Edited by S. Elizabeth Bird (1996) - *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, Boulder, CO ; Oxford [U.K.] : Westview Press.

Book Abstract

“One hundred members of NatChat, an electronic mail discussion group concerned with Native American issues, responded to the recent Disney release Pocahontas by calling on parents to boycott the movie, citing its historical inaccuracies and saying that "Disney has let us down in a cruel, irresponsible manner." Their anger was rooted in the fact that, although Disney had claimed that the film's portrayal of American Indians would be "authentic," the Pocahontas story the movie told was really white cultural myth. The actual histories of the characters were replaced by mythic narratives depicting the crucial moments when aid was given to the white settlers. As reconstructed, the story serves to reassert for whites their right to be here, easing any lingering guilt about the displacement of the native inhabitants. To understand current imagery, it is essential to understand the history of its making, and these essays mesh to create a powerful, interconnected account of image creation over the past 150 years. The contributors, who represent a range of disciplines and specialties, reveal the distortions and fabrications white culture has imposed on significant historical and current events, as represented by treasured artifacts such as photographic images taken of Sitting Bull following his surrender, the national monument at the battlefield of Little Bighorn, nineteenth-century advertising, the television phenomenon Northern Exposure, and the film Dances with Wolves. Well illustrated, this volume demonstrates the complacency of white culture in its representation of its troubled relationship with American Indians.”

Chapter 9 pp. 129-147 - “My Grandmother was a Cherokee Princess”: Representations of Indians in Southern History, Joel W. Martin

Chapter Abstract

“This chapter argues that the character and significance of Indian representations have changed over time. It suggests classification into five major time periods: pre-Removal, antebellum, Civil War-closing of the "western frontier", Jim Crow era, and civil rights struggle. Even when history and geography might suggest an Indian ancestor from a different group or none at all, an astonishing number of southerners assert they have a grandmother or great-grandmother who was some kind of Cherokee, often a "princess." William Gilmore Simm's novel provided literary model for romantic representations of Indians and Indian wars, but an actual Indian, Osceola, became the real-life incarnation the noble enemy. Far from being uncommon, Indian representations were central to southern culture during Antebellum Period. By invoking the figures, contemporary southerners seem to be claiming a wild past, seeking to affix the romance of the "frontier" to their region's narrative. The images reinforce southern regionalism and pride, even as they unite southern history with larger national story.”

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