

AMERICAN INDIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE WORLD OF CHILDREN

A Reader and
Bibliography

Second Edition

ene Hirschfelder, Paulette Fairbanks Molin, Yvonne Wakim

word by Michael A. Dorris

American Indian Stereotypes in the World of Children

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2nd edition

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Yvonne Wakim



The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
Lanham, Maryland, and London
1999

SCARECROW PRESS, INC.

Published in the United States of America
by Scarecrow Press, Inc.
4501 Forbes Blvd., Suite 200
Lanham, Maryland 20706
<http://www.scarecrowpress.com>

4 Pleydell Gardens, Folkestone
Kent CT20 2DN, England

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Yvonne Wakim

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retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hirschfelder, Arlene B.

American Indian stereotypes in the world of children : a reader and
bibliography — 2nd ed. / Arlene Hirschfelder, Paulette Fairbanks Molin,
Yvonne Wakim.

p. cm.

Includes indexes.

ISBN 0-8108-3612-2 (cloth : alk. paper). — ISBN 0-8108-3613-0
(pbk. : alk. paper)


1. Indians of North America—Public opinion. 2. Race awareness in
children. 3. Public opinion—United States. 4. Textbook bias—United
States. 5. Indians in popular culture—United States. I. Molin, Paulette
Fairbanks. II. Wakim, Yvonne. III. Title.

E98.P99H57 1999

970.004'97—dc21

98-49654

CIP

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of
American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of
Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992
Manufactured in the United States of America.

*This work is dedicated to the memory of Kathy Kerner;
whose The Thanksgiving Epidemic is included in this book.*

*For Kathy Kerner;
Who Knew They Taught Us All Wrong*

Your spirit circled around us
as we gathered to honor you
with songs, stories, and memories,
of the days
you stood with a people,
whose struggles you adopted as your own.

You grew in the knowledge
that our struggles are intractable,
colonization-old and colonizer-fueled.

Still, you took them on,
and with rare courage and healing grace,
dared to speak the truth.

"They taught you wrong,"
you reminded us,
corrections must be made.

So, with your mindful intelligence
and compassionate heart,
you set out to right the wrongs of centuries.

Now, we remember you with great love, respect,
and thanksgiving,
as your strong, warrior spirit journeys home.

Paulette F. Molin
September 1998

To my inspirations: Dennis, Brooke, and Adam.

—Arlene Hirschfelder

To my mother, Marie Fairbanks, and my husband, Larry Molin, for their unconditional love and support. In loving memory of my nephew, Shannon Fairbanks, a young poet who is held closely within the “traps of the heart.”

—Paulette Fairbanks Molin

To my son, Jiman, who has grown up to be a wonderful human being, and to all the folks who helped me help him get there!

—Yvonne Wakim

Foreword to the First Edition

Michael A. Dorris

I isn't for Indian. As the authors of the articles in this book know and demonstrate, it is often for Ignorance. In the Never-Never Land of glib stereotypes and caricature, the rich histories, cultures, and the contemporary complexities of the indigenous, diverse peoples of the Western Hemisphere are obscured, misrepresented, and rendered trivial. Native Americans appear not as human beings but as whooping, silly, one-dimensional cartoons. On occasion they are presented as marauding, blood-thirsty savages, bogeys from the nightmares of "pioneers" who invaded their lands and feared for the consequences. At other times they seem preconcupiscent angels, pure of heart, mindlessly ecological, brave and true. And worst of all, they are often merely cute, the special property of small children.

It's an easy way to dismiss an unproud history. A society that chooses to make a running joke of its victims embalms both its conscience and its obligations, relegating a tragic chronology of culture contact to ersatz mythology. It's hard to take seriously, to empathize with, a group of people portrayed as speaking ungrammatical language, as dressing in Halloween costumes, as acting "wild," as being undependable in their promises or gifts. Frozen in a kind of pejorative past tense, these make-believe Indians are not allowed to change or in any other way be like *real* people. They are denied the dignity and dynamism of their history, the validity of their myriad and major contributions to modern society, the distinctiveness of their multiple ethnicities.

It's a shame. To deprive our children (who grow up to become no less deprived adults) access to the wealth and sophistication of traditional Native American societies is indefensible. Among the several hundred separate cultures of North America alone, comprising as they did between twelve and twenty million people in 1491, there existed a pluralism of social experimentation and worldview unimagined by the melting pot theorists. Every known form of political system was practiced, from democracy to theocracy to communism to hereditary leadership. In the vast majority of these societies, power

and decision-making rested with both women and men. Most Native peoples were village-based agriculturists, not “roaming hunters.” A wide variety of sciences—astronomy, agronomy, medicine, mathematics, geology, meteorology and taxonomy, to name only a few—were highly developed and practiced. A wealth of spiritual and philosophical beliefs flourished. A tolerance for individual difference, either within one’s own culture or in another society altogether, was the norm. Literature, music, dance, and art found widely divergent and brilliant expression. And yet this treasure trove of experience and intelligence, perfected over tens of thousands of years residence on this continent, is allowed to be eclipsed by dumb, racist drivel.

Real American history, abounding with confusion, misunderstanding, exploitation, good people and bad ones, cultural chauvinism and hard-won insight, contains lessons that vitally need to be learned, not forgotten or whitewashed. We, as a people, must not make the same mistakes again in other dealings with new societies that seem to be initially either strange or unfathomable to us.

Some readers may find individual instances of stereotyping cited in this book to be inoffensive, and individually they may be. Taken out of the general context, objection to a particular toy or school symbol or nursery rhyme might seem to be a case of over-sensitivity. “Where’s your sense of humor?” they may ask. “Aren’t all groups satirized or emblemized? Irish-Americans are proud of the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame! What’s wrong with exhorting little boys to want to be brave and stoic? Can’t you take a joke?”

No. It’s no joke when a dominant group, with a sorry history of oppression towards its minorities, expropriates a shallow version of a subordinate, relatively powerless group and promulgates that imagery as valid. This realization may come slowly but it can come. Even the most hearty enthusiast can probably comprehend today the tastelessness of little black jockey statues in front of a house or the rolling-eyed parody of minstrel show revelry. Even the most oblivious observer cannot help but see the danger inherent in early Nazi caricatures of Jews or gypsies. Italian anti-defamation leagues are strong in their censure of media gangsters with Sicilian names. For most of us the Polish joke is at least suspect.

So why should standards of respect and restraint differ when it comes to Indians? Are Native people less worthy of serious consideration, less contemporary (the 1980 census revealed nearly one and one-half million Indians in the United States alone), less complicated? Is it any less demeaning or ridiculous to portray every Indian with feathers than it would be to present every Afro-American with a spear or every Hispanic with a sombrero?

This book is *about* context. It presents evidence from a variety of sources—toys, pageants, misrepresented “history,” advertisements—that demonstrates the pervasiveness of the problem. The stereotype has even been exported: In duty free souvenir shops from Fiji to Freeport one can purchase stuffed animals wearing war bonnets or Hong Kong manufactured, dewy-eyed papoose dolls.

Generations of German children have grown up reading “Westerns” about stalwart, crafty “redskins.” Japanese baseball teams emulate their American counterparts and call themselves “Braves.” The reality of American Indians, past and present, has been lost in the shuffle.

By legal definition, Indian tribes in the United States exist, in over two hundred treaty relationships with the federal government, as “domestic, dependent nations.” They are self-governing, political entities, many of them rich in natural resources and all of them rich in human potential. For far too long they have been denied their legitimate place, their own voice, the public awareness of their diverse heritage. Let *I* be for someone else.

Introduction to the Second Edition

This first edition of this anthology was first compiled to “shock adults into realizing that the world of contemporary American infants and young children is saturated with inappropriate images of Indians.” Unfortunately, almost twenty years later, too many toys, picture books, television programs, and sports team mascots bombard children with ignorant and insensitive images of Native people. Popular movies like *Pocahontas* and *The Indian in the Cupboard*, filled with offensive language and stereotypical characters, have turned the clock back on meaningful and realistic presentations of Indian peoples.

The second edition of this book has the same purpose. New material has been added to again shock parents, educators, and other caregivers into positive action. If Indian children are to build strong self-concepts, feelings of personal worth, and a sense of their place in United States history and the here-and-now, they are entitled to have culturally and historically accurate books, texts, movies, and other learning materials about their people. Constant encounters with specious images of Indians in school settings and popular culture result in Indian children losing self-esteem and pride in their identity. With constant rejection and denigration by society, Indian children soon learn to reject themselves. If non-Indian children are to learn to accept their Indian neighbors as friends and equals, they must have culturally and historically accurate accounts of Indians. Continuing encounters with racist imagery distorts the social and visual perceptions of European-American and other children and prevents them from developing appropriate attitudes—and behavior—about and toward Indians.

These racist images and even the complete omission of Indian peoples rob both Native and non-Native children of the opportunity to benefit from the richness and wisdom of Indian cultures, as well as the possibility of resolving many contemporary problems endemic in our society with solutions based on Indian life, thought, and philosophies.

The bibliography in this second edition has been tripled. Over the past decade, scholars in the United States and Canada have turned their minds to analyzing every conceivable form Indian imagery and stereotyping takes in

both countries. It's nearly impossible to keep up with the scholarship, so the bibliography merely offers a sampling of the rich studies written during the twentieth century. A variety of new learning materials have been added so teachers and other educators can do battle with the worn-out images that belittle Indian cultures, traditions, and histories and replace them with accurate and respectful depictions.

Introduction to the First Edition

Adults who nurture, love, care for, educate, and work with children should heed the research findings regarding both the development of racial awareness and attitudes in very young children and their feelings about race differences. Psychologist Gordon Allport in his early work about prejudice generalizes that “The first six years of life are important for the development of all social attitudes, though it is a mistake to regard early childhood as alone responsible for them. A bigoted personality may be well under way by the age of six, but by no means fully fashioned.”¹

Mary Ellen Goodman, a cultural anthropologist who has done fundamental research in children’s awareness and feelings about race differences, concludes that children begin to develop racial awareness at an extremely early age, perhaps as early as three or four years.² By upwards of age five, Goodman argues that incipient attitudes—and prejudice—are likely and by age seven true attitudes not unlikely.³

When infants are ready to focus their eyes on concrete objects, they are very likely to see angry-looking “I” for Indians brandishing weaponry on plastic or cloth block sets. By the time these infants are seven years old, they probably have seen hundreds of images of mean, silly, or noble Indians. It should come as no surprise that non-Indian children programmed on these stereotypes at early, formative developmental stages grow into adults who may unwittingly or knowingly discriminate against Indians. These children have been prevented from developing health attitudes about Indians. It also should come as no surprise that Indian children who constantly see their people stereotyped or treated in unfair ways grow into adults who begin to feel and act as if they were not as good as other people. These Native children are hindered in developing healthy self-images and racial identities; according to a group of scholars, they learn helplessness, the idea that they are incapable of making decisions for themselves.⁴

Children in America regularly see images of Indians that are inauthentic, unrealistic, and often offensive. Typical American children may dress in clothes decorated with headdresses, tipis, tomahawks, and faces of Indians and others may pin on pieces of jewelry shaped like one of these objects. Some youngsters pour “Life” cereal out of boxes that picture historic Indian cultures and offer free

posters of Indians or dinosaurs. In school, children read social studies texts that portray Indians as obstacles to progress or incidental to the entire course of American history. Most routinely see silly or ferocious Indians in their story books and play with toys that demean important aspects of Indian cultures. After school, children watch Indians kill settlers, army regulars, or similar "good guys" on television or view the same scenarios on movie screens. They receive birthday cards that joke about Indian languages, dress, and customs, and presents wrapped in paper decorated with Indians. At Halloween or Thanksgiving, most nursery school children bring home a feathered headband they have proudly made themselves. Many youngsters across America cheer for sports teams that have names such as the "Redskins" and/or mascots that parade around at half-time in buckskin, beads, and feathers. Food packages, greeting cards, games, common household objects, songs, advertisements, and cartoons carry images of Indians that are either savage, noble, lazy, stupid, or subhuman.

This anthology has been put together to try and shock adults into realizing that the world of contemporary American infants and young children is saturated with inappropriate images of Indians. The carefully selected articles spell out the prevalent attitudes of children, explain the emergence of the Plains Indian stereotype, scrutinize in detail the images of Indians in children's story and textbooks, analyze toy Indian imagery, describe the misuse of Indian religion and customs in YMCA programs, and report on sports teams with Indian names and derogatory mascots. Essays discussing the images of Indians in the movies have been omitted because a number of them have been published in an anthology entitled *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies*.⁵

Following these readings, there is an annotated bibliography of articles and books about the images of Indians in the world of children and adults in America and other countries. The studies examine Indian imagery in art, literature, social science, children's story and textbooks, movies, television, European literature, and other fields. A shorter section of articles, books, curricula, and other materials suggests ways to correct the inauthentic, offensive, and unreal images of Indians. It is clear that much more work needs to be done in creating methods and materials that will counteract the harmful effects of so much negative and inappropriate Indian imagery.

Some of the articles in this anthology were written some years ago, but they are no less relevant today. For example, many of the findings regarding the social studies textbook treatment of Indians and Eskimos⁶ are valid today. There have been *some* improvements, of course, in the history texts published in the 1970s, 1980 and 1981. A reader can find more accurate information about Indians prior to and subsequent to contact with Europeans. One textbook does an excellent job of presenting the viewpoints of contemporary Indians, an area sorely lacking in most texts; however, it contains meager information on the Iroquois and nothing about Eskimos.⁷ Very few textbooks include enough information about Indians to suggest to young readers that there are hundreds of contemporary, dynamic Native societies in America.

A brief look at a few of the statements about Indians in a 1981 textbook entitled *History of a Free People* written by Henry W. Bragdon and Samuel P. McCutchen (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.) illustrates the nature of information currently being published about Iroquois Indians. On page three, the Iroquois are called "northeast woodland" Indians, a map label deplored by scholars such as Jack D. Forbes because it is a non-Indian construct. The authors inform readers on page four that the Iroquois who lived in New York occupied a territory that they called a "longhouse" with its eastern "door" at Albany on the Hudson and its western "door" at Niagara Falls. There is no discussion of the Iroquois empire, which at its peak spread some 800 miles between the Appalachians and the Mississippi and which was strategically important land. In the few pages that discuss the traditional organization, beliefs, and actions of the Iroquois, the only observation quoted by the authors is one by a Jesuit priest likening the behavior of Iroquois warriors to foxes, lions, and birds. There is an illustration of Father Jogues, a Jesuit priest preaching to the Iroquois in one of their longhouses. The caption reads "Jogues was later tortured and put to death."⁸ The authors write that Jesuit priests "Undaunted by starvation and torture"⁹ made journeys far into the middle of the continent to convert Indians to Christianity. Thirty-two Indian scholars who investigated more than 300 books for a study about the treatment of Indians in textbooks¹⁰ call such information the "semantics of racism." They argue that:

Torture, human sacrifice, and delight in war are descriptions given of Iroquois customs by . . . textbook writers. Not to understand the differences in culture and standards of conduct, displays the lack of an objective, scholarly mind. Describing Roman history, for example, few if any historians and textbook writers give blow by blow accounts of the many atrocities committed by this society. It would appear that the contributions of the Iroquois would far outweigh any "strange" accounts of their religious customs (which are usually not understood and highly exaggerated).¹¹

There is one paragraph about contemporary Iroquois keeping alive their traditions generation after generation, and there are several paragraphs at the end of the volume that deal with the new militancy of Indians. There are sixty-six maps that appear in the book, one of which depicts the location of Indian peoples before 1700—and which is left out of the table of contents. Not one map shows the boundaries of contemporary state and federal Indian reservations although there is room for a full-page map of Africa. It would be difficult for uninformed students to know that there are over 450 federally recognized tribes who live on or near 267 reservations, that there are over twenty state recognized Indian tribes, some of which are in New York State, that there are Indian groups without trust lands and certain tribes and groups that have been terminated by the federal government. As Michael A. Dorris remarks:

The Indian, by and large, is a motif embedded in Americana, not perceived as a part of the American present. The confusion comes when we realize that Indian people, too often mistaken for The Indian, are still very much around.¹²

There are other social studies texts that contain statements and/or illustrations that distort Indian cultures and history. In *The American Adventure* published by Field Educational Publications, Inc. in 1970, there is a full page color illustration of a 1787 engraving of an Iroquois warrior in battle pose. The caption tells readers that "A scalp is draped over the end of his musket and a tomahawk hangs at his waist."¹³ Iroquois men did not spend all their time dressed and ready for battle, equipped with weaponry and scalps, although some young readers might have difficulty believing otherwise. Probably the most important job of an Iroquois man was hunting. He was also a musician, dancer, physician, athlete, craftsman, politician, and religious leader. *The American Adventure* has nothing to say about present-day Indians and Eskimos.

After reading the essays about children's toys, books, and programs in this anthology, perhaps more adults will become convinced that it is essential to dispel the offensive, inauthentic, and unreal images of American Indians and replace them with accurate, authentic, and real depictions. After all, children's attitudes are at stake.

NOTES

1. Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison Wesley Publishing Co., 1954; Boston: Beacon edition), p. 297.

2. See Mary Ellen Goodman's study entitled *Race Awareness in Young Children*. Revised ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1964).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

4. "Stereotypes of Indians Decried at Conference on Native Americans." *New York Times*, November 28, 1976.

5. *The Pretend Indians* was edited by Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L. P. Silet (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980).

6. See Chapter Five in this anthology.

7. Allan O. Kownslar and Donald B. Frizzle, *Discovering American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974).

8. Henry W. Bragdon and Samuel P. McCutchen, *History of a Free People* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1981), p. 18.

9. *Ibid.*

10. American Indian Historical Society, *Textbooks and the American Indian* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, Inc., 1970).

11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

12. Michael A. Dorris, "The Grass Still Grows, The Rivers Still Flow: Contemporary Native Americans," *Daedalus*, vol. 110, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 46.

13. Kenneth Bailey, Elizabeth Brooke, and John J. Farrell, *The American Adventure* (San Francisco: Field Educational Publications, Inc., 1970).

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Chapter 1

Through the Eyes of a Child