rugged vacant places surrounding
     ?" Col. Hollings pressed. "Who's in charge of   law and order in Cheyenne?"  Tap took a couple
            don't figure anyone is in charge of   law and order."  "I'm the acting marshal, and
     in my forthcoming editorial on the coming of   law and order to Wind River."  Cole folded his
     lly fit.  Always interested in the enforcement of   law and  order, but disinclined to follow his father
   eant, Mosehan studied the two local enforcers of   law and order who were pushing with scant courtesy
       return for which he maintained a form of   law and order among the other workers. Such a
       . "They're our top three deputies, guardians of   law and order."    "That's it!" the reporter said,
        an open town, with no great pretense of   law and order. A peace officer who believed otherwise
              I will do our best to bring some   law and order to Wind River and make it
     other leaders of the community to bring some   law and order to Wind River. Besides, it would
```

Figure 13 Concordance Lines for Trigram "law and order"

The keyword "law," in context, highlights how the structures of settler colonialism are built through relations and processes that continually renew to ensure their own dominance—but also point towards the role that violence plays within this structure.

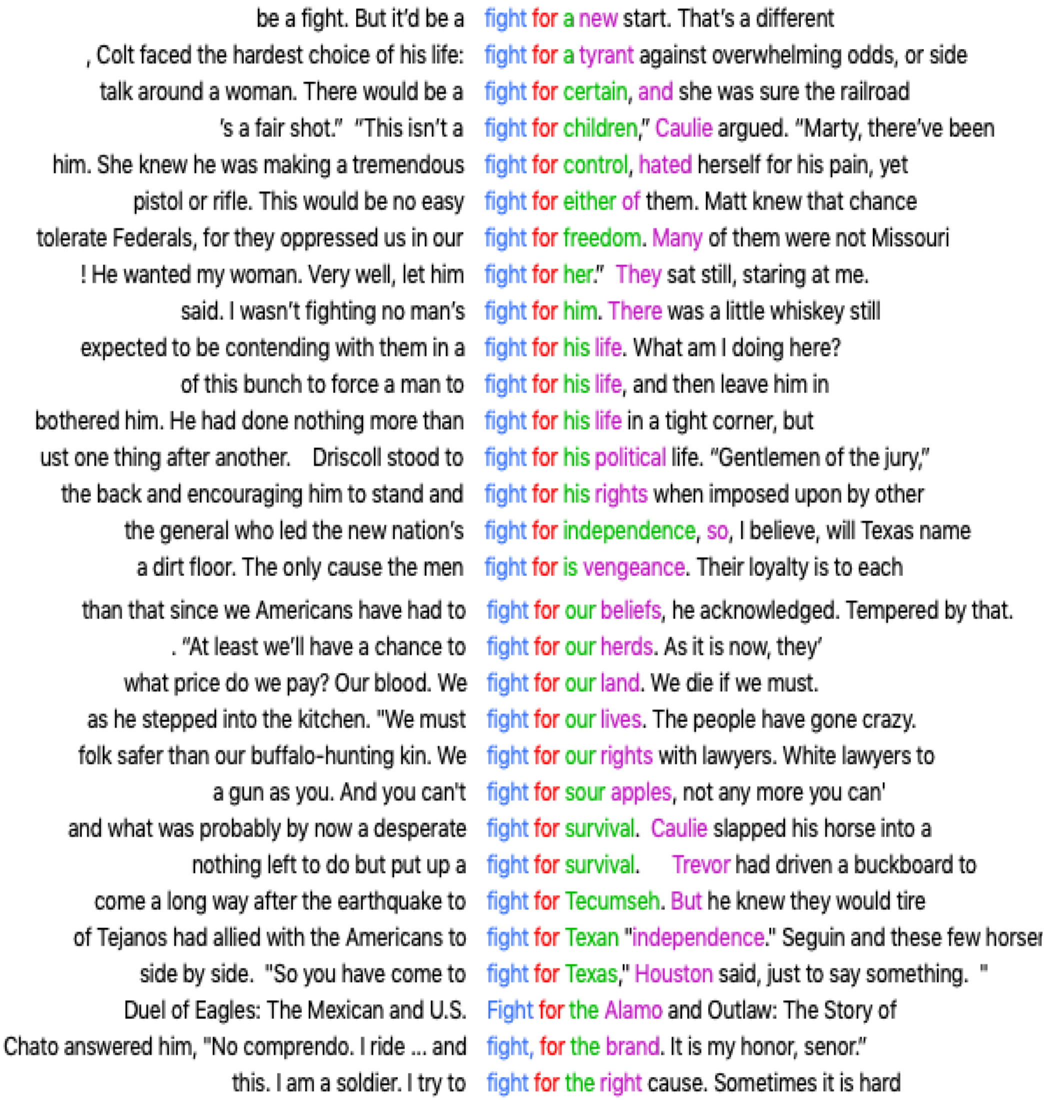
Settler colonial structures are also built on differing forms of violence—processes of elimination and eradication, dispossession and delegitimizing indigenous sovereignty, etc. But interesting patterns around specific keywords showcase how the corpus constructs reasons for violence. Towards this end, I analyzed the collocates of the keyword "fight" (table 12) that initially show familiar situational and character keywords indicating military conflict (battles, win, soldiers, die). But the collocates with the highest frequency (will, against, us, we, them, for) also show interesting patterns of how fighting creates relationships and reasons for violence.



Freq	Freq (L)	Freq (R)	Stat	Collocate
13	0	13	8.82003	battles
11	3	8	7.30857	win
30	26	4	7.22551	fair
64	32	32	6.83381	fight
35	35	0	6.50116	stand
16	5	11	6.40435	americans
10	1	9	6.10479	knives
10	9	1	6.04708	wants
15	6	9	5.83849	today
35	20	15	5.77866	soldiers
28	25	3	5.74632	ready
15	4	11	5.58473	crazy
15	3	12	5.52442	die
28	14	14	5.40727	warriors
10	7	3	5.39038	rather
43	28	15	5.32758	must
12	1	11	5.30024	battle
111	71	40	5.27611	will
11	5	6	5.25709	apache
13	3	10	5.18632	hunter
32	6	26	5.15726	war
51	38	13	5.08217	want
17	2	15	5.0748	death
46	3	43	5.07314	against
10	10	0	5.04143	picked
11	8	3	4.99903	during
55	30	25	4.94699	our
68	43	25	4.81864	us
16	9	7	4.69298	army
193	114	79	4.69019	we
19	16	3	4.67453	won
31	15	16	4.67299	indians
13	11	2	4.65424	knife
12	8	4	4.64091	lost
14	6	8	4.57412	boys
17	1	16	4.56737	kill
19	12	7	4.55539	women
157	61	96	4.5144	them
12	7	5	4.48588	texas
36	25	11	4.4758	make
10	6	4	4.46211	probably
56	43	13	4.46127	come
75	40	35	4.44785	men

Table 12 Top 40 “fight” Collocates

The concordance lines for the collocate “for” (figure 14) shows a multitude of reasons why characters within the corpus fight, and particularly what they fight for (“a new start,” “a tyrant,” “freedom,” “his life,” “his political life,” “his rights,” “independence,” “vengeance,” “our beliefs,” “our herds,” “our land,” “our lives,” “our rights,” “survival”).



be a fight. But it'd be a	fight for a new start. That's a different
, Colt faced the hardest choice of his life:	fight for a tyrant against overwhelming odds, or side
talk around a woman. There would be a	fight for certain, and she was sure the railroad
's a fair shot." "This isn't a	fight for children," Caulie argued. "Marty, there've been
him. She knew he was making a tremendous	fight for control, hated herself for his pain, yet
pistol or rifle. This would be no easy	fight for either of them. Matt knew that chance
tolerate Federals, for they oppressed us in our	fight for freedom. Many of them were not Missouri
! He wanted my woman. Very well, let him	fight for her." They sat still, staring at me.
said. I wasn't fighting no man's	fight for him. There was a little whiskey still
expected to be contending with them in a	fight for his life. What am I doing here?
of this bunch to force a man to	fight for his life, and then leave him in
bothered him. He had done nothing more than	fight for his life in a tight corner, but
ust one thing after another. Driscoll stood to	fight for his political life. "Gentlemen of the jury,"
the back and encouraging him to stand and	fight for his rights when imposed upon by other
the general who led the new nation's	fight for independence, so, I believe, will Texas name
a dirt floor. The only cause the men	fight for is vengeance. Their loyalty is to each
than that since we Americans have had to	fight for our beliefs, he acknowledged. Tempered by that.
. "At least we'll have a chance to	fight for our herds. As it is now, they'
what price do we pay? Our blood. We	fight for our land. We die if we must.
as he stepped into the kitchen. "We must	fight for our lives. The people have gone crazy.
folk safer than our buffalo-hunting kin. We	fight for our rights with lawyers. White lawyers to
a gun as you. And you can't	fight for sour apples, not any more you can'
and what was probably by now a desperate	fight for survival. Caulie slapped his horse into a
nothing left to do but put up a	fight for survival. Trevor had driven a buckboard to
come a long way after the earthquake to	fight for Tecumseh. But he knew they would tire
of Tejanos had allied with the Americans to	fight for Texan "independence." Seguin and these few horser
side by side. "So you have come to	fight for Texas," Houston said, just to say something. "
Duel of Eagles: The Mexican and U.S.	Fight for the Alamo and Outlaw: The Story of
Chato answered him, "No comprendo. I ride ... and	fight, for the brand. It is my honor, senor."
this. I am a soldier. I try to	fight for the right cause. Sometimes it is hard

Figure 14 Concordance Lines for Collocation "fight for"

While there are many different reasons, the patterns that are most interesting appear as a relationship between life, political ideals, and material stability, essentially connecting the broader strokes of settler conquests (and its modes of rationalization) to the needs of its members or communities. Within the corpus, the structures of settler colonialism are often found in the ownership of a wild land, the settling of this land that moves towards a social order of the settler community and the legal violence of the settler state and finally, the justification of this process through a discursive violence of "fighting for" in which the collective material needs are tied to the naturalization and rationalization of conquest in the name of rights, freedom, life, beliefs, and survival.

What this analysis reveals about these specific ideological discourses is the following: that the conventions of the western genre in mass market novels utilized patterns of language usage to uphold specific ideological frameworks and to construct knowledge about gender, race, and settler colonialism. Specifically, I argue that these novels present a hegemonic masculinity defined by an interior subjectivity and an external agency that emerges as a moralized violence making visible the connections between an "ideal" dominant masculinity and relations of power. Additionally, the western genre navigates discussions of race through a logic of elimination in favor of white settlers and by a moral legitimization of settler sovereignty. White identity is particularly salient as a racial category and the semantic prosody of both "non-white" groups and groups that are coded white work naturalize whiteness as a form of settler power. And finally, the genre approaches (and constructs) settler colonial structural relationships by "taming" the wild land of the West through acquisition and ownership, by "settling" this land towards a social order that erases indigenous sovereignty and that legitimizes this process through a discourse of "fighting for" which connects the broader strokes of settler conquests to the economic needs of its members or communities. The chapter ultimately draws conclusions about how specific western publishing-industry practices reinforce these ideologies through the fossilization of conventional plots, characters, themes, etc. that 1) define or delimit the western genre by assessments from editors, agents, and imprints and 2) are identified as the products most likely to resonate with readership base and have the most financial success.

Conclusion

Taken together, what I hope is clear in this analysis is that mass market western novels from 1970-1999 built their narratives through the development of conventions based on general categories of setting, character and patterns of situational action that are intrinsically twined together through patterns of language usage. But so too are its ideological dimensions—with discourses on gender, race and settler colonial relations intrinsically twined into a story of conquest and power that refuses to name itself as such. However, as scholars of distant reading have argued, in utilizing these methodologies, we sacrifice certain elements to see the whole—the system, genre, etc. Part of this analysis then demands an accounting of this sacrifice and specifically thinking about the limitations of corpus analysis as it works to analyze the ideological dimensions of a literary genre like the western. It should be said that just because certain language patterns are present within a set of texts, it might not necessarily suggest that the author intended the reader to empathize or even agree with these attitudes. The limitations of the keyword and collocate analysis is that the decontextualization separates the narrative voice from dialogue so that patterns that support or reinforce ideologies could be attributed to a villain character and not to a third person narrator or to a protagonist. That is why I tried to focus on elements of the corpus results where the argument's meaningfulness lay in the presence of language, regardless of narrative voice. Additionally, in the concordance line analysis, where there is an element of context, I tried to focus on lines and patterns that could potentially be attributed to a narrative voice; but I do acknowledge the room for error in these interpretations.

However, I believe there is a counterargument to this limitation that the project tries to address, specifically that while the author might not have intended ideological dynamics there is also no guarantee that a reader approaches the text from a similar perspective and indeed, their unique frameworks of knowledge might lead towards radically different understanding of the text. In tracking the ideological dimensions of the encoding process within the genre, we can move towards a more nuanced understanding of its eventual decoding.

Additionally, it was my intention to track some of these patterns over time especially thinking about how the corpus texts from the years 1990-1999 differentiated themselves from the previous decades especially thinking about the wider publishing trends that perhaps indicated a shift in genre conventions. However, it was difficult to recreate the same process in comparing an even more specialized corpus with another so similar that any differences were rendered obsolete. This is not to say that there are no differences or evolution between the decades in the corpus' scope but that the CL/CDA methodology followed in this chapter is not suited to answering that question.

It is also important to discuss the limitations of this analysis especially because quantification of racial discourse and identity requires a certain element of reflexivity and critique. As much as "zooming out" affords a certain perspective, it obscures context necessary to making specific arguments, especially related to race. As Richard Jean So and Edwin Roland argue in "Race and Distant Reading," these methodologies can potentially "erase the historical and intersectional way that identity is defined" (72). It was for these reasons that I tried to avoid making arguments that required knowledge about the author's own racial identity. It is also tricky to quantify the categories of racial identity within the corpus beyond its explicit references and might not capture important nuances of these representations. But there is space to answer these questions in the following chapters where I can engage with more traditional modes of analysis, and I hope the full implications of this first chapter are made clearer in relation to the reception studies approaches in the subsequent chapters. To do this, however, I will first need to trace how the corpus situates itself into its wider discursive contexts. In the next chapter, I will discuss the broader political contexts of the ideologies discussed above and thinking specifically about where the ideological underpinnings of the western genre intersect with the political history of US conservatism in the last half of the century but especially where the evolution of far-right extremism culminates in the 1990s.

Chapter Two "Lone Whiteman Looming Tall:"

Far-Right Politics, Narrativized Extremism, and the Western *Mythos*

Part One: Political History of the Far Right

David Thompson's 1990 *Lure of the Wild* is the second book in Thompson's *Wilderness* series, which spans sixty-six novels published from 1990 to 2010. In the novel, a shy New York accountant named Nathaniel King is lured to the unsettled American West in 1828 by a letter from his fur trapper uncle with a promise of the "greatest treasure in the world" (9). Thinking he will inherit gold and riches, Nathaniel travels West but is surprised to learn that the treasure Nathaniel is to inherit from his uncle is "freedom" and specifically the "pure, pristine freedom of a soul unfettered by the restraints of civilization" (12-3). Nathaniel goes on to have several adventures over the course of the novel as he befriends a mountain man named Shakespeare McNab and they fight hostile Utes and Blackfeet war parties on their way to a fur trapper rendezvous in the mountains. Along the way, Nathaniel wonders about his uncle's "treasure" and especially how freedom could exist in such harsh environs. By the end of the novel, Nathaniel finally understands the value of his treasure: living in the West isn't just about survival, it's about a freedom from regulation, the freedom to build whatever life you want. As McNab shows King as they make their way to the rendezvous, in the West, "you don't have to answer to anyone…you don't have taxes to pay or the government breathing down your back…you don't have politicians trying to tell you how to live…where you find the freedom our forefathers fought and died for" (25). As King finds out, this freedom from regulation allows a man to being "totally self-sufficient, [which] seemed to him to be the ideal way of living" (138). Like many Western novels, Thompson's novel takes historical elements as inspiration. The mountain rendezvous that Nathaniel and McNab attend in the novel is based on a real annual event, the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous. The rendezvous was started in the summer of 1825 by William Ashley of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company where trappers, mountain men, and indigenous tribes would trade, replenish supplies, and pack their furs out of the mountains to be sold but also existed as one of the few sites of community engagement, where trappers would socialize after long periods of isolation in the wilderness, telling stories and singing (Gowans 13; 50-1).

In October 1992, one hundred and fifty years after the last fur-trapper rendezvous and only two years after Thompson's novel appeared, another 'Rocky Mountain Rendezvous' was held at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, CO. The meeting was held in response to the recent events at Ruby Ridge near Naples, Idaho in which the wife and son of Randy Weaver, a far-right Christian Identity adherent, were killed after an eleven-day standoff with US Marshals. At the summit, white supremacist leaders and various political groups from around the country convened to discuss what they believed to be an existential threat to their sovereignty and to plan how they were going to directly respond to the threat of the encroaching federal government with an organized surge of militia action. Led by a Christian Identity pastor, Pete Peters, in attendance were representatives from a diverse array of far-right white supremacist adherents and militia organizations including Texas KKK member Louis Beam, Idaho Aryan Nations pastor Richard Butler, Militia of Montana leader John Trochmann, Michigan Montana leader Mark Koernke, National Alliance leader and author of *The Turner Diaries,* William Pierce, and head of the Gun Owners of America Larry Pratt (Schlatter 140; Belew 202). While some scholars claim that the Estes Park meeting was the birthplace of the modern militia movement, others contend this argument is skewed by the heightened media attention in the wake of the meeting and indeed, most militia groups were already organizing in the Western US for several years before the summit (Schlatter 140). However, what was important about the Estes Park meeting was that it marked a moment where “members of groups and individuals with differing views that normally would not have anything to do with each other were suddenly in the same room expressing similar views. Neo-Nazis, Identity adherents, antiabortion activists, Klan members…came together and attempted to devise a battle plan for future conflicts with the government” (Schlatter 140). At the summit, Beam, the progenitor of the “leaderless resistance” strategies that helped extremist groups organize against federal surveillance, gave a rousing opening speech that invoked sentiments like Nathaniel King’s treasure of freedom in *Lure of the Wild*, including a freedom from regulation and the freedom to provide for one’s own in an ideal lifestyle rooted in self-sufficiency and rugged individualism. Beam claimed that the federal government’s actions at Ruby Ridge threatened his and his children’s “right to a place under the sun” and called for the attendees to water “the tree of liberty with the blood of both patriot and tyrant” (qtd in Belew 203). While the meeting of various white supremacist and militia groups at Estes Park was a new stage in the evolution of the far right, the articulation of extremist politics via rhetoric of patriotic self-reliant individualism has deep roots in the twentieth century rural populism in the West and reflects a growing feeling that identities endemic to the region were under threat and required a collective response to protect the “Western” way of life.

And so even if the meeting at Estes Park wasn’t the exact birthplace of the modern militia movement, it certainly represented a major confluence in the use of Western imagery to articulate far right political positions and set the stage for these positions to culminate in the violence that defined the period. It also marked a point of collision between this somewhat regional rhetoric, built on a narrative foundation of the Western mythic traditions, and the conspiracy-laden ideologies couched in nativist, nationalist and scapegoating rhetoric that often defined the far right. This collision is important because the frontier imagery that was rooted more in regional Western social practice and discourse allowed for some of the more “extreme” narratives concerning global conspiracies and government corruption to seem not only reasonable, but necessary.

In the previous chapter, I argued that in the last decades of the twentieth century, western mass market novels relied on very specific constructions of gender, race, and settler colonialism within conventions of character, setting and patterns of action that, in part, reinforced hegemonic masculinity and that coded whiteness as a form of settler power. In this period, the far-right used the “romanticized mythological past” of the frontier in which white archetypes, usually male, triumph over the landscape and nonwhites through Protestant values and hard work” (Schlatter 40). At the very same time these novels were being published and read with regularity, the US—and the West in particular—was experiencing a swell of far-right political movements that tapped into these precise rhetoric, tropes, and images, to articulate their identities, goals, and grievances as well as to recruit to their various causes. This chapter explores this overlap by answering the following questions: was the political rhetoric of far-right extremist groups in any way connected to the cultural discourse that in mass-market western novels being published at the same time? Were members of these far-right movements reading, or in other ways using or being exposed to, these novels? Did the western genre and far-right groups share specific ideological constructions of gender, race, and settler colonialism as articulated in the texts they produced? If so, how, and what are the implications of these shared discourses both for our understanding of these movements and of the genre?

To answer these questions, it’s important to first understand what groups and movements scholars consider falling in the spatial designation of the “far right” in this period and have a foundational understanding of what they believed, how their actions were shaped by their beliefs, and how this iteration of the far right emerged out of the broader arc of conservative politics in the US and especially the West as a geopolitical region. Then, using primary documents from these groups such as promotional materials, manifestos, newsletters, and magazines, I trace patterns of language use in connection or in conversation with the mass market Western novel, asking how these groups, movements, and ideologies utilized frontier and western mythos to articulate their beliefs, or recruit to their cause, and achieve their political objectives. I first start by analyzing how these groups articulated their positions through settler colonial logics that tie race, nation, and people to the land itself. Then I explore discourses of race, and how these groups use the western *mythos* to frame their grievances as a loss of the white heroic ideal, as a representative of white racial identity. I analyze how gender intersects with conversations of both settler colonialism and race, mapping how extremist groups utilized characters like the frontiersman, farmer, and Aryan mother to connect their reader's present to the historical Western past, and finally I analyze how these groups present a tension between the individual and society, in figures like the sheriff and outlaw, to narrativize conflict between various extremist martyrs and the organizations that they claim as enemies (the federal government, non-white, environmentalists, etc.)

By doing so, I hope to demonstrate how far-right extremist ideologies often take root in political traditions that are not as fringe as we might think, and indeed that they "evolved from earlier ideas about American nationalism, 'character,' and a sense of 'mission' that defined westward expansion" (Schlatter 37). This is especially true in the context of these groups' attempts to mobilize and recruit by appealing to an audience with specific experiences and values, perhaps the same audience with whom *Lure of the Wild's* treasure of freedom also resonates. As Schlatter argues, the extreme right uses frontier and pioneer discourse within the "context of the American creation story to garner support from potential members and paint themselves as simply pro-American rather than extremist" (40). By looking at the historical, political, and economic conditions that spurred the proliferation of far-right groups in the West and prompted both the Estes Park rendezvous and the violence that followed, we can better understand the role that culture played in these events, and especially what it means that mass market Western novels like *Lure of the Wild* were widely published and read in this same period espousing similar ideological discourses that readers could potentially leverage into their politics.

Definitions and Methodologies

The literature analyzing far-right extremist groups and ideologies is immense and there are a wide variety of methodologies and scopes employed by critics in history, political science, sociology, ethnography, and other disciplines that try to understand and analyze what these varied groups do, how they defined themselves, and the various forms of violence employed in the service of their ideologies.[24] Defining these groups and movements is also tricky because different terms have been used over time to describe the various movements and groups including far-right extremism, radical right, and far-right populist which take into consideration ideologies and belief systems that exist within a shifting terrain of political discourse.[25] Scholars in the fields of political science and political history use a combination of criteria when discussing these terms, but as Nonna Mayer argues in the 2020 collection, *Researching the Far*

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[24] This includes works from critics like Mark Pitcavage, David Neiwert, Chip Berlet, Matthew Lyons, Catherine Stock and Kathleen Belew. These are often either broader histories or in-depth studies of one or two groups or movements.

[25] Additionally, the US and Europe have different iterations and histories of the far right which yield different definitions. Some of these definitions do overlap but others, like Europe's manifestation of extreme ideologies within specific political parties doesn't always translate to the US.

Right: Theory, Method and Practice, political science's definitions of the far right are categorized by a combination of "spatial dimensions" (positions on a left/right scale), ideological features (fascism, racism, etc.) and "attitudinal measures" (i.e. pro/anti-government) (Mayer 18). Moreover, some scholars challenge the use of both "radical" and "extreme" preferring to reference the far-right as a type of populist movement that is not so dependent on evaluative considerations of what is or isn't acceptable political practice i.e., what counts as "mainstream" and what counts as "extreme."

The term "right-wing populism" is an important concept that often bridges these discussions of "mainstream" and "extreme" politics. Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons discuss this intersection with their definition of "right-wing populism" which captures the collision between the regional discourse of right-wing antigovernment groups and the more conspiratorial neo-Nazi belief systems as well as the dangers of simply dismissing some of these movements as "outliers" (Berlet and Lyons 15). Right-wing populist movements often reflected the interests of two distinct social groups: "middle-level groups in the social hierarchy, notably middle- and working-class whites, who have a stake in traditional social privilege but resent the power of upper-elites over them" and "outsider" factions of the "elite itself, who sometimes use distorted forms of ant-elitism as part of their own bid for greater power" (16). They argue that right wing populist movements are a form of repressive populism concerned with maintaining "systems of social privilege and power" in the U.S. and often stem from a backlash against various liberation movements and events (Berlet and Lyons 19).[26] Some of the defining characteristics of this type of far-right populism include tendencies towards valorizing producerism narratives, whereby those that see themselves as self-reliant and productive members of society are both more valuable and taken advantage of by those who are not, e.g. ‘unproductive’ elites and subordinate groups (often people of color) who are “defined as lazy or immoral” (Berlet and Lyons 21). Additionally, producerism often leads to the populist narrative of scapegoating, what Berlet and Lyons describe as the “demonization” of groups or individuals, deeming them leaches on society’s hardworking producers and perceived to be a threat to the natural social order. Scapegoating is prolific throughout the populist far right in the US and refers to:

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[26] Some scholars, however, like Joseph Lowndes argue that theory of the rise of the modern right as a "backlash" from the social upheaval of the 1960's in which conservatives were able to "reclaim" political ground in the name of traditional values and patriotism often obscures valuable discussions of how racial, economic, and political discourses were utilized to motivate a white conservative voter base. He argues in *From the New Deal to the New Right* (2008) that discussions of "backlash," especially in the 1990's, masked "what was a long-term process

> a social process whereby the hostility and grievances of an angry, frustrated group are directed away from the real causes of a social problem onto a target group demonized as malevolent wrongdoers. The scapegoat bears the blame, while the scapegoaters feel a sense of righteousness and increased unity. The social problem may be real or imaginary, the grievances legitimate or illegitimate, and members of the targeted group may be wholly innocent or partly culpable. What matters is that the scapegoats are wrongfully stereotyped as all sharing the same negative trait, or are singled out for blame while other major culprits are let off the hook (Berlet and Lyons 24)

As I explore in this chapter, the dynamic that Berlet and Lyons describe here, in which felt economic precarity or real social problems are misdirected towards a target group, is especially present within twentieth century political discourse, and not just in white supremacist groups that promote violence against ‘outgroup’ communities. What happens especially in the iterations of far-right populism in the West is the collision of specific conceptions of producerist identity rooted in Western ideals or imagery. These conceptions become threated by various economic or social realities and are then leveraged into a specific conspiracist scapegoating. As Berlet and

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whereby various groups in different places and times attempted to link racism, antigovernment populism, and economic conservatism into a discourse and institutional strategy through linguistic appeals, party-building, social movement organizing, and the exercise of state power” (4).

Lyons argue, conspiracist scapegoating is a type of narrative that "frames the enemy as part of a vast insidious plot against the common good, while…valoriz[ing] the scapegoater as a hero for sounding the alarm" (25). This narrative becomes especially dangerous when it uses coded language to "mask ethnic or racial bigotry" (25). In the US specifically, these narratives are often paired with narratives with religious overtones that often manifest as apocalyptic or millenarian conspiracies as seen in the postwar Christian Right more broadly but that has roots in nineteenth and early twentieth century populist movements.

And so, the term "far right" exists in relation to a loose populist politic within postwar US spatial dimensions that is tied to specific ideological elements and rhetorical strategies that may not immediately translate as "extreme" or "radical." Extremism is used to describe both a relational attitudinal measure for attaining political or social change through violence and describes groups or movements that engaged in this violence against various 'out-group' communities to fulfill their ideological mandates (Schlatter). Similar uses of "radical" emerged in the 1990's to describe the third wave of far-right politics that shared core ideologies that combined "nativism (combination of nationalism and xenophobia), authoritarianism (a belief in a strictly ordered society) and populism (emphasizing people as body politic in opposition to corrupt elite run state) (Mayer 18). According to the ADL, far-right extremism in the United States is loosely made up of two overlapping characterizations that scholars use to help define groups and movements: the first include groups that are explicitly Neo-Nazi or that adhere to white supremacist beliefs and the second are anti-government movements that include militia groups and are loosely defined around Patriot ideologies of nativist nationalism; both of these overlapping designations have movements that would also fall under the definition of "extreme" as it is used to define groups that seek to use violence to bring about political change (Neiwart 4;

ADL "Extreme Right/Radical Right/Far Right"). What defines "extreme" far-right groups or movements from others is not their ideological positioning is further right from the "mainstream" spatial positions but instead go to extreme lengths to act on the perceived threats that are laid bare within the same discourses. And then, in the aftermath of this violence, these groups are alienated from the mainstream who don't necessarily reject their grievances or ideological positions, but certainly their methods. When discussing the radical or extreme far-right, scholars refer to these groups or members as "extreme" in that they "opt to work outside the democratic political process and…advocate violence to achieve their goals" or reject the state altogether as a legitimate order and seek to overthrow it (Schlatter 11; Berlet and Lyons 21). While I'm not contributing new information or revisions to this debate over definitions, it is productive to use terms like "extreme" to describe political movements, groups, and ideologies. But instead of offering a relational definition in which extreme is defined in relation to some static spatial mainstream, I suggest we think about extreme as both a contextual and historical designation. So that at any moment in the political history of the US, extremism is defined as a political position that at the time was condemned (via a degree of consensus or as decreed by the state) to be outside of the bounds of acceptable or appropriate political discourse or behavior, regardless of where they might exist on any spatial spectrum of left/center/right. Approaching far-right extremism from this perspective also allows for an analysis of government response to extremism, as seen in the standoffs at Ruby Ridge and Waco, to be considered as part of this definitional negotiation.

Several ethnographic studies of neo-Nazi and milia groups in the West exist, including Pete Simi's work with neo-Nazi groups in the 1990's[27] and Amy Cooter's more recent ethnography of the Michigan Militia*,* and use theories of ideology to study far-right groups and how they operationalize their ideologies. Cooter found in her study of over forty in-depth interviews that militia membership is primarily driven by a “search for commonality” in which members seek to form in-group bonds in a society that is continually in flux and to these members perhaps in “crisis” (2). It was common for white, lower-middle class male members to become invested in a particular narrative of “Americanness” (3). They often discussed their reasons for joining in terms of “hegemonic masculinity,” that they felt a sense of duty and as “strong, independent men” and that they felt the need to defend themselves, their family, and country from perceived threats. This masculinity, Cooter argues, relies on references to a mythic American past in which the nation was founded by the physical labor and moral strength of white men, including the taming of a Wild Western frontier (225). Cooter also analyzes the group’s tendencies towards racial self-conceptions, where she found that symbolic racism was a more salient feature than perhaps an older form of white supremacy. The militia’s conceptions of race are formed through nationalistic threats to the group (as seen in the trends of anti-Muslim sentiment) (Cooter 229). Ultimately Cooter’s study demonstrates how militia members construct racial identity through the common thread of Americanness which relies on a “mythological version of national identity” and that “references the historical timeframe of the American frontier and the Revolutionary War, where white men had a monopoly of sociopolitical power” (233). But she also concludes that the militia members are constantly reconstructing these identities; both hegemonic masculinity and conceptions of race were often flexible, adjusting and evolving within the social practices of the group. The one caveat to this study is that its more contemporary setting does fall into a different “wave” of militia membership that later than this project’s scope and incorporates the far-right’s online presence and organizing. Regardless, these ethnographies are important because they offer insights into how far-right ideology is operationalized and internalized in their day-to-day social practices.

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[27] See, Simi, *Amerikan Dreams: Dialogues with White Supremacists* (1999) and Cooter's *Americanness, Masculinity, and Whiteness* (2013).

Other scholars like James Gibson, Michael Kimmel, and Abby Ferber approach far-right extremism from similar frameworks of gender and its intersections with race, specifically the that constructions of white hegemonic masculinity are pervasive in the earlier far right white supremacist communities, especially in the form of a paramilitary “warrior” culture. More recently though, Robert Churchill challenges some of these conclusions surrounding hegemonic masculinity in militia groups, and especially how these gender identities fit into the larger processes of in-group identification. Churchill notes that Ferber and Kimmel are correct in stressing the importance of the “warrior dream” in militia masculinity that manifests a ‘new war’ fantasy in which men are free from collective obligations either civil, ethical, or domestic (Churchill 207). He argues that the reality may be a little more complicated and the militia masculine ideal was in fact a response to Gibson’s “warrior dream” in which militia members developed an identity around personal accomplishment that reinforced their “sense of obligation as citizens to strengthen the larger community, rather than a sense of alienation” (209). Churchill’s analysis aligns with Cooter’s findings that while some of these narratives are formative to a militia member’s decision to join, it isn’t just a reiteration of paramilitary “new war” fantasy but often tied to larger discourses about community and often evolving to fit more contemporary conversations around gender roles.

In addition, the far-right’s relationship to the environment is a crucial site of rhetorical engagement at the end of the twentieth century and beyond, especially as they seek to link their politics to pre-existing regional themes in the West. Scholars like Blair Taylor, Kyle Boggs, and April Anson’s work with ecofascism use settler colonial theory to think about connections between the far right and environmental discourse. In “The Rhetorical Landscapes of the ‘Alt Right’ and the Patriot Movements,” Boggs analyzes the rhetoric of the Bundy standoff at Malheur National Refuge in Oregon in 2016, exploring how far-right claims to white settler sovereignty are intertwined with environmental discourse in the Western US. Boggs argues that “the natural environment affects the process by which far-right appeals to national identity become narrative, and in turn, these narrations impact the landscape, how it is understood, who belongs there, and how they belong there” (242). Again, even with a more recent iteration of the Patriot movement (the post-2008 wave), important connections exist between settler colonial theory and far-right extremism, arguing that the settler narrative is a necessary framework for the far-right to uphold white supremacist ideologies. These elements are present in the Patriot and militia groups of the late twentieth century, perhaps even laying the groundwork for the rhetoric for the more contemporary iterations of far-right politics in the rural West. Additionally, questions surrounding Western land management intersection which questions of both federal government oversight and the debate around gun control, both of which have deep histories in the West. As Alec Trimble Young argues in his analysis of the rhetoric of the right-wing media figure, Glenn Beck, and his use of the massacre at Wounded Knee to galvanize his audience against an oppressive and violent state, the rhetorical underpinnings of the Second Amendment rights and “stand your ground” movements are rooted in a form of sovereign settler (Trimble-Young 2).

What is clear from this scholarship is first, that the far right’s discourse is, in part, shaped by various ideological constructions of race, gender and settler colonialism and that these ideological structures intersect with pre-existing discourse that has defined the West as a geopolitical region. In this chapter, I cover and analyze the active far-right extremist groups between the years 1970 and 1999 and focus on those that were most active in the Western parts of the US. Additionally, I am most interested in those groups that represent the intersecting definitions of far-right extremism at that time*,* that sat on the continuum where white supremacy and anti-government militia organizations intersect.[28] What happens at the end of the twentieth century is two distinct, yet related, discourses colliding: the use of regional Western rhetoric in right wing populist politics that fed on preexisting economic and social problems, and the concomitant growing trends towards hyper-nationalism, nativism and conspiracism that often defined the far right and that enjoyed various levels of acceptance and popularity. And perhaps most importantly, the nature of this collision manifests as a series of narratives that make up what scholars have also discussed as the western mythos: a teleological story of a land being settled towards civilization, a story that naturalizes white presence on this land, a story of a man protecting his family and his family's right to be on this land, and a story of an individual whose commitment to the "treasured" moral freedoms from regulation and towards a specific way of life justify violent rebellion against any institution that threatens it.

Conservatism in the United States, 1959-1996

Before exploring these groups and their ideologies more in depth though, it's useful to think briefly about the environment in which they emerged, and especially what we might consider “mainstream” evolutions in American politics that paved the way for these groups, especially in relation to Western rhetoric used in politics. Simply put: not everybody holding these beliefs was “extreme,” and many of these ideas were in fact commonplace and well received. As Berlet and Lyons argue, it’s not productive, nor accurate, to characterize these movements as somehow outside the range of what we consider “normal” political discourses and indeed part of what makes these dynamics so dangerous is that they aren’t simply a matter of fringe groups living in isolation harboring hatred that no one else in society shares. Instead, these movements operate as most social movements do and their members are mostly “average people motivated by a combination of material and ideological grievances and aspirations…right-wing populists are dangerous not because they are crazy irrational zealots—but because they are not” (Berlet and Lyons 17). It’s important to identify how the US’s broader conservative trends in the years following World War II reflect the average nature of the far right as it offers a foundation for the extremist violence that emerges in the mid-1990’s. Understanding the relationship between these positions demonstrates how regional and historical conditions are used to leverage “mainstream” beliefs or positions into “extreme” methods. As we will see, the relationship between the mainstream and far right is not demarcated by a hard boundary and indeed large political movements or events in the US in the twentieth century had rippling effects on the groups or ideologies considered to be on the far fringes of conservatism while some ‘mainstream’ (at the time) figures held open extremist or radical political opinions (Ferber 8-9). Some of the most important of these elements included the utilization of a combative maverick political persona, especially within presidential campaigns, that excited white voter bases with the fusion of rhetoric and policy. These were often combined with the framing of major social problem within narratives of a masculinity in crisis and the righteous violence as a solution to this problem especially in relation to foreign and domestic policy positions of the American/Vietnam War. And finally in the political discursive trends around land ownership and settler sovereignty that framed economic experiences as part of a larger contentious relationship between the Western settler as "producer" and the state that infringes on one's divine rights to live and work on Western land. I outline several of these elements below and try to trace the connections between them and the more extreme trajectories of these narratives that collide with explicit white supremacist, anti-Semitic conspiracist trends define some of these groups that utilized Western narratives.

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[28] In the years following the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and more recently, the election of Donald Trump in 2016, far-right extremism has risen significantly with a distinct resurgence in militia groups like the Oathkeepers, Three Percenters, and the loosely organized Boogaloo movement. While drawing on some of the discourse that was prevalent at the end of the twentieth century, these more contemporary iterations of far-right extremism have their own complex formations and belief systems that, for the purposes of this analysis, will not be addressed. I made this decision first and foremost because these movements are still evolving but also because widespread use of the internet fundamentally changed how far-right groups organized and recruited and thus changed their ideological landscapes including a move away from regional interests and identities. There are several scholars that are tracking and analyzing these movements as they evolve including Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Mark Pitcavage, Amy Cooter, and Kathleen Belew as well as the "non-scholarly" work done by prominent activists that track, identify, and expose these groups and their affiliated members. I will briefly discuss some of these more contemporary groups in the conclusion to the dissertation and especially how the internet has significantly impacted the consumption of culture and extremist discourse, in the dissertation's conclusion.

An early focal point that coalesced certain far-right tendencies towards scapegoating and conspiracy was the work of the John Birch Society in the 1960's. Founded by Robert Welch in 1959, the JBS was a political advocacy group whose core belief was that the US government had been infiltrated by a "cabal of internationalist, greedy bankers and corrupt politicians" who, if not stopped, would bring about the downfall of American democracy and way of life for a "collectivist new world order" (Berlet and Lyons 258). They also pioneered new forms of political grassroots organizing that they used to promote and distribute their conspiracist narratives including "lobbying…educational meetings, petition drives, and letter writing campaigns" (Berlet and Lyons 261). The JBS would fall out of favor with more mainstream right-wing political discourse later in the century, in part because of this conspiracy laden rhetoric, but its legacy would lie in its ability to excite a conservative base through grassroots organizing that offered solutions to political problems through the scapegoating of a corrupt federal government.

The John Birch Society helped pave the way for mainstream figures like the Arizona U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater who found success in an unapologetically conservative persona that was staunchly anti-immigration and isolationist, and that preached against the overreach of government, and the constant threat to traditional "American" values (Mulloy 105; Lowndes 110-1; Perlstein xiv-v). The Goldwaterian maverick persona was defined as one who would play by the rules even while railing against the corruption of an elitist federal government but always framed this cooperation as conditional, and always held on to the threat of working outside the system if he felt it violated his internal code of American values. Even though it was an immediate failure in terms of winning an election, the 1964 Goldwater presidential campaign would shape the processes of political organizing on the right through the twentieth century. He was especially successful walking the line between what would excite voters and what would be considered "too extreme" for a presidential campaign. As John C. Hammerback argues, Goldwater's messages appealed to his conservative audience because Goldwater himself embodied the themes of "rugged individualism" that he touted as ideally American, performing the "qualities of America's hardy pioneer forbears" (Hammerback 325). Goldwater's Arizona cowboy maverick performance transitioned seamlessly into both his policy proposals and organizing as Goldwater leveraged anti-communist and anti-government oversight positions using this Westerner persona, noting once at a Southern California Republicans dinner early in his career, "we still have many Donner passes and deserts to cross. No government can smooth out the hills and valleys of the world" (qtd in Farber 85). At the 1964 Republican Convention, Goldwater welcomed the fringe John Birch Society, infamously claiming that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" (qtd. in Farber 111). In this instance, the hanging threat of working outside the system (extremism) is made morally right through the defense of liberty. Although Goldwater's loss in 1964 seemed a grave defeat for this growing conservative movement, his legacy of a "forceful grassroots conservative movement aimed at national power" endured and his rhetoric on the campaign trail laid the groundwork for the fusion of Western mythological imagery and conservative political positions, and often the most extreme iterations of these positions (Farber 117). The individualist type rhetoric that Goldwater evinces utilizes anti-elitist scapegoating strategies to offer solutions to social and political problems but that also was dependent on this persona resonating with an audience that would be familiar with this character, often valorized as rogue sheriffs or Texas rangers fighting outside the law for what they saw was right and worth protecting.

The elements that made Goldwater so successful in the 1964 presidential planted seeds that lead to Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980, often said to be the victory for conservatism at the end of the century. Even during his California governorship and his 1976 presidential bid, Reagan leaned heavily on this same maverick persona that depended on the rhetoric of the mythological West.[29] Reagan's frontier aesthetic resonated with voters and had great success in Texas, where political conservatism was almost always tied to an aesthetic americana. Reagan's visual manifestation of how the western mythos and cultural cowboy-hero aesthetic established in the western genre fused with conservative political positioning. Reagan personified this aesthetic[30]: "championing 'law and order,' 'plain folks Americanism,' and 'God-fearing patriotism'" that is deeply rooted in the Western cultural tradition (Cunningham 5). Like Goldwater, Reagan used this "rugged cowboy" persona to market himself as a "citizen-candidate, angry about government corruption and incompetence, nostalgic for frontier and free-market individualism, a champion of strength in the face of liberal weaknesses, and an advocate for traditional values" (Cunningham 160). Critics argue that this persona is what led to Reagan's success, and how this imagery galvanized a base that saw themselves as part of that same Western tradition. This confluence of bravado and policy sent the message to voters that he was willing to work within the system but also not opposed to taking matters into his own hands when necessary, coding extremism innocuously through a narrative of protecting fundamental American values.

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[29] Reagan also relied heavily on his career starring in Hollywood Westerns to develop and promote this branding. For more on Reagan's use of the cowboy imagery, see Sean Cunningham's *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right* (2010).

Like Goldwater, Reagan embodied his Western maverick persona and fused it to his policy proposals; in a 1982 speech at a Wyoming Senate race rally in Cheyenne, Reagan invoked the Western mythos to comment on the economic recovery and the threat of big government: "you and your forebears… tamed a wild frontier. And, believe it or not, you did it without an area redevelopment program or urban renewal. [Laughter] So now, load up the musket and help us conquer this wild growth and centralization of power which threatens all that we've created" (Reagan). In this example, Reagan invokes the heritage and history that he knows his Wyoming audience shares (the taming of the wild frontier) while tying this narrative to a contemporary policy that would cut down on government spending or social programs while implicitly implicating the people who might benefit from a larger government.[31] And at the same time, Reagan asserts that the solution to the degradation of his audience's way of life, is itself that way of life via policy (the conquering a different kind of wild). Reagan's victory in 1980 signaled a new era of conservative politics that ushered in the normalization and strategic use of "anti-statist rhetoric" that coincided with the rise in militia groups in the West (Lowndes 140). But Reagan's presidency would also implement economic policies that exacerbated already tenuous conditions in rural Western communities. Even as Reagan's persona solidified the relationship between the frontier imagery and presidential rhetoric, far-right groups often used his economic policies to leverage the resonance of this rhetoric into more extreme political positions.

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[31] See also Reagan's infamous rhetorical framing of Black mothers as the "welfare queens" that leach on the (white) economic producers.

In addition to the framing of the rugged individual as a foil for society's ills within mainstream electoral politics, scholars point to historical events and changing social dynamics at the time created opportunities for the far right take root. Looming large, the American/Vietnam War, an active US military engagement through 1975, was one of the influential moments in the history far right as it exacerbated pre-existing grievances. The war contributed to the growing sentiments by some that the federal government was corrupt and couldn't be trusted, often falling back to the anti-elitist scapegoating techniques that Berlet and Lyons describe in their analysis of far-right populism. The imagery most associated with these sentiments were young, poor (often white) men being sent to Vietnam to fight in the place of the sons of rich politicians who could avoid the draft. Additionally, the concomitant changing social and political dynamics in the Civil Rights, New Left, and women's liberation movements gave the impression that white men (and the 'traditional values' associated with their socio-political power) were under threat. As Kathleen Belew argues, the American/Vietnam War spurred many white men to "dream about the powers and features of another kind of man who could retake and reorder the world" (60). These responses to changing social and political realities including the military loss in Vietnam told a very specific story that justified radical political action and righteous violence around ideologies of white masculine power as a solution to these perceived problems (Belew 23-4). The war also offered a foundation of military training that would re-emerge in paramilitary and militia groups in the 1980's and 1990's. Veterans who would later be radicalized by some of these white power groups would apply their military and tactical experiences to paramilitary and militia training, often in concert with the survivalist tendencies of those that prescribed to millenarian religious beliefs (i.e. preparation for impending apocalypse) (Belew 34). Moreover, the conflict itself, in which a Western (in the global sense of the word) settler superpower came to another Western nation's aid to reassert colonial rule and establish a stronghold against the communist threat to the American way of life and economic interests also reflects modern iteration of settler colonial relationships.

The other important events that influenced the growth and popularity of far-right politics in relation to the western mythos were the agricultural and farm crises of the late twentieth century and the so-called Sagebrush Rebellion, a movement that opposed the federal ownership of Western land, in which many budding far-right groups would take part. These events, which further exacerbated the relationship between regional Western communities and the federal government, showcased how populist sentiments took root within a larger Western tradition of asserting manifest settler sovereignty over the land. This was often characterized through the sacrosanct nature of private property rights as the right of a white male producer to provide for himself and his family and seeking to blame others when he could not do so. The economic instability of the farm crisis helped sow the seeds of extremist discourse within Western communities because it created the conditions under which far-right ideology was offered as a solution to catastrophic economic losses and the perceived loss of a producer identity, often by rural white men. This is a great example of the dynamic that Berlet and Lyons describe where real economic or social problems can often lead to scapegoating and conspiracy.[32] After a boom period in the 1970's, a combination of national and international economic forces and government policies resulted in a restructuring of the rural economy, especially in relation to the increased size and scale of agribusiness (Schlatter 113-4; Ferber and Kimmel 585). Although some rural communities benefitted from this restructuring, most did not. In the 1980's, these changes prompted hundreds of foreclosures that sent most farm communities in the US into an economic depression and by 1989, around 700,000 to a million small to medium-sized family farms had been shut down (Schlatter 114). Sociologists argue this crisis affected communities in different ways but often manifested in the perceived failure of idealized ways of settler colonial life, especially the traditional imagining of the family man as economic provider. Often this crisis was directed inward; data from studies at the time indicated that the leading cause of farm-related deaths between 1983 and 1988 was suicide and farmers were "five times more likely to die from suicide than from accidents" (Ramirez 2). But this crisis was also directed outward as many looked for someone to blame for their economic woes and far right groups like the Posse Comitatus and other militias were standing by to help point the finger at non-white immigrant labor, Jews, and the federal government (Ferber and Kimmel 585-6). As Schlatter notes, these losses were felt acutely by men who had to deal with the "gilded shame of being the man to lose the [family] land" that pushed many white male farmers towards conspiracy and violence (114). This shame is not just the loss of the family land but intrinsically tied to the relationship between the white settler and the land they occupy, in which the loss of this land means the loss of identity. And so not only are far-right movements documented to capitalize on economic and political crises, but strategically target those crises that also intersected with the social identities rooted in ideological constructions of white settler masculinity endemic in the rural West.

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[32] The famous example of this is the very active far right groups, Posse Comitatus who would seek out farmers and ranchers protesting or expressing anger at losing their farms and livelihoods and distribute antisemitic literature blaming the economic downturn as part of a global conspiracy in which a cabal of Jewish bankers secretly controlled the US government (also known as the ZOG, or Zionist Occupied Government).

A similar dynamic occurs in the growing populist concern with the overreach of federal management of Western land, called the Sagebrush Rebellion, which in conjunction with the Wise Use movement, helped fuel antigovernment sentiments in the West at the end of the twentieth century where states like Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico passed legislation that seized or contested land within the public domain from the federal government (Schlatter 130). Sagebrush rebels pointed to the huge amount of land Western states owned and managed by the federal government and claimed not only that it put them at an economic disadvantage, but that it violated sacred boundaries between land as property, both private and public. Sagebrush proponents not only thought that the federal government owned and controlled too much land in Western states, but they believed state, county and private entities would know how to make the best use of this land. The Wise Use Movement was deeply invested in private property rights as a justification for antigovernment sentiments. Initially started as a political fundraising campaign, Wise Use proponents sought to "remove present environmental protections and prevent future environmental reforms" to benefit groups like the Center for Defense of Free Enterprise, for whom Ron Arnold drafted the Wise Use agenda in 1988 (Schlatter 131). The Sagebrush Rebellion and the Wise Use movement found immense support in rural areas of the West and with the Patriot militia groups that were organizing in the same area as well (Schlatter 131-2; Berlet and Lyons 412). These groups thus fed off the political and economic relationships already in the regions, especially concerning land and property disputes between individuals and the federal government. One striking example of how the Sagebrush Rebellion fused Western mythological discourse with contemporary discussions of private property rights and government overreach can be seen in the early politics of a Nevada rancher named Cliven Bundy, who later came to prominence during the late Obama administration. The Bundy family has a long contentious relationship with the federal government which began in the 1990's when the Bureau of Land Management asserted grazing privileges on public land to protect endangered species while Bundy continued to graze his cattle in that area (Graefe 62).

The blurring of public and private land in which a white rancher asserts his sovereign right to that land in defiance of the state offers valuable insights into how individuals and communities embodied these Western mythic narratives even as they navigated the contemporary political landscape. Bundy's early clashes with the federal government found immense support amongst the militias but also just everyday people, some of whom were also affected by what they saw as an overreaching government. Both the BLM headquarters in Reno and a US Forest Service office in Carson City were targeted with explosive devices as both local militias and ranchers showed their support for Bundy (62). What resonated deeply with both the "extreme" and "mainstream" communities in the West though was Bundy's claim to sovereign right over Western land purely by virtue of being white upon it and by having forbears who were white upon it. Both the Sagebrush Rebellion and Wise Use movement rely heavily on "producerist" narratives, believing that the purpose of land is to be economically productive and that any other use or function, including conservationist policies, waste potential value. These movements coalesced and evolved in myriad ways, but they make explicit connections between the land (as both a geographic and regional political entity) and the process of white settler sovereignty that manifests through discussions of land ownership, private property rights, and government regulation or overreach that is endemic to the West. The agricultural crises, the evolution of radical environmental politics, and the historic tension in rural places between individual landowners and the federal government are important elements to consider within these conversations because they showcase just how pivotal the West was, as a region with its own histories and politics, to far right movements providing "ample fuel for regional militia groups" (Schlatter 132).

All these elements—political, social, and economic—played a role in the development of the far right but especially moving into the 1990's, regional populist energy centers such as the Sagebrush and Wise Use movements veer further and further right even as the mainstream seems to be defined more and more by its extreme positions. This double movement is clearly seen in the reactionary "paleoconservative" movement (defined by isolationist foreign policy, an ethnically defined nation, and the desire for the state to enforce traditional conservative Christian values), which rejected neoconservative views on foreign and economic policy while doubling down on the scapegoating and conspiracism that defined far-right populist politics (Berlet and Lyons 348). While Reagan coded racist sentiments towards scapegoats, paleoconservatives like Pat Buchanan, in his bids for the Republican presidential nomination in 1992 and 1996, championed overtly racist views on immigration that normalized more radical political discourse within the framework of patriotic or traditional values (Berlet and Lyons 399). While the John Birch Society had been pushed out of mainstream circles for its sensationalist claims, paleoconservatives were welcomed (to a certain extent) into the mainstream conservative fold even to the rise of the "alt-right" in the twenty-first century and the election of Donald Trump in 2016. In the mid-1990's, when far-right extremist violence was at its peak, the populist paleoconservatives offered a meeting ground of white racial nationalism where the boundaries between "mainstream" and "extreme" blurred; as Berlet and Lyons claim in their history of right wing populism, the paleoconservative movement in the 1990's "brought mainstream right-wingers and avowed Klan and neo-Nazi far rightists together" in a way that the New Right in the 1970's and 1980's had not (402).

Part Two: Extremist White Settler Sovereignty as Past, Present, and Future

Because of these disparate but related developments, far-right extremist groups took root in the West and eventually reached their peak in the last decade of the twentieth century, a decade that the SPLC identifies as "virtually unprecedented in the history of the American radical right" (SPLC *Intelligence Report*). It was at this time, and perhaps because of these compounded elements, that these disparate far-right figures and groups decided to meet to discuss shared grievances, goals, and strategies at the Estes Park rendezvous. While the mainstream political movements utilized western imagery and themes to effectively galvanize their base, identical themes and ideas also motivated, and were used by, far-right extremist movements whose beliefs were similarly connected to these same constructions of gender, race, and settler colonial identities of their own membership but also new audiences they are trying to reach. Far-right movements used western mythos strategically to offer extremist violence as a reasonable solution to perceived social, economic, and political marginalization. To trace this discourse, I analyze the newsletters, publications and recruiting materials of twenty-three organizations across the far-right political spectrum.[33]

Far-right groups active between 1970 and 1999 communicated in a variety of modes across multiple audiences (group members, prospective members, the mainstream public, etc.), including communicating with, and about, each other. By analyzing a broad range of these materials in this chapter, I explore how western imagery and discourse was used differently across groups for various purposes and towards specific political goals. Several groups (including the Aryan Nations, Nation Alliance, and White Aryan Resistance) had the membership and infrastructure to publish regularly and send materials to both their members and individuals they were hoping to recruit. Other militia groups like the Michigan Militia and Militia of Montana published smaller newsletters with an eye towards reaching their pre-existing base. Small independent libertarian publications throughout the West often covered similar topics and content but with different stylistic and language choices, especially as the more extreme groups promoted and enacted more and more violence in the 1990's. These publications also utilize different types of writing that use Western rhetoric in different ways. There are editorials at the beginning of issues that circulate founding principles and values or discuss group business, there is also significant coverage of current events in the various regions in the West, but also concerning national and international political and economic news. There are long-form historical features, short fiction and poetry, political cartoons, illustrations, and photography as well as the cover art that appears in the regular newsletters and brochures. There is significant political commentary outside of the editorials in the form of articles as well as reprinted political essays and speeches from other groups or far-right individuals that creates a matrix of political discourse geared towards a specific base. Within this matrix there are also advertisements (across different groups), informational articles, letters from readers, and fundraising drives that help our understanding of who these groups were trying to reach in terms of a committed readership as well as how their use of western mythological discourse to do so. What emerges is a peek into the far right, not just as a political entity, but as a print culture—an ecosystem in which various ideologies take root and grow in the West, nurtured by the narratives and themes that have defined the region.

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[33] The materials analyzed in this chapter reside in the Wilcox Collection at the University of Kansas Spencer Research Library. The Wilcox Collection is one of the largest collections of US political literature from 1965 to the present across 10,000 different organizations. This chapter includes materials from the Aryan Nations Idaho Chapter, Louis Beam's writings from his time in the Texas KKK, the Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord, the Michigan Militia, the Militia of Montana, the National Alliance, the Northwest Front, the NW KKK, the Present Truth Ministry's *Patriot Report,* the Posse Comitatus, the Sword of Christ Good News Ministries, Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance based in California, several miscellaneous militia groups and figures including the American Contingency Force and some of the coverage of Bo Gritz' election campaigns, as well as several smaller National Socialist Neo-Nazi publications from Texas and Indiana.

What these materials show is that the white supremacist and militia organizations most prolific through the mid-1990's, as well as other far-right publications and organizations were deeply invested in the western ideological constructions of race, gender, and settler colonial structures of knowledge while also engaging in the types of rhetoric that defined the populist far right at the time including producerism, scapegoating, and conspiracism.[34] Throughout these materials, far-right groups and authors use both western imagery and narratives (at the level of language) as organizing principles that shape and construct their political positions, articulate their values, understand current events, and promote both out-group hate, and violence against the local and federal governments. Additionally, these ideological elements and the use of surface-level western iconography showcase how political authors had a specific readership in mind. They couched the more extreme political positions in western language and imagery because they knew their readers already identified with these narratives and already felt connected to the wider western identities dependent on them and that have historical shaped the regional, political, and cultural landscape throughout the twentieth century.

There are several key patterns that thread together the constructions of race, gender, and settler colonialism and that exist across various groups, individuals, and publications. The far-right materials utilize settler colonial identity by constructing relationships to the land itself via discussions of sovereignty that naturalize white possessive logics. As I discussed in the first chapter and in the first section of this chapter, settler colonialism is important in thinking about the western as a literary genre but also for the West as a geo-political region and for broader conversations about national identity. According to critics like Patrick Wolfe and Aileen Moreton-Robinson,[35] settler colonialism is an ongoing process in which colonial structures seek to dispossess and replace indigenous communities and naturalize this replacement. Settler sovereignty is also constructed in these texts as authors make explicit connections via language but also historical features to the "rugged pioneers" that settled the areas by taming the vast Western wilderness and whose heritage white Americans (and far-right members) now share. Ancestry plays an important role in how these materials construct ongoing settler relationships rooted values of individualism and self-sufficiency as crucial elements of white supremacist ideology. This destined heritage through the work of settling is also connected, for some groups, to the more explicit constructions of the idealized "white homeland" in the Pacific Northwest. These elements are leveraged to comment on specific current political discourse especially around non-white immigration and environmentalism in the West as a site of contestation between individual people and the government including the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Ultimately all these elements frame white supremacist ideologies through settler colonial relations that justify and naturalize the presence of settlers in the West but also that articulate the contemporary threat to their sovereignty in the present day.

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[34] As outlined in the first section by Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons.

Connected to the far right's engagement with settler colonial sovereignty is, perhaps unsurprisingly, their use of racial discourse. Race, and especially the construction of whiteness, is a crucial aspect of how these groups talk about themselves and promote violence against non-white out-groups. Consistent with how settler colonialism is theorized more broadly, whiteness exists within these discourses as a "mode of rationalization" in which "the possessive logics of…sovereignty are operationalized, deployed, and affirmed" (Moreton-Robinson xii). The construction of whiteness works as a form of power that utilizes the processes of settler colonialism to uphold its possessive logics but also, crucially, to naturalize its presence on stolen land as a means of erasing those that the settler state eradicated, replaced, and deemed "non-productive" members of society. While the connections between settler colonial structures and whiteness are often theorized as "supremacy, as hegemony, as ideology, as epistemology and ontology" what these materials highlight is how white settler colonial logics can be, and often are, operationalized as social identity (Strakosch 19). One of the most common elements of racial discourse that appears in these publications is the strategic framing of race and nation as intrinsically related. These race/nation constructions are then validated through the larger conceptualizations of the "white race" throughout history including Ancient Greece, Viking, and European cultures (including literary cultures) that forecast the greatness of white supremacist groups in the West. In a similar way to the threat to white sovereignty that is depicted in settler discourse, the liminality and fragility of the race-nation is consistently used in conjunction with contemporary discussions of white replacement, immigration, and demographic anxiety especially in the 1980's and 1990's. In this way, the imagery of the Western landscape exists as a backdrop of white crisis but also as the savior of a white future as the race-nation's destined territorial imperative. These anxieties around race are also reflected in how far-right groups at the time engaged with popular culture often focusing on how whiteness is represented and celebrating how contemporary culture depicts white racial superiority.

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[35] See, Wolfe's *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnograph Event* (1999) and Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (2015).

Gender is another vitally important component of how the far right engaged with western mythos in their producerist rhetoric. White men are consistently portrayed as "society's producers" seen primarily in the use of frontiersman, agrarian farmer and renegade outlaw imagery that embodies a masculine identity protecting the “ideal” self-sufficient Aryan way of life from an overreaching government and non-producing non-whites and elites that threaten this way of life. The agrarian farmer of the nineteenth century especially is used to connect current economic crises like the Agricultural Crisis in the 1980’s to radicalize farmers by framing their economic loss as a loss of their birthright and identity. White women are also characterized by their contribution to the white Aryan race-nation, often seen as the pure and fragile symbols of goodness being threatened by non-white predators but also as the regenerative producers of the race-nation itself (in their propagation and keeping of the home) in furtherance of the pioneering and homesteading traditions.

And finally, far-right groups utilized rhetoric surrounding the individual in relation to the construction of an idyllic white community in the US and held in tension with a society that is overrun with corruption and tyranny. This is seen extensively in western discourse, but especially in references to the “rugged individual” or outlaw vigilante and their moral authority to act with violence as they see necessary, even if these actions are illegal. This kind of rhetoric is tied to the preexisting tensions between people in the West and the federal government but also in the more nebulous use of “freedom” as an organizing principle of values and the basis on which these groups rationalized their more extreme methods of political change. These discourses are also tied to the ever-present tension in western literature, and the western genre specifically, between law and lawlessness. These discussions become especially important in the 1990’s when events like the Ruby Ridge standoff, Waco, and the Oklahoma City bombing bring questions of righteous violence to the surface. In these scenarios, lawlessness and violence are promoted as the solution to the perceived crises of society to achieve the destined future that is promised to those people who share the great ancestry of the white nation.

Settler Colonialism: The Land and the People Destined to Live on It

The archive materials present a far-right preoccupation with the idea of land, and especially land as a foundation for white settler sovereignty. The landscape of the American West looms large in the poetic minds of these authors and often works as a backdrop for the epic battle for America that these groups imagine themselves participating in. In the Aryan Nations'[36] monthly newsletter, *Calling Our Nation,* as well as the militia publication, *The One-Hundred Percent American,* authors wax poetic about the "fog shrouded mist of the mountainous highlands of the Northwest," of the "crags and mountain streams," of "thy warm and smiling plains" as the place in which the white people of the US were destined to inhabit (Forrest[37] "Dangerous Alliance;" Beam "We Are At War;" Keith "Our Native Land"). The presence of white settlers in the Americas is naturalized first through their connection to the land itself and extends into the freedom to exist and determine the nature of that presence, i.e., their sovereign right. The land exists as a promise, both of one's destined heritage but also as the future of the white race. As one author notes in an issue of *Calling Our Nation, "*Aryans! America is yours and yours alone! The territory appointed for you, the Empire Kingdom and from you are those appointed by the 'God Who Cannot Lie' to take this Empire-Kingdom (dominion and rule) and to possess it for ever and ever! ("America: Separate Sovereign Sanctuary"). At the heart of this framing is the understanding of sovereignty as the possession of land and the agency to construct a nation through this possession that then naturalizes white settler presence as the inherited spirit of the rugged and intrepid pioneers that originally settled the country and "tamed the wilderness." Far right authors see themselves as part of this heritage, and by extension, see their possession of the land as sacrosanct. Authors across multiple publications refer to this heritage, including Louis Beam's address to the Aryan Nations Congress which was printed in the 1983 *Calling our Nation*:

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[36] The Aryan Nations was a Christian Identity white supremacist organization with multiple chapters across the Western US. It was founded by Richard Butler in 1977 after a period with the anti-government militia, Posse Comitatus and followed the popular religious Christian Identity movement most associated with the teachings and leadership of Wesley Swift. Identity is a racist millenarian ideology that comes from older traditions of British-Israelism that claimed white Europeans are descended from a biblical lost tribe of Israel and promotes an anti-Semitic, Eurocentric supremacy of white men and often acted as a binding ideological force among several groups (Schlatter 8). At his compound in Idaho, Butler would host the annual "Aryan World Congress" attracting various members and leaders of active white supremacist groups including Tom Metzger, founder of White Aryan Resistance, KKK member and strategist, Louis Beam and Don Black, founder of Stormfront (SPLC "Aryan Nations"). Butler would eventually lose his Idaho compound in court but the legacy of the Aryan Nations, especially in the Pacific Northwest and other Western states, left a legacy that would continue with other white supremacist paramilitary militia organizations that sought to operationalize some of these ideas about male Aryan warriors fighting for supremacy over non-whites.

[37] Nathan Bedford Forrest is a nom de plume used by Texas KKK member and far right leader, Louis Beam. For the purposes of this chapter, I am treating these groups and their various publications and authors within them as a "whole" representative discourse. If an author is noted in a particular issue, I will cite it but the question of authorship itself is hard to approach with these texts because of the size of the scope and the use of pseudonyms. There are some cases where I think the author is important and I mention these specifically, especially in cases like Beam whose writings spread across multiple publications and movements under various names and reprints and this spread has broader implications for how the ecosystem that makes up the far right's print culture functions. But for the most part, I focus on the groups and how they exist as part of a whole representative discourse.

> Despair not! Look and behold! For, the greatness that was…IS! Look to the mountains across yonder plain. Are they not the same mountains that greeted the rugged explorers, traders, and trappers in times past? And the fields with trees and endless expanse of moist, green grass—are they not the same as when the first hearty pioneers laid axe and plow to them? Now comrades, look to yourselves. Are you not the same men who with axe, rifle, and courage made this land what it is? Genetically those brave men of yesteryear have passed on to us not only their blood but their courage, their bravery, and their will to conquer. We have but to call it forth…Look! Look! Do you wish to see the rugged pioneer who with tremendous strength makes the wild forest his humble servant? He is here—with you today. He sits before me now! (Beam "We Are At War")

Beam galvanizes his audience by tying them to the great settling of the continent through the land itself and the taming of the land by the rugged pioneers whose heritage and traditions they share. This heritage creates and sustains the settler nation through the contemporary day as the blood of their pioneer ancestors live in the land itself. Jim Rhea highlights these same connections as he reflects on the Western landscape: "This is Lewis and Clark country. Not far from here is the Little Big Horn, and the Battle Ground where Custer laid down his life for this grand country" (Rhea). As Beam notes in the 1981 issue of *Calling our Nation,* "it is time for our blood, for our sweat, and time for our courage to manifest itself. We have lived on the courage of our Grandfathers long enough. Their blood, the blood that built America, has long since dried and soaked into the earth" (Beam "It is Time"). In these ways, settler presence is naturalized in the land itself through the process of settling, the toil and struggle undertaken by the rugged pioneers that built the nation which then extends towards the contemporary reader.

Some of these connections are explored more specifically through historical features that narrate this will to conquer. In the National Alliance's newsletter[38] *Attack!* (renamed *National Vanguard* In 1978), they cover several historical narratives connected to the US's imperial expansion westward into North America including an extensive narration of the defense of the Alamo during the Texas Revolution framed as a microcosmic metaphor for the white race's superiority. As on author notes, the white men and women that fought to free themselves from Mexico, "felt themselves to be the vanguard of their race, they meant to wring their destiny, manifest or otherwise, from the plains and mountains which stretched across the remainder of the continent" ("The Men of the Alamo"). Indigenous dispossession is also briefly mentioned in these stories and is used to highlight the destined ownership of the land via the settler colonial project. In a feature in the August 1982 issues of *National Vanguard* on the 1813-14 Creek War, Jan Keown notes that the indigenous Creek tribes were simply "in the way" of white settlers and it was impossible that they "should remain as they were, a savage nation encamped on hundreds of square miles of eminently desirable land, squarely astride the route west. There were really only two options: assimilation or conquest" (Keown "The Creek War: Racial Collision on the Southern Frontier"). Additionally, biographical stories like the coverage of nineteenth century figure Denis Kearny not only valorize the settling of California by the "two-fisted brawling breed" of white men whose "desire for golden riches was matched by their thirst for adventure and freedom" but also demonizes the "non-white" Chinese immigrants who were "radically different from the hardy White pioneers who had crossed the continent" ("Denis Kearney and the Struggle for White America"). This valorizing of settler conquest in the eyes of the far right extends beyond the United States itself as the imagery of white settler pioneers crossing wild lands towards their destiny in "canvas-covered wagons drawn by teams of…oxen" is also used to describe the colonial history in Africa, as demonstrated in a historical feature on the Boer Pioneers in the nineteenth century ("The Great Trek"). Part of the work these historical features seek to accomplish is the tying of these regional and national settler stories with the global project of the white nation, both within, and without, borders.

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[38] National Alliance was founded in 1974 by William Pierce, author of the infamous white supremacist novel, *The Turner Diaries.* While this group is not based in the Western US, their content indicates a nationwide readership as it caters towards the regional politics and rhetoric that is consistent with other groups based in the Western US like the Aryan Nations, White Aryan Resistance, and the various militia groups. There is also an established relationship between the cultural production of Western mythological discourse *for* Eastern readerships especially in the late-Nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In these ways, the pioneer tradition that exists as a rhetorical strategy in the overtly political editorials and historical features becomes more than just an inherited spirit from the rugged individuals that shaped civilization from the wilderness; it exists as a way of life that contemporary readers can, and try to, emulate. Advertisements within these publications also highlight how this shared pioneer tradition via self-sufficiency exists as an effective tool to build in-group cohesion. Libertarian and survivalist militia publications like *Common Sense, The Free American, Live Free International's Directions,* and *Preparedness Journal* all present survivalist and self-sufficient living to reconnect with traditional settler lifestyles as a solution to the corruption of the modern world. An advertisement in the May/June 1993 issue of *Preparedness*

Journal highlights how a subscription to *Wilderness Way* can help you learn "earth wisdom," "peaceful ways of living with the land" as the reader reads "tales from ages past—the Rendezvous Era, Fur Trade Era, Indian Lore, and more" ("*Wilderness Way* Advertisement"). In preparation for Y2K, one advertisement in a 1998 issue of *Free American* notes that the best way to stock up on protein is to purchase beef jerky just like "the men and women who settled this country came across in covered wagon or by horseback. They had no ice or freezers and had to cross miles of hostile desert with the food they could carry" ("To Stock Up on Protein for Y2K"). Another feature in *LFI Directions* promotes a new in-person class called "New Pioneer" that teaches women "how to do things the way they did before the modern convenience were around" that would also be good skills to have in a "disaster situation" when "most of the modern conveniences will not be available" (Armstrong "The Woman Survivalist"). Much like the editorial and historical features, these references to the pioneer past frame present day action and promote preparation for a coming future that is linked to the conspiracist tendencies of many Christian Identity groups. These advertisements also highlight a matrix of consumer consumption (magazine subscriptions, goods, and services) that cater towards a certain kind of reader that identifies with the pioneer ancestry and that would be swayed by conspiracist warnings of the impending apocalypse that frames rugged pioneer survivalist self-sufficiency as a far-right answer to the social and economic realities of the modern world.

As much as these publications invoke the past to discuss their identities, they do so to comment on their present. These present conversations invoke settler sovereignty in their discussions of contemporary economic, social, and political crises as the loss of white settler sovereignty and the need to reclaim their destined birthright. This framing of contemporary crisis is discussed especially in relation to the anxiety around white replacement, but is also about the loss of, and the need to return to, the land itself as the future of the white nation. As one author writes in a 1982 issue, “consider that we are now becoming a minority in a land which we tore from the vines and tangle of wilderness” (Fafnir “The Birth of a Nation”). Additionally, in an article titled “Understanding the Struggle or Why We Have to Kill the Bastards,” the author claims, “we must become cognizant of the fact that we no longer have a country. We live in an occupied TERRITORY that is controlled by the enemies of our race and culture. Our enemies run their territory as best suits their plans and interests. Since their objectives and goals are the converse of ours, it is only natural that we should come into conflict” (“Understanding the Struggle”). And this conflict, between those who perceive themselves to be the rightful inheritors of the land and those who are occupying it, reflects the conflicts of settler colonialism itself in which the rugged and intrepid (now indigenized) settlers must again wrest their sovereignty from those that do not belong. As Crystal writes in from Denver in the 1980 issue of *Calling our Nation,* sometimes it feels like “[we]…are just scouts working in the land of the heathen which is sometimes populated with savages” (“Letters from Readers”)[39] The loss of majority presence on the land itself, that was won through its settling, represents a loss of the white race-nation. Additionally, the connection made here between the dispossession of land as occupied territory works to further indigenize white settler presence as the perceived loss of settler dominance is framed as a grave and unnatural injustice that demands retribution (often in the form of violence as a repossession of what was lost).

The conclusions drawn about the land (as territory, as nation, as race), who belongs on this land, and who gets to decide, become the driving framework in these groups’ rhetoric and their inextricable nature is often the fundamental assumption made by publications as they cover other contemporary events, especially concerning land management and immigration in the Western US. As previously mentioned, the discourse around the environment, as exemplified in the Sagebrush Rebellion, Wise Use Movement and ranchers like the Bundys is a central aspect of far-right discourse. The materials analyzed here demonstrate how these conversations about the land and who knows best how to manage it is also bound up in the framing of settler sovereignty as an organizing principle for white supremacy across groups. Additionally, these elements appear across ranges of "extremism" from the explicitly white supremacist like National Alliance and Aryan Nations, but also the more "mainstream" libertarian newspapers published in the West. As Richard Lober writes in a 1982 issue of *Calling Our Nation:*

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[39] I don’t think it’s possible to verify printed letters from readers, and indeed, should probably move forward with the assumption that letters from readers are just as likely to be fabricated as they are real.

> our biggest and most important concern should be with environment. The systematic pollution of our country is, in reality, repugnant to any true Aryan. Always we have been awed by the wonders of nature, and throughout our heritage we have tried to live as one with our habitat, as well as control it. At no time should we condone destruction of that which was put forth by the Everliving. In particular, our waters and forest land should be protected wherever possible. Should we not also be on the record as supporting space exploration and actively support it? The greatest explorers of all time are in our heritage and in our destiny (Lober "Warriors on the Edge of Time").

Not only is there a perceived threat to settler sovereignty, but also to the health of the land itself, which would be the death of the settler nation, again cementing these two concepts together as intrinsically related and dependent upon each other for legitimacy. The conclusions drawn here have less to do with the environmentalism of the left in the twentieth century, especially in relation to organizations focused on conservation or sustainable development. Instead, these groups promote the idea that the majestic land is for white settlers to use, care for, and make productive unlike the federal government or the indigenous peoples who were just wasting it.

But what are these imminent threats to the land-nation as conceptualized by the far right as outlined by Lober? Two trends emerge in these materials at the forefront of these conversations: non-white immigration paired with urban overpopulation and federal overreach that seeks to limit and overregulate white settler presence. As Neal Pierce notes in the 1981 issue of *Calling Our Nation,* the debate over immigration is wrapped up in issues of environmentalism, the new settler colonial system is maintained through discerning who gets to be an intrepid pioneer and who is a “drain” on the land’s natural resources. Immigration is a “resource question,” writes Pierce, unlike the earlier periods of the West’s development, the US “no longer has open frontiers and unsettled areas crying for immigration. We face depleting oil and gas supplies, dwindling resources of other essential minerals, farmlands lost to sprawl, soil erosion, threatened timber supplies and imperiled ground water. Heavy immigration undercuts the effectiveness of conservation efforts and exacerbates each of these problems” (Pierce “Immigrants Strain US Resources”). These two passages highlight how the settler underpinnings of white supremacy interact with environmental discourse, especially as they imply who should benefit from the land as a natural inheritance and who strains these resources as a threat to that inheritance.

Additionally, the federal government plays a large role in how the far right shaped and discussed threats to white settler sovereignty, especially in relation to land and resource management. As discussed earlier, contentious political relationships with the federal government were already a fixture in the regional political landscape of the Western US, but these materials highlight how they are tied specifically to the rhetoric of white settler sovereignty. Magazines like *The Free American* ran features on the percentages of how much of each Western state was owned and controlled by the federal government in contrast to the

Eastern US (“All the Good Mines in the West and All the People Get is the Shaft”) Additionally, large scale federal projects in the 1980’s and 1990’s like the UN Biosphere and Wildlands projects are explicitly framed as threats to white sovereignty in magazines like *The Free American,* GCC’s *Common Sense,* and the Militia of Montana’s *Taking Aim.* As Grace Wilson writes, UN Biosphere project was part of a larger scheme to convert the Western US into “biodiversity preserves” that would unjustly push current residents off land that rightfully belonged to them by virtue of living on it and posed a distinct threat to “individual freedoms, private property rights, and national sovereignty” (Wilson “The Plan: UN Agenda 21 Dissolves United States Sovereignty”). These publications highlight already tense relationships between Western settler communities and the federal management under the National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management with reports like *Common Sense’s* 1994 coverage of new USFS regulations that would prohibit “hunting, trapping, fishing, catching or killing any kind of wild animal, bird, fish, shellfish or taking eggs of any bird or fish… discharging or possessing a firearm, air rifle, gas gun or other device capable of causing injury to persons of wildlife” (“New Regulations for the National Forest System Prohibit Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping!!”)

One of the clearer instances of the far-right response to these perceived threats to white settler sovereignty is the promotion of the Northwest Imperative, which sought to establish an all-white homeland by groups like the Aryan Nations.[40] A key element of the Idaho Aryan Nations coverage in *Calling Our Nation,* the white homeland was a place where “soft white men could transform themselves into hardened Aryan Warriors and their Aryan women could stay at home churning out future Aryans” (Schlatter 72). As David Lane notes in a 1989 issue of *Calling Our Nation,* white territorial sovereignty must be reestablished because the white race “cannot survive without areas, i.e., political states, in which we are the exclusive residents and governors. Nothing less than a political state, with inviolate borders, can secure our existence" (Lane "Migration"). The white homeland (proposed variously to include Washington, Oregon, Idaho, parts of Montana, the Dakotas) existed in the minds of the Aryan Nations group as an idyllic promised land that fuses the past heritage, present crisis, and future destiny together in the resettling of the West. As one editorial notes in the 1990 issue of Louis Beam's *Seditionist: Quarterly Journal of Seditious Thought,* the white supremacist far right must

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[40] Other groups proposed similar migrations including Harold Covington’s Northwest Front, but the Aryan Nations had a more sustained and successful campaign.

> become new Pilgrims [and] Coeur d'Alene will be our Plymouth Rock. New Pioneers, Idaho is the Last Frontier. Instead of cruel heathen Indians to fight, we will contend with unthinking liberals who occupy the area in small numbers. Other natives, more farsighted, will welcome us, other still, having themselves fled the American dream-turned-nightmare by YOUR government, will great us with knowing understanding. The modern-day land rush is on. Forget your guns and bring your babies.… Our Forefathers of the Constitution, Our Heritage of the Pioneers, Our Faith in the Sword of Christ, require us to step forward, to seize the initiative and act. Let only those who can turn their backs on these imperatives remain behind. Wherefore, since nothing but departure will do, let us for our children's sake as well as our own-depart. Form up the wagons! Let the great trek begin! Wagon's West! ("A Place Under the Sun")

As demonstrated here, the settler narrative of the intrepid pioneers taming the wilderness, fighting the savage heathens galvanizes readers to support the development of a white homeland in the West by calling upon the ancestry that is their birthright promoting the resettlement of the West as a repopulated settler race-nation protected from a corrupt government and liberal society that threatens settler sovereignty as the destined white future. Ultimately settler colonialism exists in these materials to naturalize white presence in the US and to justify violence when this presence is threatened. As one author notes in the 1982 issue of *Calling Our Nation*: "we have territory. It exists within your home. It lives wherever you and others of our Folk gather.

Wherever the banners rise in the skies, wherever the Lighted Cross shatters darkness, there the Racial Nation holds territory" (Fafnir "The Birth of a Nation"). Throughout these materials, settler colonial discourse exists as a way to sustain (and naturalize) white possessive logics through a multifaceted rhetorical subsuming*,* in which "being" becomes a form of "possessing," and possessing, a form of being: the land, which has waited for its destined occupant, the white settler, becomes the race-nation as the settler transforms the land through productive toil. The nation then becomes, and lives on, in the settlers' descendants which justifies the taking back of the land (through violent means) when it is threatened (by those who don't belong i.e. non-productive non-whites), These violent and extreme positions exist because the land is the people, who are the settlers, who made (and will remake) the nation on behalf of their race because their presence on the land is their sacred destiny.

Race: The White Western Heroic Ideal

It is difficult to separate the settler colonial ideologies in these materials from racial discourse because of how they work to reinforce each other's legitimacy. However, race is a vitally important topic under discussion here that perhaps deserves more specific attention and not just with the organizations that identified as explicitly white supremacist.[41] As discussed previously, discussions of race are inseparable from nation in these contexts, as many of these groups operated from a white nationalist position that "your Race is your Nation" ("Editorial-Hoist the Standard").[42] But, as with some of the settler colonial rhetoric, the western mythological constructs become part of this race/nation discourse, especially as modern groups saw themselves as direct descendants of the first white people to settle the West on behalf of the white race. In the historical feature of the Alamo in National Vanguard's *Attack,* the author constructs the white race-nation in relation to the West. At the end of the narrative, the author describes the final sacrifice of the men of the Alamo:

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[41] Many of these groups did, but not all and not all in the same way. See the discussion of white supremacist and nationalist militia overlap in the first section of this chapter.

[42] This is also a key paleoconservative idea.

> And so the great funeral pyre was enveloped in flames, and the fire consumed the men of the Alamo—just as countless times a thousand years before, it had consumed the fallen heroes of whom their ancestors had sung in the longhouse and the great halls of northern Europe. Like all the champions of their race, the Texans treasured honor and courage above life itself. The echoes of their heroism reverberated at San Jacinto six years later, when Sam Houston's men avenged them on Santa Anna, and for a century afterward their memory gave Americans the strength to face hopeless odds resolutely…it is time to renew the pact between the living and the dead: that they shall live on in the memory of their race, and that we, remembering, shall have their example always before us, exhorting us to carry out unflinchingly whatever the future of our race requires ("Men of the Alamo/White Heroes Put Duty to Race Before Self")

What is fascinating is how they tell this famous western narrative in relation to white supremacy. The men of the Alamo are not just heroes on the western frontier but the next in a long line of heroes for the white race specifically that stretches back to the Viking warriors of old. And, like the framing of the rugged pioneer ancestors, the courageous and honorable men of the Alamo exist as a moment in time that stretches from the ancient past to the nineteenth century present and the future (the reader's present) and the reader's future. The author calls to the reader to remember their example as warriors for their race as asks them to do the same, "whatever the future of our race requires" ("Men of the Alamo/White Heroes Put Duty to Race Before Self")

Groups also articulate representations of whiteness alongside their own constructions of racial identity, especially in writing where they react to the popular culture of a US society that they deem immoral and corrupt. One example highlights the connections between the mass market paperback industry in the early twentieth century and the development of white in-group identities. A 1977 issue of *Attack!* includes a book review on the fiction author Robert E. Howard, and in particular, Howard's character Conan, the Barbarian as an ideal Aryan representation ("Book Reviews: The Importance of Conan"). According to the National Alliance author, the Conan stories are a good example of how popular, mass-produced culture can help develop a reader's loyalty to the white race. Howard's books "carry a positive, encouraging message to any White with 'race' within him, and they instill in receptive minds the vital, forward-leaning assaulting temperament which empowers us to realize our inherent might and to seize the offensive in the coming world conflict between man and subhuman" ("Book Reviews: The Importance of Conan"). This type of cultural production, writes the author, is vitally important especially now when most culture is poisoning the youth with "racially incompatible ideas" ("Book Reviews: The Importance of Conan"). Like the western writers analyzed in the first chapter, Howard wrote across genre, including cowboys, detectives, explorers, and adventurers, although, the author in *Attack!* claims that Howard's biggest "effect on the Aryan soul comes mainly through his lone-adventurer heroes" ("Book Reviews: The Importance of Conan"). Conan appeals to the healthy instincts that should be nurtured in young, white readers as he "strides across a wide and hostile world-continent, scattering enemies with mighty sword strokes and winning treasures and women as he moves ever onward…what quickens the long-slumbering and suppressed Aryan race-soul in the Conan adventures is their pounding action and hammering violence" ("Book Reviews: The Importance of Conan"). Another review that appears in the August 1996 issue of White Aryan Resistance's magazine, *WAR,* goes through a similar process of highlighting how whiteness is represented in film. The article analyzes the film *Twister* starring Bill Paxton and Helen Hunt which follows storm chasers across the Oklahoma landscape and opens with surprise that a film with such a positive "Aryan message" slipped through the “claws of the Hollywood Jew community” (“Twister Movie Review”). According to the author, the film has plenty of redeeming qualities that help bolster ideal of Aryan supremacy: “an Aryan father sacrificing his life to save White women and children… The Aryan hero is so in touch with Nature, he clearly has a spiritual relationship to it (no Amer-Indians need to apply!). The Aryans are right at home in the countryside, while the city Jewess is quite dysfunctional without her cell phone…After a disaster, Whites rush to help one another, even at the risk of their own lives” (“Twister Movie Review”). This review is especially interesting because it links the imagery of rural Western lifestyles, including an indigenized settler relationship to the land, with whiteness itself, and with the social cohesion of white supremacist in-group dynamics (the focus on family and community led by a strong male patriarch). While some scholars think about the cultural texts that extremists either produce themselves or respond to, including canonical literary authors like Jack London, most dismiss popular culture in this period as having any resonance, mostly because of the previously mentioned regard for contemporary society. And those elements certainly exist in other film and book reviews throughout the materials, but these suggest that far-right groups also engaged with popular culture through a lens that assessed “mainstream” representations of whiteness and viewed these types of cultural texts as functioning to develop racial loyalty amongst readers and viewers.

But, in a similar way to the settler colonial discourse, the precarity of this racial identity is at the forefront of the more political editorials especially in the anxieties around white replacement and the focus on the relationship between racial superiority and nation-building producerism. In the editorial for the 1984 edition of *CON,* the author cites a statistic in *Nation’s Business Magazine* that white men are now the minority in the work force and laments the “passing of the great driving white power that tamed the savage, cleared the wilderness, built the world's greatest cities, the world's finest farms, the great mills and factories, medical miracles, furnished electric lights to the world" ("1984 Editorial"). In a similar way to the death of the white worker as producer, there is also anxiety around the death of the white family through lower birth rates in relation to invading non-whites, especially immigrants crossing over the Southern border. In a reprinted report from the Euro-American Alliance's *Talon* in *CON,* the editor cites the birth rates of white, Black, and Hispanic families while claiming with alarm that the "White family is an increasingly endangered species. And these statistics do not consider the great influx each year of illegal…aliens" ("1982 Editorial"). The influx of non-white immigrants and the threat they pose to the white race is especially relevant for discussions of western ideological discourse as it offers a contemporary framework for readers to revisit narratives like the Alamo as a way to explore what is to be done about the reality of white replacement. Building on the settler narratives of the destined expansion into the West, this focus on non-white migration highlights how the far right naturalizes white presence in the West but also racializes these mythological narratives of expansion. As one author notes in the 1979 issue of *Attack:* "the American dream of prosperity and freedom is the product and legacy of the white race alone" ("Illegal Aliens: Worst Threat to America"). These perceived threats to the white race also appear the far right's coverage of violence that peppers the last twenty years of the twentieth century, often justifying violence in defense of the white race-nation. In the National Alliance's coverage of the death of Robert Matthews in 1984,[43] they note Matthew's anxieties around white replacement in relation to community/family, non-white immigration, and the white western hero that make up Matthew's racial identity. According to *National Vanguard,*

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[43] Robert Matthews and his group, the Order, are most famously known for their string of robberies in the early 1980's and the 1984 assassination of Jewish talk-radio host Alan Berg in Denver after which Matthews would die in a standoff with the FBI at his house in Washington state (Schlatter 74-80).

Matthews had recognized that the country was rapidly being populated by “Mexicans, mulattoes, Blacks, and Asians” and “realized that White America indeed, [his] entire race was headed for oblivion, unless White men rose and turned the tide” (“Editorial- What Will It Take”). These elements highlight how, from within the far right’s inner communicative circles, these grievances were explicitly framed as a loss of white identity and a loss of the western heroic ideal as representative of this white identity. According to the *NV* coverage, Matthews had justified his actions by contrasting the “selfish and cowardly behavior of most White Americans today with their heroism in an earlier era, and with the heroism of their European forebears. *“Were the men of the Alamo only a myth?”* he asked” [emphasis added] (“Editorial- What Will It Take”). The white race, as conceptualized by these groups, is at once great in its ancestry and brought low by its contemporary precarity. Western mythological discourse like allusions to the Alamo plays an important role in this balance between power and precarity; it provides a historical foundation upon which the far right can measure their racial superiority and legitimize the regional political dynamics in the West in which these traditions are already salient, allowing for the anxieties around white precarity to develop and gain legitimacy. And, in a similar way to the settler colonial discourse, the perceived threats to the race-nation acts to leverage these in-group identifications into out-group hate and violence.

*Gender: The Frontiersman, the Farmer, and the Aryan Mother**:***

What perhaps is clear from these discussions is that these elements work together towards a type of unified discourse that defines (in part) the far right during this period in relation to western mythos. And just as the use of settler discourse is hard to extricate from racial discourse, so too is it difficult to separate any of these from discussions of gender, and in particular their constructions of both masculinity and femininity. In the same coverage of Robert Matthews' death as explored above in relation to race, Matthews is also defined by his identification as a white man and a certain kind of man: self-sufficient and independent, morally righteous, courageous, heroic, etc. The same type of man that also defined the "men of the Alamo." According to the *NV* author, Matthews did not fit the stereotyped image of an "extremist:" instead he was:

> An intensely earnest man, a passionate man, with strong convictions about what was right and what was wrong, but he also was a very private man, who believed in leaving others alone as long as they left him alone…he spent the last decade [of his life] building a small farm on land he cleared from the forest and providing for his wife and son, he was known as a 'straight arrow': always friendly and helpful, but never nosy: a hard steady worker ("Editorial-What It Will Take")

This initial imagery helps showcase how the far right valorized constructions of masculinity in relation to the "Western hero." The ideal man is held in tension between the past and the present, as well as between the solitude of his independence and the commitment towards community. Scholars have previously identified these patterns in extremist discourse. Ev Schlatter argues that Matthews himself utilized the rhetoric of the mythic "frontiersman" to bolster and define an ideal Aryan manhood. These constructions of masculinity and especially their use of frontier imagery, taps into a wider tradition that ties the West as a space in which white men can make an ideal life for themselves and their families with the 'treasure' of freedom from regulation to the development of a national American character (Schlatter 83). In this vision, the white man pushes "ever westward, seeking new homelands and new beginnings" which is exactly what a lot of these groups sought for themselves (83).

The materials in this analysis help cement these arguments but also build on them. The Matthews editorial constructs a masculinity in relation to the modern world and highlights, again, how the far right viewed modern society through the western mythic ideal. This comparison is often gendered, with the settler world of the past is the environment in which men were allowed to be men and the current society just could not understand. As the editorial asks, can "America's soft, feminized, materialistic masses have any idea of the thinking of a man who made a deliberate choice to die, when he might have lived—to die fearlessly and defiantly—solely so that his death could set an example for other fearless and defiant fighters who would follow him in the years and decades to come?" ("Editorial- What It Will Take"). In a similar way to both the constructions of settler colonial and white supremacist discourse, the answer to these social problems lies in the violent actions of these men out of time, like Matthews. Only when men wake up and decide to emulate the heroic men of the settler past can the world be set right again; when men "say to themselves, as [Matthews] did: 'I have no choice. I must stand up like a White man and do battle" ("Editorial- What It Will Take"). These gendered discussions of time, in which the ideal western hero plays a starring role that links past to present, and narrativizes violence as a productive force that justifies itself.

As Schlatter notes, the rugged frontiersman looms large in the minds of these groups as a masculine ideal with violent productive power and their constant referencing to frontier history showcases this preoccupation. In the National Alliance's Alamo feature, the American frontiersman is described as the most effective fighter in the world, but especially so against their non-white enemies: "they fired their long Kentucky rifles with deadly accuracy at ranges up to 200 yards. At close quarters they were devastating with knife and tomahawk. A tendency toward indiscipline was counterbalanced by a self-reliance and a self-sufficiency not to be found among the Mexicans" ("The Men of the Alamo/White Heroes Put Duty to Race Before Self"). Additionally, Jan Keown's feature on the Creek War in *National Vanguard* evinces similar characterizations, describing the hero Sam Dale as a "man cut from the same cloth as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett" who led a band of scouts against the Creeks in a "rendezvous with immortality… in the best tradition of the Homeric epics and the Viking sagas" (Keown "The Creek War: Racial Collision on the Southern Frontier"). In these examples, the frontiersman exists as a deliverer of violence on behalf of white settler presence, and it is this violence that both defines him as a man and connects him to the larger traditions of Aryan masculinity. But this masculine violence is also immortalized; it is how the "land was won by White men for future generations of their sons and daughters," and how it connects to the present day: "we are going to have to fight for the land again. As members of a race which has always loved to fight, we should welcome the opportunity" (Keown "The Creek War: Racial Collision on the Southern Frontier"). In these ways, the frontiersman character allows for the narrativization of violence on the far right as a productive force, it destroys in the present to build toward the future.

If the frontiersman exists as a violent producer that destroys to make room for the race-nation, the other western mythic character in the mind of the far right, the agrarian farmer, exists as the social or generative producer that sustains the race-nation. As other critics have noted, the agrarian farmer exists in the imaginations of the far right as a white moral vigilante "ensuring the safety of his home, family, and land" (Schlatter 125). In the 1970's and 1980's, these tenets laid out in the imagery of the agrarian farmer intersected specifically with Patriot Christian Identity ideologies. One of the groups that bridges these beliefs (Christian Identity, patriot militia, white supremacist, etc.) via the agrarian farmer was the Posse Comitatus,[44] a sovereign citizens group[45] that leaned heavily on the fears and hardships of modern farmers. Posse adherents like Gordon Kahl made national news at the time but also existed as martyrs for the far right through the late 1990's. In a poem titled "Farmer Kahl, Patriot" that appears in an issue of *Calling Our Nation,* Kahl's story is framed as the "farmer's hour of glory;/Nay not only just a farmer, but a Christian Patriot Prince/He so loved the Land and soil, despite all the endless toil,/That he took up arms to save it" (Franklin "Farmer Kahl, Patriot"). And other farmers were swayed by these arguments, like Arthur Kirk, a farmer from Nebraska who died in standoff with a SWAT team after the country sheriff came to collect his remaining cattle to cover the debts he owed on his family farm (Schlatter 118). In the aftermath of Kirk's death, authorities recovered Posse Comitatus brochures and other outreach materials from far-right groups that make explicit connections between the agricultural crises and extremist beliefs as a solution to these problems (118). In these instances, the ideological and narrative trappings of what it means to be an American farmer in the West, as well as what lengths one would go to protect this identity, was leveraged into extremist anti-Semitic and anti-government viewpoints with violent ends.

There are several examples of this extremist discourse that showcase how fusing romantic ideals of the farmer as the social-generative producer of the race-nation with the economic realities faced by these farmers in the contemporary period were able to radicalize people like Kirk. The framing of violent solutions to economic crises that the reader would be at least familiar with, if not directly experiencing, through the most idealized idyllic version of their reader own's imagined identity, which is under threat because of this crisis, provides a piercingly effective way to push readers with more "mainstream" politics towards extremism. The use of the agrarian farmer iconography also offers a vehicle through which these groups can present a scapegoat-parasite that is to blame for both the crisis and the loss of the (white) agrarian producer as the ideal way of life.[46] One *National Vanguard* piece tells the story (reprinted from a *Chicago Tribune* article) of "Gary Main, a burly, redheaded farmer in overalls and heavy work boots who, with his wife and three children, grows corn and raises hogs and cattle on 620 acres near Altona, in west-central Illinois" ("Parasites vs. Producers"). As the article notes, because of drought-affected corn and feed prices, "the Mains don't think they will be able to borrow enough money to buy the amount of feed they will need to get through the winter and Gary…doesn't know what he can do to save his farm ("Parasites vs. Producers"). The article then goes on to describe the "commodities speculator" who benefits from Gary Main's crisis: "a wiry little Jew described as 'looking casual in a black trading jacket, bright green golf slacks, a yellow knit shirt, yellow socks, and an assortment of heavy gold jewelry" and who spends half his time benefiting from the changing farm prices and the other half vacationing in Florida ("Parasites vs. Producers").

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[44] The Posse Comitatus was founded in 1971 by William Potter Gale and emerged in the national spotlight with the death of Gordan Kahl (the founder of the Texas chapter) in 1983 in a standoff with local law enforcement and the US Marshals (Schlatter 105). One of the core beliefs of the Posse was its conspiratorial views on the federal government as an illegitimate state oppressing the natural rights of individuals and that "the true form of government was a near anarchic, highly localized form of government centered on the county sheriff" (Pitcavage 959).

[45] The sovereign citizens movement refers to a strategy of protest that reject the authority of the federal government and uses tactics like false lawsuits and liens to resist what they see as a false authority seeking to regulate them.

A similar narrative is told in an earlier issue of *National Vanguard,* in which this same dynamic (the agrarian farmer under threat from the parasitic Jew) is presented to be the death of the race-nation itself ("Farmers Fighting to Survive: A Way of Life is Threatened"). Like the rugged frontiersman, the American farmer personifies the "the virtues of self-reliance, independence, and pride in nation and race" and is man out of time, under threat of extinction in the modern world ("Farmers Fighting to Survive: A Way of Life is Threatened"). The loss of these men would be even more egregious because they belong to a greater tradition of "pioneer farmers" who "gave their blood in countless battles against the Indians, as part of the great conquest of the continent for our nation and race" ("Farmers Fighting to Survive: A Way of Life is Threatened"). The article goes on to claim that the farmer is not just another businessman (like the Jewish-American owner of Continental Grain, Michel Frebourg), but an intrinsic aspect of the white race, he is "an essential and honored part of a harmonious and organically organized social order…a healthy and vigorous landfolk ensures the unbroken vitality of our White kind" ("Farmers Fighting to Survive: A Way of Life is Threatened"). If the frontiersman is the violent producer that makes space for the race-nation, the farmer is the heart of this race-nation whose labor does not simply produce economic profit but generates the social health of society itself. To threaten this man is to threaten the future of the white race. The shock of this reality, argues James Wickstrom in *Calling Our Nation*, another prominent Posse Member, is what has caused the American Farmer to "finally…awaken from his sleep" and "prepare to defend their families and their land with their lives or surrender it all" ("The American Farmer 20th Century Slave"). Printed the year of Kahl's death, Wickstrom's call to action, in defense of the farmer as a masculine ideal, and his insistence that the farmer's future can be protected by the farmer himself in fulfillment of this ideal provides an interesting rationale for joining the already active and resisting organizations like the Posse.

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[46] Perhaps unsurprisingly, non-white immigrant agricultural workers are *not* portrayed as economic producers but instead parasites crossing the border to steal prosperity from the white agrarian farmer.

Additionally, one of the more interesting constructions of femininity in these materials exists in relation to the agrarian farmer and the devastation that his absence will cause if action is not taken. Throughout these materials, white women are characterized by their reproductive power and their centrality in the family unit and "the single greatest treasure of the White Race ("The Aryan Women in Perspective"). But in the context of the agrarian farmer, the white woman also represents the loss of this future. In a “Letter to the Editor” in the 1983 issue of *Calling Our Nation,* Gordon Kahl’s wife, Joan offers a bleak image of what life is like without the agrarian famer: “they totaled out my home and…killed my husband. They put a lien on our property; so all in all they left me nothing on this earth—my husband, my son, my home, and left me penniless; but I must go on” (“Letters to the Editor”). These elements (past, present and future, masculine and feminine, economic, political and social) converge to reinforce the gender standards of the white settler nation, from the past to the present and into the future. The frontiersman exists as the violent producer carving out space for the race-nation and the agrarian-farmer is the regenerative producer who sustains the race-nation and its future, in whose absence white women, and by extension the other vital regenerative function of the race-nation, will be left alone and vulnerable. Perhaps more importantly though, these materials do not just characterize leaders like Kahl and Matthews but prompt the reader (perhaps someone like Charlie Kirk) to not only see themselves in this light, resonating with pre-existing self-conceptions, but to also come to the same conclusions about what must be done to protect these identities.

Individual and Community: The Sheriff and the Outlaw

And finally, in addition to the interconnected discourses of race, gender and settler colonialism, these materials highlight how the relationship between individual and community is used by the far right and is rooted in western mythological conceptions of individualism. A good entry point into these discussions is Louis Beam’s 1992 “Leaderless Resistance,” a famous essay that circulated in far-right circles and which was one of the founding documents of militia organization throughout the 1990s. In a version appearing in the *Free American,* itself reprinted from *Modern Militiaman,* itself reprinted from its original in *The Seditionist,* Beam discusses how the banding together in organized political groups often draws unwanted attention (from the corrupt federal government) that then interferes with a movement's ability to further their political goals (Beam "Leaderless Resistance"). Beam calls for strategies oriented towards "non-organization," in which the future of the resistance to state tyranny is "filled with a thousand points of resistance" (Beam "Leaderless Resistance"). While most scholars focus on the impact of this essay in a strategic sense, the organizing principles that allow Beam to make these strategic suggestions are rooted in the western mythos. As Beam notes in his essay, the struggle itself is "becoming a matter of individual action, each of its participants making a private decision in the quietness of his heart to resist: to resist by any means necessary. It is hard to know what others will do, for no man truly knows another man's heart. It is enough to know what one himself will do" (Beam "Leaderless Resistance"). The essay does not make references to the pioneer heritage or settler expansion, but in the context of the far right's print culture, with their numerous historical features and editorials, and the scope of its reprinted reach, it's hard not to imagine readers seeing it in these terms. It's also important to note that Beam isn't necessarily advocating for the abandonment of community in favor of individual isolation, but instead suggesting that to achieve the victories that will allow for the natural and bountiful growth of the Aryan community (the race-nation), the heart of the movement's actions must reside in the individual.

This relationship between individual and community character by action is also articulated through discourses on law and lawlessness that come to life in the narratives of the sheriff and outlaw figures, both historical and contemporary. These elements, while prominent in the western genre, are also utilized by the far right in a variety of ways. Not only does the sheriff play a large role in the ideological foundations of some groups like the Posse Comitatus, who believed the County Sheriff to be highest legitimate legal authority in the nation, but both the sheriff and outlaw, like the frontiersman and farmer, help narrativize the conflicts and histories of the West and tie them explicitly to far-right politics. Publications like *The Free American* have "Law Enforcement Man of the Month" features that highlighted the actions of contemporary sheriffs like the in the case of Dave Mattis of Bighorn County, Wyoming who forbid "federal officials from entering his county and exercising authority over county residents unless he is notified first of their intentions" making sure "private citizens and government officials alike act within the law and their designated powers" ("Law Enforcement's Man of the Month: Sheriff Boots Feds from His Country"). Additionally, the history of this individualist maverick enforcer figure was of interest to these groups and especially his long history in the West as a mediating force between order and chaos in the settler colonial process; in these ways, the sheriff exists not as a representative of a government but simply as an individual making moral decisions on behalf of the community. One feature in the 1996 issue of *Preparedness Journal* titled "Law Without a Badge: The Historical Predicate for Citizen Self-Help", tells the story of these individuals in relation to the settler colonial process: "as civilization trudged across the mountains, rivers, and vast prairies of the American continent, wild animals, severe weather and Native Americans were only a few threats that faced the westward moving pioneers …the thief, the gunman, and the murderer" (Crane "Law Without a Badge"). According to Crane, these threats prompted the need for an individual upholding order in the absence of law, what he calls "self-help vigilantism." Referencing iconic cultural western figures like Shane, Josey Wales, Clay Blaisdell, and the fictional depictions of William Hickock, Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday, Crane narrates the "turbulent years on the American frontier between conditions of outright lawlessness and the establishment of adequate law enforcement" and how, through individual action order was both achieved and maintained to the benefit of the community as a whole (Crane "Law Without a Badge")

The outlaw character is utilized in a similar way to the sheriff, as a contemporary and historical individual moral force moving through spheres of law, justice, order, and chaos and always in relation with community, both actual and abstracted. In one historical feature that spanned several issues of the *WAR,* John Jewell traced the history of Jesse James from his exploits fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War and as a bank-robbing outlaw in the West in what he called the "Missouri Guerilla War." The James feature is another moment where race, gender, settler colonial structures coalesce in a far-right fascination with the western mythos, and in this case the outlaw. Like the frontiersman and the sheriff, the outlaw is an individual driven by violent, moral action. The feature narrates James' formation of the outlaw band in the 1866 and their subsequent raids on banks, stagecoaches, and trains. James, as outlaw, is afforded an intense interiority as Jewell narrates his rationale for both lawlessness and violence, and the effects of this individual acting in the name of morality and community. The outlaws were revered and compared in publications "to such heroic figures as Spartacus and the gladiator slaves who rose against the tyranny of ancient Rome and to Arthur and his chivalrous Knights of the round table. They were…brilliant, bold and indefatigable roughriders (Jewell "Rob the Banks! The Missouri Guerilla War 1860-1882"). Additionally, James is characterized as a man outside of the law but for the people, and especially the "local hard pressed farmers" and "calloused workingmen" with whom he felt kinship (Jewell "Rob the Banks! The Missouri Guerilla War 1860-1882"). His lawlessness is treated with almost a sacred reverence as Jewell notes that James, having lived in the saddle and been hunted for twenty-one years, never knew "a day of perfect peace. It was one long, anxious, inexorable, internal vigil" (Jewell "Rob the Banks! The Missouri Guerilla War 1860-1882"). As with many of the other historical narratives, Jewell then drags James' narrative and the reader in through history to the present, first noting the famed outlaw "Pretty Boy" Floyd, who, "in the same period of the Great Depression, with massive evictions of Oklahoma farmers by the corporate banks…[and] distributed money to hard pressed local farmers" before being "killed in an FBI manhunt after linking with the John Dillinger gang in the Midwest" before finally "bring[ing] us to the present era" (Jewell "Rob the Banks! The Missouri Guerilla War 1860-1882"). Like in other historical features, Western history is specifically called on to clarify present political conflicts. Western discourse is like a map that helps the far right impart upon their readers that the current events they are witnessing that may seem extreme, are in fact part of a larger historical narrative of righteous individuals fighting against tyranny. The outlaw figure helps to highlight these narratives. Much in the same way that Beam called for "un-organized" resistance born first in the hearts of individuals, James is presented as a moral individual acting on his own volition outside of the law but on behalf of the community, as seen in his relationships with local suffering farmers and his longstanding loyalty to the Confederate cause. The western outlaw figure exists as a formula for far-right extremist groups trying to make their extremism make sense, especially to a readership who would already be familiar with Jesse James' narrative, and perhaps more inclined to see the connections between the "characters" they love and the politics around them.

A man who becomes an outlaw only because he is forced to act outside of the law to protect his family and community in the face of tyranny is exactly how the Ruby Ridge standoff between federal government and the Weaver family was covered and framed by far-right publications. As many scholars note, Weaver's death provided a clear rallying point among these groups which allowed for compounded grievances and historical animosity between rural communities and the federal government led to more violent confrontations.[47] In Beam's *Seditionist: A Quarterly Journal of Seditious Thought,* Weaver is framed as an individual resisting tyranny as he "vowed not to surrender to the federals on the phony charges" ("1/4 Inch: The Randy Weaver Story"). But what is also interesting is that Weaver's actions are framed as lawless but done on behalf of his community (in this case his wife Vicki and children, two of which were also killed by federal snipers). Weaver's status as an outlaw thus exposes the law itself, and the state that upholds it, as unjust and further justifies his unlawful actions as morally righteous. As the author notes in the *Seditionist* coverage, "it is true that Vicki and Samuel Weaver's blood now stains the ground around their small cabin on a remote mountain top, but it is also clear that their blood stains the flag of the federal government and every single person who serves that government" ("1/4 Inch: The Randy Weaver Story"). The tensions here between individualism and community, between law and lawlessness act together as a cohesive discourse that frames current political events not as a failure of community, but as the failure of modern society and the state governs it. Using this framework, far-right groups seek to mobilize individual action on behalf of future communities rooted in the shared traditions of race, nation, and narrative.

Conclusion

As these materials suggest, far-right movements used similar elements of the western mythos as "mainstream" politicians like Reagan and Goldwater and political movements like the John Birch Society and the paleoconservatives but were deeply invested in western narratives to help explain their perceived crises and the proposed extreme solutions to both existing members and new audiences. The constructions of settler colonial sovereignty connect the settling of the land to the white race nation which is then connected to the various gendered characters (the pioneer, frontiersman, farmer, outlaw, etc.) that create and sustain the race-nation in a balance between individual action and community survival. These interconnected elements narrativize extremism for readers that are 1) familiar with these narratives as they already shape Western regional identity, 2) experiencing various perceived social and economic precarities and 3) feel their identities, which are themselves are tied up in the narratives of the historical western mythos, are under threat. It seems as if a key strategy by the far right was to use narrative and storytelling to help to make extremism make sense with the hope that violence becomes not only an option to bring about social or political change in the minds of their readers, but the only option, communicating that to do otherwise would be to sacrifice what makes them who they are and to lose that would mean to lose everything.

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[47] Ruby Ridge is one of the directly traceable motives for the OKC bombing.

The 1992 Estes Park rendezvous marked an important coalescence of this phenomenon and how it seemed to work as a unifying strategy, but it certainly was not all encompassing. As the twentieth century ended, a different pattern emerged in these materials in reaction to the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. In their coverage of the bombing, the editors of *Preparedness Journal,* one of the more "mainstream" survivalist publications made their thoughts known about this event and the people responsible: "the men who blew up the Federal building in OKC may have seen themselves as valiant freedom fighters. I do not…the hole they ripped in the fabric of our society will have long lasting effects. It may have started a cycle that will escalate into an unstable future for all children ("Editorial"). As seen in this reaction, the split a previously unified discourse between the organized white supremacist, Patriot, Christian Identity and militia groups who celebrated the act as a justified resistance to tyranny (like Aryan Nations, MOM, Michigan Militia, White Aryan Resistance, and National Alliance) and those that perhaps agreed with the broader narratives of white marginalization, federal oppression, and Western identity politics but refused to see violence as an answer, and indeed saw it as anathema to a better future. As the author wrote, “an oppressive government is like a fool holding a lid on a boiling pot. The harder the oppressor attempts to hold down the lid the higher the pressure builds. Soon the lid is blown off and everyone suffers…the pot is boiling” (“Editorial”). What is crucial to point out here is that even though the author condemns the violence that he sees as going “too far,” the grievances that led to this violence are not contested, and indeed, are deemed very real.

For the purposes of this analysis, the boiling pot is also an apt metaphor that represents both the rise of the far right at the end of the twentieth century and its decline. There is a slow simmer through the 1970’s which builds a fierce momentum that boils over in the 1990’s only to have the heat turned off by a combination of split reactions and intense focus from the federal authorities. By 1996, the SPLC estimated around 441-armed militia groups in all fifty states and 858 “Patriot” groups; additionally, the Aryan Nations saw an increase from three to twenty chapters in a single year in the early 1990s and a wider adherence to “Christian Identity” ideologies were estimated at 50,000 people (*False Patriots* 5; *Intelligence Report*). As Kathleen Belew notes in her analysis on broader white power movements in the US, the militia movement reached its peak in the mid-1990’s counting “some five million members and sympathizers, according to one watchdog analysis…plac[ing] the militia movement in line with the largest surge of the Ku Klux Klan, whose membership peaked in 1924 at four million” (Belew 5).

Moving forward, I hope it is at least initially clear that these groups did have a rigorous engagement with the West as both a region with specific politics and as a socio-cultural mythos that lives within the minds of those who saw themselves tied to the "frontier" tradition. Additionally, the historical foundations of this settler conquest allowed for the far right to narrativize their white supremacist ideologies using the mythological figures that adorn the Western cultural landscape: the frontiersman, the agrarian farmer, the Aryan mother, the Sheriff, the outlaw, and more. As Carl Franklin, Jr wrote in his poem praising Gordon Kahl as an Aryan martyr, "overshadowing each battle" for the nation is "that lone Whiteman looming tall" ("Farmer Kahl, Patriot). The connections made between land, race, nation, history, people, and narrative by the far right to further their political goals are effective because they share deep ideological roots with Western mythological discourse, so that the lone whiteman looms even taller across the West. What this use of rhetoric also suggests is that the trail of discursive evidence that charts the use of Western imagery and rhetoric within the print culture of the far right points to a specific readership, in whose imagination, the lone whiteman looms even taller and perhaps is someone they recognize from novels like *Lure of the Wild*. By analyzing this discourse, we see how these groups sought to reach a certain type of reader and in the next chapter, I will trace the reception of the western genre during this same period to trace the potential overlap.

Chapter 3 ‘They may be driving a truck, but in their hearts they’re out on a horse:’ Reading Westerns Through Identity, Ancestry, and Lifestyle as “Dominant” Decoding

Part 1: Reconstructing the Western Reader

As discussed in the first chapter, mass-produced western genre fiction from the 1970’s through the 1990’s oriented conventions of plot, setting, and character ideologically in relation to the wider political contexts in the US and in the West as a region (both contemporary and historical, real, and imagined). These patterns aren’t always the result of a single author or text but instead reflect how the western genre is defined by what the publishing industry perceives to be the texts most likely to be purchased and enjoyed by readers. Readers had expectations about what the genre is and what it should do, including preferences for certain kinds of stories and thematic content. These preferences influence which novels readers decided to purchase and which ones they enjoyed, creating a feedback loop that then influenced publishers to produce works that satisfied those desires. And, like readers of other popular genres, the western reader employed a unique set of reading practices specific to the genre that evolved and changed as they did.

Take, for instance, two recent *Goodreads* reviews[48] of David Thompson’s *Lure of the Wild,* the 1990 novel that fictionalizes the early fur trading and mountain man experiences in the West and that I’ve already suggested encodes political discourse of individual freedom within its narrative. One reviewer-reader wrote that *Lure of the Wild* is a “great action novel, and the battle scenes are sufficiently violent and bloody to keep the reader hooked” (“*Lure of the Wild-*

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[48] *Goodreads* is a social networking site that allows members to track and review books that they’ve read as well as interact with other readers who have similar reading preferences. Both Mike Thewall and Beth Driscoll (among others) write extensively about, and use data from, Goodreads and discuss its potential within the realm of reception studies.

Goodreads Review December 11th, 2017"). In this review the reader navigates the western genre in a specific way. The reader takes an evaluative approach to the text where the novel's commitment to "action" is linked to the process of "hooking the reader" and the ultimate metric of the book's success or failure as a western is whether there were sufficient battles, blood, and violence. This is consistent with the western's evolution especially its turn towards the action-adventure "adult western" in the later decades of the twentieth century. For this reader, the western is an action novel, and this means it should do very specific things to be considered a good western novel. Another reader's review articulates similar criteria of entertainment and action but with more detailed reflection on their reading practices. They write:

> Despite experiencing some underlying guilt about how we continue to romanticize the colonization of the West and ignoring what that meant for its original inhabitants, as well as the pseudo-masculine glee surrounding endless battles with and between the Shoshone and Blackfoot tribes, I still got caught up in the story and with the memories it stirred of watching westerns with my (now deceased) dad… I know there shouldn't be any real delight in celebrating Manifest Destiny and all its resulting carnage, but these stories are still fun to read when you experience them as they were meant—simply as adventure stories. This is entertaining western fiction. ("*Lure of the Wild*-Goodreads Review July 1st 2021")

The reader documents an awareness of the violence of representation that occurs within the genre's patterns of action and knows the emotional responses they are supposed to have from reading stories of settler colonial dispossession: guilt. But the reader decouples the process of settler violence from the "adventure" elements of the novel so that the experience of reading is still fun. This, according to the reader, is how western novels are supposed to be read ("as they were meant") and so there is an expectation that, even while readers identify the ideological components of the genre, they can (and should) ignore them to enjoy the story. Additionally, the reader connects the affective process of getting "caught up in the story" with the nostalgic reminder of time spent with their father and perhaps these memories and positive experiences changed the reader's engagement with the novel's settler colonial premise, even while the reader understands that it is problematic. This brief contemporary self-reporting of the reader's experience raises fascinating questions about who the western reader is and what they get out of reading these novels that I hope this chapter answers.

While the previous chapters focused on western texts and their place within a larger matrix of ideological discourse, this chapter focuses on the reception of these texts by trying to understand the average western reader at the end of the twentieth century—who they were, what their reading practices were like, what they wanted out of the novels they read and how they responded to this mythological rhetoric of the West. While drawing conclusions about a text's ideological components in its production are valuable, it only represents one side of a very complex process of mass media communication as expressed by cultural theorists. Indeed, in establishing initial patterns about the genre's trajectory, analyzing westerns and their political discourse builds a critical framework to ask more interesting questions about readers. These insights are especially important as the reception of the western shapes how we understand the convergence of cultural and political discourse that situates the reader in the middle. Using archival materials that highlight the various components of the late 20th-century western readers' experiences, this chapter asks: who were these readers and what were their reading practices like? What social infrastructure brought texts to readers and perhaps brought readers together? Who is the implied audience as conceived by authors, publishers, and agents and how did the publishing industry market towards this imagined reader? And finally, how did the content of these texts change based on what publishers or authors thought their readers wanted?

Book historians and reception scholars have long realized that reading is a deeply complex process, and so the reconstruction method I use here can only provide an incomplete picture of who the western reader was between 1970 and 1999. What this reconstruction indicates, however, is that western readers were made up of a variety of demographic groups across age, gender, geographic location, and class. Additionally, publishers and authors sought to cater to what readers wanted in ways that shaped the genre's content, and subsequently its ideology. Readers kept coming back to the western genre for a variety of reasons including entertainment and education, but often found themselves needing to navigate questions of history and myth in complex ways. This chapter also highlights the important functions that nostalgia, affect, and ritual play had in western readers' experiences, even if on the surface, it appears as a simple or casual form of entertainment. The western is entertaining and enjoyable to read, in part, because it acts as a form of community cohesion, tying the reader to larger historical national narratives including those that are deeply tied to the reader's wider regional and social contexts that they identify with. Even an incomplete picture of who the western reader was, what they did, and what they got out of their reading, foregrounds the importance of identity as a reading lens, and a deeper understanding of this lens offers paths forward to understanding how, and why, these same readers then demonstrated an anxiety around the evolving genre in relation to their political environment. As I showed in chapter one, the western genre invites readers to interact with, and reflect on, various ideologies through its linguistic conventions of setting, character, and patterns of action. This chapter explores how this language thus gains power through both its usage and reception, including how dimensions of identity, narrative, community, and history overlap. Furthermore, I argue that western readers used identity as a lens through which they encountered the ideological violence of settler colonialism (supported in turn, by logics of whiteness and hegemonic masculinity) and most importantly that this lens offered a way to absolve oneself from the problematic aspects of these ideologies.

Methodology:

I employ a reconstruction methodology, without conducting a full-scale ethnography, that tries to understand these readers and their specific practices without directly talking to them. Several reasons led me to not reach out directly to readers in an ethnographic approach. The first is that their responses would be contemporary and so, while possibly still alive, many readers would not be speaking of their present reading process in the ways that traditional ethnographies capture and instead would ask them to recreate their own reading practices and mindsets with too much room for the inadvertent skewing any sort of collected ethnographic data. Additionally, while other genres like romance novels have established reading groups with significant communication with those that saw them as consumers (publishing reps, etc.), the progression from production to encounter to consumption for western readers is harder to trace. And finally, because this chapter plays a smaller (yet vitally important) part of a larger argument about the connections between readers and their political discourse, an exhaustive methodology like ethnography doesn’t make sense for the purpose this project. For these reasons, I decided to emulate scholars that use a cultural-studies approach to reconstruct readers (especially those who are long dead or out of the historical record). If the western reader at the end of the twentieth century is an inaccessible figure that presents a gap in historical knowledge, the function of the reconstruction is to surround this historical gap with stakeholders who have constructed knowledge about these readers, and thus present a clearer picture of who these people were, what they did, and what they got out of their process of reading.

Following the examples of Christine Bold's work on the early publishing history of western dime novels as well as Elizabeth McHenry's and Erin Smith's works analyzing and reconstructing readers outside of the historical record, this chapter reconstructs the western reader by surrounding them with stakeholders that historically produced knowledge about them. Information about who readers are, and the infrastructure that connected them to westerns, offers an entry point into thinking about what they get out their reading and how these reading experiences are tied to identity and ideology. I look specifically at the periods of 1970-1999 and how archived materials[49] from the publishing industry (imprints, editors, agents, and authors) demonstrate knowledge about readers as well as provide brief moments of direct contact with readers. I explore how western readership evolved in relation to gender, age, geographical region, socio-economic class; how readers encountered westerns through specific social infrastructure and importantly, how authors and publishers (encoders) and readers (decoders) constituted a dynamic feedback loop, where readers influenced the content of western stories over time, and how publishers' understanding of reader desires influenced design, marketing, and distribution strategies.

I then reconstruct the reading practices of western readers, exploring what drew them to the genre, what they liked about the novels they read, what they got out of these novels, and what role reading played in their lives. The materials suggest that readers were drawn to westerns that could place them in the historical setting and action-oriented situations especially if they coincided with the geographical areas that readers are familiar with. Many readers often started reading the genre as teens and continued into adulthood. Evidence also suggests that readers read across genres into both the historical and romance categories and read special-interest western historical magazines. Magazines like *True West* and *Cowboys & Indians* covered a variety of western themed historical writing and often ran parallel with the evolution of western fiction and film in the twentieth century. These magazines had intersecting customer bases with western fiction, often feeding off each other's interests and shared topics. The magazines add dimension to the reconstruction and reinforce the conclusion that western reading practices were informed by readers' participation as a consumer within a larger matrix of cultural media production whose primary objective is the selling of a specific identity rooted in the various thematic, historical, and rhetorical elements. Additionally, I argue that most readers read for entertainment and some readers felt there was an element of education in reading westerns especially as novels leaned towards more historical realism towards the end of the century, but these functions existed as mere stopgaps enroute to the final satisfaction: that readers consumed westerns to connect, and reconnect, with a certain lifestyles and identities.

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[49] The materials analyzed in this chapter are located in the Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Oregon, specifically from the Oregon Collection of WWA materials, correspondence from the Todhunter Ballard Papers 1926-1975, Lenniger Literary Agency, William R. Cox Papers 1914-1980, Dwight Bennett Newton Papers 1947-1985, Edwin Booth Papers 1906-1980 and the *True West* materials held in the Knight Library at University of Oregon. The content from *Cowboys & Indians* were acquired by the author from a private owner in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

The reconstruction methodology highlights these practices and traces how readers engaged with the genre through the lens of identity that makes meaningful connections between this identity and the ideological encoding of the texts being read. For these reasons, it's important to return to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theories, as they offer a productive framework to make sense of these reading practices, and crucially, how these practices demonstrate decoded meanings that can "influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotion, ideological, or behavioral consequences" (Hall 260). As

Hall notes, signifying elements in a text or other broadcast ultimately remain polysemic with no set rules to "ensure that the receiver will take the preferred…meaning…in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer" (265). For these reasons, there are as many possible meanings of each western novel published as there are people who picked up those novels and read them. But, as Hall argues, there is a way to think about this polysemy in relation to encoders' ideal (or true) decoding and briefly sketches three different decoding positions where readers might deviate from the intended meaning. The first of these is what Hall calls the dominant or hegemonic code. This decoding position is inhabited when the viewer (or reader) "takes the connoted meaning from a [text], full and straight, and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been coded" (272). In thinking about how the western genre's encoded ideological dimensions of gender, race, and settler colonial logics, a dominant-hegemonic decoding position would include the reader's interaction with this ideology in a way that "defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meanings of a whole society or culture; and that carries with in the stamp of legitimacy—it appears conterminous with what is 'natural,' 'inevitable,' and 'taken for granted' about the social order" 273). As discussed in chapter one, the ideologies around gender, race, and settler colonialism are encoded in a way to encourage their naturalness, inevitability, and argue for their legitimacy. The question then becomes, under what conditions does a reader remain in the dominant-hegemonic code and what does this code look like. In this chapter, I trace these connections (between ideology and decoding) and argue that the dominant-hegemonic code provided identity as a reading lens that absolves readers from needing to process the problematic aspects of these ideologies. The dominant-hegemonic code is characterized by "entertaining" stories, a historical past that connects with reader's felt historical belonging, that allows them to live out the fantasized version of the West that nostalgically and unproblematically connects past to present, individual to community, story to story.

Part Two: Guilt-Free Entertainment and Good, Clean Death and Destruction

Publishers, authors, editors, and agents always wanted to know exactly who the western reader was, and what they wanted, but that question was much more complicated and elusive than it appeared. As Jory Sherman noted while discussing the widespread popularity of Zebra's westerns, publishers needed to be adept at "gauging the thready pulse of the public" (Sherman "Along Publisher's Row" July/August 1984). In 1973, *Knowledge and Industry* reported that government funding decreases in both schools and libraries prompted a "phenomenal expansion" in the fiction paperbacks for educational fields, with some publishers reporting gains in the 30-50% range. Paperback companies reported one of the most gains was the genre of traditional westerns and, according to Richard Curtis, genre fiction writers, often wrote original paperbacks catered to a wide audience, counting "on a minimum readership numbering in the hundreds of thousands and even millions" (Danow "Along Publisher's Row" 1973; Curtis "Two Worlds of Literature" 1992). But for the western genre itself, it was normal for these numbers to fluctuate, with writers and publishers always on the lookout to entice new readers. According to one Gallup Survey of the book buying public conducted by *Publisher's Weekly* in 1984, only 11% of the 1610 adults reported that they read western imprints even though 24% listed they read Action/Adventure and 34% read Historical (Sherman "Along Publisher's Row" October 1984). Imprints like Leisure Books sought to capitalize on this wide audience, catering their westerns towards "as broad a spectrum of readers as we could; old, young, male, female" with the only requirement in terms of adherence to genre forms was that the books were set in the "Old West" (D'Auria "Leisure Books" 1998). But even while publishers sought to appeal to as broad a public as possible, patterns emerge around who specifically read westerns and what economic and social infrastructure facilitated this relationship between reader and text. These patterns existed along lines of gender, age, social and economic class, as well as geographic region and stakeholders often discussed what content or formal qualities would prompt these demographics to either buy or not buy a western and how best to market to them. What these broader moments highlight is that the category fiction market in this period was highly competitive and western publishers competed with other genres to appeal to readers. The stakes were high in accurately understanding the western reader because publishers counted on these assumptions to sell books; but at the same time, this guesswork often left publishers confused as to who readers actually were and what they wanted.

Who Read Westerns?

Westerns were, as many assumed, read primarily by men, and contemporary anecdotal evidence backs this up. For example, in 1984, author Stan Steiner wrote about his experiences setting up a book caravan that traveled around selling western books. At the New Mexico State Fair, he observed that many people approached the caravan with a mixture of skepticism and interest including "old ranchers and young cowboys, servicemen from nearby missile bases and Chicano low-riders" and one "young man in a worn and torn cowboy hat who paid for a book in nickels and dimes" (Steiner "Writers of the Purple Sage: Book Promotion at New Mexico's Grass Roots" 1986). Imprints like Berkley acknowledged that they focused on 'very traditional, male dominated' manuscripts and market them to cater towards a male readership (Waltemeyer qtd. in Robinson "Editors: Western is Alive and Well" 1998). Author Wayne Lee recalled meeting a male car dealer who was an avid western reader, and another author, Larry Jay Martin, recalled approaching potential readers at a book-signing events, often asking "'Hi, are you a reader?' or 'do you read westerns?'" but, more often than not, would ask, "'how about your dad, or husband? 'an autographed book makes a great gift'" (Lee "The President's Page" 1970; Martin "May I Sign That for You?" 1995). Several male readers wrote to author Dwight Newton to discuss what they liked about his westerns including the action and their favorite characters, what other authors they enjoyed reading, and how they started reading western pulps in the 1940s before switching to novels (Scott Rafael to Hank Mitchum/Dwight Newton May 21st, 1984; Bernie Malaboff to Dwight Newton April 9th, 1979). The fan letters suggest that men were some of the earliest readers of westerns and continued to do so through the twentieth century suggesting that the assumptions around male readers were valid while also complicated.

While the genre was broadly "male," men were far from the only people reading westerns and, indeed, the archival materials suggest that women read and enjoyed westerns. In 1977, author Lewis Holmes wrote to Dwight Newton claiming it was his experience that "some of the most dedicated western readers are women," while Jory Sherman noted in the early 1980's that he saw an increase in fan mail from women readers, and author Wendi Lee noted that at her book signings, "there were almost as many women as men who read my books" (Lewis Holmes to Dwight Newton April 25th, 1977; Sherman "Along Publisher's Row" November 1983; Lee "Writing Western" 1997). In an article on the question of women characters in westerns, author Jack Cummings reminisced on one experience in a library when a female hand reached over him to select a western from the shelf; when he turned, he was surprised to find a woman in a nun's coif. He asked, "'do you read westerns sister?'" To which she responded, "those by Ernest Haycox, I do" and walked away (Cummings "Ernest Haycox's Women" 1985). Direct contact with women readers reinforces these author experiences. One reader wrote to the Western Writers of America website asking for information about Zane Grey, claiming "I'm a 26-year-old girl from Norway. I ‘grew’ up with these books, and I have all of them. Wonderful!!” (“Roundup Online and Best Western Surveys” 1996). Two female readers wrote to Dwight Newton discussing how much they enjoyed his novels and what they liked about them. One of these women, Avis Pepper, was a regular correspondent; she wrote to find an out-of-print books, talked about her ancestry in Kansas, and discussed her favorite western television shows (*Wagon Train, Death Valley Days,* and *Wells Fargo*) and western authors (Zane Grey and Max Brand) (Avis Pepper to Dwight Newton 192.2.11.1).

Direct contact that exists from women readers also suggests that, as often as not, women read westerns for the same reasons that men did: situational aspects of the genre that focus on entertainment and action. After receiving feedback from the Romance Book Lovers convention, author Jory Sherman noted that while women might differ in reading practices in terms of wanting different types of characters and subplots, fundamentally they wanted lots of action and adventure (Sherman “Along Publisher’s Row” June 1983). This is especially interesting considering how gender functioned in relationship to the genre’s encoded ideology. As discussed in the first chapter, femininity in the western genre was shaped primarily by patterns of language use that defined women in relation to others (who they were clutching, hugging, loving, etc.) while also prioritizing a womanhood reinforced with traditional roles of purity, motherhood, and sexuality and that shaped female character’s actions in relationship to emotional and physical affection, often either “giggling and blushing” or “whimpering and clutching.” What then would it mean for a woman reader decoding this material? Is it somehow subversive that the patterns of action women readers identified as the most appealing are also ideologically coded as masculine? Or does this simply support the hegemonic naturalizing of masculinity as the “norm” and any potential subversiveness in women readers embodying male characters in their reading practices, is somehow negated by the relational aspects of women characters? Sherman notes that there was a preference from women readers to want different types of characters, which might suggest a dissatisfaction with how characters were written, but it also didn't seem to deter them from reading.

It was also true, as many assumed, that western readers were older than the average consumer, making them a durable demographic but also a worrying one as time went on. Some readers described discovering the genre in their teen years and continuing to consume the books until their old age. One reader expressed his commitment to "frontier fiction" across thirty years, starting as a teenager in the late 1940s (Bernie Malaboff to Dwight Newton April 9th, 1979; September 21st, 1981). In 1970, two librarians from Missouri wrote to the WWA characterizing their patrons as "avid western readers" and who commented on the genre being in large demand by their readers, particularly in nursing homes and retirement centers (Baker "What's Cooking" 1970). And in 1989, Sara Ann Freed from M. Evans noted that the market for large print westerns was "'burgeoning,' she says, 'more and more large print publishers are buying rights to westerns'" perhaps indicating an older readership (Freed qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). This older readership prompted publishers and authors to worry that readers and the genre would soon die out. Some, like author Jory Sherman, thought that this was a death knell for the genre, a "diminishing" and "horrifying demographics" of "mostly male readers, age 49-69, dying off slowly" (Sherman "Publishing's Bastard Child" 1993) But others thought this evolution might help to boost sales especially as these readers started to retire. As Tom Doherty, from Tor/Forge noted, "the first generation in American—the Baby Boomers—which grew up as readers is now nearing retirement. They're going to be the very first educated generation that will be readers, will have time to read" (Doherty qtd. in Moulton "Editor's Space: Review of Western

Publishing" 1998). This sentiment is supported by direct contact with readers; one reader wrote to Dwight Newton, noting that "during the time my children were growing up I didn't have much time to read. I worked outside my home, too, as a waitress and cook. I've been alone now since 1970 and just retired last March so have lots of time to catch up" (Avis Pepper to Dwight Newton November 22, 1978).

But, like readers' gender, the reality of this 'dying out' demographic picture is more complicated than it first appears. Author Ray Hogan noted that not only older people enjoy westerns, but younger ones do too as long as it's "honest, clean, and authentic fiction…they look for historically correct entertainment" (Hogan "Ray Hogan, Mr. Western" 1986). In the same vein, Bantam editor Stuart Applebaum noted that the "requests for autographs Louis L'Amour received were often from youngsters" (Applebaum qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). This younger set of readers become important as publishers and authors tried to find ways to reach them. One Simon and Schuster editor noted, the younger generations are full of potential readers, readers with "disposable income of their own and a penchant for hanging out in malls, where they can shop at impersonal chain bookstores ("From the Editors…" 1992). But one of the main differences between older and younger readers was the higher emphasis on the educational benefit children would reap by reading westerns, an added dimension to pure entertainment. In a 1984 issue of the *Roundup,*[50] author and WWA president, Don Coldsmith addressed the importance of reaching young western readers: "I'd like for my grandchildren to learn their history, their heritage, and their role modeled through the eyes of children of various cultures in that history. I'd like for them to have some heroes, other than animated pastel retardees.[51] It wouldn't even hurt to inject a little pride and patriotism" (Coldsmith "The President's Page" 1984). These materials hint at an emerging pattern within the reception of westerns at the time, especially with a younger audience: they often extended beyond their entertaining function and connected the encoding of the genre with ideology that should be embraced as true by readers. According to Coldsmith, the western played a fundamental role in shaping young readers' positions in relationship to patriotism, history, and moral values. In chapter one, I argued that the genre's encoding was primarily with narratives of collective or national identity and perhaps these moments of reader reporting in the archive highlight how a dominant-hegemonic decoding position prioritized these narratives as well.

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[50] The *Roundup* is the official publication of the Western Writers of America, the professional organization for Western authors. Published since the group's formation in the 1950's, it publishes original and reprinted materials of concern to its members including interviews and guest authors from the publishing industry like editors and agents. In the archive materials, the *Roundup* (RU) was also published under the names, *Roundup Quarterly* (RUQ) and *Roundup Magazine* (RUM).

Both authors and other stakeholders in the publishing industry discussed how social class, as well as age and gender, influenced the genre and thus, reader practices. In a letter to his editor at Gold Medal Books, author Bill Cox wrote that they had to remember the "Buchanan series sells to 'little people'…they are looking for escape reading. They want to laugh a little and worry a little…they are not sophisticated, they don't read…*The Saturday Review* nor *Esquire*" (Bill Cox to Harvey Gardner October 24th, 1972). The "little people" that Cox referred to in discussing the readers of his *Buchanan* series[52] implies that he saw readers belonging to a lower social or cultural class and that the genre needed to offer them simpler pleasures of comedy and drama. Matt Sitwell, an editor at New American Library, reinforced this idea of the western reader, noting "'our heroes are a lot like our readers…they may not possess much formal education but they show acumen and savvy in what they do. They struggle to maintain morality in the face of savagery, to sustain standards in a society still defining itself.'" (qtd. in Shotwell "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). Sitwell's comments about the western reader's lack of formal education echoed Cox's "little people" idea but also makes interesting connections between the western reader and the western hero in relation to their efforts to maintain moral and social standards. What this savagery could be, and what moral threats are face by society in 1989 is left unsaid by Sitwell. Additionally, authors remarked on the price of books itself as indicative of reader's socio-economic class. In one 1976 letter to Dwight Newton, another author remarks that "inflation has made people feel too poor to pay $1.25 for a paperback Steiner met one young man in a Northern New Mexico Safeway parking who "apologized that he had no money to buy a book. But, he said, he received his methadone on Saturday and could sell it on Sunday, so if the writers came back on Monday he could buy a book" (Allan Elson to Dwight Newton June 30th, 1976; Steiner "Writers of the Purple Sage"). These anecdotes suggest authors encountered western readers who were largely from working class and lower socioeconomic demographics and this positioning was at the forefront of authors and stakeholders' minds as they thought about what makes a western including needing storylines that entertained a "lower" social class and that even reflected them, and their current struggles.

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[51] Coldsmith is talking here about the widespread popularity of *Sesame Street* and the "pastel retardees" refer to the characters of Burt and Ernie.
[52] This series is written under the pen name, Jonas Ward.

Just as publishers and authors saw their male readers as a reflection of the genre itself, they also tended to view reader experiences outside of reading as reflective of the western narrative itself. Both authors and editors were certain their rugged, working-class readers wanted narratives grounded in themes of a moral fight against 'savagery' that connected the past that they read about with the present they experienced. This is especially interesting as both the analyses in chapter one and chapter two highlight the narrative of an individual fighting for their right to exist in the Western US but more importantly, the right to shape the Western US in relation to what they saw as legitimate political, social, or economic grievances. As seen in chapter one, settler presence in the West is always negotiated, constantly encroaching on the "savage wilderness" to civilize it while also constantly being under threat from this savagery. This struggle is somehow real to stakeholders as they imagined it as part of their readers' experience and so they needed to reflect that somehow in the content of their novels.

Geographically, western readers largely resided in the western United States but with a presence both nationally and internationally (Robinson "Editors: Western is Alive and Well" 1998). Like class, region is an especially interesting part of this discussion because it makes connections between readers and their practices, how they read, and what they got out of the books they read in relation to where they reside. In 1972, the WWA reported that westerns were read in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway emphasizing younger readers. Each new generation of international readers inherited "a predisposition towards westerns that imbued the generation preceding it" ("Norway Enjoying Boom in Westerns" 1972). The same phenomenon occurred in Germany, with younger readers expressing continued interest in westerns. Author Thomas Jeier attributed this popularity to how the genre is rooted in "the romantic and martial aspects of the Germanic character. We Germans love the heroic tale and action-adventure tale—and we find the combination only in the western" (Jeier "Why the Germans Love our Westerns") But even while the genre changed and gained new, younger readers, what stayed consistent was the ideological core of the genre. In 1984, author Don Coldsmith argued that the genre was still popular in Europe because of the strong morality narratives that focus on fights between good and evil. Coldsmith argued that readers are "looking for heroes again, after a sick anti-hero decade or two. Patriotism is no longer a thing to be ashamed of" (Coldsmith "The President's Page" 1984).

What this data shows, simply put, is that western readers were largely, but by no means monolithically, what one would expect: male, middle-aged, or older, working-class, and lacking college or postgraduate education, and residing in the western US. Publishers and authors were attentive to how their readership included significant numbers of younger people, educated and white-collar people, non-Westerners, and women. However, what unified all these readers, in the eyes of these authors and publishers, was what they wanted out of the genre, not just in terms of plot and historical detail but in ideology. So how did authors', publishers', and agents' assumptions about what readers wanted from the ideological content encoded in the western genre in this period?

What Did Readers Want?

The archival materials suggest that authors frequently focused on craft as an entry point to discuss narrative content, rather than explicitly focusing on what readers wanted in terms of ideology. What drew a reader to a book, they felt, was their narrative proximity to the characters via viewpoint. The author should choose "whose feelings, sufferings, and emotions will have the best chance of penetrating the minds and hearts of the particular group of readers toward which the story is to be directed;" the reader should be put "in the middle of the action" so that they feel a sense of immediacy especially within a historical novel (Fugate "The Key to Viewpoint" 1982; Champlin "Roundup Interviews" 1983). According to various authors including Richard Wheeler and Matt Braun, the magical tradition of western storytelling lay in its ability to pull the "reader out of his own world and into the fantasy world the author has created" (Wheeler "On Storytelling" 1990) The author needed to create a scene so vibrant with action that it compelled the reader to believe it to be true, and when the reader believed in the "authenticity of the image" they “cease[d] to be a passive observer. By layering detail upon detail, you induce the reader to become an active participant in the story. The agony and ecstasy of your characters evokes a vicarious, very personal response from the reader. The printed page becomes, momentarily, an experience of enormous impact. Wholly engaged, the reader joins with the characters for an instant in time” (Braun “Writing the Western Novel” 1996; Wallmann “The Past, Present, and Future of the Western” 1992). Readers reported this type of intimacy as being what drew them both to the western, and to authors in the genre. As Avis Pepper noted in a letter to Dwight Newton, “your writing puts a person right into the setting without having to read, over and over, the same thing” (Avis Pepper to Dwight Newton October 24th, 1978). Authors responded to this by working hard to give readers what they truly wanted out of reading these novels: access to a time or life that they did not have access to anymore. This discussion of craft in relationship to what readers wanted is especially important to consider in relation to the genre’s ideological encoding for a couple of reasons. First, the corpus analysis tells us exactly whose mind the reader is inhabiting as they read, and whose subjectivities readers are most intimate. Chapter one showed how the western genre afforded male characters far more subjectivity than female characters; the reader was privy to the interiority of a male character’s mind (his thoughts, feelings, and goals) while also driving the action of the novel with male-coded action. In westerns, male characters do things more often and with more emphasis. The discussion of craft offers further insights not only into the connections between the ideological dimensions of gender, as they were encoded, but also how they were decoded. Stakeholders assumed readers wanted to be narratively close to certain characters and the vicarious, emotional responses from readers (that presumably made the novel enjoyable) were in response to the agony, ecstasy, interiority of men.

This is reflected in one fan letter to Dwight Newton from a young reader who identified characters and patterns of action they enjoyed and commented on the layers of ideological encoding as why they enjoyed it. The reader wrote that “my favorite character in the book is Clay Reiner because of the problems he settled, and the way he settled them. I didn’t really have a least favorite character because of the way you put them into the story. My favorite situation in the book was when Clay Reiner fought the Sweed [sic] for being drunk, I don’t know really why I do but I do” (Scott Rafael to Hank Mitchum/Dwight Newton May 21st, 1984). This anecdote highlights how readers interpreted the genre’s conventions of setting, character, and patterns of action and identified them as what entertained them while reading. But it also shows how they engaged with the genre’s ideological constructions. When the reader discussed why their favorite character was Clay, he reflected on a connection to male moralized agency. In what might be considered a hegemonic decoding position, the reader was drawn to this character because of “the problems he settled and the way he settled them” especially when Clay fought another character for being drunk. This anecdote highlights how the western was received in the ways that it was intended by its various encoders, whereby the conventions of character narrativized moral values. In this moment, the reader decoded settler colonial logics through the male character operating as the enforcer of moral social order, and thus functioning metonymically for the settler process as an agent of violence. Ultimately, this demonstrates how the dominant hegemonic code allowed readers access to a time or life that they no longer experience and allowed them to experience conquest without being encouraged to problematize that conquest because they experienced it from a moralized and legitimized male subjectivity.

The publishing industry also wrestled with the greater demands for, and acceptability of (at least among some readers), explicit violence and sex, which appeared more and more in the "adult western" popular in the 1970s and 80s. In a letter to Dwight Newton, author Brian Garfield wrote in 1970 that some western authors were "pandering to the psychoses' of the sick kind of reader who revels in gory scenes" and that he was "not at all interested in psychotic readers, and am not bent on pandering to their illnesses" (Brian Garfield to Dwight Newton May 28th 1970). Newton responded by claiming violence is the "chief ingredient" of western genre; as it is primarily adventure fiction, that gives "the reader a vicarious thrill of a sense of danger" (Dwight Newton to Brian Garfield June 3rd, 1970). In this conversation, Newton argued that readers of the "mass arts" needed clues to help them navigate these depictions of violence, an author "signals to indicate what you think of the scenes of violence in your story few readers who already happen to feel as you do and who therefore have nothing to learn from you anyway will react as you want them to…[with the] risk that the other will simply enjoy the goodies" (Dwight Newton to Brian Garfield, June 3rd 1970). Western author Richard Wheeler hinted at this phenomenon in his memoir, and highlighted the gendered components of this shift. Wheeler claimed that the narrowing of the content of the genre was primarily in response to both the commercial success of L'Amour, as well as a changing readership. The western novel was no longer written for a general audience and instead became "men's action-adventure fiction." This this meant "a lot of shooting, ambushes, fist fights, and various other forms of mayhem such as whippings, torture, sniping, lynching, high noon shootouts and gang warfare. These testosterone laden stories not only drove away general audiences but even drove away many male readers, who found them tiresome. How many males actually devour stories of gunfights and fistfights and gang warfare?" (Wheeler 92). Social infrastructure that connected readers to these texts also sheds light on this question of violence, highlighting what violence was perhaps allowed and what was wanted by readers. Publishers like Avon, Bantam, and Dell saw the young adult market via school sales as a way to build western readership and in 1985, a Texas English teacher wrote to the WWA asking for help after getting in trouble from the school board for assigning William Jennings novel, *The Cowboys* in her class because of its violent content and language (Danow "Along Publisher's Row" 1973; Coldsmith "Profanity, Vugarity, and Obscenity" 1985). Schools became spaces where readers could access westerns and where the publishing industries could market their texts, but also sites where questions of sex and violence were debated including debating whether the western could (or should) perform the didactic function of "teaching" young readers through its content.

This question of gratuitous violence in the western, and what it highlights about readers, is particularly interesting in relation to questions of the genre's presentation of settler colonial ideology. Garfield and Newton's conversation made clear that, in making decisions about what kinds of violence, and how much to include in their novels, they thought about the reader and how they would perceive or interpret this violence. But missing from this discussion is a more nuanced debate around what counted as violence in the western and what didn't. The larger process of western expansion didn't seem to count in terms of the violence that needed to be explained or moralized to readers. While explicitly described violence may drive away readers or present them with moral dilemmas, the settler colonial violence as expressed linguistically via conventions of both setting and patterns of action did not, and indeed were what readers wanted over "gunfights, fistfights, and gang violence." While we don't have direct evidence from readers about this question over settler violence, these conversations highlight the importance of how settler colonial processes were potentially received by readers, especially because violence is at the heart of a morally legitimized settler colonial sovereignty in the conventions of the western genre. As examined in chapter one, settler colonial processes are coded as a natural settling towards social order and individualized around all the reasons why a settler might benefit from, and fight for, this settling. Settler colonialism is almost never positioned in a way that forces its readers to acknowledge its violence, nor do stakeholders debate this, instead a reader would have to come to that conclusion on their own negotiated decoding.

The growing popularity of the adult western in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the growing acceptance of sex and obscenity in popular culture of the time, also made authors and editors wonder about how much explicit sex readers might want in the genre, which had been largely chaste up to that point. This could have been due to how readers accessed books, primarily through local libraries. Publishers like Doubleday sold directly to libraries, and this dictated content; library sales meant "scenes of sex, violence, and profanity are kept in check" (Bragg "Selling 'Wild and Wooly'" 1984; Puechner "Publisher's Row" 1985). Additionally, Leslie Gelbman, executive editor at Zebra discussed a new western series *White Savage*[53] and how its success was tied to its presence in supermarkets but to do this, Zebra "had to cut out all references to 'adult' on their covers and their artists are closing up the cleavages on women's bodices" (Sherman "Along Publisher's Row" June 1983). But according to Tom Colgan, editor at Berkely, sex was more important to readers than violence in the adult westerns. In the 1980s, adult westerns like the *Longarm* and *Jake Logan* series were some of Berkely's bestselling titles and were overwhelmingly read by men (Estleman "Bed & Bullets: Sex and Violence in the Western Novels" 1983; Colgan qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). It is these numbers that concerned some authors like Loren Estlemen, who postulated that the enormous adult western readership merely "skips over the horses and gunplay, skimming the pages for a mention of feminine undergarments" (Estleman "Bed & Bullets: Sex and Violence in the

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[53] I couldn't find the author or other publication information for this title.

Western Novels" 1983;). Although, editors like Matt Sitwell, at NAL, acknowledged their readers' "interest in sex" but didn't see them as pornography with the story solely existing to transition the reader "from sex scene to sex scene" (Sitwell qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). In fact, their "primary concern is good western stories with credible characters" (Sitwell qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). One reader wrote to Dwight Newton criticizing the popularity of the adult western, hoping that "in the near future these sex and sadism westerns will bite the dust" (Bernie Nalaboff to Dwight Newton November 26th, 1979).

As we try to make sense of how the ideological content in the genre was produced and consumed, it's clear that publishers thought primarily about what readers wanted in formal terms, often describing how proximity to characters and narrative gave readers access to a life that they no longer had access to. But they also debated around content (sex and violence) in relation to what should or shouldn't offend a reader's sensibility. The anecdotes from authors, publishers, and readers highlight how readers navigated, and reacted to, "questionable" content. Ultimately, the adult western debate demonstrated that while explicit nature of sex or violence had the potential to offend readers' sensibilities, the overall narrative not only glorified the violence of conquest but naturalized it and coded it as morally right, thus rendering it digestible to readers. These patterns offer insights into what might be at the core of the western's encoding and decoding process that deserves deeper engagement. Specifically, what elements prompted readers engage in a type of ritualistic return to the western genre and what they got out of this ritualistic engagement.

Identity as a Reading Lens

With a better understanding of who readers were, how they accessed westerns, and what they wanted in the books they read, we can better understand what their reading practices were like including what readers were doing (how long they've been reading, how many books they read, and in what format) and what they got out of reading westerns (enjoyment, education, and more). Additionally, this moves us towards a decoding model of western reception in this period, that connects the larger cultural and political discursive formations together (the ideological functions of the western genre narrative and the narrativizing functions of far-right politics) and prompts us to think about the imagined (and perhaps actual) western readership that exists in this overlapping. Did readers read just for the excitement of an entertaining story or were they reading for other reasons? If readers were reading for entertainment, why were they drawn to westerns instead of any other category fiction? How did reading to access a lifestyle inform, or respond to, ideological components of the genre? And, as touched on previously, were readers troubled by the ideological messages associated with the settler colonial narrative? If not, what existed as an alternative reading lens that allowed them to consume these narratives 'untroubled?'

Readers often found time to read in between the demands of their everyday life including childcare and work. Avis Pepper recounted her reading schedule as picking up after her children were grown, checking out eight to ten books from the library at a time and often reading "until 3 or 4 am. I read for the pure enjoyment of it so go through books pretty quickly" (Avis Pepper to Dwight Newton November 22, 1978) Another reader recounted reading one western on a four-hour bus ride (Tracy Norstom to Dwight Bennett November 19th, 1981). The rate and longevity of reader's practices echoed what authors assumed about readers, that they read often and read with intent. In one interview, Dwight Newton expanded on this notion that "a true western fan will have read hundreds, maybe thousands of these things, but he picks up each new book hoping and anticipating that he will experience the same pleasure he has had so many times before" (Newton "Interview"). Reader pleasure and enjoyment was a contributing factor to their practices and publishers were acutely aware of this phenomenon as they sought to appeal to readers through ongoing series. According to Ballantine editor, Leona Nevler, "building reader satisfaction [in a series] can be a slow process…A first novel may not gain readers, while later ones will, as readers grow used to a writer." (Nevler qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). And publishers like NAL responded to what they call the "L'Amour" phenomenon is the series. NAL editor, Mat Sitwell noted that the market for series is tough because of how competitive it is, but ultimately is worth it because it offers "a regular program and regular delivery in the way no single author can" that puts westerns into the hand of readers (Sitwell qtd. in Showalter "Bringing Back the Western" 1989). What is interesting about this reading practice is the "repeated" nature of western reading, that they often read book after book, looking for both the "new" and the "familiar," and committing to the ongoing nature of a series.

But as much as readers were invested in western series, they were not monogamous and read across genre as well, often historical, romance, and action-adventure. One of the most important genre crossovers discussed amongst publishers and authors was the "historical romance," where the oft sought-after women readers devoured "romances with western setting, those that either have 'ranch' or 'Texas' in the title, or feature a Native American, with a remarkably European physiognomy on the cover holding a ravishing blonde in his bronzed, muscular arms" (Sherman "Publishing's Bastard Child: The Western Novel" 1993). Authors often encouraged each other to "cross genre lines" and sell their westerns as historical to women readers (Martin “May I Sign That For You?” 1995). Author Kat Martin talked explicitly about writing across genre for readers who read across genre, starting her career with romantic westerns, and moving towards historical romance but mentioned that neither were very different than L’Amour’s romance or the *Longarm* series (Martin “Is the Western Really Dead?” 1998).

Materials suggest that western readers read western magazines as well as novels. In the last half of the twentieth century, there were several different magazines that covered different aspects of Western americana history and lifestyles and that were documented to appeal to the same readers of western novels. In 1996, the WWA did a large profile on these magazines, attempting to compile information about what readers wanted from these magazines. According to the editor of *Western Tales,* the average western magazine reader was:

> a gent who grew up listening to “The Lone Ranger” on the radio, watching B Westerns like Strait Shooting and the Stolen Ranch on the silver screen at the Saturday Matinee, and consuming a steady diet of what *Western Tales* calls ‘trail-riding yarns’ filled with shoot em up action and they still have a taste for it… In other words, Average Gent heard the old adage, “Go West young Man” since childhood and did—through his reading. (qtd. in Adare “Round Up Western Magazine Readers” 1996).

Editors claimed that most western magazine readers lived in the Western US but there was an eastern readership whose “fathers or grandfathers who enjoyed reading about the West or they used to live in the West” (qtd. in Adare “Round Up Western Magazine Readers” 1996). Western Publications, who managed *True West* and *Old West,* claimed that their readers were “exceptionally loyal;” according to a survey they conducted in 1992, “twenty percent of their readers (which are seventy-five percent male with a median age of fifty) have subscribed for twenty-six years or more, and another forty-four percent have subscribed for the past ten to twenty-five years" (Adare "Round Up Western Magazine Readers" 1996). Magazines like *American Cowboy, Farm and Ranch Living, Country/Country Extra,* and *Western Horseman* all hinted at a shared readership with western novels, dedicating their pages to covering all aspects of "western culture" including "rodeo, politics horses, humor, homes, history (limited need, art, fashion, music, food, [and] poetry," as well as showcasing "more than 200 pages of 'historical stuff, book reviews, videos, and music stuff" and the "pleasures and benefits of country life, the beauty of rural America and folks with interesting tales to tell" (*Round-Up Magazine* April 1999; Van Pelt "Magazine Editors Share Preferences" 1998). The consensus among western magazines was that in order to please readers, they should be appealing to their hearts…entertaining them and if they can "make them a cowboy for a day, then "the future is rosy (and a way to preserve the endangered western lifestyle)" (Hayes "Writing for the Magazine Market" 1999). This crossover with magazines, and especially the connection between entertainment and this "living through" type of reading is fascinating. Apparently, what made the western so entertaining was its capacity to let the reader live out an imagined version of themselves, as if they were part of this story, as if reading allowed them to know (and be) exactly who they thought they truly were. And so, while reading is a deeply complex, and multifaceted process, even for genre fiction like westerns, patterns suggest that one of the most important elements of this reading experience was that westerns reflected something that readers already saw in themselves.

The ritualistic nature of reading practices suggests that there was indeed something in the genre that was fulfilling or entertaining. There was something about these narratives that perhaps another genre couldn't provide. According to stakeholders, entertainment was one of the primary reasons that drew readers to the western and this desire to be entertained was often held in tension with the question of historical accuracy. Stakeholders hypothesized that readers would prefer entertainment at the expense of accuracy or craft. In response to accusations that their texts inaccurately stereotyped indigenous tribes, Lyle Kenyon Engel of Book Creations, Inc and Bantam Books argued that the title in question, *Cherokee* (part of the White Indian Series) was not written for a "scholarly audience," nor "college professors" or "specialists;" the first "priority is to move the story along. These are not textbooks, they are stories, intended to entertain" (Conley "Another Cherokee Novel" 1985). BCI/Bantam often advertised towards reader entertainment as well. In the marketing materials for their new entertainment series *Stagecoach: Laredo* and *Stagecoach: Dodge City,* they promoted the novels' "colorful heroes and heroines who battle marauding Indians, ruthless bandits and natural hazards. As exciting as the era it evokes, *Stagecoach* brings frontier action and entertainment to millions of readers" ("Advertisement for Stagecoach: Laredo and Dodge City"). Each book would appeal to readers with their "briskly paced and action packed…entertainment value" ("Advertisement for Stagecoach: Laredo and Dodge City:" "Advertisement for *Stagecoach"*). The idea that readers primarily read westerns for enjoyment and to be entertained was explicitly tied to the content of the western story— elements of character, setting, and patterns of action—that defined the genre. It is this combination of elements that were entertaining and that kept readers coming back. Additionally, this narrative consumption provided a certain level of escapism that allowed readers to live through the colorful heroes of their stories. In a 1972 letter to Harvey Gardner, editor at Gold Medal Books, author William Cox wrote that the "reading public which like the Buchanan books…are looking for escape reading. They want to laugh a little and worry a little" (William Cox to Harvey Gardner October 24th, 1972). And this entertainment is rooted in reading about characters who were "bigger than life." As one author noted, if they don't have larger than life action "we lose our readership. Our heroes MUST be faster and more adroit with gun, and their women endowed with more courage and fortitude than the average" (Eric Allen to "Nels" December 28th, 1978).

But readers also read for educational purposes, reading westerns to learn how to live a certain way. Author and WWA president Francis Fugate spoke to this didactic role in a 1986 editorial. He began by telling an anecdote about an encounter with a group of children playing in his neighborhood park the day after Ronald Reagan gave a televised speech on the War on Drugs. Fugate asked what they were playing and who the "bad guys" were, and the children answered they were playing *Miami Vice* and the narcs were the bad guys because "cops are always trying to get you" (Fugate "The President's Page" 1986). Then, Fugate called on western writers to "join the war on drugs;" arguing that " if we do not manage to replace *Miami Vice* with decent, wholesome crime, those of us in Western Writers of America who still have the know-how to create good, clean death and destruction are going to be responsible for the ruination of a whole generation of our nation's children" (Fugate "The President's Page" 1986). Regardless of whether this was what readers actually wanted, these assumptions fueled the decisions publishers and authors made and ultimately shaped the ideological and formal content of the genre in this period.

Additionally, readers kept coming back to westerns to connect with history, and through their reading, learned about the land on which they lived. Author Francis Fugate discusses this in relation to the recent influx of people moving to the "wide open spaces of the West and the Southwestern Sunbelt" who are donning "boots and jeans and blend into the picture. They read and ask questions about their newly adopted land. Some even invest in time at dude ranches to learn how to ride horses…and some turn to reading" (*The Round Up* July/Aug 1986). In these scenarios, readers used westerns to learn about their home, their culture, and their history and reenacted the narrative of western expansion that defined the western genre. Fugate argued that by "placing one of the reader's feet in the present you can take the other to the past: Most will read western history and folklore if it springs from something he can visit and see, in his mind if not in person" (*The Round Up* July/Aug 1986). This is consistent with readers' social infrastructure. One librarian from Crook County, Oregon wrote to author Dwight Newton asking for extra copies of his novels, *Crooked River Canyon* and *The Oregon Rifles,* both of which are very popular in their branch due to the local setting (Tom Roughton to Dwight Newton February 15th, 1973). Peter Sims, marketing manager for University of Iowa Press, remarked on a similar phenomenon of how people moving to "inhabit the open spaces of the west in record numbers" represented "a growing nostalgia for the west as it was" as this new "indigenous audience" sought out western titles that helped them understand their new home (Sims qtd. in Adare "Marketing: From the University Press Perspective" 1994). Author Kenneth Davis wrote that western fiction gave its readers is a way to connect to place and also to the "living presence of history" and allowed them to "develop that necessary sense of a belonging in a tradition;" the western novel provided a "fictional link with those traditions to which we aspire…[and] can embue [sic] their readers with an epic, metaphoric vision which should help them better understand what it is to be in an on-going tradition. Modern culture is impoverished by its lack of a sense of belonging" (Davis "Splendid Spur to the Imagination: Qualities of Modern Popular Western Fiction" 1989). What is implied here is the idea that, in reading westerns, readers were linked to the past, and to a larger cultural tradition, and kept a reader invested in these stories past entertainment. As Tor/Forge publisher Tom Doherty noted, "until people don't care about their heritage or their history, there's room for what we're doing" (qtd. in Moulton "Book Industry Faces Continued Market Slump" 1998). This sentiment, that what readers got out of the western is a sense of connectedness to the West as a region, to their heritage and historical past especially in the face of a declining modern culture, is supported by the direct reporting from readers. In Avis Pepper's correspondence with author Dwight Newton, she talked about her own communities in Kansas and how they are connected to this larger sense of belonging; she wrote:

> I have been unable to trace my family beyond my great grandfathers and great grandmothers on both sides. On a map I own I found a small town called Sherrell. It had originally been Sherrill's Sound and was founded in 1833 by Isaac and Adam Sherrill—brothers. It is about 20 miles north of Dubuque, Iowa and some 70 or 80 miles West of Darlington, Wisconsin where my grandfather Sherill was born. I plan to make a trip up there next spring to try to find out if these brothers were my ancestors (Avis Pepper to Dwight Newton November 22, 1978)

These experiences are especially interesting when mapped onto the genre's preoccupation with setting as one of the most important aspects of the genre. What would it mean for a reader living in the Western US to be constantly oriented (and reoriented) in terms of space while reading through directional, distance, or geographical linguistic markers? When a western novel foregrounded mountains, prairies, valleys, and rivers, did the reader see these elements as part of, or the same as, the world they inhabited? Did readers notice or make these connections as they read? And if they did, how much, if any, significance was placed on these connections? One possible answer is that in these experiences, the western situated its readers in relationship to history, and specifically helped them navigate their presence geographically (where they lived) and temporally (their meaningful connection to a past community). Additionally, this navigation is connected to a wider idea of how, in reading westerns, people participated in a larger vision of community, that they could feel some sort of in-group belonging as they read based on the land they occupied.

That readers often turned to westerns to feel connected to their history leads to one of the most prevalent dynamics discussed by stakeholders: that readers read primarily to see themselves living a mythic western lifestyle, that they knew didn't exist, but that reading helped keep alive. Authors and publishers frequently mentioned this as they theorized what readers got most out of their reading. This representation of a way of life was also reflected in the magazines that readers also consumed, like *Cowboy Magazine,* dedicated to upholding "mythical image of the cowboy, the ideal cowboy whose word is truth and who tries to live by high standard of honest hard work, and respect for mankind and earth" (Wallmann "The Past, Present, and Future of the Western" 1992). Readers inhabited this fantasy space and saw themselves as these types of people. As author Jim Collins noted, this was the true appeal of the traditional western: "everybody wants to be able to ride of town whenever they want to…it's sort of a fantasy in a civilization like this. There is a romance about it" (qtd. in "Writers of the New Western Genre: Novels Set in the Old West Coming Back" 1987). And this fantasy world that readers inhabited was not only connected to who they were, but to a collective identity rooted in nationalism. According to Jeffrey Wallman, westerns "are not only about personal character, they are about the character of the nation…[and] incorporate all of the cultural factors which determine belief, identity, and status" (Wallmann "The Irrelevancy of New Revisionism" 1994). And according to publishers like Gary Goldstein, senior editor at Putnam Berkley Group, and Tom Doherty, president of St. Martin's Press, there was still demand for immersion in this world; readers still wanted "a traditional hero who loves his horse," the country (of western readers) to see greatness (in the traditional hero), they didn't "want to know that cowboys were just migrant farm workers" (qtd.

in “Gang of Offbeat Western Novels Takes Genre By Storm”). And this idea of a collective idealistic lifestyle became a crucial site of engagement with the failings of modern society, so that the absence of western cultural lifestyle including toys and clothing became evidence of a society that no longer existed and that represented something better that we should return to. Like Fugate’s lament on modern culture and the urge of western authors to join Reagan’s War on Drugs, authors like Jack Ravage[54] noted that the overall deterioration of modernity could be seen in the lack of western culture in particular. Ravage claimed that you used to be able to go into stores and see “toy cap-pistols, holsters, Indian knives, masks, cowboy hats, and all such accoutrements as that. Today—in the post-Rambo fever of the moment—the question is rhetorical isn’t it[?];” children don’t wear boots anymore and t-shirts no longer proudly announce “‘Head them off at the Pass’ (unless it adorns an LA Raiders fan) or ‘Nice shot, Roy. Where’s Bullet?’” (Ravage “Who Says the Western is Coming Back” 1986).

Both the publishing industry and readers saw the genre as representing a last bastion of idealism and reading these novels helped people tap into this as something they already thought was true in themselves. But this process was always informed by a knowledge that this identity was “mythic” and so in a way, both true and untrue, fundamentally precarious. In a reprinted 1959 essay, A.B. Guthrie considered why readers came back to westerns and continued to buy the myth if they knew better, why did they “go to western movies? Why do they sit hypnotized when the gunman of legend comes on the TV screen? Why do they affect big hats, jeans or frontier pants and cowboy boots when most of them never bridle a horse, can’t harness a team and live by virtue of commerce in oil or insurance or underwear?” (Guthrie “The Meaning of the West” 1988). Guthrie hypothesized it was because of the confluence of identity and precarity, that the western narrative offered the ability to live a life that was gone but could (and should) be reclaimed:

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[54] I’m not sure if this is a pen name or the author’s real name.

> the state of knowing better never has been fatal to fantasy… these ways will pass and are passing now, but while they endure we can think, all of us, that life can be different and good and refreshing, and when they are gone, we shall keep digging them up for page and screen and festival, and somehow we shall feel renewed. We reach for it, for the stout heart and muscles of yesterday, for the great and exciting pastures of innocence, for the young simplicities of right and wrong, for the vanished opportunities to do our stuff. It doesn't matter too much that our hands come back empty (Guthrie "The Meaning of the West" 1988).

Author Gordon Shirreffs supported this sentiment, that the traditional western was about a "man who never existed. It's a myth…Regardless, readers of the western believe the myth. They may be driving a truck, but in their hearts they're out on a horse" (qtd. in "Writers of the New Western Genre: Novels Set in the Old West Coming Back" 1987). These two images of the reader are especially important as we try to hypothesize what readers got out of westerns in relationship to identity in the dominant-hegemonic code. The first is that reading westerns was like reaching for some lost way of life, a way of life that had ceased to exist (or that never existed) and in the process of reading, readers could feel renewed or validated with a connection to this lifestyle. And the other is that readers believed the "myth of the West" because the longing for identity was more powerful than the realization of its inaccuracy. In reading westerns, readers could inhabit this identity and know that what they always knew to be true about themselves could be realized.

Conclusion:

Reading is a complex process, one that allows for a multitude of experiences and perspectives, and the reading experiences for western readers are no different. While it's clear that publishers and authors made decisions about the content and form of the western genre with their readers in mind, this analysis shows that not only did a variety of people read westerns, but they read them for different reasons and in different ways. However, archival patterns highlight how even this diverse spread of readers navigated ideological discourse encoded in the genre, primarily that the entertaining qualities of the western were almost always accompanied by a specific reading lens that allowed them to consume these narratives without seeing the ideological dimensions of the genre conventions as problematic. When publishers and authors imagined a reader, they saw the need to bring the reader near the character, setting, and patterns of action, to not just entertain them but to give them access to what they really wanted: a life that no longer existed. What brought people back to the western over and over, was its capacity to let them live out a certain lifestyle that included a version of themselves that was true to their own identities or self-conceptions. And crucially, this lifestyle didn't need to be "real" in any historical sense; indeed, many stakeholders and readers could acknowledge that the "myth" of the West never actually existed. Reading these novels meant it didn't need to be true, because readers knew that who they were was true, and who they were was the only truth that mattered. In reconstructing readers' experiences from stakeholders, as well as readers themselves, I argue that the dominant-hegemonic decoding position prioritized identity as a reading lens that allowed readers to consume a genre without needing to push further into the naturalized ideological violence at its heart. And based on the materials from stakeholders including publishers, editors, and authors, this marked a moment where the western genre was decoded in the ways it was intended by its encoders. But because this complex process concerns itself with a narrative that is both true and untrue, at the heart of this identity is a fundamental precarity worth exploring. In the next chapter, I analyze the moment this precarity becomes salient to readers and pushes them into Hall's subsequent stages, the negotiated and oppositional codes, and ultimately intersects with the politics of the far right.

Chapter 4 “Please cancel my subscription to your New World Order philosophy:” Western Reader Identity Under Threat as “Negotiated” and “Oppositional” Decoding

If we posit that reading westerns also implies consuming an identity, a way for readers to understand themselves, then what happens to a reader when they read westerns at a political moment oriented around perceived threats to that identity? Do politics somehow change the reading experience? Does the reading shape reactions to the politics? To consider how readers might react when they feel the identity they consume is threatened, it’s important to know how the genre started to change in relation to perceived demands by the market, who felt anxiety around this change, and when this anxiety bubbled to surface. Archival materials indicate that the western genre and readers evolved in very specific ways in the 1990s. In this period, western sales and popularity boosted and then declined, indicating rapid shifts in readership while the publishing industry reacted with changes in content, form, and marketing strategies. In this final chapter, I trace these shifts through the 1990s, how stakeholders and readers interpreted these shifts with increasing anxiety, and how this anxiety reflected a certain kind of perceived pressure on the identity so closely aligned with the dominant hegemonic relations of power that the western fundamentally represented. This chapter explores the connections between the cultural and the political, with readers existing in both spaces at once. I argue that the last decade of the twentieth century represented a turning point in cultural and political discourses involving the actual Western US as a geopolitical region, the ideology encoded in the western genre, and the political valences of the far right that not only intersected with the encoded ideological dimensions of the genre itself, but also with reader themselves.

This turning point (and intersection point) also represents the moment when readers demonstrate their capacity to move from a dominant-hegemonic code to Hall's other positions: the negotiated and oppositional. As mentioned in the introduction, the negotiated code is when a viewer's (or reader's) reception contains "a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations, while, at a more restricted, situational level, it makes its own ground rules, operating with "exceptions" to the rule" (Hall "Encoding/Decoding" 273). Additionally, negotiated codes are often "shot through with contradictions" as they navigate dominant ideology, and "operate through what we might call particular or situated logics…[arising] from the differential position of those who occupy this position in the spectrum, and from their differential and unequal relation to power" (273-4). The oppositional code refers to a contrary position where a viewer perfectly "understand[s] both the literal and connotative inflection given to an event" but "decode[s] the message in a globally contrary way" (Hall 274). Additionally, Hall argues that "when events which are normally signified and decoded in a negotiated way begin to be given an oppositional reading," it indicates a particularly significant political moment (Hall 274). The 1990's were a significant political moment, marked by some of the highest numbers of far-right, white supremacist, nationalist militia, and extremist groups in US history which significantly impacted mainstream politics in ways that are still felt today. This last chapter treats this political moment and the moment of "precarious identity anxiety" as the same moment, the moment that fundamentally shaped western readers' experiences and contributed to the socio-political climate that encouraged readers into both negotiated and oppositional decoding positions. The archival materials discussed here document how readers moved from a negotiated decoding position to an oppositional one in relation to the western genre. In the following analysis, I discuss why this movement is so significant, and how it overlaps with the increase of far-right violence in the 1990s. While the third chapter argued that many readers operated from a dominant decoding position, this chapter argues that the negotiated decoding position included reading experiences that engaged in ideas of history, identity, and the "real" West. Additionally, I trace the moment when the threat to reader's identity felt particularly real and leveraged them into an oppositional decoding position.

Negotiating Anxiety

In the 1970s and 1980s, stakeholders attributed any decline in westerns to a disinterest in both the history and the way of life depicted in the western narrative. In a letter to Dwight Newton, a historian writing on the genre claimed that "modern young people" are not interested in history, but also not "really too interested in anything" and that this could be, in part, attributed to

> new Left nonsense which says history is not relevant is either a form of acute social paranoia or a case of pronounced historical myopia. Paradoxically, based on contemporary historical experiences, they are saying that either this period in history is totally unique or that it has absolutely no historical precedents. If anything, they are seeking to create a non-dimensional history, or present time (Phillip Thomas to Dwight Newton January 12th, 1971)

Additionally, authors and agents talked about the pressures to change their western novels in relationship to what publishers wanted. In 1973, Dwight Newton's agent wrote to him informing him that Ace Books rejected his novel, *High Country Showdown,* and several others by regular Ace contributors, because they were "trying to upgrade [their] western line" with "more serious western plotting, with some strong character conflict in addition to the ‘shoot em up’ action routines. We could have situations where a woman motivates conflict and action… [and are] interested in considering some westerns that sympathetically handle a minority group character, the Negro, Mexican, Indian” (August Lenniger to Dwight Newton May 16th, 1972). Ace’s proposed changes included incorporating more minority characters in the genre as well as women to drove the narrative. Through the 70s and the early 80s, the genre evolutions were taken as a sign of a depleted culture, and this decline, for many readers and members of the western publishing community, emblematized the coming extinction of the identity it represented. As Brian Garfield said, the western codified “certain principles…the idealization of moral values—the values that hold civilization together. Without them everything falls apart…the Western told us where we were, culturally” (Brian Garfield to Dwight Newton November 20th 1973). This meant that the genre walked a thin line between wanting to change (to appease new readers) and needing to maintain the narrative that “idealized the moral values of civilization” and what made the genre what it was (to appease old readers).

However, some authors seemed amenable to this evolution, claiming that westerns will become “more realistic—sexier—and more like novels in the mainstream of fiction” and that the trend of cold, mean heroes can be reversed through the “restoration of warm emotions, dramas that involve families and children, women, love, inner values, moral choices, temptations to character and virtue to the extent that these replace the macho cult” (“Molly: A New Heroine from the Old West” 1982; Wheeler “What’s Wrong with the Western” 1983). Additionally, authors discussed how this evolution could usher in different perspectives for different readers. Jeanne Williams discussed how most women readers wanted “feelings, the longing, the excitement, to be dwelt upon” and both Williams and Jack Cummings discussed how adopting the “radical new perspective” of strong female protagonists “certainly won’t hurt any book’s readership to present women in fuller perspective” instead of years of “men and horses” (Williams “Women Writers of Western Fiction” 1984; Cummings “Ernest Haycox’s Women” 1985). Through the 1990s, authors discussed how this evolution of the genre could represent a good thing, a fresh appeal to new readers, not about a “hidden feminist agenda or about eliminating white males and their contributions to our western mythology [but] an opening of the door to the women, children, and often-ignored minorities…[it’s] an expansion of what ‘western’ means in the American psyche (Bauer “Women’s West a New Anthem” 1998; *Round Up Magazine* 1995).

But despite this optimism, and depending on who you asked, the western was either alive and well or dead and dying at the end of the twentieth century, indicating at the very least, mixed messages about demand and readership. The late 80’s and the early parts of the 1990’s actually saw a surge in popularity due to the success of ‘literary’ titles like Larry McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove* (1985), its sequels, and its popular television adaptation, and Cormac McCarthy bestseller *All the Pretty Horses* (1992). The commercial success of several western films like Clint Eastwood’s *Unforgiven* (1992), Kevin Costner’s *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and the adaptation of Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1992) also helped revive interest in the western mythos. As Dennis Showalter noted in the 1993 January issue of *Publisher’s Weekly,* the surge of interest in the themes of the American West is reflected in sales, future publishing plans, and trends with Bison Books reissuing classic titles such as *The Virginian*—modernized, updated, and illustrated—and reprinting midcentury traditional westerns like the novels of Elmore Leonard (Showalter). But there was also significant activity and demand for new, and different, westerns, especially in mass market paperback series with new releases from Harlequin, Bantam, Berkeley, Zebra, Kensington, Avon, and NAL/Signet. While the rise of the adult western and the success of Louis L'Amour was, in part, due to a turn back towards the traditional formula, the new mass-market western was moving in another direction: towards historical accuracy.

What stakeholders could agree on was that the genre wasn't as an inevitable and steady sell as it had been in previous decades and indeed, by the late 1990's, the surge of demand brought on by the commercial success of films and the critical success of authors like McCarthy soon faded. Publishers, including Bantam, were cutting back and closing their western lines and agents were no longer attending the Western Writers of America conventions where they connected with authors regarding new projects. As Wheeler noted about some of his final WWA conventions, it looked like the western was going to expire with the twentieth century. The genre that had started in 1902 with *The Virginian* "might not last beyond the book's hundredth birthday in 2002. All of this had a funeral quality. It was as if the organization devoted to western literature could only look backward because there was no future" (179). Additionally, authors and critics attributed this decline not necessarily to a coinciding lack of demand from readers but from systemic changes within publishers and distributors. Authors worried about how the conglomeration of U.S. publishing houses in the 1980's into the "Big 5" and the acquisition of Random House by German media firm Bertelsmann in 1998 would influence how imprints like Bantam, Doubleday and Dell approached their western lines (Wallmann 182). Some claimed that the decline in the western's popularity had nothing at all to do with a declining readership, instead recent changes in book distribution infrastructure including the inability of independent distributors to compete with national grocery store chains' regional and nation distribution bids and the rise of "superstores" had impacted the performance of western titles across imprints because it made it more difficult get books into the hands of readers of who still wanted them (qtd. in Wallmann 183-4).

This new direction was accompanied by an awareness that the western formula wasn’t enough to satisfy readers and part of the turn towards more historically accurate novels was in response to this perceived dissatisfaction. As Edwin McDowell wrote in 1985, the formula western was falling from fashion with its narrow narrative morality and an overreliance on stereotypes; there were still moral components to "formula western" but “few authors still take a stereotypical view of Indians, or follow Max Brand's advice that, "there has to be a woman, but not much of a one. A good horse is much more important.’” (McDowell) There was also a generational component to this shift—young authors weren’t writing these formulas anymore and young readers weren’t interested in reading them. And this lack of interest is politically motivated; as Patrick LoBrutto, an editor at Doubleday noted, “the generation of the 60's was understandably not going to accept the concept of good guys and bad guys, where the bad guys were always Indians and Mexicans” (McDowell) Instead, according to Walker editor Michael Sagalyn, younger writers “‘are blending serious historical research with good writing,' that yields a familiar frontier character that is still “self-reliant and [has] nobility of spirit” but that more fully encapsulates the complexity of a historical perspective that readers need and want (McDowell).

The historically accurate western presented a challenge to the mythic west as it replaced it with a reality that abandoned the “trappings of dead cliches and the contrivances of outworn plot formulas… [and] reflect[ed] the dignity of honest history, because that is where the truth lies—not only for the historian but also for the moviemaker and novelist” (“Westerns, Continued” 1985). Tony Seidl, Pinnacle’s Director of Sales and Marketing noticed that there was a growing interest in “authentic western historical fiction, as more than ever before Americans are becoming intrigued with their country’s past” (qtd. in House “The President’s Page” 1985). The striving for authenticity is reflected in many different stakeholders through the late 1980s and early 1990s with a desire to portray things in a less romanticized, formulaic way, “the way things were” and incorporate far more historical research (Lewis “An Interview with Wallace Exman” 1989; Sobel “An Agent’s Experience with Westerns” 1990). In the void where formulas used to exist, novels were emboldened to challenge the genre’s conventions including narratives “about women, blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, and gays” (qtd. in “Gang of Offbeat Western Novels Takes Genre By Storm” 1994; Jameson “The Western is Not Dead: It’s Just Changing Costumes and Addresses” 1995). These changes reflected what we might consider a confluence of revisionism and New Western History, but more important the changes highlight how publishers understood western readers as now wanting more. According to author Katheen O’Neal Gear, “readers are demanding more and more from their novels. It no longer suffices to simply entertain…readers demand authenticity. The public wants the truth…They want to see deeply human characters with enough sheer audacity and brains to meet the frontier challenge head-on” (qtd. in Eickhoff “Women Rewriting the West” 1996). As NAL editor Ed Stackler noted, these mass market novels showed a movement away from the formula and towards historical accuracy to appeal to new readers. What sells in this new western are “authentic details structuring a specific story, often with real events and real people as integral to the plot.” (qtd in Showalter “Bringing Back the Western” 1989). This perceived shift in the genre’s conventions towards historical accuracy also signify a tendency to include more diverse voices in texts especially considering both indigenous perspectives and the essential role that women played in the West. As bestselling author John Jakes notes, ‘I don’t know what exactly what’s meant by ‘revisionism’ in writing about the West, but if it means western fiction is being more mature, honest, factual, faithful to the record—the frontier experience as it really was—then I suppose I’ve been a ‘revisionist’ ever since I started writing historical novels” (qtd in Wallmann 4-5). In this new western, readers have released themselves from the “mythological story of the West [and] now that [they’ve] been released from it, all kinds of things are happening” (“Writers of the New Western Genre”). In 1992, Jeffrey Wallmann argued that the developing western formula represented more than just an enduring nostalgia, it’s about the continued need for connection with a “past for the benefit of a possibly barren present…as long as it is acknowledged that the western cannot imitate history and should not, the myth will survive” (Wallmann “The Past, Present, and Future of ‘Westerns’” 1992). This tension between history and myth, with the western reader at the center, presents an interesting and almost contradictory phenomenon in the archive materials. The need for a connection to a history is established as a primary element of the reader’s identity that they consume in reading the western, but at the same time the drive for authenticity brings a challenge to that identity. And as genre evolves, it asks the reader to let go of the myth, without somehow becoming disconnected from it.

The resulting discourse highlights a strain of anxiety that ran through this moment of “letting go,” as stakeholders sensed a shift in cultural consumption and in the genre itself. This anxiety intensified in the 1990s and reified into worries about a threat to modern culture as some started to critique the genre. This critique was especially dangerous because transcended the mere genre practices of including more diverse voices in the western or incorporating more historical research and instead threatened the ideological core of the genre’s narrative. One way this anxiety manifested is in how criticism of the genre was interpreted through the lens of belonging and understanding. Some stakeholders thought that those who criticized the western for its ideological components simply didn't understand the identity the genre portrayed, and that the criticism was just a larger piece of the PC culture war. Indeed, editor at Putnam, Gary Goldstein recalls turning down contracts to turn some of Putnam's westerns into audiobooks because they requested the novels be "rewritten to make the Indian characters more sympathetic" (qtd in "Gang of Offbeat Western Novels Takes Genre By Storm" 1994). As author Suzann Ledbetter says in a letter to the WWA magazine, "God save us from the revisionist and the politically correct" ("Letters-More PC Warning" 1998).

Some authors shot back at those who criticized the genre's politics, accusing them of being ignorant to the true western identity. Judy Atler, for one, charged that in analyzing the ideological dimensions of the western, literary critic, Jane Tompkins failed to "absorb the history and the geography of the region" which is "essential if you're going to criticize its literature" because she "is an easterner" who as only "passed through the West, much like a tourist" (Atler "Through a Glass Darkly" 1992). To understand what the western genre is about, Atler implied, one must understand the identity that it portrayed, and the pressure for it to change was a result of not understanding who the western was about, and who it was for. If you didn't have this identity, it wasn't for you, and you wouldn't understand it. These authors were often responding to a growing belief among academics and intellectuals that the western's narrative was fundamentally a story of conquest, as expressed most influentially in Patricia Nelson Limerick's famous New Western text, *The Legacy of Conquest.* This is what author Larry McMurtry observed in his criticism of the New West History, that it represented a change in national attitude:

> expansion [according to New Western historians] was, specifically, an irresponsible white male's adventure, hugely destructive of the land itself, of the native peoples, and

> even of the white male's own women and children…Conquest, once a national habit, almost a national ideal, is now despised. Old, brutal, masculine American confidence has been replaced (at least among historians) by a new, open, feminine American self-doubt—a moral doubt, the sort that can produce a malaise of the spirit" (McMurtry "How the West Was Won or Lost" 1991)

This idea of the evolving genre as mirroring a new type of national self-imaging reflects an anxiety around what people believed could be lost when you pushed on the ideologies behind western expansion and conquest so central to its story. It caused stakeholders (and perhaps readers) to see the possibility of different perspectives as a threat to their own developed self, just as the New Western History movement did. The move towards revisionism becomes accusatory, decrying the "Anglo-Saxon frontiersmen and settler of having been chauvinist racists bent on aggression and exploitation" and accusing the whole genre as "racist, sexist, imperialistic, genocidal, right-wing juvenile trash" (Wallmann "The Irrelevancy of New Revisionism" 1992; Walker "Westerns: From Maligned to Mainstream" 1998). This last comment is particularly interesting because it marked a moment of intersection between the western and the far right brought up by Richard Wheeler, a western author, in defense of the genre. He makes it clear that the western doesn't belong in this category, and that especially the newer westerns do not resemble the "sexist, racist, imperialist epithets of the PC police" (qtd. in Walker "Westerns: From Maligned to Mainstream" 1998).

What is interesting here is that, although Wheeler tries to save the genre from these accusations, the analyses in chapter one and two highlight how these discourses do share close ideological frameworks. What differentiates them, as explored in chapter three, is that the genre didn't require its reader to associate the conventions with any "sexist, racist, or imperialist" qualities, while the far-right groups reveled in these associations. And so, we might think of the anxiety around the New Western History movement and the political correctness of the 1990s as the veneer surrounding the genre cracking and revealing relationships that stakeholders did not want to see, or acknowledge, because interfered with the genre's entertaining, educational, and identity-mirroring functions. And if stakeholders felt this way about the proposed challenges to the western, to what extent can we see these phenomena in readers' experiences as well? This moment of anxiety (for stakeholders and readers) perhaps represents what Hall calls "negotiated" decoding, which is often characterized by its contradictions. These contradictions were already apparent in the messages that stakeholders were receiving (readers want westerns to both change and stay the same, westerns were thriving and dying) but the rest of this chapter explores this negotiated position in more detail with evidence from readers and analyzes how it opened doors for modes of oppositional decoding that explicitly linked itself to the far right.

I trace the logics of this anxiety by exploring how the western represented as a "way of life" that seemed to be fading (or faded into the historical past) and the need for it to keep living in the western for it to keep living in those that read westerns. Additionally, this phenomenon seems tied to another tension between a historical authenticity and a mythical subjectivity (what feels real about the West). This is expressed throughout the stakeholder material, as western nonfiction writer David Dary states, history:

> does not require formal instruction to be handed down for generation to generation. We all have listened with interest as parents or grandparents told stories of the past. And from these stories, just as in the epic tales of old, one must sort out fact from fiction to learn history…[but] readers will pay attention to fact *only* when they are interesting. To be

> interesting, factual information must be touched with emotion (Dary "Academic Historians Need to Wake Up" 1997)

There seems to be a historical truth to this emotion, a truth that equaled fact, especially when it was a truth passed down for generation to generation and told through the same stories that appealed to readers. This idea of a historical and felt truth, emerged in direct contact with readers as well. In the June 1990 issue of *True West,* one reader wrote in correcting an article about their family member, whose son died at Little Big Horn: "yes, Ella Mae Sturgis's mother was called "Juty" by her family, but her name was Jerusha, not Gerusha. She was my grandfather's cousin, and although 20 years his junior, she was his favorite among his whole family. She and her brothers and sisters were the only blood relatives my grandfather had, since his only brother had died when grandpa was three." ("Truly Western" *True West* 1990).[55] Regardless of whether this reader's correction was true, in this moment, the reader embodied the western historical narrative, possessing knowledge truer than the magazine they consumed. This letter also echoes the role that history and ancestry played in narrativizing of far-right politics as a foundation on which to build political positions because the communities they were hoping to radicalize were already invested in this history. This isn't to suggest that this reader harbored extremist or far-right politics (there would be no way to prove this) but it points towards a situated logic that developed as the reader engaged with the encoded messages about the historical stories of the West, and how they prioritized what they knew was true about these stories (because the stories were part of their identity). This also highlights a moment of negotiation in the decoding process, whereby the dominant-hegemonic code gives way to a more negotiated dynamic between accepting dominant positions while also operating with “exceptions” to the rule. In relation to the historical accuracy debate, a reader might accept the logic of wanting historically accurate stories of the West but reject the notion that these stories needed to include diverse voices, because this inclusion felt like an encroachment on their own self-conception. In the negotiated code, readers’ “felt” history, made real through ancestry or stories, was as “real” as the history that was presented via novels or magazines and allowed them to choose for themselves how they would read the printed story.

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[55] Letters from readers that are published in commercial magazines like *True West* and *Cowboys & Indians* are a complicated type of evidence in this analysis, especially because decisions about what letters get published are made by the magazine's editorial board and are clearly chosen with intent. However, based on the clear crossover in advertising, writer contribution, and stakeholder evidence that suggested western readers read across novel and magazine formats, I made a strategic assumption that the same people reading western novels were also reading, and writing letters to, western magazines.

Revisionist Trash and the Culture War

The idea of “history as identity under threat” is the other aspect of this situated logic that ran through the discourse of the 1990s, and where stakeholders and readers held the line against what they feel to be the onslaught of “political correctness.” In relation to the western, this line was drawn at the intersection of history and identity. Author Elmer Kelton was an especially fierce proponent of this idea. He argued in several different features in the WWA magazines that:

> all that we are, everything we believe in, the way we live our lives, is rooted in the times, the mores, the histories of our parents, our grandparents, and many generations before them. We may sometimes veer away from the old teachings. We may find that parts of them were misguided or even fatally flawed. But they have been a factor in making us whatever we are” (Kelton “Rancher Use of Range Resource” 1993)

It irritated him that revisionist and environmentalists would place all the “ills of mankind” on his ranching and farming forefathers characterizing them as insatiable with greed when the truth was that they were “just trying to make a living and to improve their lot in life…to get a little something of their own, to put a little more space between their families and the wolf at the back door" (Kelton "Politically Correct or Historically Correct?" 1993; qtd. in "Gang of Offbeat Western Novels Takes Genre By Storm" 1994). Kelton's truth about his family was more akin to something historically felt (yet no less true) and so it makes sense that criticizing this felt historical narrative (by calling it racist or imperialist) would feel at once threatening and false. Readers also documented this logic. In one letter published in the March 1994 issue of *True West,* a "longtime subscriber and loyal reader" commented on a recent editorial about private property, land rights, and whether ranchers should be able to deny access to people crossing their land. The reader acknowledged that it must be hard for the magazine to weigh in on these political issues, but also argued that on the right side of this debate was "private property owners who believe that ownership of real property is a constitutional right [and] most are hardworking, honest ranchers" who are "being assailed by politically correct office holders and overzealous bureaucrats from all directions" ("Truly Western" 1994). Another letter from a reader appearing in this same issue, wrote: "if you think your little housing lot is private, don't you think a rancher believes his acreage is private? If not, please enlighten me to the difference. You just sleep in that house in the suburbs—that rancher's property is his place of business—fence line defense line. If you drive over the grass that is feed for his animals, you destroy it and part of his profits" ("Truly Western" 1994). These letters are especially insightful as they hint that a growing political frustration amongst readers, especially in relation to the environment, which as discussed previously, was a salient issue in the discourse of the far right. At the time readers were writing letters to *True West* in 1994, the Wise Use Movement was proposing that rural, working-class people (ranchers and farmers especially) were suffering from oppressive federal overreach concerning environment regulations. These letters echo far-right sentiments that frame private property rights as a sacred sovereignty over Western land, by virtue of having a physical presence on the land as a producer (i.e., farmer or rancher), and having forbears who settled the land. Additionally, these letters highlight a potential movement towards negotiating with the dominant position on land management, as encoded in the magazine itself; and most importantly, this negotiation is characterized primarily by the friction expressed by readers between the content they were reading and the editors (encoders) with whom they exchanged correspondence.

Author Larry McMurtry added an important dimension to this debate, especially as we consider what might draw a reader into a western, what would keep them engaged beyond entertainment, and what would push them into a negotiated or oppositional code. In a 1991 article, McMurtry wrote about his family's experiences in the range cattle industry and its status as a "calling" instead of an industry and he talks about its inevitable demise in the face of the Twentieth Century, that it was doomed to end and how it did. But what endures, McMurtry argues, is the "yearning for it" (McMurtry "How the West Was Won or Lost" 1991). In these anecdotes, authors and readers drew clear connections between history, identity, and the land existing to connect past to present, ancestry to identity. As discussed in the first chapter, the connections between life, political ideas, and material stability are crucial to the ideological and narrative framing of settler colonialism, often using the connection between the land and the individual establishing ownership over this land, as natural, rational, and morally right. Additionally, the second chapter argued how far-right extremist groups often used familiar narrative framings with characters like the farmer or rancher to leverage violent solutions to real economic and political problems precisely because these figures were often the most idyllic versions of the reader's own imagination. The idea of yearning for a historical self-conception under threat is interesting because of its rhetorical connections to the far right and how they engaged with questions of both history and identity under threat. Far-right groups identified themselves as belonging to an inherited spirit of rugged frontiersman and intrepid pioneers, and so their presence in the West is as much about the past as it is about the future. This is clear in the historical features on events like the Alamo published in far-right publications, as they sought to connect themselves to a larger narrative of the West as a destined homeland but also as a lens through which to view the future. McMurtry's comments are interesting in relation to these ideals because in claiming that even when your way of life was completely eradicated, there would always be the yearning for it to come back, it creates, and maintains, something tangible to fight for. This form of nostalgia was crucial in western reception, but in political self-conceptions as well. As political scientist Lisa Beard notes, this type of nostalgia "reimagines a we" from "mythic origins," conveying a "sentiment of loss and displacement and a romance with one's own fantasy" and "exile from the mythic past is a definite fall from grace, and the dream is to rebuild the world as it was" (117). This moment, one of precarity and nostalgia rooted in identity, carries potential for a negotiated code, especially in relation to the lone characters in the western genre who must exist in the spaces between "wild" and "settled," roaming the "lonely" land without a community or a "we." And even indigenous characters could potentially serve as vehicles through which white settler readers could not only indigenize their presence, but feel like in their contemporary moment, they too were being threatened with eradication.

In these ways, readers started to develop an animosity towards the groups, people, and texts that were somehow embodying a "fake West" while they themselves represented the "real West" that still existed in themselves. One reader wrote to the magazine, *Cowboys & Indians* criticizing an article about "homogenized subdivision in what was ranch country" ("Letters"

1998). They wrote that they found the “September 1998 issue a dichotomy…featuring articles about outstanding individuals, and then describing the joy of people who have moved into wholly controlled environments…Giving someone else total control of your architecture, colors, building sites, usage, etc., is indeed not *my idea of a westerner* [emphasis added]…Is this the future we fought to leave our children? I hope not” (“Letters” 1998). Even on the topic of interior design, readers found something lacking in the dominant-hegemonic framing of the western lifestyle; it was somehow not “ruggedly individual” enough that someone wasn’t choosing their own architecture and paint colors. In the same issue, another reader expressed displeasure at the publication as a whole, noting “I find the magazine a serious affront to people who have to work the land to make a go of it and can't quite muster the bucks to buy into what you're pushing as ‘western’… some of us will go on realizing there's more to life than buying into someone's notion of culture” (“Letters” 1998). This reader goes even further to reject the dominant encoded idea of the “western” lifestyle, claiming that they don’t buy into this “fake” version of western culture. Again, this isn’t to suggest that these readers would be more inclined towards a far-right extremist group hoping to radicalize them; but it does highlight how, perhaps starting in the 90’s, readers decoded texts like *True West* through the framework of a “fake” and “real” West and this framework operated as a specific negotiated logic that contended with the dominant and preferred meanings.

Stakeholders believed that in reading these stories, readers validated their own yearning for identity; but this is also what felt so dangerous to readers when the genre (and perhaps the West itself) evolved, because it challenged the narratives that acted as the foundation for this identity. And it seemed to create a split between those readers who felt empowered by the genre’s evolution and those who felt threatened, depending on their position in relation to dominant power structures. In the very small moments of reader reporting in the archive, these negotiated anxieties do emerge around “political correctness”, the “true” West, the “yearning” in relation to identity and it is perhaps these moments that pushed certain readers towards an oppositional code that reflected explicit engagement with the political ideologies of the far right. For example, in the February 1993 issue of *True West*, one reader writes to the editorial board:

> Please cancel my subscription to TRUE WEST. I no longer wish to receive your magazine, as I am opposed to the “New World Order” philosophy to which you have begun to promote in the past couple years. Our forefathers shed their blood and sweat to secure the West. They met their enemies with respect but disdain for those who would challenge their moral or technological superiority. They realize the law of nature mandates that the spider eats the fly, and no lost sleep over it. Many of your now “politically correct” articles stress an exaggerated role of the black man in the West’s development and the plight of “those poor Indians” we virtually raped, who lived “in tune” with nature, not harming the environment. You may be able to rewrite history, but you’ll never be able to change the way it really was. If you have no respect for the heroes of our past and their philosophy, you obviously have no respect for yourselves (“Truly Western” 1993).

This letter highlights several fascinating aspects that could give us insights into an oppositional decoding position. First, we see the direct allusion to a far-right political concept, the New World Order conspiracy, and the accusation that *True West* is imbricated in this conspiracy. The reader invoked the ancestry of Western history as a collective identity (seen in the use of “our”) while also articulating a threat to that identity, and an anxiety around this perceived threat that perhaps prompted the letter. The reader also accused the magazines of betraying the collective ancestry by implying that non-whites (“blacks” and “indians”) were a part of this ancestry. And finally, in stating that *True West* will “never be able to change the way it really was,” the reader implied that this knowledge lives somewhere “unreachable” in the past, but also in their knowledge of this past as the “true” past. In a similar way, another reader letter was published in the same issue, criticizing advertisements for books an issue of *True West,* claiming that she:

> enjoyed the issues of *True West* that I have seen thus far, but I must protest that some of the books advertised stand in need of serious reviewing…the advertisement for *The Broken Ring: The Destruction of the California Indian States* states that the California Indians were “brutalized” by the federal reservation system. Hardly. But if they had been, it would have been justified. Whoever writes these books about Indians obviously is either an American Indian movement propagandist (like the contemptible Dee Brown) or is ignorant of the true nature of the Indian Pagan and lives on *Dances with Wolves* disinformation. [and] in *The Honor of Arms: A Biography of Myles W. Keogh.* If the only sources are Indian, then they are debatable. They had no idea at all that it was Custer's command that they were fighting, and Custer himself was the bravest man they ever fought. Indeed, all our troops were braver than the Indians, and more humane and noble too. Please keep up the material about Custer, who was a real American hero and a great soldier and patriot—despite revisionist trash that fools no one (“Truly Western” 1993).

The reader begins her letter by expressing their past enjoyment of the publication before it was sullied by AIM propagandists, disinformation, revisionist trash. She criticizes the reviewed books for inaccurately depicting the historical treatment of “Indians” in the “federal reservation system” while also legitimizing this treatment by saying if it was true, they deserved to be brutalized. And crucially, she ends by claiming that this trash won’t fool anyone, with anyone perhaps implying, “anyone that matters.” These letters offer fascinating examples of potential oppositional codes in the western genre’s reception, one that detotalizes the revisionist historical narratives of the West published in special interest magazines, and retotalizes this message in what Hall would call an “alternative framework of reference” (Hall 274). And in this case, the alternative frame of reference overlaps with a extremism that believed revisionism to be part of a larger political conspiracy.[56] Additionally, these moments highlight how reader identities are made real through yearning (for a historical past) and reflect the ideological commitment to a vision of a way of life that’s now gone but must be protected from those who would besmirch its character, i.e. the “New World Order” conspiracy and the revisionist trash. And even when the western authors and stakeholders understood and intended for a certain framework of reading that allowed readers to enjoy evolved conventions without also yearning for a “way of life” explicitly linked to settler colonial violence, some readers could not; and indeed, some readers could not even fathom criticism of the genre without feeling as if who they were was also being criticized.

What ultimately happened in the 1990’s is that the cultural elements of the western and the political discourse of the far right overlap with the western existing as one battlefield in a larger culture war for the soul of the nation. It was in this period, that the leaders of various extremist groups, who defined themselves through a regional western mythos, met in Estes Park, to discuss what immediate action needed to be taken to protect the identities under threat from non-whites, environmentalists, and the federal government and to ensure the survival of their way of life. But, as discussed in chapter two, it was also in this period that a “double movement” started to occur where previously mainstream organizations were moving further to the right, while more “extremist” positions were increasingly given mainstream platforms because they garnered a good deal of support. Therefore, it is perhaps valuable to think more in depth about the western mythos role in this shifting, and how the western reader (and their various decoding positions) moved within this shifting.

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[56] Including a shared disdain for Kevin Costner.

As discussed in chapter two, far-right groups often narrativized their extremism with the western mythos because they knew the story of settler colonialism and its various gendered characters were familiar enough to readers to resonate. Readers were already invested in the western mythos as a form of self-conception and were experiencing perceived social and economic precarity that could be interpreted as a threat to their self-conceptions. But what becomes apparent is that these strategies gathered momentum not just on the fringe, but on established national political stages. This is seen in specific events like the radicalizing of Nevada rancher, Cliven Bundy in the early 1990’s who clashed with the federal government by grazing his cattle on land set aside to protect endangered species. Bundy not only gathered support from ranchers, but with local militias who shared a hatred of BLM and USFS.

But one of the most significant examples of this occurred in August 1992, when paleoconservative, and recently conceded Republican primary candidate, Pat Buchanan spoke at the Republican National Convention in Houston, speaking in support of GOP presidential candidate, George Bush. As Lisa Beard notes, in the crowd were his supporters (the “Buchanan Brigade”) sporting “neon baseball caps or red cowboy hats decorated with antiabortion stickers” and Buchanan proceeded to appeal to a “white kinship…distinctly gendered and racialized, with the feminized sentimentality of nostalgia—including images of home, childhood, and precarity—sandwiched between masculinized calls to a cultural war” (Beard 107; 120). Buchanan’s speech is significant to this project in several ways; first, the rhetorical framing is consistent with how far-right extremist groups appealed to their so-called "fringe" audience, and, just like the extremists, Buchanan consistently invoked western mythos to communicate his politics to his "mainstream one". Towards the beginning of the speech, he noted that the election is not about "who gets what," but about "who we are… it is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as…for this war is for the soul of America" (Buchanan). In much the same way that identity offered a lens through which readers consumed the western novels, an "identity under threat" became a lens through which Westerners understood their current political climate. Buchanan went on to say that the "central organizing principle of this republic is freedom. And from the ancient forests of Oregon and Washington to the Inland Empire of California, America's great middle class has got to start standing up to these environmental extremists who put birds and rats and insects ahead of families, workers, and jobs" (Buchanan). Buchanan also referenced the "tiny town" of Hayfork, California that was "now under a sentence of death because a federal judge has set aside nine million acres for the habitat of the spotted owl, forgetting about the habitat of the men and women who live and work in Hayfork" (Buchanan). Like Bundy, the far-right extremist groups, but also the western readers writing letters to special interest magazines, Buchanan connected the physical space of the West, and his supporters' existence in this space, as highly contested, highly political, and worth engaging in whatever action necessary to communicate their willingness to protect the identity that could not be separated from the land, or from the stories of the people who lived on it.[57]

The far right echoed the culture war rhetoric of Buchanan, especially in features like the *WAR* review on the 1996 film, *Twister,* praising it for linking rural Western lifestyles with the indigenized white settler, and white racial in-group community dynamics. In his 2002 book, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* Buchanan explicitly mentioned the western genre as a key battleground in the culture war. Buchanan lamented that the stories in the books, films, and televisions no longer captured the true nature of this period in history, he argues that:

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[57] We might tease out important differences between how these groups define "action," but in the case of a reader, writing and sending a letter to criticize a magazine they've been dedicated to might seem like a meaningful and important political "action."

> Not long ago, stories of the pioneers, soldiers, settlers, and cowboys who "won the West" and tamed a continent in a historic struggle against an unforgiving nature, outlaws, and Indians were the stuff of books, films, and TV shows that enthralled not only Americans, but the rest of the world as well. But the revisionists have done their work. No film today would dare paint Indians as backward, capricious, or cruel. Rather, as in *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*, Indians are seen as early environmentalists who cherished, nurtured, and protected the land and wildlife they depended on. These peaceful, trusting people were cheated, murdered, and massacred by amoral white men who butchered their way across the plains, slaughtering the buffalo and corrupting the Indians they did not wantonly kill. Custer and the Seventh Cavalry are now the role models for the Einsatzgruppen (Buchanan 162)

In this excerpt, Buchanan invokes much of the ideological content encoded in the western and in the extremist discourse: the stories of pioneers, settlers, and cowboys winning the west by taming a wild continent. But Buchanan also articulates an anxiety around the perceived threat to both the narrative and the collective settler identity that depended on the narrative for its legitimacy in much the same way that both stakeholders and readers did. And just as they were in reader self-reporting, revisionist westerns were a clear site of contestation for both the far right and a "mainstream" politician like Buchanan, and demonstrated how one could read westerns from an oppositional decoding position. In these examples, the literal and connotative messages of films like *Twister, Dances with Wolves,*[58] and *Little Big Man* are understood but rejected, and Buchanan focuses instead on the white men as the wronged party, suffering from the slander of the "politically correct," whose representation was being sullied by the "Jew controlled Hollywood." These moments, where the far-right extremist positions overlapped with the western mythos and mainstream politics, complicates the boundaries in this moment. These moments of overlap show how spatial boundaries between "far right" and "extreme" were nebulous, if not meaningless, to a western reader imbricated in these precarious identities. A reader in an oppositional decoding position might align strongly with these sentiments and refuse to "hide" these sentiments in the respectability of the dominant code (even though it was no less problematic). What differentiated these codes is not their ideologies, but how explicitly one connected these ideologies to white supremacist logics. These moments highlight the connecting threads between the extreme and the mainstream, how they both narrativized their political positions through a western mythos that naturalizes white settler presence in the Western US. But perhaps more importantly, these moments highlight the connecting threads between the extreme, mainstream, and the western reader and construct a framework through which we can better understand reader's identities, experiences, motivations, practices. Additionally, the overlapping frameworks of the far right and the mainstream illuminates what political issues pushed readers to align with these various groups or figures, and what pushed them to write letters to western authors and magazines, expressing their discontent.

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[58] While this isn't an analysis of western film, I think it would be interesting to think about the success of *Dances with Wolves* and films like it as being both lambasted as being revisionist trash while also being responsible for a renewed interest in western film or literatures. I think the argument could be made that films or novels that are considered "revisionist" don't deviate that much from the traditional form. And indeed, if revisionism deliberately recreates the traditional conventions of the genre to subvert or critique them, it wouldn't make a difference in they were decoded from a negotiated or oppositional position that interpreted these texts as simply mirroring the audience's own deeply felt precarity. However, that is not within the scope of this project.

As discussed previously, westerns encoded ideologies centered around gender, race, and settler colonial processes and extremists prioritize this content as well. But westerns often couched this ideology in palatable characters and stories, refusing to acknowledge the violence that underpinned these stories. The conventions of the western genre did build ideological knowledge around gender, race, and settler colonialism but never asked their readers to reckon with the implications of this knowledge. Instead, readers used identity as a lens through which they could be unproblematically entertained by the characters and stories, while also finding meaning in what the western gave them access to: a version of themselves. But the last decade of the twentieth century presented a deeply complex conclusion to this story, whereby the perceived threat to this identity (by various changes to the genre, but also by reader's lived experiences) pushed readers into negotiated or oppositional codes. Additionally, the nature of these codes overlapped with far-right political solutions to reclaim what readers felt was being taken from them: a version of themselves. Extremists leveraged the ideological knowledge they produced, because they knew there was a preexisting investment in these narratives, and they used that investment to champion contemporary political positions. The implication that this investment was facilitated through the negotiated or oppositional decoding of western novels and magazines prompts even more questions: How many individuals in the crowd in Houston during the 1992 Republican convention were western readers? How many of these readers listened to Buchanan's speech and saw themselves in the ideas he espoused? How many felt connected to each other in the crowd as they collectively listened? How many felt enraged by the threats to their collective identity? How many would vote in the next election, and whom for? How many wrote letters to *True West* or *Cowboy & Indians* thinking they were doing their part in the culture war?

Conclusion

The third chapter argued that many western readers operated from a dominant decoding position, where their identities could remain separate from the problematic ideological aspects they read even while they hinted at an anxiety around this identity's fundamental precarity. This chapter argues that something unique happened in the sociopolitical climate of the 1990s that forced this precarity into the open and encouraged readers to move towards more negotiated or oppositional decoding positions. This is not to say that all readers were in this oppositional decoding position, indeed there are many examples of readers who wrote in "disgusted" by the letters discussed above and *True West* editor, Jim Joerschke, wrote that the new diversity in the genre is "what makes 1994 the best time ever to be a western reader" (Joerschke "Editorial" 1993; "Editorial" 1994). But it might be important to speculate who was the most susceptible to this type of reading experience. Who would be most inclined towards an anxious reaction to the evolving genre in the political climate of the 1990s? Maybe one of the most interesting aspects of this dynamic is that according to the analysis in the first chapter, the novels published in the 1990s were not markedly different than the novels published in the 1970s and 1980s. What was different was that readers were asked to do what they had never been asked to do before: look at the violence that was always there. Because Hall argues that the negotiated code includes different people in various positions on this spectrum between dominant and opposition in relation to their "differential and unequal relation to power," (273-4) I argue that, within the context of the western, readers with the most investment in systems of power in the current political moment were the most susceptible to transitioning from a negotiated position towards an oppositional decoding position that overlapped with far-right politics. It was these readers that had the most to lose, who saw the political climate around them, and saw far-right groups acknowledging and reciprocating their felt grievances (the slipping away of identity); “extreme” politics explained what these readers saw happening, who was to blame, and offered a solution of how to protect what they were “losing.”

Conclusion: Writing from Complicit Locations

While this project's scope covered the last decades of the twentieth century, making connections across texts, readers, extremism, and mass culture after 1999 is too immense to capture here in full. This is especially true considering how the landscapes have fundamentally changed for both the production and consumption of the western genre and the mechanisms for far-right extremism. But, because political and cultural spheres continue to overlap into the twenty-first century in interesting ways, I conclude by tracing the contours of these landscapes and I discuss the potential implications of this continuing overlap. Since the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and Donald Trump in 2016, the US has seen a resurgence of the far right in groups like Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, the deeply violent neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division, and the loosely assembled Boogaloo movement. Recent scholarship takes up white identity politics and its relationship to extremism in our contemporary moment, especially how perceived threats to white sovereignty act as an onus for political radicalization. Scholars agree that widespread use of the internet fundamentally changed how groups organized, recruited, and disseminated ideology (Binder and Kenyon). Additionally, these groups seem less concerned with questions of regional culture identity and instead utilize technology to facilitate national and global interconnection. For these reasons, far-right discourse is not as western-mythos coded as it was in the twentieth century, but it still is present in meaningful ways.

In 2016, Ammon and Ryan Bundy led a group of armed militia members in a takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Burn, County Oregon (Parks). The occupation was in response to the arson sentencing of Dwight and Steven Hammond, two Marion County ranchers long associated with the Sagebrush Rebellion. The Malheur occupation highlights just how powerful and prevalent the western mythos still is and how it is still used to articulate political positions around federal overreach, grazing rights, and rural identity are in the twenty-first century (Wiles). Two years previously, the Bundys had confronted law enforcement after the Bureau of Land management ordered Bundy to pay withheld grazing fees and notified Cliven Bundy that they would his "unauthorized livestock grazing on BLM and National Park Service lands" ("Bundys Federal Feud: Timeline of Events"). In interviews, Cliven Bundy repeatedly referenced adherence to sovereign citizen ideologies, and his protest gathered support from extremist groups including the "Oath Keepers, the White Mountain Militia, and Praetorian Guard" (Hernandez and Langdon).

Additionally, President Donald Trump, like Reagan, Goldwater, and Buchanan before him, consistently utilized western-coded rhetoric to galvanize his base, garner support, and articulate political ideologies. In a speech commemorating Independence Day, Trump spoke to a crowd in front of Mount Rushmore, claiming that the real Americans were the people who "settled the Wild West" and who "pursued our Manifest Destiny across the ocean, into the uncharted wilderness, over the tallest mountains and even into the stars" (Trump). But he also used these western myths to articulate a threat to larger political myths, claiming that "as we meet here tonight, there is a growing danger that threatens every blessing our ancestors fought so hard for, struggled, they bled to secure" and that the nation is:

> witnessing a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children…They think the American people are weak and soft and submissive. But no, the American people are strong and proud, and they will not allow our country, and all of its values, history, and culture, to be taken from them (Trump).

In these remarks, Trump connects the settler colonial past with the audience's present, including naturalizing their presence on land sacred to, and illegally seized from, the Lakota Sioux (Estes).

And crucially, Trump orients these moments towards the future, articulating a threat to these identities, and a threat to the ancestors upon whom these identities are formed, in the form of cultural war appealing to his audience's self-conceptions as "strong and proud" instead of "weak, soft, and submissive." As shown in this project, Trump's speech is only the most current iteration of strategies that have been utilized since the mid-twentieth century, narrativizing political positions through western mythic imagery, character, and theme, precisely because they resonate with a particular audience.

Like with the political landscape, the internet fundamentally changed the publishing industry primarily with the introduction of e-books, digitizing libraries like Project Gutenberg and Google books, and online self-publishing like Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (*Understanding Media and Culture*). Additionally, online environments have shaped how novels are marketed to readers, how readers discover new books, and how they read them in ways that are still felt today as new technologies emerge. The emergence of social media platforms like Instagram and Tiktok offer fascinating new avenues of inquiry surrounding reader identity and how readers create, join, or move through various communities. Western novels are still widely published today, especially in Kindle and mass-market formats, and western readers are perhaps more active than ever on sites like Facebook and Goodreads. Western author William Johnstone and co-author, J.A. Johnstone, who write the "Jensen/Mountain Man" series have an active Facebook group, where readers share their favorite characters and novels (William W. Johnstone & JA Johnstone Westerns Fan Club-Facebook Group). Goodreads also offers a space for readers to review books and discuss what they liked or didn't like, like one review of Charles G. West's *Hell Hath No Fury,* who noted the book was: "Lively and quite entertaining. My main love with westerns are [sic] the flora and fauna descriptions and the chases and scrapes. There were several cliff hanger moments which kept me entertained" ("*Hell Hath No Fury*-Goodreads Review"). In addition to social media facilitating western reader practices and self-reporting, the recent success of western film and television offers exciting new avenues to think about the reception of these mythic narratives in relation to identity or politics. Shows like Taylor Sheridan's *Yellowstone* (2015), starring Kevin Costner, and the spin-off series, *1883* (2021) and *1923* (2022) are extremely popular. Airing on the cable network, Paramount, and streaming online through Paramount Plus, *Yellowstone* averages around five million viewers per episode, over twenty-million views on their digital platforms and is growing with each subsequent season (Bitette "*Yellowstone* Most-Watched Series"). According to the network, a big reason why these shows are so popular is because of "audiences in middle America" with high viewership in Arizona, Texas, Denver, Kansas, and Oklahoma (Bitette "The Audiences Behind *Yellowstone's* Success"). As Paramount's head of research, Laurel Weir notes, *Yellowstone* resonates with audiences because they can still relate to the character's struggle even if they aren't from Montana: "We are not going after portraying the Coasts, there's a trend across the country where viewers want to be exposed to worlds and cultures that they don't normally see, but they can completely relate to the story and the struggles of the characters. We've seen the show pop in the middle of the country" (Bitette "The Audiences Behind *Yellowstone's* Success").

Additionally, these political and cultural spheres continue to overlap into the twenty-first century in interesting ways as extremist groups will often use social media platforms and publishing technologies to recruit to their cause. For example, the National Alliance and White Revolution neo-Nazi Billy Roper was active on Goodreads and, up until recently, ran a "European American Reading Group" (Wheatley). Additionally, Roper publishes alternate history and science fiction novels on Amazon's self-publishing eBook platform that disseminate his white supremacist ideologies (Kofman et al.). Not only are platforms allowing for the publishing and dissemination of extremist materials, their use of algorithms to recommend similar texts to consumers funnels users down “hate-filled rabbit holes” of “far-right texts” that “reinforce white nationalist worldviews” (Kofman, et al.) Roper’s presence in both these spaces highlights how the Internet significantly impacts the intersection of culture and extremism.

However, a key evolution in the reception of westerns is that ideological encoding has perhaps become more explicit, is being noticed more frequently by readers, and with less success. In one Goodreads review of C.J. Box’s thriller-western, *Storm Watch,* the reader mentions they are a long-time reader of the “Joe Pickett” series, that “features a fish & game warden who finds himself and his family threatened by bad men intent on raping the West,” and that “overall they're great reads, engrossing and hard to put down.” (“*Storm Watch*-Goodreads Review, March 19th, 2023”). However, according to this reader, *Storm Watch #23* was a “bit of a letdown” because:

> C.J. Box injects right-wing views into his characters and tends to portray the people of the mountain West as monolithically conservative. While Joe Pickett generally remains apolitical (with a minor slip here and there, as when he makes a nasty crack to a cross-country skier about the "coexist" bumper sticker on her — what else? — Subaru), the storylines constantly highlight C.J. Box's political inclinations, holding leftists, government officials, and environmentalists up to scorn. Countering this is Nate Romanowski, Joe's sidekick, naturally distrustful of government and a survivalist by nature, who paradoxically winds up fighting villains who share his worldview. It's as if Box wants to push the Fox News/MAGA narrative while giving himself wriggle room to disassociate himself from it, putting me in mind of the late Rush Limbaugh, who when called out would always claim he was "just an entertainer." Which each Box novel, though, it becomes increasingly clear the author listens to a shitload of AM talk radio.

The reader identifies the author's encoding of "right-wing views" into his characters, including the pushing of specific contemporary ideological families (as seen in the "Fox News" and "Make America Great Again" narratives that clearly identify adherence with the Trump presidency). But the reader also expresses an interesting negotiated (or even perhaps oppositional) decoding position, identifying the ideological components of the narrative, and refusing their validity or truth. Instead, the reader attributes Box's attempts at political posturing for somehow being "too obvious" or "try-hard" as the reasons why the book was rated lower than the previous in the series.

The threads that tie these elements together in the twenty-first century are the same twentieth-century threads that weave my chapters together, and that wind their way back through history. In this project, I explored how westerns carried meaning even as they evolved, how this meaning extended beyond their own cultural sphere, intersecting with various far-right ideologies, and used towards political ends. I explored how these stories resonated with a multiplicity of peoples and communities and I traced the contours of their identities as they lived in, and through, the stories they read. And finally, I explored what happens when this mythic story evolves in such a way as to prompt some to believe their own world, and identity, were under threat. Ultimately though, the threads that tie all these elements together are readers. Readers who lived through intersections class, gender, and race and whose stories carried these intersections as well; readers who existed as the common denominator in both political and culture spheres, and who were uniquely susceptible to shaping, and being shaped by, the culture they consumed and the politics they engaged in, ultimately rendering this historical moment at the end of the twentieth century as particularly important. Additionally, this project highlights how "settler" functions as a meaningful category of self-conception that will require deconstructing to further lessen the hold of white supremacy on American culture. And ultimately, one of the questions that this project has tried to answer is: to what lengths will a settler reader go to protect the stories at the heart of who they think they are?

In reflecting on the project's limitations, I know that the scope of what (and who) I tried to capture, made it so that parts of this project would inevitably fail. Primarily, I wish I could have better captured the variety of readers experiences and the nuances of their unique practices and decoding positions. The archive materials suggested such a rich and diverse readership that I was only allowed hints of. I wish I knew whether that young man had sold his methadone and returned to the Safeway parking lot to buy a book, what book it was, and how he read it. I wish I knew how Avis Pepper felt about the way westerns depicted women characters. And ultimately, I wish there were a way to truly capture the complexity of readers' engagement with the politics of their day. If some were intrigued and felt validated by the militia groups who seemed to share a deep understanding of their experience, if they became disillusioned after the Oklahoma City Bombing like the writers in *Preparedness Journal,* or if perhaps they continued to fall down a rabbit hole of conspiracy and thymotic rage and continue to do so today. Perhaps these communities will always be, in some way, unknowable—by virtue of the genre, but also because of the readers themselves, lost from the archive through time and circumstance.

To return to Richard White's question posed in this introduction, about the "weirdness" in the West in the mid-1990s, what I believe these threads show is that far-right extremism in the West was no "weirder" than settler whiteness in the West. This includes to those who count themselves descendants of pioneers, cowboys, sheriffs, and "simple, hard-working people" searching to build a "better life." Both were violent, neither were possible without cultural texts like the western offering them legitimacy, and both required recognition from their audience.

What was compelling about these mythic narratives was that they said something settler readers already knew and believed about themselves. Indeed, for a Western settler to look at extremism in the West and call it "weird" is like looking in a mirror and not recognizing yourself.

And so, I conclude this project by thinking about this mirroring not from a scholarly perspective, but a personal one. In her essay, "Claiming Bad Kin: Solidarity from Complicit Locations," Canadian philosopher, Alexis Shotwell poses a question in response to Christina Sharpe's essay, "Lose Your Kin," published shortly after the 2016 election. In her essay, Shotwell asks: what does it mean to "resist the continued enfleshment of the ghosts and present hauntings of slavery, eugenic projects, the violence of borders, racial distributions of environmental devastation, capitalism, and colonialism?" (Shotwell). Ultimately, in answering this question she pivots to "wonder if refusing to capitulate to current configurations might require white settlers to acknowledge our social and political entanglement with them" (Shotwell). Utilizing the work of indigenous theorists like Kim TallBear, Audra Simpson, and Kyle Powys Whyte among others, Shotwell explores these ideas of entanglement, acknowledgement, and refusal. What emerges for her is the idea that it "does not only matter what we claim about who we are; it also matters who claims us as kin" (Shotwell). The ideas of kin and relationality become a way for white settlers to better understand the "histories we inherit" and the "webs of connection" that entangle us with white supremacy, arguing for a specific form of refusal that "involves white settlers claiming rather than disavowing our connection to white supremacist people and social relations" (Shotwell). Fundamentally, settlers make bad kin because the structural logics of settler colonialism reject both relationality and reciprocity in favor of violence and harm done to people deemed outside the protection of whiteness (Shotwell). It thus becomes necessary for people who benefit from these structures, "who benefit from white supremacist actions, policies, and inheritances… [to understand that] whiteness is an inheritance we cannot disavow or divest from, only reckon with" (Shotwell). Shotwell discusses the role of a "traitor" in relationship to extremist communities as a form of reckoning, especially the role of "race traitor" as refusing the kin of those who see the privileges these structures bestow as their sacred right. While the role of "race traitor" is mostly metaphorical for those not in positions to enact treason as a form of true *praxis,* she suggests "comradeship" as a practice any white settler can take as a form of "treason to whiteness." She argues that it is only in understanding "our complicity in ongoing brutality can white settlers participate in the project of remaking the world. Any solidarity relation we can take up will have to start from our understanding of who is claiming us as kin, and from a commitment to pulling back on the ties that bind us to kinship relations of expropriation and violence" (Shotwell).

It was not lost on me as I sat in the University of Kansas archives, sorting through box after box of far-right extremist rhetoric calling for the sacred and destined occupation of land for the white race, that if these groups had known who I was, could conceive of my history, they would count my mere presence (as a white woman) as a victory for their cause. Additionally, as I sat in University of Oregon archives, learning more about western readers and their experiences, I couldn't help but see myself (as someone born and raised in the Western US) in the people that wrote letters to magazines, that expressed the love they had for their families and histories, and the connection they felt to the land they lived on. But like Shotwell says, "we can only be treasonous to something we claim, or that claims us… [and the] final way to claim our bad kin is direct opposition to the white supremacism that benefits us" (Shotwell). Because the subjects of this project claim me, I am obligated to claim them back and recognize white supremacist settler ideologies as kin, if only for the briefest moment. Because it is only in claiming that relationality, I am given the opportunity to betray, deny, and reject that kinship. In rejecting the ideologies that claim, and celebrate, my settler positioning and whiteness, I can work towards a comradeship "organized around future oriented solidarities," even as I cannot abdicate responsibility for my positionality, history, or relationalities (Shotwell). And so, as a white woman and settler scholar living in the Western United States, whose family can trace their historical presence on Western land back two hundred years, I write this from a complicit location but with a commitment towards what can be disarticulated, remade, and transformed.

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