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Injurious Benevolence: How Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook* and *A Tour on the Prairies* illuminates Nineteenth century US-Indian policy

BY

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Abstract:
The most common narratives of encounters with the indigenous race are from the early colonial period of American history. Indian relations were central to the struggle of early American settlers to tame the American wilderness and flourish as colonies under the Crown. After the Revolution, however, it seems that the Indian position in history has been thought of as a side story to the main event of American Independence. In this thesis I explore an alternate perspective, a reading of history which promotes the idea that after the American Revolution, the fate of the new nation was irrevocably defined by its political and cultural relationship to the indigenous Americans. The laws that would be passed, the wars that would be fought, and the ideologies that would construct a unique American character are results of US-Indian relations. Moreover, I would like to explore this topic using an alternative literary medium to dissect ideologies behind this relationship that have not often been acknowledged. In order to draw attention to and understand the significance of Native American influence on the United States, as well as the United States’ influence on the Native American experience after the Revolution, I use Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook* and *A Tour on the Prairies* as guidelines to trace the shifting political and cultural ramifications of US-Indian policy on both American society and the Native American lifestyle.
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“It frequently happens that the historian, though he professes more humanity than the trapper, mountain man, or gold-digger, who shoots one [Indian] as a wild beast, really exhibits and practices a similar inhumanity to him, wielding a pen instead of a rifle.” – Thoreau

The Native American was fundamental to the creation of the United States. Few would object to that statement, but what if we asked how long exactly this relationship lasted? And when the story of America and the story of the American Indian diverged?

The most common narratives of encounters with the indigenous race are from the early colonial period of American history. Pilgrim narratives describing their fear of the “threat of Indian Cannibals” (Slotkin, 38), Indian War Narratives, and Captivity Narratives are just a few examples. Indian relations were central to the struggle of early American settlers to tame the American wilderness and flourish as colonies under the Crown. After the Revolution, however, it seems that the Indian position in history has been thought of as a side story to the main event of American Independence. In this thesis I would like to explore an alternate perspective, a reading of history which promotes the idea that after the American Revolution, the fate of the new nation was irrevocably defined by its political and cultural relationship to the indigenous Americans. The laws that would be passed, the wars that would be fought, and the ideologies that would construct a unique American character are results of US-Indian relations. Moreover, I would like to explore this topic using an alternative literary medium to dissect ideologies behind this relationship that have not often been acknowledged. In order to draw attention to and
understand the significance of Native American influence on the United States, as well as the United States’ influence on the Native American experience after the Revolution, I have decided to turn to an unlikely and somewhat questionable source, the nineteenth century American story-teller Washington Irving. Irving wrote histories and biographies, as well as essays and short stories. What is interesting about Irving specifically is that, in both his fiction and non-fiction, he was concerned with folkloric histories, the stories passed down through the generations in which imagination often trumped fact. Moreover, Irving has been known, since early in his career, to use the imagination and gullibility of his readers to his literary advantage. Take for example a hoax he conducted prior to publishing his first major work, A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker. Prior to the release of the book Irving placed a series of missing person ads for the mysterious historian Diedrich Knickerbocker and created a rumor that should Knickerbocker not return to his lodgings the hotel proprietor would publish his manuscript to pay for the bill Knickerbocker had left behind. The public was fascinated by the story and when Irving published the elusive manuscript under his pseudonym it became an instant success, (Washington Irving: The Definitive Biography, Jones). Irving is a valuable source for this discussion because his stories offer a glimpse at the American subconscious and its response to the politics of the day, specifically US-Indian relations. Worthy insight considering throughout his career he concerned himself with rendering a distinct cultural heritage that enveloped what would be defined as “Americaness.” That is, he is partly responsible for nurturing the characteristics we see today as uniquely American.
While the political fight may have been won with the Revolution, the American people were then in need of new communal understanding of who they were and, perhaps more importantly, a new cultural scope with which they could look back at history and define themselves as the inevitable victors all along. Irving’s sketches rely on Native American culture in a way that profoundly informs our understanding of US-Indian relations. By tracing the Native American presence in *The Sketchbook*, his collection of short stories published serially between 1819 and 1820, and into *A Tour on the Prairies*, his travel narrative published in 1835, one can also follow United States’ cultural and political directives towards the Native Americans. What is compelling about Irving’s writing in particular is that it both shapes and is shaped by the American perspective of US-Indian relations. By exploring this perspective we can add another dimension to our knowledge both of the American political climate of the nineteenth century and the Native American influence on American ideology and identity. As we will see, the United States government imbued Native Americans with specific value, given the political conditions of the moment, and this value while portrayed as a benefit by the United States was in actuality a lethal burden. While the argument has been made that the government had the Native American’s best interests in mind when formulating policy, I believe the Native American’s best interest was only a consequence of what was really the United States’ best interests.

I will be relying on historical evidence, such as laws and court cases, in my argument and I hope to expose the impetus and consequences of these government policies and laws through a reading of some of Washington Irving’s most influential stories to reveal how they help provide insight into previously concealed or disregarded
details of American-Indian relations. When formulating their relations with the Indians, both before and after the War of 1812, the United States government was seeking to manipulate the terms of the relationship for the sake of fulfilling political and cultural needs. Moreover, the government believed that its needs or desires for an economically successful future for the new nation depended on how these relations played out. Thus its philosophy towards the existence of the Natives was as a means to an end, even when coming from a place of good intentions. The best way to describe the guiding United States’ philosophy would be the manipulation of Native Americans to fit a political or cultural use, meaning the laws and policies passed by the United States in the nineteenth century were meant to force Native Americans into fulfilling a cultural or political need. However, in practice this manipulation is problematized by the unique nature of the United States Government’s definition of Native American sovereignty. Unlike slaves who could be viewed as commodities, or at least property, Native Americans were granted legal rights to land, and sovereignty as a separate nation. Therefore, the United States Government imposed this manipulation through paternalistic policies which disguised their injurious practices as benevolent.

By studying Washington Irving’s stories side by side one can follow a change not only in the cultural sentiment but also political prerogatives of the time. Irving’s stories revealed an alternate perspective through which we first see, in *The Sketchbook*, Native American mythology as an alternative to European history, Native American characteristics as a guide to discovering a unique American identity, and a prophecy of Native American disappearance to legitimize American inheritance of their land. In *A Tour on the Prairies* the emphasis is shifted to veiled vignettes of the beneficial
The consequences of paternalism – the practice by those in positions of power to restrict the freedom and responsibilities of those deemed subordinates so as to act in their alleged best interest – and allusions to the inevitable civilizing of the frontier that offered Native Americans a future of assimilation or eradication. The consequences of these shifts inform the Native American experience, as Irving moves between rehistoricizing the American beginning to cementing its imperial destiny. Including firsthand accounts of these experiences is another opportunity to fill in gaps of perspective of this time period. It will elicit shame to unearth what was lost at the expense of American gain but penance can in part be paid by “forcing Americans to rethink their understanding of history and by extension to rethink the contemporary place of Natives in the United States” (764, Hendrix).
Chapter 1: The Sketchbook

"The existence of any pure race with special endowments is a myth, as is the belief that there are races all of whose members are foredoomed to eternal inferiority" ~ Franz Boas

Irving is concerned with establishing the “American character” in his writing and much of his project is achieved by identifying “Americaness” through highlighting the ways in which it deviates from European culture. As scholars have been quick to note, Irving spent a large part of his life in England, first as a young man on a Tour of Europe from 1804 to 1806, and again ten years later for an extended stay from 1815 to 1832.

What makes this biographical detail relevant is the specific time period which he spent in England and the catalyst that necessitated his move there, the war of 1812. The Irving family business, a merchant company involved in importing goods from England, was greatly affected after the war, and Irving travelled to England in an attempt to restore it. Instead, he was forced to declare bankruptcy. In the first story from The Sketchbook, “The Author’s Account of Himself,” Irving, in his introduction of the pseudonymous narrator, states, “My native country was full of youthful promise; Europe was rich in the
accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of the times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle” (14-15). Irving respects England for its romantic history and “poetical association” but I think he too inserts these moments to showcase the absurdity of America aligning itself politically, or culturally, with England. What is meant as naïve respect by the phantom author – “I was anxious to see the great men of Europe; for I had read in the works of various philosophers, that all animals degenerated in America, and man among the number…I will visit this land of wonders, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated” – Irving also means ironically. Irving did not presume The Sketchbook would be very popular in England, meaning then his intended audience was American. Given this, I believe in The Sketchbook Irving is trying to create a national narrative and in many ways he succeeds. The Sketchbook was, to Irving’s surprise, the first widely read work of American literature in Europe. In a letter to his publisher, John Murray II, Irving revealed, “I am astonished by the success of my writings in England…Had anyone told me…that anything I could write would interest such men as…Byron, I should have as readily believed a Fairytale” (The Life and Letters of Washington Irving, P.M. Irving). The success of The Sketchbook also helped to advance the reputation of American writers with an international audience since before the success of The Sketchbook it was unheard of for an American author to write so well and, more importantly, to write so well on American themes. In his essay “Memory in Native American Land Claims,” which questions the ability of the American legal framework to address the legitimacy of claims by Native Americans for the return of expropriated land, Hendrix identifies the
characteristics of successful national narratives, all of which are present in *The Sketchbook*:

The kinds of narratives that tend to resonate with new members over time, whether they are born into the nation or immigrate to it, will generally have to be fairly simplified, so that they can be easily understood. The will also tend to be stories that make members of the nation feel good about themselves – that show past members of the nation doing noble deeds that demonstrate the central virtues of the group as a whole…the stories tend to fade into mythology at many points, and tend to downplay or entirely ignore unpleasant historical facts. (772)

Yet less than a quarter of the stories deals with actual American subject matter, and *The Sketchbook*, along with its Anglophile narrator, seem like unusual representations of an American in England following the War of 1812. One would expect to find evidence of discord in a text by an American author on English themes since not only had there been a political schism between the two countries, there had also long been a cultural schism. Not only had Europeans undervalued American literary works, they too derided the American identity as being “a blending of Indian and European characteristics” (Slotkin, 191), which had consequently degenerated the colonists. Irving’s stories show a respect for the European literary heritage, using popular English modes of sentimentality and allusions to literature of antiquity, but he also asserts an independently “American” storytelling. With stories such as “Rip Van Winkle,” “Traits of an Indian Character,” and “Philip of Pokanoket,” the once degenerative feature of “Indianness” is reimagined as essential to the American identity, a positive degeneration, defined by a return to a
purified, uncorrupted national character more akin to Irving’s characterization of the Native American. I hope to show that the strategic resource Native Americans represented politically and culturally during the War of 1812 is mirrored in *The Sketchbook*. The political usefulness of Native Americans is significant because, as Prucha suggests, “Washington observed in 1783, ‘The settlmt. of the Western Country and making a Peace with the Indians are so analogous that there can be no definition of one without the other’” (36). In *The Sketchbook*, specifically the stories “Rip Van Winkle,” “Traits of an Indian Character” and “Philip of Pokanoket,” Irving is attempting to create an alternative to the popular European tradition by exchanging it with Native American mythology and symbolism. Doing this not only creates a space for establishing an authentic American identity but also allows Irving to assert a cultural and political history in which Native Americans are aligned, politically, with the new nation, as opposed to the British. As we will see, in perhaps the most famous of Irving’s stories, a character like Rip Van Winkle challenges popular European modes of thought while simultaneously appropriating Native American characteristics to portray the imagined notion of American inheritance.

**Rip’s Uselessness and Justification for Indian Removal**

The beginning of “Rip Van Winkle” is characterized by its preamble – reminiscent of Irving’s earlier Knickerbocker hoax – that manages to set the story up as be both an artifact of local lore and yet containing an inherent factual truth:

> There have been various opinions as to the literary character of his work, and to tell the truth, it is not a whit better than it should be. Its chief merit
is its scrupulous accuracy which indeed was a little questioned on its first appearance, but has since been completely established; and is now admitted into all historical collections, as a book of unquestionable authority. (44)

Creating a fiction that the story has already been weighed and measured as truth is essential because it adds credibility and thus is readily accepted by readers who are now given to believe the narrator knows something the readers do not and has earned the ability to pass on a certain truth. Jean Luc Nancy’s book *The Inoperative Community*, a philosophical treatise on the imprint of “community” on modern thought, suggests that the role of a narrator is in part to recount to them [the readers] their history…a story that he alone has the gift, the right, or the duty to tell…It is the story of their origin, of where they come from, or of how they come from the Origin itself – them, or their mates, or their names…it is also the story of the beginning of the world, of the beginning of their assembling together. (43-44)

In combining Irving’s origin story and the historical context it is possible to expose a political meaning in conjunction with the cultural symbolism in Rip Van Winkle, though I will be dealing specifically with what is revealed regarding American-Indian relations.

The most consequential predicament facing American-Indian relations throughout history has been the question of land. As Prucha suggests in *The Great Father*, his seminal text on the history of relations between Indians and the United States government
from the Revolutionary War to 1980, questions of “property” and “ownership” have been relevant since the dawn of colonization:

There was much theoretical discussion about the rights of savage, non-Christian peoples to the land they occupied, of whether the Indians and similar people could claim lands…and the idea that the lands in the New World were a *Vacuum Domicilum*, a wasteland, open for the taking, had wide acceptance… (14)

The idea of “occupancy,” versus “ownership” is imperative for understanding the difference between the American government and the Native American notion of land. Prucha suggests that “The Indians had a notion of communal ownership of land, the English one of individual ownership in fee simple; neither fully understood the concept of the other” (15). Keeping this in mind, it is time to turn to the eponymous character of the story, Rip Van Winkle. Rip is characterized as a “simple, good-natured man…a kind neighbor” universally liked by everyone in the town but Mrs. Van Winkle. However, Rip does suffer from one significant flaw:

The great error in Rip’s composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor. It could not be for want of assiduity or perseverance…he would never refuse to assist a neighbor even in the roughest toil, and was a foremost man in all country frolics…In a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody’s business but his own; but as doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he found it impossible…his patrimonial estate had dwindled away under his management, acre by
There are two essential parts to this description; first, that Rip does not value property in the culturally accepted way, that land equals livelihood, and secondly, that his way of life and his family are, uncivilized despite being well-liked. The parallels here between Rip’s way of life and the conventional view by Americans of the “Indian,” way of life are important because of how they inform the struggle between conflicting meanings of “property,” and “prosperity,” among Americans and Native Americans. Moreover, I believe it is Irving’s purpose in the story to have Rip as a substitute for the Native American. Rip cares for neither property nor prosperity as he would “rather starve on a penny than work for a pound.” Not only is Rip void of the European obsession with wealth but he is also unconcerned with patriarchy. He was an “obedient hen-pecked husband” and suffered in the “fiery furnace of domestic tribulation.” This characteristic speaks to many Native American tribes who, while they may not have been entirely matriarchal – though the Iroquois, indigenous to New York, were – were at least not burdened by the unnatural degrees of patriarchy which ruled European and colonial society. Rip does not have an impulse to make himself a “master” in his community. These traits have their consequences however, which can be best understood by looking to the English philosopher John Locke, and his chapter, “Of Property”:

...every man has a “property” in his own “person.” This nobody has any right to but himself. The “labour” of his body and the “work” of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with
it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. (Ch. V, section 26)

This philosophy of ownership is almost entirely responsible for the legalized removal of Native Americans from their land, and the consequent genocide when they wouldn't leave voluntarily. Locke continues, in his chapter “Of Property,” to imply disapproval towards the Native American notion of property. Locke notes that “…there are still great tracts of ground to be found, which (the inhabitants thereof, not having joined with the rest of mankind in the consent of the use of their common money) lie waste, and are more than the people who dwell on it do, or can make use of, and so still lie in common…” (Ch. V, section 45). Furthermore, Prucha shows how this viewpoint was employed by the earliest European settlers such as John Winthrop, a leading figure in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in his justification for dispossessing the Indians:

And for the Natives of New England they enclose noe land neither have they any settled habitation nor any tame cattle to improve the land by & soe have no other but a Natural right to those countries soe as if we leave them sufficient for their use wee may lawfully take the rest, there being more than enough for them and us. (14)

We can follow this theme into Post-Revolutionary politics as well, as Prucha observes:

…they [frontiersman] saw the rich lands of the Indians and they wanted them. Their philosophy was summed up by John Sevier, one of the most aggressive of the frontier leaders. “By the law of nations, it is agreed that no people shall be entitled to more land than they can cultivate,” he said.
“Of course no people will starve for want of work, when a neighboring nation has much more than they can make use of. (108)

Rip Van Winkle is the antithesis of the true property owner in the Lockean sense because he does not value his work and his land by the same principles. Similarly to Native Americans, Rip does not labor because he expects or is anticipating profit. Instead of laboring in order to make those things that are “in common” his and give them value, he labors for the others in his community or in specific moments when he wants to but never expects a profitable outcome. The main schism then informing American-Indian relations is a fundamental philosophical difference on how to measure value, as Native American’s do not measure value by profitability. The capitalist ideology of the colonies sees land as a necessity to produce commodities which would create chances to accrue wealth, but these concepts are simply not present in the Indian cultural ideology. Hopi spiritual leader Dan Katchongva narrates the Native American experience of encountering the colonial obsession with wealth through his foretelling of the future of mankind in the book *Native American Testimony*:

In Ancient time it was prophesized by our forefathers that this land would be occupied by the Indian people and then from somewhere a White man would come…It was known that the White man is an intelligent person, an inventor of many words, a man who knows how to influence people…and that he will use many of these things upon us when he comes… We knew that the land beneath us was composed of many things that we might want to use later…We knew that the white man would search for the things that look good to him…and we knew that…he would use any means to get
what he wants…and we today know that those prophecies were true because we can see how many new and selfish ideas and plans are being put before us. We know that if we accept these things we will lose our land and give up our very lives. (6)

I find this passage particularly significant because it provides an alternative interpretation of the history of American-Indian relations that we find in books such as Prucha’s. It is firsthand accounts like these which fill in the gaps in the history that give a clearer picture of the political and cultural motives of the United States. Robert Williams, in his book *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought*, which examines the history of legal thought and its effects on the rights of indigenous peoples, shares his insight and discusses the implications of Locke on English colonizing discourse:

…the utilitarian justifications for dispossessing the American Indians that has emerged in early-seventeenth-century English colonizing discourse had, by Locke's time, hardened into the assumptions of ideological argument… judging by the Revolutionary era's reception of Locke, the continuity in English colonizing discourse of the thematic Indian deficiency had been completely integrated into the “common sense” of late-eighteenth century English Americans. (249)

While I would agree that post-Revolutionary Americans were guided by the European ideologies Williams lies out, to say that the American government was singularly concerned with the absolute removal of the Native Americans would be an oversimplification. Americans had already inherited many of their legal philosophies from Europe after the Revolution and so, as I hope to show in my continued reading of
“Rip Van Winkle”, they were eager to distinguish the nation culturally and politically from Europe lest they remain shadows of their former colonizer. The historical moment is guided by this political maneuver to diminish the British influence in the new republic and especially its influence on the politically essential allies, the Native Americans. While Americans adopted, as Williams suggests, philosophical models of property from Europe that guided justifications for Indian removal, Americans also felt that they needed to remove the European influence on American-Indian relations.
As the previous section suggests, Irving hoped to draw connections between American identity and the Indian identity, but in order to authenticate those connections Irving also needed to remove European influence which threatened the stability of US-Indian relations. Wilkins and Lomawaima in their book discussing American Indian political rights and sovereignty, Uneven Ground, explain the political triangle that the new American nation, the American Indians, and Great Britain were caught in between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812:

Between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, tribes had the diplomatic backing of Great Britain, which supported their territorial rights. Defeat in the War of 1812 removed Britain as a major political player along the United States’ Western frontier…Most of the treaties negotiated between tribes and the United States between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 were designed to restore peace on the frontier and in the interior. (41)

From this shift in political intentions a few interesting and frankly awkward situations arise. First, despite being defeated in the War of 1812, the English presence was not entirely eliminated and they still could partake in major trade with the Indians on the frontier, which was not yet property of the United States. Since England could no longer gain land from the natives their usefulness was only as group with which England could
trade. This means that, unlike America, England could support the Indian’s right to sovereignty and land, doing so they would ensure continued trading rights and also cause tension between the United States and the Indians. Given this, the United States has to try and win the loyalty of the many Native Americans who fought, not surprisingly, with the British in the war of 1812 to establish an economically beneficial relationship; such tribes include the Iroquois, Fox and Delaware. Irving is able to create a fiction, a mythology that promotes a positive reading of this historical moment. He endows the character Rip Van Winkle with traditional Indian attributes creating a sense of commonality, and community, a sense that the United States government is at the same time hoping to build with the tribes whose support they lacked in the War of 1812.

Continuing with the belief that Rip Van Winkle is meant to embody aspects of Native American culture, as interpreted by Irving, then Rip’s ancestry is worth noting. The beginning of The Sketchbook notes that the Dutch village in which Rip lives was “founded by some of the Dutch colonists, in the early times of the province, just about the beginning of the government of the good Peter Stuyvesant” (46). And furthermore that Rip himself was “a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina,” (46). Irving, having a reputation as a historian prior to The Sketchbook, specifically a historian of New York, would not make such allusions unintentionally. Peter Stuyvesant served as the last Dutch Director-General of the colony of New Netherland from 1647 until it was ceded provisionally to the English in 1664, after which it became known as New York, and consequently a colony of the English. Rip is then both exemplary of Indian culture but also a descendant of another group dispossessed by British
colonization. In associating Native American culture with American history and removing the British influence, Irving can create a history in which it seems natural for Americans and Indians to ally against the British. Laura J. Murray in her essay “The Aesthetic of Dispossession” examines, through literary analysis, the influence of institutions and ideologies of oppression specifically between America and Europe in the early years following the revolution. She suggests that “Native Americans were valued in the symbolic economy of emerging nationalist discourse…” (206). While I agree that at one point Native Americans were valued as much as they represented a distinguishing cultural feature of American life, I think their symbolic value for the United States government and for Irving was as a backdrop to exhibit the phases of emerging American nation. Most importantly for Irving, creating a distinct American identity is a reaffirmation of the inevitable advancement of the United States beyond the shackles of being nothing more than colonies of England. And so Irving mirrors and helps make palatable this emerging national discourse through his story-telling. Hendrix suggests “that nations are, ‘imagined communities,’ that are constituted through storytelling and other forms of narration, and that are expressed and created through concrete practices like education and through artifacts like public monuments and novels” (771).

The connections between Rip and Native Americans continue through the story as Irving reveals the characteristics of the town and its residents:

he [Rip] used to console himself…by frequenting a kind of perpetual club of sages, philosophers and other idle personages of the village, which held its sessions on a bench before a small inn, designated by a rubicund portrait of his majesty George the Third…how sagely they would
deliberate upon the public events some months after they had taken place…the opinions of the Junto were completely controlled by Nicholas Vedder, a patriarch of the village,…the neighbors could tell the hour by his movements as accurately as by a sun-dial….he was observed to smoke his pipe vehemently, and to send forth, frequent, and angry puffs; but when pleased, he would inhale the smoke slowly and tranquilly, and emit it in light and placid clouds, and sometimes letting the fragrant vapor curl about his nose, would gravely nod his head in token of perfect approbation. (49-50)

The passage is ripe with popular Native American tribal imagery, a group of wise elders discussing past events, a leader whose pipe is an extension of his body and character. The theme continues as Rip escapes into the woods with his dog “Wolf,” a major symbol of Native American mythology, to avoid “the labor of the farm and the clamor of his wife” (51). As night encroaches, Rip’s name is called but sees nothing but a “crow” and is beckoned by an “old fellow…His dress was of the antique fashion” (53). What this figure ends up being is a type of spirit guide to Rip, leading him into what seems to be a dream but turns out to be a supernatural experience:

…Nothing interrupted the stillness of the scene but the noise of the balls, which whenever they were rolled, echoed along the mountains like rumbling peals of thunder…he ventured…to taste the beverage which he found had much of the flavor of excellent Hollands. He was naturally a thirsty soul, and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another; and he revisited his visits to the flagon so often, that at
length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined, and fell into a deep sleep. (54-55)

Rip is induced into his lengthy repose by the mysterious drink of his ancestors and he misses entirely the American Revolution and the events leading up to it. The repose is vital because this is how Irving is able to remove the English presence and yet keep a continuous and alternative historical narrative. Upon his return much in the village has changed:

Instead of the great tree that used to shelter the quiet little Dutch inn of yore there now was reared a tall pole, with something on the top that looked like a red nightcap, and from it was fluttering a flag, on which was a singular assemblage of stars and stripes...the ruby face of King George...was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed to for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a scepter, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, “GENERAL WASHINGTON.” (58-59)

We have American imagery taking the place of English imagery, and while Rip is at first frightened and disappointed by the change he eventually “preferred making friends among the rising generation, with whom he soon grew into great favor.” (64) Rip embraces the American presence, and Rip’s story is trusted because Peter Vanderhook, “the most ancient inhabitant of the village, and well versed in all the wonderful events and traditions of the neighborhood,” corroborates Rip’s story, assuring that “the Kaatskill mountains had always been haunted by strange beings” (63). From this again we see an
allusion to Native American culture, as the most trusted member of the society is the oldest inhabitant who is familiar with the myths of the tribe and intimately familiar with the landscape. Furthermore, if we continue with the motif of Rip as being reminiscent of Native American culture, then it is important that the change from one nation to the next, while it scares him at first, it marks an improvement in his quality of life. He is able to “resume his old walks and habits,” and can afford to be “idle with impunity,” without the fear of Dame Van Winkle. Thus Irving is able to promote both a reading of American inheritance from the Native Americans as opposed to a British inheritance as well as a history devoid of Native American resistance, as Rip’s passive, and positive, attitude towards his new Americanized environment implies. This theme is strengthened by the “Postscript,” or traveler’s notes in which the “Indian tradition” is again emphasized:

In the old times, say the Indian traditions, there was a kind of Manitou or spirit, who kept about the wildest recesses of the Catskill mountains, and took a mischievous pleasure in wreaking all kin of evils and vexations upon the red men…This place was held in great awe by the Indians, insomuch that the boldest hunter would not pursue his game within its precincts. (66)

In his essay “The Fourth World of American Philosophy” Thomas Alexander, among his discussion of the components of “American” philosophy versus “Native American” philosophy states:

…there is the idea of natural history, developmental process capable of being expressed within a narrative structure...In order to explain
something, you tell the story of how it got there, what it is currently doing, and where it is likely to go….American philosophy is likewise given through a narrative genealogy. It is *told*; in the telling it allows the hearer to understand herself as a member of a family. (376-377)

Irving weaves Native American history into American history in such a way that it creates a seamless lineage from one to the other. Rip’s emergence into the scene of the new nation mirrors the emergence Irving hopes to promote, and the United States government hopes to manipulate into being, an absence of British political influence coupled with the inheritance of Native American culture and consequently their resources. In “Philip of Pokanoket” we get another example of a reimagined history, while in “Traits of an Indian Character” Irving begins to intimate a future without the Indian presence while also lauding the characteristics that would be present in federally-mandated paternalism.
While “Traits of an Indian Character” and “Philip of Pokanoket” are also found in The Sketchbook, they are distinct both in style and genre from “Rip Van Winkle.” “Traits of an Indian Character” provides a characteristic sketch of the Indian, that both historicizes and prophesizes the disappearance of the Indian. “Philip of Pokanoket” is a retelling of an actual, well-chronicled historical event. While Irving’s discussion of the “North American Savage” appears on the surface sympathetic, progressive and understanding, it is in fact something else entirely. Irving’s discussion of the Native American character creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of disappearance – not to say that Irving is responsible for the removal of Native Americans – but his reading of Native Americans does contribute to removing them from the American consciousness. Irving’s retelling of King Philip’s War appropriates traits of the Noble Savage, specifically one of
the most prominent figures in Native American history, Philip of Pokanoket, into American Revolutionary history. As in “Rip Van Winkle,” Irving is promoting a theme of inheritance from the Native Americans with the hope that it will help create a uniquely American culture while simultaneously promoting a discord between Native Americans and the English. Each of these concepts reflect the manipulation that is underlying the American government’s Indian policy.

Jill Norgren in her book *The Cherokee Cases*, an examination of the Supreme Court cases *Cherokee nation v. Georgia* and *Worchester v. Georgia*, lays out the political situation in the West in the early years following the War of 1812:

Equally important although not immediately apparent to the Cherokee leadership was the growing political influence after the war of 1812 of General Jackson and the frontier voter. The eastern political establishment and the new President, James Monroe, found it increasingly difficult to ignore frontier factions that clamored for the removal of the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaws and others. (39)

This reality coupled with the influence of an ever-centralizing paternalistic government meant that the usefulness of Native Americans as political allies and trading partners was at odds with the attitude by many Americans that they were obstacles to inevitable westward expansion. As Prucha states:

The place of American Indians in the scheme of the civilization depended on the way Americans viewed the Indians. Opinions varied from extreme disdain of the aggressive frontiersman, who equated the Indians with wild
beasts of the forest fit to be hunted down at will, to the romantic idea of
novelists like James Fenimore Cooper…who exalted the superhuman
qualities of the noble savage. (136)

What Irving is able to do in “Traits of an Indian Character” is present an image of the
Native American that harkens onto the romantic and yet also positions the idea of the
Native towards a future of disappearance, either in romantic resistance to the
encroachment of civilization or in submission under the guardian of an increasingly
paternalistic United States government:

…the North American savage, taken in connection with the scenery over
which he is accustomed to range, its vast lakes, boundless forests,
majestic rivers, and trackless plains, that is, to my mind, wonderfully
striking and sublime. He is formed for the wilderness, as the Arab is for
the desert…we should find him linked to his fellow-man of civilized life
by more of those sympathies and affections than we are usually ascribed to
him. (342)

This section achieves a few things. First, it links the “savage” inherently with the
wilderness, implying that with the coming of civilization the destruction of the
wilderness, or the taming of the wilderness, would inevitably mean the destruction or
taming of the “savage.” Secondly, Irving makes an attempt to establish a commonality
between the “true” character of the savage and the characteristics of civilized culture so
as to infer the possibility of future assimilation, however, in that assimilation the savages
would relinquish their Indian traits ensuring the disappearance of the Native identity all
the same. This idea is also important when considering again the prevailing American paranoia regarding English influence on the Native Americans. Irving makes a point of ridiculing the English concept of chivalry:

That chivalrous courage which induces us to despise the suggestions of prudence and to rush in the face of certain danger is the offspring of society and produced by education. It is honorable, because it is in fact the triumph of lofty sentiment over an instinctive repugnance to pain…and thus the dread of real evil is overcome by the superior dread of an evil which exists only in the mind. (350)

In contrasting the popular English code of chivalry with the Indian “stratagem,” Irving is able to again diminish the kinship among English and Indian traits. Irving also promotes the Indian way as effective, and chivalry as useless and even foolish. There is no place for chivalry in the American wilderness. The text also touches on the concept of the noble savage. Prucha historicizes the theoretical complexity that both concepts, noble and ignoble savage, held in the minds of Americans:

The threads of these two conceptions intertwined in strange ways, and one or the other was drawn upon as suited the occasion…Savagism (whether noble or ignoble) was contrasted with “civility”,…There was little doubt in the minds of Europeans …that savagism was an inferior mode of existence and must give way to civility (civilization)…The dichotomy between noble and ignoble savagism was never completely resolved, for
the a priori images were fixed, and from time to time these simplistic positions resurfaced in theoretical discussions of the Indians.” (8)

Whichever type of savage suited the conversation was in the end irrelevant. Prucha suggests “savagism,” noble or ignoble, would inevitably give way to civility, again emphasizing the eventual assimilation, or disappearance of Native Americans. Irving continues:

…the unfortunate aborigines of America in the early periods of colonization have been doubly wronged by the white men…dispossessed of their hereditary possessions…the colonists have often treated them like beasts of the forest, and the author has endeavored to justify him in his outrages. The former found it easier to exterminate than to civilize…thus the poor wanderers of the forest were persecuted and defamed, not because they were guilty but because they were ignorant. (342)

Again Irving practices creating a myth of removal, this time by discussing the past situation of the Indian to imply that their current situation is already hopeless. While integral to Murray’s nationalist discourse, Native Americans, as Irving sees it, have no future in the American political or cultural climate. They are disposed wanderers, and while he chides the colonists for their aggression against the Indians, he gives no examples of actual Indian savagery and he makes no suggestions of retribution or repayment by the United States government to the Indians for past discretions. The quote also induces disconnect between what was committed by the colonies and the responsibilities of the United States government formed from those same colonies. The
last sentence is striking because of the emphasis on Indian ignorance, which is a major component of paternalism. Irving goes on to promote and applaud paternalism:

…the American government, too, has wisely and humanely exerted itself to inculcate a friendly and forbearing spirit towards them from fraud and injustice. Their spirits [Native Americans] are humiliated and debased by a sense of inferiority, and their native courage cowed and daunted by superior knowledge and power of their enlightened neighbors. Society has advanced upon them like one of those withering airs that will sometimes breed desolation over a whole region of fertility. (343-344)

While paternalism is not yet an official policy of the United States it is becoming the preferred fix to the “Indian problem.” At this point I feel compelled to provide an alternative interpretation of the same historical moment but from a source that Irving would deem “savage”:

Before I was born, they [white men] came to our country and visited us. The man who came was from the government. He wanted to make a treaty with us, and to give us presents, blankets and guns, and flint and steel, and knives. The head chief told him we needed none of these things…”You see, my brother, that the ruler has given us all that we need; the buffalo for food and clothing; the corn to eat with our dried meat; bows, arrows, knives, and hoes; all the implements which we need for killing meat, or for cultivating ground…We do not want your presents. (Native American Testimony, 40)
I want to show from this passage that the seemingly beneficial principles of paternalism, as they are defined by Irving and by Prucha, are a myth. It was not a benevolent decision to protect the Indians from themselves and the marauding thieves encroaching on to the frontier, but forced regulation upon Native Americans by the United States government. It would never have been necessary, even well into the Nineteenth century, for Native Americans to exist in a state of dependency on the United States government. Irving had hoped to show that Native American desolation came first and paternalism was the benevolent response of the government to “ameliorate the situation of the Indians…To protect them from the frauds of the white traders” (343), when in actuality the encroachment of “civilization” and the dismissal of Indian sovereignty in favor of paternalism is, as we will see in A Tour on the Prairies, what induced dependency and calamity upon the Indian way of life.

“Philip of Pokanoket,” not surprisingly, immediately follows “Traits of an Indian character” in The Sketchbook. Much of Irving’s characterizations of Indian character are personified by Philip of Pokanoket:

…chivalrous courage…his expeditions may vie in distance and danger with the pilgrimage of the devotee, or the crusade of the knight-errant…He even takes pride in taunting his persecutors and provoking their ingenuity of torture; and as the devouring flames prey on his very vitals…his last song of triumph, breathing the defiance of an unconquered heart and invoking the spirit of his fathers to witness that he dies without a groan. (352)
In similar fashion the story of Philip of Pokanoket is described by Irving as, “PHILIP OF POKANOKET… Worthy of an age of poetry and fit subjects for local story and romantic fiction, they have left scarcely any authentic traces on the page of history, but stalk like gigantic shadows in the dim twilight of tradition” (358). We see again that Irving has transferred what is an actual historical event into the realm of myth. The historical event to which Irving is referring, King Philip’s War, took place from 1675 to 1678 in New England between colonists and their Native American allies. The story Irving presents is that of a Native American protagonist, Philip, fighting against an enemy, the colonies, for the continued existence of his tribe and way of life: “He saw the whole race of his countrymen melting before them from the face of the earth, their territories slipping from their hands, and their tribes becoming feeble, scattered, and dependent” (361). But this is more than just a story. Irving uses it to accomplish two things; first, it cements with historic “fact,” or that which Irving is portraying as fact, the characteristics he lays out in “Traits of an Indian Character”: The admirable, noble natives which thrived in the wilderness, who have been notably wronged and yet, it is sadly too late for them. These traits then support the inevitable conclusion of the disappearance of the Indians. However, this story is also meant to be an appropriation of Native American history for the purpose of creating a national identity. Hendrix suggests that “…national narratives’ will revolve around the past achievements and sacrifices of historical figures who are considered founding members of the nation, or particularly noble defenders of it, with some additional guidance as to how these incidents should be understood” (772). Given this I believe it was Irving’s intention to present the “savage,” specifically Philip of Pokanoket, as a patriot. Many of his descriptions of Philip were reminiscent of
descriptions of the founding fathers, and Irving chose to drop the common use of “King” as a historical reference to Philip strengthening this comparison:

…we find him [Philip] displaying a vigorous mind, a fertility of expedients, a contempt of suffering and hardship, and an unconquerable resolution that command our sympathy and applause…he would fight to the last man, rather than become a servant of the English. His home being destroyed, his country harassed and laid waste by the incursions of the conquerors…he formed a rallying-point to the whole body of Western Indians and laid waste to several of the English settlements…Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune, but great minds rise above it. The very idea of submission awakened the fury of Philip. (375)

Like all of Irving’s passages this serves a multitude of purposes. First, it is similar to “Rip Van Winkle” in that it provides a sense of inheritance. In “Rip Van Winkle” it is an American who embodies Native American characteristics, while in “Philip of Pokanoket” it is a celebrated Native American embodying American characteristics. This passage would read just as naturally if we were to replace Philip with George Washington and Western Indians with Continental Army. Furthermore, an image of an Indian as a patriot of the Revolution further emphasizes disunion between the Indian and the English. It also maintains the schism between an American mindset versus colonial mindset, specifically Irving’s attempt to distance one from the other. However, the story ends with Philip’s defeat; he is “shot through the heart by a renagado of his own nation” (376). The common thread that follows through both “Traits of an Indian Character” and “Philip of Pokanoket” and the dominating historical mindset is the idea that the Indians were, as
Irving puts it, “brave but unfortunate.” Philip dies bravely, but tragically. The noble savages, conveniently, are too late understood and appreciated in “Traits of an Indian Character,” and thus are destined to decline. And Rip, our Indian stand-in, in the end successfully and happily eventually assimilates into American society. Each of Irving’s stories echoed the needs of the American government: the establishment of an alliance with the Indians, removal of any political influence of the English, justification for the start of Indians removal. However, the conclusions of all the stories are indicative of a philosophical shift in US-Indian relations, the legal embracement of paternalistic policies.

The principles of paternalism developed to justify American involvement in Indian affairs. The definition of paternalism as defined by Prucha in his book *The Indian in American Society* is composed of three fundamental properties:

The first was that all mankind was one, that all human beings were created innately equal by God and were descendants of one set of parents, Adam and Eve…a second principle must also be noted: The Indians in their existing cultural circumstances were inferior to the whites…the third fundamental principle: The Indians’ culture could and should be transformed to equal or approximate that of their white neighbors. (10)

Prucha does not absolve the government from blame, but he does position the United States government too comfortably whitewashed from any accountability. While it is important to try and keep historically objective, we must also keep in mind what Hendrix suggests. He posits that “such ‘benign neglect’ is untenable because it is simply
impossible for states, no matter how well intentioned, to ever be culturally neutral…with regard to content…they are always colored by particularistic cultural expectations. Moreover, states virtually always reflect the cultural values of the majority in their choice[s]” (Hendrix, 768). And what the American government and culture valued was wrought at the expense of Native Americans, and as Norgren suggests there was a dark underbelly to paternalism: “From 1818 through 1825, Monroe’s Secretary of War, John Calhoun, ‘encouraged the use of ruse, subterfuge, circumvention, and outright fraud to achieve through chicanery, under cloak of voluntary cooperation, a continued stream of land cessions’” (39). Components of paternalism are echoed in The Sketchbook, such as a sense of Western superiority over Native Americans and a disregard for Native autonomy. However, while Irving foretold Indian removal in order to imply the inheritance of their land to the United States, forced Indian Removal would not be administered until 1830. Moreover, paternalism as the justification for removal is not fully realized and embraced until after the Cherokee case rulings in the early 1830s. Thus The Sketchbook should be seen as a speculative and idealized precursor to Irving’s first writing when he returned from England in 1832, A Tour on the Prairies, which tackled the “Indian question” and the future of the American national identity. Where The Sketchbook rehistoricized the past into a convenient myth, A Tour on the Prairies shrewdly permeates the contemporary experience on the frontier with the politics of the day, notably paternalism. For a deeper discussion of such however we must turn to Irving’s 1832 travel narrative, A Tour on the Prairies.
Chapter 2: *A Tour On the Prairies: the Noble Savage becomes Ward of the State.*

Irving returns from England in May 1832, and four months later sets out with the Commissioner on Indian affairs, Henry Leavitt Ellsworth. In between his release of *The Sketchbook* and his return to America a few key political statutes are put into place that illustrate a shift in not only the United States government’s Indian policy but also the popular opinion among the American people regarding Native Americans. At the same time as *The Sketchbook* was published Congress passed a lesser known, yet significant, law, the Civilization Fund Act, in 1819. The Act “encouraged activities of benevolent societies in providing education for Native Americans and authorized an annuity to stimulate the ‘civilization process.’” In 1830 the Indian Removal Act was signed into law, by President Andrew Jackson, which authorized the president to negotiate with Native Americans for their removal to Federal territory west of the Mississippi river in exchange for their homelands. Embodied in these two laws is the underlying anxiety for either assimilation or segregation of the Native Americans, similar to the conceptual struggle between the Ignoble vs. Noble savage we see in “Traits of an Indian Character.” While they’re opposites, both terms fail to invest any meaningful understanding into our interaction with the Indians, either by reducing the complexity of the Indian identity to platitudes, or creating legal standards that eliminated opportunities for surviving as an indigenous culture. At this point America begins to outgrow its “use” for the Native Americans, as the continual growth of the nation could potentially be thwarted by the Indian presence on the frontier. The only two options offered by paternalism was the dismantling of Native American culture through assimilation or forced physical removal from their land. From this quandary one of the most famous court decisions occurs, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* [1831]: “The Cherokee and their lawyers hoped that a
favorable opinion from the Supreme Court, accepting both the Cherokee claim of national sovereignty and the supremacy of federal law over state action would stop Georgia from attempting to exercise jurisdiction…and seizing Cherokee land” (Norgren, 99). The crucial question at hand was whether the Cherokee nation and by extension other Indian tribes were to be considered under the definition of a “Foreign Nation,” capable of suing and if so whether Georgia had violated treaty agreements with the Cherokee or the U.S. constitution. The response given by Chief Justice John Marshall would define Indian-American relations:

Marshall found that he needed only to pose – and answer – a single question: “Is the Cherokee nation a foreign state in the sense in which that term is used in the constitution?” Marshall’s answer relied heavily on discovery doctrine and a corrupt reading of history. In spite of dozens of international treaties agreed on by the United States and various Indian nations, Marshall concluded that the Cherokee did not constitute a foreign nation…a generalization necessary to support the new legal theory that tribes were something Marshall chose to call domestic dependent, not foreign, nations, and that Indian people were in a state of pupilage. (Norgren, 101)

It is important to note that Norgren points out this a new legal theory, representative of a shift in the United States’ dealings with the Native Americans. Additionally, we must remember that the previous quote does not say Marshall sided with Georgia either rather he reinforced the idea that “the authority to deal with Native American nations rests solely with the government in Washington.” We move then into another phase of the
Native American experience, which will be mirrored in *A Tour on the Prairies*, defined by federally-mandated paternalism. Paternalism coupled with the new era of Jacksonian politics and a national obsession with Westward expansion proved much less friendly to concepts of indigenous land ownership and resulted in the deprivation of Indian sovereignty. Unlike *The Sketchbook*, in *A Tour on the Prairies* we are faced with actual accounts portraying the consequences of these political philosophies on the Native American as opposed to folk legends like Rip Van Winkle and Philip of Pokanoket. Wilkins and Lomawaima provide a summation of the corruption inherent in this shift in political dealings:

…the historical record shows that legal ownership resided fully in the hands of tribal nations. Indian tribes retained complete ownership of their respective territories until such times as they formally ceded their claims to land in a consensual treaty arrangement with one of the competing European nations or later with the Americans…The doctrine of discovery, when defined as an exclusive principle of benevolent paternalism, or…as an assertion of federal ownership of fee-simple title to all the Indian lands in the United States, is a clear legal fiction…A doctrine of discovery that purports to assign instantaneous ownership of Indian lands to European/American nations, and that hopes to reduce Indians to a status as simple tenants in their aboriginal homelands, runs contrary to common sense and to the force and continued vitality of tribal sovereignty. (63)

In the following section I will explore the politics of Irving’s tour, from the different perspectives of those who travelled alongside Irving, and how their perspectives informs
ones reading of Irving’s own account. Moreover, as in the previous chapter, I will explore how Irving is using his narrative to produce a specific reading of the Native American experience in the West so as to emphasize the benefits of paternalism, and the inevitable “civilizing” of the frontier.
The Politics of “The Tour:” Assimilation vs. Vanishment

The Sketchbook was concerned with myth-making, as a means to reimagine the history of America and substantiate a uniquely American identity through Irving’s national narrative. A Tour on the Prairies is unique because it is non-fiction, and where The Sketchbook had to create a false sense of legitimacy, A Tour on the Prairies is granted validity by its status as a first-hand account, non-fiction, and travel narrative. While I want to focus on Irving’s perspective, his two travel partners, Henry L. Ellsworth and Charles Latrobe, offer simultaneous perspectives that are, as Williams and Simison say in their introduction to Ellsworth journal, Washington Irving on the Prairie, “an indispensable bit of Irvingiana” (ix). While I have laid out the historical context in the previous section, I hope to set up, through these companion texts, the two “options” forced upon Native Americans as defined by the politics of time: assimilation or removal. The word “option” implies choice but it would be wrong to say that Native Americans “picked” either assimilation or removal. In the time between The Sketchbook and A Tour on the Prairies, there is significantly less threat of political confrontation between America and Europe, as well as an increase in laws passed to limit tribes’ trading options and ability to sell land with any nation besides America. This meant the emphasis on appeasing Native Americans in the early nineteenth century was no longer crucial for the United States government. However, the nation still struggled with an identity crisis. In The Sketchbook Irving tried, as Thomas Alexander suggested, showing “where we come from” (377), and tried to create a common origin for the new nation. Though he imagined a future of Westward expansion and the inevitable civilizing of the rough frontier, there was still uncertainty as to the future of the nation. In A Tour on the Prairies the emphasis
is shifted to “where we are going” (377), and how the new policies that have been set in place by the government, such as Indian removal, are fulfilling a national destiny.

Prucha highlights the creation of Henry Ellsworth’s position in his chapter, “The Indian Department”: “The bill, which became law on July 9, 1832, authorized the President [Andrew Jackson] to appoint a commissioner of Indian affairs, under the secretary of war, who was to have “the direction and management of all Indian affairs, and of all matters arising out of Indian relations’” (165). This new appointment of Ellsworth’s is the reason the Tour of the Prairies occurred, as it gave him the opportunity to invite Irving along upon his arrival back to the United States. Due to the political aim of the tour it is inevitably colored by Ellsworth’s role as Indian Commissioner. In the introduction to Ellsworth’s journal Williams and Simison state:

The passage by Congress in 1830 of the Indian Removal Bill stimulated not merely the migration westward of tribes east of the Mississippi River, but provoked a long series of complex disputes among the whites and the various groups of red men, notably the Cherokee and Creeks, living in the regions of the Arkansas River. The government treaty of May 6, 1828 with the Cherokee gave to this nation certain sections of land which had been previously occupied by some hundreds of Creeks. (x)

Much of Ellsworth job then during the Tour is to “study the country, to mark the boundaries, to pacify the warring Indians, and, in general, to establish order and justice” (xi). What this list of chores translates to is Ellsworth being charged with enforcing the policies of paternalism, such as Indian removal and pacification of Indian resistance, as a
means of controlling Indian affairs in the West. Ellsworth, unlike Irving and Latrobe, holds no romantic excitement for the Tour. He wrote “I started with a heavy heart – conscience approved my decision – still, the danger from Wild Indians… the exposure to inclement weather far from medical treatment… the conflagration of the prairies – the reptiles that must every night be my companions & the wild beasts on all sides” (9). This lament illustrates Ellsworth’s attitude during the trip. He is first and foremost concerned with the business at hand, because of this his observations provide insight into the politics of the day:

We travelled about 10 miles, through a fine section of land, improved by several enterprising Creek farmers who seemed to have all the necessary provisions, in the field and good comfortable cabins for themselves – The numerous swine that started every now and then, by the side satisfied us the Creeks had a great supply of Pork, and the fine cattle feeding in the cane breaks and rich vines, was an interesting spectacle, to strangers, who were rejoicing to witness the progress of Natives in civilization. (11)

Ellsworth notes the successes of the Indian policy, the abundance that the paternalistic government has provided to the Creeks and moreover that their removal has proved beneficial for the Indians. The following description of the half-breed Indian, on whose land they camp, offers an ironic alternative to the positive view of paternalism: “The Indian offered us what he had to spare, which was corn and fodder… The Indian’s family were mostly sick with the bloody flux, and as we understood the disorder was Catching, we took good care not to enter the house – some children too, had the whooping cough; and the groans & coughs” (11). The diseases described in the passage refer to pertussis,
dysentery and possibly cholera. All of which are diseases historically known to have been transmitted to Native American tribes by colonists originally and later to Western tribes by people such as Ellsworth, Irving and Latrobe. The spread of disease as a consequence of Western expansion is one that Ellsworth either ignores intentionally or more likely writes off as being at the expense of “the greater good.” The utter destitution these diseases caused is more accurately represented by George Bent in his description of the cholera siege of 1849:

In ’49, the emigrants brought the Cholera up the Platte Valley, and from the emigrant trains it spread to the Indian camps. “Cramps” the Indians called it, and they died of it by the hundreds…whole camps could be seen deserted with the tepees full of dead bodies. Our tribe suffered very heavy loss…A war party of about one hundred Cheyenne had been down the Platte hunting for the Pawnees and on their way home…saw white men dying of Cholera in the wagons…they rushed out of the camp…but the terrible disease had them already in its grip… (Nabokov, 88)

Unlike the image we get from Ellsworth, the reality of westward expansion was in many cases a nightmare for Native American tribes. Similarly Ellsworth’s aversion to any Indian not yet embracing the “blessings” of Federal assistance is clearly evident:

We mistook the Osage trail for that of the rangers, and unexpectedly found ourselves…in the midst of an Indian encampment – about 500 Osages had taken up their residence there, during the hunting season…The huts were constructed entirely of bushes & skins, and never did I see such a dirty
disgusting set of beings…and when I was addressing them and urging them to peace & not to fight Pawnees, or steal horses, and provoke revenge…little boys made water before all the women… (18)

The utter disdain Ellsworth has for the Osage is so much in contrast to the charitable mindset often perceived to go hand in hand with paternalism. In this moment off-guard we see a much more candid reaction to the Indian presence on the frontier. As modern readers the humor is in the image of Ellsworth attempting to preach to a group of Osage Elders and children, without an interpreter, the commands of the United States government as the little boys pee in the open. The most telling passage of Ellsworth’s journal comes when he is considering his opinion of the Indian country, despite claiming to defer judgment “until further examination”:

…in the meantime I will say, here is good land enough, for the present Indians in the United States, and none can behold the improvements and comforts of the Creeks Cherokees & Choc-taws, without lamenting the mistaken policy of many of our Eastern friends who oppose the emigration of aborigines to this country…As for myself, I am far, very far removed from all scenes of political strife, and…my feelings become everyday more & more interested in behalf of Indians…(60-61)

From this it’s obvious that Ellsworth is fully invested in the political ideology of paternalism, and while he claims to be “far removed” from politics, which seems like a feat for someone who is at that moment actively engaging in politics, he dismisses the alternative political stance against Indian removal. And he ends by reestablishing that his
biggest concern is the well-being of Native Americans, even the ones he so despises in the previous quote. The fault is the philosophical fallacy in paternalism, that its proponents such as Ellsworth claimed it to be benign and that it had the best interests of the Natives at heart, but the consequence was it produced distress among the Indians, and created a “system of dependency and handouts to replace the Indian’s original total self-sufficiency and self-reliance” (Fleck, 68). While Ellsworth’s narrative provided the political perspective informing the tour, Charles Latrobe’s narrative, *The Rambler in North America*, provided a necessary European perspective. The benefit of having a European perspective is that it provides insights and observations from an impartial party, one who can offer a more removed view of the political situation. Nevertheless, Latrobe is not free of bias since he is guided by his own cultural ideologies; however biased, the alternative perspective is helpful.

While it does not take place during *A Tour on the Prairies*, Letter V of Latrobe’s collection does take place during his time in America preceding the tour and is concerned with providing insight into the “man and manners” of the United States:

…where is their nationality? The fact is, that, in their present condition, the people of these countries cannot be considered to have a national character. It is even to be doubted whether they will ever amalgamate sufficiently, under the great difference of temperament, style of life and habits consequent upon such diverse climate alone, to admit one picture, however broadly sketched… (59)
It may be tempting to write this passage off as an inherent foreign lack of understanding of American culture, but we must also consider that less than 30 years from this point the United States enters into a Civil War over conflicting ideologies. Given this Latrobe makes an impressively astute observation of the national character, or lack thereof that at the time drove US-Indian relations. Laura J. Murray again offers helpful insight; she suggests too a struggle by Americans to create a unique identity: “For while European Americans were actively engaged in appropriating the land of Native Americans…they also found themselves in ties of trade, ideology, and diplomacy with Great Britain…British reviewers routinely laughed at American cultural efforts, and against this background Americans with increasing fervor proclaimed projects of proclaiming a national American culture” (206). This quote is especially poignant because the need to define a national character is heavily influences the politics of the Tour and in turn heavily influences Irving’s own creative project to encourage a shared desire within the nation for Westward expansion. Again, this shift in the government’s use for Indians meant that the Indian presence was now a point of contention and disunity. Ideological clashes between varied groups all vying for new, profitable opportunities in the West would have been amplified in a setting such as A Tour on the Prairies, though as Latrobe goes on to suggest the “many races of men, with peculiar habits and manners…though for a time bound together by a common government, and the ties of common interest” (60). The common interest being shared is the expansion of the country and solving the consequential “Indian” problem in the eyes of the government and American public. Native Americans during A Tour on the Prairies find themselves as the central obstacle to the United States’ struggle for a unique national character.
I began the section by reading into Ellsworth’s and Latrobe’s journals before my discussion of Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* because Irving was aware their sentiments and they would have informed his own writing. While Ellsworth may have been blindly devoted to the government cause to a fault, Irving was able to take the cause one step further by creating a filtered reality in his narrative that subtly leads the reader to a seemingly inevitable conclusion. Irving was familiar with the European’s opinion that there was no hope of establishing an American national character in a nation so varied in opinion and lifestyle. Upon hearing he had been invited to accompany Ellsworth to Fort Gibson, Irving wrote to his brother Peter:

I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian tribes, which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government. I should see those fine countries of the ‘far west,’ while still in a state of pristine wildness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist. (xvii)

Irving is aware of the political situation regarding the Indians and regards the encroachment of civilization upon the West as an inarguable fact despite his appreciation for the “pristine wildness.”

Among his sketches of the many Native American tribes he encounters on the prairie, Irving accentuates a characteristic divide between the tribes who appeared to have embraced civilization and those who clung to their indigenous way of life. Irving’s sketches suggest that the alternative to civilization was destitution:
Several hundred miles beyond the Mississippi, extends a vast tract of uninhabited country, where there is neither to be seen the log-house of the white man nor the wigwam of the Indians…These in fact are the hunting grounds of the various tribes of the far West…the Osage, Creeks, the Delaware, and other tribes that have linked themselves with civilization…Here resort also the Pawnees, the Comanches, and other fierce, and as yet, independent tribes…None of them presume to erect a permanent habitation within its borders…Mouldering skulls and skeletons, bleaching in some dark ravine, or near the traces of a hunting-camp, occasionally mark the scene of a foregone act of blood, and let the wanderer know the nature of the region he is travelling. (10-11)

Irving constructs, again, an image of absence. The land is uninhabited yet teeming with Native American tribes. His observations echo Locke once again; the idea of there not being a “permanent settlement” implies a lack of ownership, or right to the land. In his essay “Ineffectual Chase’: Indians, Prairies, Buffal0, and the Quest for the Authentic West in Washington Irving’s A Tour on the Prairies” Mark K. Burns examines Washington Irving’s notions of the “authentic” and “American” during his time on the frontier. Burns suggests that

In lieu of firsthand encounters with Indians, pristine landscapes, and wild animals, the narrative generally records a succession of disappointing near-misses and close encounters…These repeated absences, near-misses delays, and disappointments will be seen to plague Irving and his travelling companions…in a way that forces the text’s characters as well
as the reader to reconsider...the...transparent manner in which the American frontier was often thought to reveal itself and its significance.

(58)

While I would agree with Burns that Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* does not turn out to be the romanticized adventure Irving thought it would be, I do not believe that “plagues” Irving throughout the tour. Irving does get to chase buffalo, not only chase but hunt and kill one. What is interesting about Irving’s experience on the frontier is his fascination with the novelties of the West paired with his resolution that the indigenous land and lifestyle will inevitably make way for civilization which for Irving is the natural order of events. Furthermore, we see juxtaposition between the tribes that have linked themselves with civilization and the independent tribes. Irving makes it clear that the “wild” tribes not yet submitting to government control relish in violence. The characteristics of these tribes are understood in terms of how they relate to civilization and their relationship to the federal government as opposed to the quality of their native lifestyle. It is not that the Pawnees are unnecessarily violent because they have refused the benefits of paternalism, but because they are hunters. They survive on that which they are able to kill. It is another example of an alternative way of life that is misconstrued as less valid because it resists “civilization.” Irving continues to show his support of the paternalistic temperament in his admiration of Ellsworth’s character:

> Our party was headed by one of the commissioners appointed by the government of the United States to superintend the settlement of the Indian tribes migrating from east to the west of the Mississippi...let me bear testimony to the merits of this worthy leader...a man in whom legal
practice and political life had been able to vitiate a benevolence of heart.

(11)

Irving’s praise of Ellsworth’s character, which cannot be separated from Ellsworth’s political purpose, coincides with Irving’s support of the United States government’s Indian policy. It is at Fort Gibson, the last outpost before frontier wilderness, where Irving sketches the various Indian characters he encounters:

Nearby…was a group of Osages…stern and simple in garb and aspect. They wore no ornaments; their dress consisted merely of blankets, leggings, and moccasins…their hair was cropped close, excepting a bristling ridge on the top, like the crest of a helmet, with a long scalp-lock hanging behind. They had fine Roman countenances. And, as they generally wore their blankets wrapped round their loins, so as to leave the bust and arms bare, they looked like so many noble bronze figures. The Osages are the finest looking Indians I have ever seen in the West. They have not yielded sufficiently, as yet, to the influence of civilization to lay by their simple Indian garb, or to lose the habits of the hunter and the warrior; and their poverty prevents their indulging in much luxury of apparel. (21-22)

Irving, throughout the tour, romanticizes Western figures by comparing them with those of antiquity. The simple Osage are reminiscent of images of the ancient Roman warriors and while such an image implies nobility, it also implies a sense that the Osage are remnants of history themselves. The Osage, as Irving continues to show, are one of the
tribes that still cling to their indigenous lifestyle and should they not “yield sufficiently,” their increasing poverty will either force submission, or dissolution. It is important to keep in mind that Irving’s judgments of the Natives are informed by Western philosophies of wealth and poverty, and as those begin to flourish on the frontier, the enrichment of indigenous American culture is sacrificed for the onslaught of civilization. In contrast to the Osage is the image Irving provides of a tribe that has embraced civilization:

In contrast to these was a gayly dressed party of Creeks. There is something, at the first glance, quite oriental in the appearance of this tribe. They dress in calico hunting shirts, of various brilliant colors, decorate with bright fringes, and belted with broad girdles, embroidered with beads;… the country was sprinkled with Creek villages and farm-houses; the inhabitants of which appeared to have adopted, with considerable facility, the rudiments of civilization, and to have thriven in consequence. Their farms were well stocked, and their houses had a look of comfort and abundance. (22)

His description harks on ‘Oriental’ themes which are not surprising, since the Chinese were an imperial power blossoming in the 19th century, thus implying that these Indians are of the present, or at least successfully adapting to contemporary life. They have not only adapted but with ease, and so Irving is able to raise the question of why would other tribes resist assimilation if it was so easy and beneficial for the Creeks? Irving also chooses to interpret some of the same experiences we see in Ellsworth’s account in a way that portrays the attempts at paternalism in the West as not only right but successful and accepted by the Native Americans. We see this specifically with Irving’s account of the
encounter with the Osage at their camp. “This speech being interpreted by Beatte [the party’s half-breed Indian guide], seemed to have a most pacifying effect upon the multitude, who promised faithfully that, as far as in them lay, the peace should not be disturbed; and indeed their age and sex gave some reason to trust that they would keep their word.” (42) Instead of the drunken elders and insubordinate children we see in Ellsworth’s account, here we see a thoughtful group receptive to Ellsworth’s speech. From this version a reader of the time would get the impression that paternalism was indeed a success on the frontier.

Native Americans were not the only group Irving sketched in *A Tour on the Prairies*. “Half-breeds,” to which they were commonly referred, made up another essential demographic of Irving’s frontier. The prevailing view of half-breeds during the time of the tour was negative, and Irving’s sketches enforced this viewpoint:

They had, moreover, engaged the services of a young man named Antoine, a half-breed of French and Osage origin. He was to be a kind of Jack-of-all-work; to cook, to hunt, and to take care of the horses; but he had a vehement propensity to do nothing, being one of the worthless brood engendered and brought up among the missions. He was, moreover, a little spoiled by being really a handsome young fellow, an Adonis of the frontier, and still worse by fancying himself highly connected, his sister being concubine to an opulent white trader! (23)

Antoine’s character is contemptible to Irving because he is lazy, but more interestingly because Antoine doesn’t recognize his proper “place” in society. He considers himself
“highly connected” and the idea that someone of half-breed ancestry could be satisfied with, or moreover could be ignorant enough to brag about, his position in society is bizarre to Irving. This theme continues when we meet one of the main figures of the Tour, the guide Beatte. “Pierre Beatte, a half-breed of French and Osage parentage…He had altogether more of the red than the white man in his composition; and, as I had been taught to look upon all half-breeds with distrust, as an uncertain and faithless race, I would gladly have dispensed with the services of Pierre Beatte” (31). If, as I have suggested, Irving is like the rest of Americans at the time, obsessed with finding a unique national character, then it is not surprising half-breeds appear as menacing. By definition a “half-breed,” is a mixed creation, an amalgamation. The product of that breeding is left in a limbo of identity, a characteristic of which Americans disapproved, and yet with which they struggled in their own identity. Furthermore, most of the half-breeds Irving encounters on the West are half-breeds between Indians and French or British. This would only amplify the distrust of the Americans who encountered them because it indicated there was no room for allegiance to the United States. Furthermore, the remnants of this racial intermixing served as reminders of a time before the United State was in control of the West, specifically during the War of 1812 and the French and Indian War. Slotkin suggests, in his book Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, that the “Indian functioned as a symbol for the internal and external forces threatening social order” (347). In A Tour on the Prairies Irving worked to highlight the positive aspects of the frontier which best demonstrated the benefits of Indian removal and the government’s paternalistic policies. Conversely, those who represented hurdles to expansion were written out of Irving’s future for America,
casualties of the inevitable civilizing of the frontier. Moreover, the Natives, or half-breeds who resisted removal and assimilation were considered threats to the burgeoning American imperial identity. It is not surprising then that a main feature of life on the frontier was violence between Frontiersman and Native Americans, violence which eventually required action from the government. Examples of such violence are prevalent in *A Tour on the Prairies* and are indicative of a nation becoming increasingly less friendly to the Native American presence.
Clashes on the Frontier: The limits of Laws and Justice

The struggle of Native Americans on the frontier is further agitated by the government’s inability to police violence between Native Americans and frontiersmen. Irving sketches such encounters during *A Tour on the Prairies* with the hope of emphasizing the need for civilization in the West. In an attempt to control the growing violence on the frontier, Congress began making amendments to the Intercourse law of 1793. Unfortunately, the law did not function in the manner intended by the government as Prucha states:

The United States government was determined to provide an adequate judicial system for Indian country and intended Indians and whites be treated with equal justice. In practice, however, there were serious discrepancies…Serious disturbances were solved by crushing defeats of the Indians and by their removal to lands farther away rather than by strict enforcement of the laws. (104)

Not surprisingly, the law was much more effective when used to persecute the Indians than the white men. Prucha notes one of the more prevalent crimes of the frontier: “Theft was another cause of conflict, and the chief concern was horses. Aside from outright murder and massacres by the Indians, nothing was so likely to embroil the two races on the frontier as horse stealing, for horses were of elemental necessity for the frontiersman” (106) What is not mentioned is that horses were also an imperative resource for the Native Americans. There is an essential moment in *A Tour on the Prairies* that showcases the inadequate justice on the frontier regarding this volatile crime:
On the verge of the wilderness we paused to enquire…by a white settler or squatter…One of his horses was missing; he was sure it had been stolen in the night by a straggling party of Osages encamped in a neighboring swamp…He would make an example of the villains. He had accordingly caught down his rifle from the wall, that invariable enforcer of right or wrong upon the frontiers, and, having saddled his steed, was about to sally forth on a foray into the swamp; while a brother squatter, with rifle in hand, stood ready to accompany him. We endeavored to calm the old campaigner of the prairies…but he had the frontier propensity to charge everything to the Indians… (31)

It is important to note Irving’s disdain for the white settler in this description. Like the untamed Indian and the half-breed, the squatter is another being that has no allegiance to the Nation. His only allegiance is to the financial gains a life on the frontier can provide and he values are inconsistent with the type of civility Irving hopes to see in the West. Not only does this passage reflect a more realistic consequence of the law on the Indian experience, Irving takes it one step further:

…we descried an Osage on horseback issuing out of a skirt of wood about half a mile off, and leading a horse by a halter. The latter was immediately recognized by our hard winking friend as the steed of which he was in quest…The youth rode slowly up to us with a frank open air, and signified by means of our interpreter Beatte, that the horse he was leading had wandered to their camp, and he was now on his way to conduct him back to his owner. (32)
Not only is the young Osage not responsible for the thievery, he is identified as honorable in his efforts to return the horse to his owner. The reaction by the squatter is not one of gratitude but continued blame against the Osage: “He was for tying the young Indian to a tree and giving him a sound lashing. Such…is too often the administration of law on the frontier” (33). This type of irrational reaction was common on the frontier, not only because of racial prejudice but also another section of the Intercourse law which stated: “…a guarantee of government compensation for theft of horses…The war department was eventually flooded with claims…and it did not know just what to do about the claims because often they were submitted on the least provocation without clear evidence that Indians were the real culprits…” (107). This is yet another government policy aimed to better the existence of the Indians by controlling their affairs that instead makes matters worse; it also represents another venue in which Native Americans were used by frontiersman as scapegoats and an opportunity for monetary gain. However, it is necessary to make the distinction that these moments in *A Tour on the Prairie* are not meant, by Irving, to critique the paternalistic policies as much as to enforce the rude nature of the frontier in its present, uncivilized, state. Instead of taking issue with the failure of the laws Irving, as he does in “Philip of Pokanoket,” depicts a heroic “noble savage” whose lifestyle is tragically, but conveniently, fading with the onslaught of civilization.
The Economy of the Frontier

In addition to frontier violence, Irving also demonstrated the negative effects of capitalism on the indigenous culture. The westward expansion was a unifying agent, symbolizing the inevitable imperial destiny of America and within that westward expansion frontiersman discovered new commodities to aid in the economic advancement of the United States. While proponents of paternalism would have you believe the economic advancement of the United States would by extension include the economic advancement of the Native Americans, this was in reality not the case. Yet again Irving, in *A Tour on the Prairies*, provides images that reflect the onslaught of civilization and what that means for the current Western economy. Perhaps the most recognizable allegory is the “Buffalo and the Bees.”

In his chapter “A Bee Hunt” Irving focuses his narrative on the symbolic meaning of the Bees’ presence on the frontier:

The Indians consider them [honey bees] the harbinger of the white man, as the buffalo is of the red man; and say that, in proportion as the bee advances, the Indian and buffalo retire. We are always accustomed to associate the hum of the bee-hive with the farmhouse and flower-garden, and to consider those industrious little animals as connected with the busy haunts of man, and I am told that the wild bee is seldom to be met with at any great distance from the frontier. They have been the heralds of civilization, steadfastly preceding it as it advanced from the Atlantic
borders, and some of the ancient settlers of the West pretend to give the very year when the honey-bee first crossed the Mississippi. (50)

Irving sets up imagery that has us equate Western civilization with honey bees and indigenous culture with the buffalo. The most fascinating aspect of this is the authenticity of the allegory. The honey bee, not being indigenous to the West, provides an actual, as opposed to symbolic, icon of encroaching civilization. The same has been known of certain plants, such as the aptly named “White Man’s footprint” that was once unknown in America now blankets the country as a result of White, European settlements. It is no accident that Irving makes the comparison with an insect that has thrived in the new Western territory. The other side of the comparison, the Indian and the buffalo, becomes exponentially significant when we consider the fate of the Buffalo in the following decades:

When Black Elk was 20 in 1883 he remembered that the bison herds were slaughtered by the Wasichus [people of non-indigenous descent] who “did not kill them to eat; they killed them for the metal that makes them crazy, and they took only the hides to sell. Sometimes they did not even take the hides, only the tongues; and I have heard that fireboats came down the Missouri river loaded with dried Bison tongues…sometimes they did not even take the tongues; they just killed and killed because they liked to do that.” (Fleck, 68)

The alarming excess practiced by the White frontiersman nearly caused an extinction of the buffalo with numbers dipping below six hundred, even today they are classified “near
threatened.” Taking this comparison a step further, it’s key to note that the decline of the buffalo reflected the decline of indigenous Native Americans. The twist of the allegory can be found in the next section of Irving’s comparison:

I beheld numbers from rival hives, arriving on eager wing, to enrich themselves with the ruins of their neighbors. These busied themselves as eagerly and cheerfully as so many wreckers on an Indiaman that has been driven on shore;...banqueting greedily on the spoil, and then winging their way full-freighted to their homes. As to the poor proprietors of the ruin, they seemed to have no heart to do anything, not even to taste the nectar that flowed around them; but crawled backward and forward, in vacant desolation… (53)

Irving is using this image as a metaphor of how the frontiersmen are reaping the benefits of Indian ruin. On the other hand, the phenomenon among honey bees known as Colony Collapse Disorder is similar to the state of the rangers towards the close of A Tour on the Prairies:

With the wasteful prodigality of hunters, there was a continual feasting, and scarce any one put by provision for the morrow… On leaving an encampment, they would leave quantities of meat lying about, trusting to Providence and their rifles for a future supply. The consequence was that any temporary scarcity of game, or ill-luck in hunting, produced almost a famine in the camp. In the present instance, they had left loads of buffalo meat at the camp on the great prairie; and, having ever since been on a
forced march, leaving no time for hunting, they were now destitute of supplies, and pinched with hunger. (203)

This offers another interesting focal point of Irving’s story, the necessity of following the “Indian way” when travelling on the frontier.

Frontiersman and settlers were faced with a philosophical quagmire; while both despised the indigenous way of life because of its inherent resistance to “civilization” an indigenous attitude and understanding of the West was a necessity for survival and achieving the spread of civilization. What *A Tour on the Prairies* successfully illustrates is this complex split between aversion and respect towards Indian modes, and characteristics. Perhaps the best examples of this division are found in Irving’s description of Beatte and Tonish, his party’s Indian guides. Irving’s initial reactions to each are characteristic of the common bias against the Indian character:

This was…Tonish: a kind of Gil Blas of the frontier, who had passed a scrambling life, sometimes among white men, sometimes among Indians; sometimes in the employ of traders, missionaries, and Indian agents; sometimes mingling with the Osage hunters. We picked him up at St. Louis, near which he had a small farm, an Indian wife, and a brood of half-blood children. According to his own account, however, he had a wife in every tribe; in fact, if all this little vagabond said of himself were to be believed, he was without morals, without caste, without creed, without country, and even without language; for he spoke a jargon of mingled
French, English, and Osage. He was, withal, a notorious braggart, and a liar of the first water. (13-14)

Irving’s description of Tonish includes not one redeeming characteristic; he encompasses all the bad traits with which Irving associates half-breeds and, in Irving’s opinion, lacks all the necessary refinement of civilized life. Within the mood of Irving’s description it is obvious that Tonish is the type of individual that will have to perish before civilization can exist in the West. Similarly is Irving’s first impression of Beatte:

I confess I did not like his looks when he was first presented to me. He was lounging about, in an old hunting frock and metasses or leggings, of deer skin, soiled and greased, and almost japanned by constant use…His features were not bad, being shaped not unlike those of Napoleon, but sharpened up, with high Indian cheek-bones… He had, however, a sullen, saturnine expression, set off by a slouched woolen hat, and elf locks that hung about his ears…Such was the appearance of the man, and his manners were equally unprepossessing. He was cold and laconic; made no promises or professions; stated the terms he required for the services of himself and his horse, which we thought rather high, but showed no disposition to abate them, nor any anxiety to secure our employ. (24-25)

The problem with Beatte is he exhibits no desire or urge to involve himself in the contemporary decorum. He was not going to beg, or barter, to get the job and he certainly was not compelled to prove to the party that he was qualified. The schism between Irving and these two is aggravated by the incident with the Pole cat:
…suddenly there was a bustle and a clamor in a distant part of the line. A bear! a bear! was the cry. We all pressed forward to be present at the sport, when to my infinite, though whimsical chagrin, I found it to be our two worthies, Beatte and Tonish, perpetrating a foul murder on a polecat, or skunk!…Gibes and jokes now broke out on all sides at the expense of the Indian hunter…When they found, however, that he and Tonish were absolutely bent upon bearing off the carcass as a peculiar dainty, there was a universal expression of disgust; and they were regarded as little better than cannibals …Mortified at this ignominious debut of our two hunters, I insisted upon their abandoning their prize…I made a solemn vow, however, in secret, that our fire should not be disgraced by the cooking of that polecat. (68)

Irving proves to be serious, as the first chance he gets he steals the Pole Cat from Beatte’s horse and throws it into the Arkansas River. This apparent gap in understanding is in large part due to the fact that Irving and the rangers – since it was many of their first times on the prairie – are untrained to survive on the frontier and this ignorance makes them judge Beatte and Tonish’s behavior as vulgar when it is, in fact, in harmony with frontier life. Irving knows that he is a novice at surviving on the frontier and yet cannot accept certain realities of frontier life. Wilkins and Lomawaima propose a helpful term as an explanation of this behavior, “irreconcilability.” While they use it in a discussion of US-Indian policy, the term is applicable to Irving’s relationship with Tonish and Beatte because of his inability to “reconcile the seemingly contradictory impulses” (99). Irving and his party could not have gotten by, or at least as successfully as they did, without the
direction and insight provided by Tonish and Beatte. As we also see in a scene from *A Tour on the Prairies* the “Indian way” ends up being the most beneficial in dealing with Frontier life, in this case with the fording a river:

> It was now that our worthies, Beatte and Tonish, had an opportunity of displaying their Indian adroitness and resource. At the Osage village...they had procured a dry buffalo skin. This was now produced; cords were passed through a number of small eyelet-holes with which it was bordered, and it was drawn up, until it formed a kind of deep trough. Sticks were then placed athwart it on the inside, to keep it in shape; our camp equipage and a part of our baggage were placed within, and the singular bark was carried down the bank and set afloat. A cord was attached to the prow, which Beatte took between his teeth, and throwing himself into the water, went ahead, towing the bark after him; while Tonish followed behind, to keep it steady and to propel it. Part of the way they had foothold, and were enabled to wade, but in the main current they were obliged to swim. The whole way, they whooped and yelled in the Indian style, until they landed safely on the opposite shore. The Commissioner and myself were so well pleased with this Indian mode of ferriage, that we determined to trust ourselves in the buffalo hide. (70-71)

Native Americans thus embodied an indispensable knowledge for anyone who hoped to survive in the Western wilderness. The negative consequence of this, however, is that they were often exploited by frontiersman and settlers for their knowledge yet not respected as individuals. Furthermore, while being guides represented an economic
opportunity, Native Americans would essentially be working themselves out of a job or out of existence once civilization came. The unifying anticipation of Westward expansion meant that Native Americans now stood in the way of the final phase of the American national identity. The options provided to them, and underscored in Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies*, were assimilation or removal further west but as Irving shows in his sketches of frontier life resistance meant destitution, or violent clashes with the advancing hordes of frontiersmen and fur trappers, especially after the Supreme Court’s ruling removed Native American’s identity as a foreign nation, and thus their sovereignty. Either way it meant an end to indigenous identity:

> We never had a thought of exchanging our land for any other, as we think we would not find a country that would suit us as well as this we now occupy, it being the land of our forefathers, if we should exchange our lands for any other, fearing the consequences may be similar to transplanting an old tree, which would wither and die away, and we are fearful we would come to the same… (Plea from the Chickasaw, 131)

There are still many gaps to be filled in for the history of Indian-American relations as “the story” of US-Indian relations continues to be uncovered. I have shown a perspective of this history viewed through some of the most popular writings of the time, Washington Irving’s *The Sketchbook* and *A Tour on the Prairies*. As the nation’s first best-selling author and someone who had struggled personally with the politics of the day, as he watched his family’s business go bankrupt during the aftermath of the War of 1812, Irving was uniquely in-tune with the American subconscious. Moreover, his stories provided a timeline that mirrored the political and cultural needs of Americans, as
described by historians such as Prucha. He also provided another dimension to our understanding, specifically, that the story of America is the story of the American Indian and vice versa. In *The Sketchbook* Irving rehistoricizes events such as the American Revolution and King Philip’s War into national myths that help to establish a commonality of origin for the new nation by appropriating Native American themes. Intertwined in this appropriation is the justification for the literal appropriation of indigenous land, imagining Americans as the inheritors of the Indian estate after their inevitable disappearance. In *A Tour on the Prairies* the emphasis shifted to sketches portraying the supposed benefits of the United States’ paternalistic policies and the successes of Indian removal. Moreover, Irving positioned the frontier, and by extension Native Americans, as not only willing to accept, but also in need of civilization, an expansion which would cement America as an Imperial power. However, as Hendrix pointedly reminds us, “some claims can only be justified in the third way – as a strategic mechanism for forcing Americans to rethink their understanding of history, and by extension to rethink the contemporary place of Natives in the United States. This type of justification raises some troubling issues about the moral acceptability of strategic actions that may fail to treat others with due respect…” (764). In addition to treating others with due respect, the consequences of assigning an inherent usefulness to a group of people and letting that dictate a political relationship must be revealed. This act is a common political practice and we’ve seen it throughout history, often under the guise of “paternalism.” The “troubling issues” Hendrix mentions are those moments when the humanity of a group is disregarded for a more compelling utilitarian purpose they could
serve. I would argue this is an essential philosophy to question if we claim to live in a civilized world.

I should also address the role of the artist in these matters. I do not believe Irving should be vilified. He was, as we all are, a product of his generation, and I would argue was more compassionate and progressive than most of his contemporaries. However, it is also necessary to try and recognize the flaws in past beliefs as a tool to evaluate current presumptions similarly flawed. The early nineteenth century American subconscious was obsessed with identifying what Latrobe claimed did not exist, “Americaness,” a common identity that could unify a nation with so seemingly little in common once the unifying threat of the British monarchy had been removed. The US relationship with the Native Americans was defined by policies attempting to answer the question with which all Americans were obsessed after the Revolution: what did it mean to be “American?” An industrious spirit? An adventurous heart? A belief in the infallibility of democracy? I cannot say there has ever been a clear answer. I can say that in an attempt to find an identity we nearly annihilated the identity of the people who had made our existence in the new world possible.
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