

## The Noble and Ignoble Savage

Christer Lindberg

### Land of Wonders

The discovery of a New World in the 15<sup>th</sup> century definitely stimulated the quest for unknown land and peoples. Spanish conquistadors brought home fantastic tales, turning reality to myth and myth to reality. Castañeda, in *Capítulo decimo of Relacion de la jornada de Cibola conpuesta por Pedro de Castañeda de Nacera donde se trata de todos aquellos poblados y ritos, y costrumbres, la cual fue el año de 1540*, recalls how Captain Melchior Diaz, in his search for the seven golden cities of Cibola, encountered a very strange people – giants! They were naked, lived in marvelous underground huts housing more than a hundred men, women and children. They were able to carry enormous burdens, and one of them even took away a log that six Spaniards had been unable to move. Their favorite food was ash-baked bread in slices as big as rocks (Castaneda 1896: 426).

This incredible story is typical for the period and reveals the European idea of the world in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Indian peoples met by Spanish, English, French and Dutch representatives were cast into dual stereotypes: the noble and ignoble savage. Civilized man was horrified by their nakedness, that is to say neither men nor women hid their genitals – yet, at the same time, hailed their liberty. Their collective way of living was praised, but they were also described as “children lost in the hands of the Devil”. Terrible reports of cannibalism contradicted stories of extreme hospitality. As we have already seen, the reality was not always enough; for instance, Native Americans were portrayed as giants, amazons, white-skinned, and so on. A legend of a noble and an ignoble savage was born and it is still part of our conception of *the other* today.

Coinciding with the global expansion was an increase in the notion of civilized behaviour in Europe as outlined by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (originally published in 1939 as *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*). Elias traced how post-medieval European standards regarding violence, sexual behaviour, bodily

functions, and table manners were gradually transformed by notions of shame and court etiquette. But in spite of an emerging re-definition of European identity in terms of a civilized center, pieces of a former cosmic conception remained – a notion of the universe as a Great-Chain-of-Being, where every creature was ranked by its spiritual closeness to God (Lovejoy 2009).

One of the major practical and philosophical issues of this time was how to regard the American Indian – whether naked savages were really true human beings or something between man and beast. This prolonged debate divided the European intellectuals into two camps: modernists and primitivists. The former group argued that the Indian was an inferior creature, subject to Aristotle's law of natural slavery. This view was strongly supported by a number of religious groups, among them the puritans of New England representing an extreme Christian imperialism: the life of the savage was the sign of Satan (Pearce 1964: 20).



Figure 1: America (from Montanus 1671: frontispiece; courtesy Staffan Jansson at Jönköpings Stadsbibliotek)

The primitivists camp, on the other hand, argued that the Indians and other indigenous people were not half-animals, but true humans with human rights. The first true primitivist was Bartolomé de las Casas who recorded the “black legend” of the ruthless Spanish colonization in South America. A former encomienda owner, Las Casas was converted and started his work for Indian rights. In 1540 he published his *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* – a bitter declaration of Spanish inhumanity. With his *Historia del mondo nuovo* (1565), Italian-born Girolamo Benzoni provided a pocket history of the events of colonization from the days of Columbus until the fall of the Inca Empire. The difference between them was that Benzoni also spoke in favor of the black man, whom Las Casas considered well suited for slavery (Honour 1975: 24-25). Las Casas, however, was the true primitivist, declaring the Indian not only a human being, but a human being superior to the Europeans, free from the burdens of civilization and living in innocent purity.

Meanwhile in Europe, Michel de Montaigne had become the leader of the primitivist camp, picturing the Native Americans as the total counterpart of the hypocrisy of civilization (Friedman 1983: 36). The concept of the noble savage was deeply rooted in an idealized past – the utopia of a Golden Age, a time and place of happiness, moral purity and the absence of priesthood and governmental rule. The Greco-Roman culture was viewed as superior, and modern Europe was considered degenerated from the ancient ideal. The images of American Indians were often borrowed from those ancient societies as well. Marc Lescarbot, in *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (1609), compared the North American Indian to the people of Sparta, and other books portrayed Indian chiefs as possessing the profile of Caesar and the muscular body of Augustus (Honour 1975: 120).

The dualism of the noble and ignoble savage became a popular and ever-lasting image in the nineteenth century with the emergence of a new genre: romantic adventures of the wilds. Two of the most famous representatives of this genre were James Fenimore Cooper and Karl May. Cooper, for instance, wrote a series of books featuring a hero called Leatherstocking, whose prototype in real life was Davy Crockett. He made a huge success with his book *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827), today considered a literary classic. The two main Indian characters in that novel fit in well with the categories of the noble and ignoble savage – the brave Uncas, last of the Mohicans, helping his white friends, in contrast to the almost inhuman Magua. In May's books, in turn, we find the noble savage portrayed in the Apache chief,

Winnetou, who fights against bad Indians and crooked whites alongside his German friend Old Shatterhand. Those fantasy tales met with enormous success – in Germany alone the number of copies sold has exceeded to more than 24 million, and his books are still being republished (Honour 1975: 242).

Purely racist novels did appear on the market as well. Among the Indian-hating literature we find titles as *Tom Quick, the Indian Slayer* (Quinlan 1851), *The Forest Rose* (Woodworth 1855) and *The Indian Hater* (1828; Hall 2009). The hero is often a man whose family has been killed by Indians. Taking up the savage way of life, he becomes even more of a savage than his opponents. These heroes, with names like 'Bloody Ben', are always destined to die at the end, since they have transcended the limits of a civilized society. Their last words are never expressing regret or sorrow – only the disappointment that they have not been able to kill more savages.

Of course, a number of more realistic accounts were produced during this era, but many of them were rewritten by the publishing companies – Jonathan Carver's *Travels through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778) is one of many examples. Carver spent several years with different Indian tribes and wrote a substantial and sober description of their life, manners and customs. He sold his manuscript to a publishing house in London which had a ghostwriter change the whole story and add a number of exciting and purely romantic events (Honour 1975: 136).

## Noble or Ignoble – Two Images in One

Before we attempt to analyze the impact of savagism in the scientific field, we may explore the image of the noble and ignoble savage a little closer. It goes without saying that my presentation of the subject makes no claim to being complete. It is merely a resume of some of the most outstanding characteristics of the *idea* of civilization in relation to Native Americans as noble *and* ignoble savages:

*Legends:* The conquest of Indian civilizations in Mexico by Cortez and in Peru by Pizarro gave birth to numerous legends of unknown places with enormous riches. They include 'The Land of the Amazons,' 'Casa del Sol' and 'Manoa – the Golden City'. The most famous of all these is the story of 'Eldorado' where an Indian king painted himself in gold every day – and at night just brushed the gold dust on the ground wherever he was standing. Sometimes he is supposed to have taken a raft over to a small island where, after his numerous visits, the ground is covered by

gold. Another fable of this kind is 'The Seven Golden Cities of Cibola', which are supposed to be found in the interior parts of North America. In 1540 Francisco Vázquez de Coronado set out with a large expedition to find this source of wealth. The image of the savage in these legends is in most cases ignoble. He is very strange, sometimes half monster, and with no exception inferior in the sense that he has no idea of the value of gold.

*The savage community:* The noble savage is a representation of the Golden Age in a lost European paradise. In the eyes of Rousseau and Voltaire he is open-hearted, simple, gallant and honest. His physique is athletically perfect. His nobility is expressed in a childish innocence. The noble savage community is located and developed in a natural setting, and the noble savage himself lives in a state of nature. It is a happy society. Yet, the type of social and political organization that was met in native societies puzzled the Europeans. Often these societies were described as lacking systems of social and political organization, as well as a moral system. This 'lack of organization' played a central role in both images: in the case of the noble image, there was a supposed lack of freedom – in the ignoble, a lack of reason and depraved human behavior. In a celebrated passage in *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes described the life of man lacking society as nasty, brutish, and short.



Figure 2: 'Savages' (from Montanus 1671: 359; courtesy Staffan Jansson at Jönköpings Stadsbibliotek)



*Nakedness*: The exposure of genitals also fitted into both stereotypes – Rousseau’s and Voltaire’s naked and unarmed hunters as well as Hobbes’ grim natural conditions of uncivilized mankind. Liberty, innocence, no moral tyranny and no feeling of shame is the content of the noble image, but on the other hand, this could as well be interpreted as sexual abnormality and sodomy in terms of ignobility.

*Cannibalism* is an important trait in the character of the ignoble savage. This was the clear sign of Satan, and combined with masturbation and sodomy it was a crime against natural laws. According to this idea, savages do not understand the laws of nature, including any kind of moral order. They have to be taught all those things which are self-evident for any civilized nation. For instance, Locke mentions Peruvian cannibalism as an instance of how far “the busie mind of Man” can “carry him to a Brutality below the level of Beasts, when he quits his reason” (Honour 1975: 119).



Figure 3: Cannibals (from Montanus 1671: 534; courtesy Staffan Jansson at Jönköpings Stadsbibliotek)

*Language*: The ability to speak was a holy gift from God to Adam, at least this was believed by 16<sup>th</sup>-century theoreticians. The diversity of languages resulted in some absurd cases of eurocentrism: investigations showed, for example, that the languages of some Indian tribes in Brazil lacked the letters of F, L and R. Thus, they

were not able to express *Fide, Lege* and *Rege* – “with faith and order through His Majesty”. With no faith in God and subjects to no rule they could never understand the meaning of this expression of civilization itself. No arts, no letters, and “every-one against everyone”, according to Hobbes (Honour 1975: 118).

*Betrayal and mutilation:* The ignoble savage is always unpredictable. He has no sense of honor, and betrayal is his trademark. Attacks upon innocent people with no formal declaration of war, together with mutilation and the scalping of fallen victims, are characteristics of the ignoble savage. Furthermore, he enjoys the act of killing and especially the killing of defenseless victims, that is, women and children. Very often his victim turns out to be a pregnant woman. Torture is another trait of the ignoble savage. Magua, as the villain in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1827), does it all. But Cooper based the evil deeds of his fictional Magua on the cruelties described by the early Jesuits and the Reverend John Heckewelder’s early nineteenth century depiction of the *Iroquois in History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations* (Lindberg 1998: 40-42).

*Terminology:* Both stereotypes, the noble and the ignoble, are associated with certain expressions in the literature – in historical accounts as well as in fiction. One can always read about “naked wild hounds” or “slaughtered Christians bathing in their own blood, as lambs ripped apart by wolves”. Naturally, primitivists such as Las Casas inversed these concepts – in their accounts, it was innocent Indians, men, women and children who were torn apart by white wolves (Lindberg 1998: 30-31, 111).



Figure 4: The Golden Age (from Montanus 1671: 159; courtesy Staffan Jansson at Jönköpings Stadsbibliotek)

*Romance*: The ignoble savage can, of course, never attract a white woman – he captures or kills her. On the other hand, a noble savage may declare his affection for a white woman, but only in the moment when his life is fading away, mortally wounded. It is quite usual for a white man to take a native woman, but the so-called squaw is treated and regarded as inferior to a white lady. This theme is mainly developed in the fictional literature about the American frontier (Lindberg 1998: 29-31). As with all the above images of savagism and the savage, I argue that these clichés were constantly present. However, the concept of the ignoble savage dominates in periods of intense European expansion, that is, the discovery and initial conquest and later the conquest of the American West. The idea of a noble savage is, of course, an ideological counter-construction used to challenge modernity and the notion of (Western) civilization. While the notion of progress is present in both of these shared intellectual constructs, it is valued positively by modernists and negatively by primitivists (Lindberg 1998).

## The Indians as Used in Polemical Literature

Thus, the encounter with ‘savages’ in a New World produced a more profound impression than just a number of romantic stories of the Wild West. It gave rise to a philosophical, sociological and anthropological debate which has been going on for centuries. History perceived as a scheme of evolution started to appear in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was to develop in the three centuries that followed. One of the early examples is *Relectio de Indis* by Francisco de Vitoria who compared the Native American with European children in his lectures compiled and published as *Relectiones Theologicae* (1557). Even more famous is José de Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590) which introduces the combination of the concepts savagism, barbarism and civilization. Savage or sauvage is the English and French re-spelling of the Latin word *silvacus*, meaning people of the woods. Barbarian is a Greek term, indicating people who talk strange languages – a word that was reinterpreted in late medieval times as non-Christian societies. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, ‘civilization’ was only used in singular form, that is, for a fixed geographical location, to mean Europe.

Acosta classifies the different people of the world in a hierarchy of five stages with the European nations on the highest level. Below the stage of civilization are two stages of barbarism, the upper for Japanese and Chinese cultures and the lower



for Latin American high cultures. At the bottom of the hierarchy, in the stages of savagery, he placed people with some kind of social organization above those who “live like animals” (Friedman 1983).

Some 250 years later, the self-taught anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan presented his *Ancient Society* (1877) – a classic study of the evolution of mankind. In 1842, Morgan joined a writers’ club in New York called “The Gordian Knot” – a society hailing ancient Greek traditions. Soon Morgan began to argue that America had its own traditions to celebrate, and urged his fellow writers to rearrange American society according to the social order of the Iroquois nation. Morgan published his first study of the Iroquois in 1851: *The League of the Ho-De-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois*. Twenty years later he followed it up with a general study of kinship entitled *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*. With *Ancient Society* – influenced by Charles Darwin, but even more so by Herbert Spencer – Morgan displays a scientific construction of an evolutionary scheme based upon classifications and comparison of ethnographical information from all over the world. He uses the same labels as Acosta had done previously – civilization, barbarism and savagism – but with a refined classification, and he attempts, although sometimes confusingly, to demonstrate the forces of human evolution. It is a Spencerian and Lamarckian conception of unilineal evolution striving towards the ultimate goal of civilization. Morgan outlines this historical process through categories like substitution, political and social organization, language, family structure, religion, architecture, collective and private ownership, etc.

History repeats itself in a sense, and at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries we find a new reaction towards the positivistic notion of evolution. Significantly, cultural relativism began to grow in the American anthropology of Franz Boas. The concept of civilization was replaced by that of culture, and it was now argued that each culture had its particular history and sets of ideas. Culture, not race, governed the human institutions. With a series of detailed studies of Native American cultures, particularly from the Northwest cultural complex, Boas managed to show the over-generalizations and inaccuracy of Morgan’s, Tylor’s and Frazer’s conceptions of human evolution.

## Relations from the North

After presenting the general idea of America's native inhabitants as noble and ignoble savages, I will now discuss the practical implications using the example of two case studies. The first case study illustrates how living with the Indians affected the early missionaries' preconceptions about the 'heathens', and how their writings reinforced the stereotypes but also, to some extent, challenged the clichés. What we see is a great deal of ambiguity and contradictions; for instance, 'savages' with no society or social institutions could nevertheless be represented as having "kings" and "ambassadors". In the second case study, on westward expansion, the idea of savagism contra civilization is transformed into a larger shared intellectual construct – a manifest destiny. Native Americans, be they be considered as wild or noble, are now becoming "dying Indians". It is supposed that the divine and natural force of progress will ultimately sweep their traditional way of living away. Their only way of survival is to become part of civilization, that is, surrender language, culture and everything else belonging to the past.

Far north, in the area surrounding the Great Lakes, the Huron and Montagnais were approached by Jesuits in 1615. The Huron, or Wendat as they called themselves, were living in several large villages in the high country between Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay at Lake Huron, but were gradually pushed northward by their traditional enemies, the Iroquois. War and raiding had been intensified by the Indian nations' involvement in a global economic system based on fur trade, as well as by their being dragged into the colonial war between England and France.

In 1633, deadly fever epidemics reached the English colonies, spread to the Iroquois and then on to the Hurons. Gathered at missions or in villages close to the French settlements, the Hurons suffered far more than the nomadic tribes. The exact number of victims cannot possibly be determined, but at least 10,000 died within a decade. Thus, the Huron population was reduced by more than a half (Jennings 1984: 88). Hence, the editor of the *Jesuit Relations*, Reuben Thwaites, noted that the war and epidemics did make it easier for the Jesuits to spread the Christian message. By 1648, New France's former allies the Hurons were broken and scattered, small groups seeking refuge among other tribes.

Most Jesuits regarded the Indians as ignoble savages. "You should see these

wretched barbarians", wrote one of them. "They are without government, power, arts and richness" (Thwaites 1959, III: 75). The Indians were also said to be wild in their manners and not caring about days and time, obligations, or prayers. The Jesuits challenged and sometimes outmanoeuvred Indian chiefs and shamans. They outlawed all aspects of heathen religion, banning dances and ceremonies. Church rules greatly affected the traditional social organization by condemning the existing marriage systems (Thwaites 1959, XXX: 63; XXXIII: 87). Issues of constant conflicts were the natives' views on the human body and sexuality. Their only clothing was the breechcloth, and it did not always cover what it was supposed to hide. The Jesuits tried, mostly in vain, to prevent polygamy, adultery and prostitution. Perhaps most shocking was the open homosexuality among the Algonquian tribes. The Christian ambassadors also did their best to stop interracial marriages during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Thwaites 1959, XXI: 197-199; White 1991: 60-61). During the very first attempts to approach the Abenaki and Micmac tribes of Maine, Acadia and Cape Breton, the missionaries realized that but little results could be obtained until the Indians were induced to lead a sedentary life. Their wandering habit nullified all attempts at permanent instruction; it engendered improvidence and "laziness", bred famine and disease; and the constant struggle to kill fur-bearing animals for their pelts rapidly depleted the game. Initially the fur trade brought far-distant tribes within the sphere of French influence, but as soon as the Jesuits sought to change the habits of the natives, to cause them to become agriculturists instead of hunters, and to oppose the rum traffic amongst them, the commercial monopoly which controlled the fortunes of New France began to see the Jesuits as enemies.

Expanding the missionary work to the Montagnais in the St. Lawrence valley, the Jesuits once more faced the problem of the Indian groups' mobility. "Little work can be achieved amongst them as long as the tribes are not permanently settled", in the words of a friar (Washburn 1975: 113). According to the Jesuits, paganism was reinforced by the natives' unstable and uncivilized milieu, whereas civilization and Christianity depended upon a settled life way.

In pursuance of the sedentary policy, the Jesuits in 1637 established for the Montagnais a palisaded mission four miles north of Quebec. It was first given the name of St. Joseph, but later that of Sillery, in honor of Commander Noel Brulart de Sillery, of France, who had given ample funds for the founding of this enterprise. Here were at first gathered twenty of the Indians, who began cultivation of the soil.

The mission Indians were almost immediately ravaged by smallpox; they left the place but returned the year after. New problems arose, and it turned out that maintaining community solidarity was much more difficult than building cabins, church and school. The Jesuits and French settlers took it for granted that the Indians had surrendered their sovereignty and placed themselves obediently under the white man's government. One of many controversies concerned the fining of some Indians who killed a white man's cow which had destroyed their garden (Thwaites 1959, XXVIII: 223). Another was the imprisonment of Indians who had been drunk during the Easter holiday (Thwaites 1959 XXXII: 83). Moreover, the Jesuits found themselves forced to use verbal as well as physical abuse in order to prevent the Indians from leaving the settlement. The Sillery experiment did not last long: the church and mission house were destroyed by fire; disease wrought havoc in the settlement; the soil became exhausted due to careless tillage, and Iroquois preyed upon the converts. Few Indians stayed behind, and the last handful of them left in 1663.

As historian James Ronda (1978) has noted, we need to broaden our studies of mission history, combining history and anthropology to be able to view evangelization as more than a tool for spreading God's word to the Indians. The natives were seen by the church as living in darkness, waste and confusion. Taming the wilderness, the missionaries brought churches and schools, the means of Enlightenment, to the frontier. It was not a national enlightenment in the modern sense of the word, but it was far more than the diffusion of Christian values as the Jesuits became deeply involved in both the fur trade and the foreign policy towards the Dutch and British colonies.

On the British side, Indian affairs were largely controlled by the individual colonies. Indian policies were usually initiated by the colonial governors, and the assemblies appropriated funds and passed laws to regulate trade and land. Colonial dealings with the Indian tribes were more personal than institutional. It was not until the onset of the American Revolution that the Americans established three superintendents to control Indian affairs (Kawashima 1988: 254). War, purchase and confiscation of land pushed the Indian tribes away, one after another. Many tribes were divided into fractions due to the missionary work. Small groups of Christian converts stayed behind, gathered in so called praying towns, while their fellow tribesmen were deported. In Massachusetts, the Indian praying towns were established as early as the 1650s (Kawashima 1988: 245).



## Manifest Destiny

In a painting called *Westward-Ho, or Manifest Destiny*, John Gast in 1872 captured the continuity and illusion of inevitability of the American history. A year later it was reproduced and widely spread as a chromo lithograph entitled "American Progress", published by George A. Crofutt of New York. The explanatory text printed on the reverse side of the lithograph is reproduced in Wilcomb E. Washburn's *The Indian and the White Man* (1964: 128-129):

*"Purely National in design, this beautiful painting represents the United States' portion of the American continent in its beauty and variety, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, illustrating at a glance the grand drama of our own happy land. In the foreground the central and principal figure, a beautiful and charming Female, is floating Westward through the air bearing on her forehead the 'Star of empire'. She has left the cities of the East far behind, crossed the Alleghanies and the 'Father of Waters', and still her march is Westward. In her right hand she carries a book - Common Schools - the emblem of Education and the testimonial of our National enlightenment, while with the left hand she unfolds and stretches the slender wires of the Telegraph, that are to flash intelligence throughout the land. On the right of the picture is a city, steamships, manufactories, schools and churches, over which beams of light are streaming and filling the air indicative of civilization. The general tone of the picture on the left declares darkness, waste and confusion [...] Fleeing from 'Progress', and towards the blue waters of the Pacific [...] are the Indians, buffaloes, wild horses, bears, and other game, moving Westward ever Westward the Indians, with their despairing faces towards, as they flee from the presence of, the wondrous vision. The 'Star' is too much for them."*

The quote reveals the underlying ideological assumptions in 19<sup>th</sup> century westward expansion in America. The key words and phrases are: grand drama of our land, westward expansion, national enlightenment, schools and churches, education, civilization, progress, darkness, waste and confusion (for example, Indian traditional life ways), Indians and wild animals fleeing from civilization.

Any romantic escape from 'progress' was, of course, not possible for the Native Americans. As a matter of fact, the history of forced relocation of Indian tribes or groups goes back to the earliest colonial encounters in Spanish, French and English America and later became the most consequent element in the U.S. government's Indian Policy during the nineteenth century. Separating people from their homeland was obviously an instrument of political control, but the ideas and actions behind this policy were far more complex. By relating missionary reduction, relocation policy and the reservation system to the idea of savagery (that is, notions of the noble and ignoble savage) we can trace the intersection of cultural and racial superiority with environmentalism (the effects of environment upon man). Thus, dispossession and removal were central components in the 'civilization process of the American savages'.

There had been sporadic attempts from colonial days onward to provide schools for the Indians to give them special aid toward adopting White patterns of civilization. After the War of 1812, the United States government began to play a more active role, establishing a "civilization fund" in 1819 (Prucha 1988: 43). The systematic removal of the Southeast Indians began as early as 1814. Andrew Jackson forced the Creeks to cede most of their territory to the United States. The earlier voluntary emigration policy was replaced by forced relocations. The 1830 Removal Act epitomized Jackson's Indian policy (Berthrong 1988: 258).

The Trail of Tears is historically well-documented and does not need recapitulation. One must note, however, that it would be more correct to speak in the plural form of Trails of Tears in the systematic removal of tribes to the Indian Territory. It is commonly held that the reservation period began after the Civil War. However, it is necessary to point out that the reservation system and policy were initiated some thirty years earlier and steadily developed into a pattern of confined areas, Indian agents, muster rolls, identification cards or numbers, and Indian police forces.

The period from 1850 to 1900 – "the grand drama of the country" – is well symbolized in the lithograph. The work proclaims the most cherished stereotypes of all-manifest destiny and progress. Westward expansion in combination with technological innovations conquered the wilderness and turned it, again symbolically, into a garden. Healing the wounds from the Civil War, the United States moved forward to create a national identity – an identity which embraced immigrants and, in theory at least, also Afro-Americans. The Indian, however, belonged

to the past. He was doomed to perish or assimilate. The savage, may he be noble or ignoble, had met his destiny in a lost cause against civilization.

## Conclusion

Las Casas, Montaigne, Boas and others firmly established the dualistic image of the Native Americans – they offered first a philosophical counter image of the ignoble savage, and later a scientific relativistic interpretation of the noble savage. From the days of Columbus to this very day this image persisted in cycles of positivism and relativism. Modernists, with their notion of progress, rationality and belief in the future have tended to see history as a gradual success story, while those who have lost faith in the modernist project have pointed to the negative sides of evolution, and hailed alternatives to the modern project. This game of human identification can, for instance, be illustrated with Kevin Costner's movie *Dances with Wolves* – which received seven academy awards, causing the whole of Hollywood to go native. The Lakota in Costner's movie are definitely portrayed as human beings. When they are faced with the behaviour of the civilized union soldiers at the end of the film, one can only conclude that the Lakota were noble savages. The stereotype of ignoble and noble savages is an intellectual construct covering all evil and all good. The ignoble concept represented the reality of the wilderness and the obstacles to a modernistic project of controlling nature. The noble concept was, and still is, a reaction to this project – then, as now, expressing a nostalgic response to the past.

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Christer Lindberg is professor of social anthropology at Lund University, Sweden. His fields of expertise include anthropological theory, comparative religion, Native American studies, and visual anthropology. Contact: [christer.lindberg@soc.lu.se](mailto:christer.lindberg@soc.lu.se).