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**Comics & Colonial Propaganda: The Representation of Indigenous
Superheroes in Contemporary Mainstream American Comics**

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English

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Abstract

This thesis examines the continual presence of settler colonial propaganda in Marvel and DC comic books from the 21st century. In order to do this, the study employs theory and works from Indigenous Studies and applies them to the analysis of comics, focusing particularly on the works of Raymond Stedman, Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, M. K. Green, Robert Berkhofer Junior, Michael Sheyahshe, Cornell Pewewardy, P. J. Deloria, Shepard Krech III, R. H. Pearce, Arlene Hirschfelder, Devon Abbott Mihesuah, and S. Elizabeth Bird. The work is framed around four categories, all of which have been drawn from these theories: the Bloodthirsty Savage, Naïve Sidekick, Romantic Ecologist, and Homogenous Relict. These categories are used as frameworks from which to compare the changing and sometimes contradictory nature of the stereotypical representations of Indigenous Peoples, whilst also drawing on colonial depictions, the origins of such stereotypes, and examples of these categories as presented in other media from the last century. The *New Mutants* series receives particular attention due to its prominence in the comic world and the fame of the team's Indigenous hero: Dani Moonstar. The examination of where and how the selected comics continue to facsimile or indeed reject and challenge these stereotypes, is followed by the conclusion which considers Marvel's newly published *Indigenous Voices* as an apt demonstration of the effect of hiring Indigenous creators. The aim of this work is to bring attention to the very slow (and at times lack of) progress made in terms of Indigenous representation, which feels especially important in an era full of efforts to improve the representation of marginalised and often misrepresented groups. In order to make better progress in this area, it is not only necessary to look at examples of where and why representation of Indigenous characters is done well; it is also essential to recognise the shortcomings and acknowledge exactly where and how creators are facsimileing colonial narratives that attempt to justify the genocide that facilitated the very existence of colonial countries such as those currently known as the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Chapter One: The Bloodthirsty Savage.....	33
Chapter Two: The Naïve Sidekick.....	78
Chapter Three: The Romantic Ecologist.....	136
Chapter Four: The Homogenous Relict.....	179
Conclusion	214
Bibliography	235

Introduction.

Comics ‘are history. Emerging from the shifting interaction of politics, culture, audience tastes, and the economics of publishing, comic books have helped to frame a worldview and define a sense of self for the generations who have grown up with them. They have played a crucial explanatory, therapeutic, and commercial function in young lives. [...] To critically examine the history of comic books is to better understand the changing world of young people as well as the historical forces intersecting to shape it.’

Wright, *Comic* xiii

Settler colonial propaganda remains a pervasive part of contemporary, Western media in the form of the continual presentation of stereotypes surrounding still-colonised peoples. The use of these stereotypes represents a continuation of propaganda that seeks to justify the historical and ongoing occupation of the country in question. Indeed, any use of these stereotypes is simply proof of the integral presence of settler colonialism and, whether they intend to or not, any media that facsimiles these tropes still functions to convince new generations that settler colonialism is justified. Stereotyped misrepresentations of Indigenous Peoples have been used since before any contact with real Indigenous Peoples in order to “justify” the ‘expropriation of Native lands’, ‘policies of extinction and assimilation’, genocide, and slavery (Berkhofer 83; 109; 119),¹ and their continued use demonstrates a continued desire to justify both the historical atrocities and present-day occupation and inequity. This thesis intends to outline and examine the ways in which popular, contemporary American comics interact with settler state propaganda, including how they reinforce, expose, undermine, and demolish such apparatus.

¹ See also Jennings; Pearce; Meade; Salisbury; Slotkin; Meyer and Royer xii; Deloria 36-7; Tuhiwai-Smith 27; Leask, 2015.

Settler colonialism as a concept is at the core of this study, by which I refer to the specific type of colonialism that dominates from within; the settlers who become the majority in that territory and whose very aim is to replace the Indigenous population and cultures with their own invasive society (Cox; P. Wolfe 27). Whereas colonialism dominates from elsewhere and exploits the people and land for their own interests, settler colonialism exploits and displaces these people (Veracini 6); it is ‘an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of Indigenous Peoples and culture’ (Cox). As Wolfe explains, settler colonialism is ‘a structure not an event’ (P. Wolfe 163); it is an ongoing system designed to eliminate the original peoples and cultures as a ‘winner-takes-all project’ (P. Wolfe 163). Any reference to settler colonialism or colonial propaganda in this work, therefore refers to this definition of it as an ongoing system of not just domination but elimination; a ‘structure of power that systematically erases Indigenous Peoples from the land (through genocide, assimilation, and other means) and replaces them with settlers from around the world’ (Cox). This system is thus examined as it appears in contemporary comics and functions to continue its erasure of Indigenous Peoples and cultures, and to justify the historical and ongoing oppression of these peoples; that is, to justify the very existence of these settler states.

Comics have a varying history in relation to race: early comics were plagued with racist stereotypes and even today many comics ‘repeat the sins of their literary ancestors, particularly in representing Indigenous Peoples in only one or two generic fashions’ (Sheyahshe 10). However, many comics also operated on the margins of institutional practices and were able to defy cultural norms and challenge prejudices without the censoring other mainstream media attracted (Hatfield). Indeed, the origins of popular comics are full of progressive storylines and even diversity, such as Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s creation of Superman (a Jewish “alien”) as a metaphor for their own Jewish parents’ immigration and navigation of an unfamiliar

culture/world in 1938, or William Moulton Marston's creation of Wonder Woman as a feminist hero in 1941.

As Sheyahshe explains,

Comic books can reveal more about popular society and culture than just the black-and-white idea of good versus evil [...] A comic book can inspire and teach. More importantly, comics can provide their audiences with a clearer view of ingrained societal and cultural attitudes. (Sheyahshe 3)

As the recognition of this potential grows in academia, recent years have seen the publication of works such as Michel A. Sheyahshe's *Native Americans in Comic Books* (2008), Fredrick Strömberg's *Black Images in Comics* (2003), Frederick Luis Aldama's *Multicultural Comics* (2010), and the most recent *Graphic Indigeneity* (2020). Studies such as these have opened up the field to include issues of representation regarding race and colonialism. These books have been hugely influential in the field and have begun to integrate Indigenous and Comics studies, which previously seemed to be a world apart from one another. Strömberg and Aldama's early works were hugely influential in bringing together comics studies and critical race theory, and certainly proved the importance of examining such issues in relation to comics. Sheyahshe's book was the first study to focus solely on Indigenous representation in comics, and Aldama's recent work, *Graphic Indigeneity*, has brought a much-needed focus to Indigenous-created comics.

This study aims to continue Sheyahshe's work, in part, by examining contemporary comics that post-dated his work, but also to open up a new conversation surrounding the intentions and problems surrounding the categories that Indigenous characters are too often written into.

As P. J. Deloria explains,

there have been two different manifestations of the Indian in American history. One group of Indians is material and real – a diverse set of tribes and individuals with whom Europeans have interacted for the past several hundred years. The other set is ideal – a

collection of mental images, stereotypes, and imaginings based only loosely on those material people Americans have called Indians (20)

This construction of “the Indian” remains prevalent throughout media and stereotypes can be found anywhere from Hollywood (Ridiculous 6 and Lone Ranger), to advertisements (Land o’ Lakes butter), music videos (No Doubt’s 2012 ‘Looking Hot’), sports (Atlantan “Braves” and Washington “Redskins”),² cars (Jeep Cherokees, Winnebagos, and Pontiacs), and the armed forces (“Apache” helicopters and “Tomahawk” missiles). Western cultures are rife with stereotypes surrounding Indigenous Peoples either through association (e.g. weaponry) or caricatures, and all of them reinforce settler colonial propaganda that seeks to justify the literal and epistemic genocide committed against Indigenous Peoples (Veracini). These misrepresentations delegate Indigeneity to stereotypes, abstractions, and caricatures and in doing so disguise and omit the real people affected by settler colonial atrocities and ongoing inequity. Representing Indigenous characters as violent villains, helpless simpletons, objects and naturalists, and as homogenised relicts of an extinct world essentially ‘tell[s] us white Americans were superior and tribes who lost lives, land, and culture really had it coming’ (Mihsuah, *So You* 3) while refusing to acknowledge them as real human beings. As Stedman explains, ‘Writers do not seem to know what to do with Indians if they do not fit into either the exalted or debased molds [...] Nowhere does there seem to be a place for individual Indians possessing both strengths and weaknesses in the manner of real people’ (Stedman 248-9). The Indigenous characters presented through these categories are the image of “The Indian” as a ‘colonial enactment’; as Vizenor asserts, ‘the Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation’ (*Manifest Manners* 11).

This stereotyping has real-world effects on Indigenous Peoples. As B. Young explains, there is a ‘level of ignorance that results from one’s only exposure to a culture being what one sees

² Although this team have now changed their name, it took until 2020 for this to happen.

in movies'; 'carelessness with racist, sexist jokes can establish misperceptions that are hazardous in real life to real people'. Indeed, if most of the Western world's only exposure to Indigenous cultures is via Wild West films or poorly written comics, these stereotypes form our only image of Indigenous cultures and peoples. Many studies have examined the psychological effects of such portrayals and their results are expectedly upsetting. Hirschfelder et al discovered that Indigenous children 'are hindered in developing healthy self-images and racial identities' and are taught 'helplessness' by such portrayals, and Hirschfelder & Molin explain how 'constant encounters with false images result in Native children internalizing stereotypes that interfere with their developing positive self-images and racial identities'. Another study by Children NOW discovered that 'Native youngsters said they see themselves as "poor," "drunk," "living on reservations," and "an invisible race"' (Children NOW; see also Hirschfelder & Molin). Similarly, Mihesuah implores her readers to 'keep in mind that your writing can affect people' (*So You* 8) and to 'imagine how modern-day Natives feel when they read that their ancestors were "savages," "ignorant," or "heathens," or the countless other unsubstantiated stereotypical claims made by writers in thousands of books, essays, magazine articles, and children's stories' (17). She then asks, 'How do you think Native children endure classes taught by teachers who are woefully ignorant of tribal life but assert that Indigenous Peoples are inferior to whites and continue to equate tribes with animals?' (Mihesuah, *So You* 17). Kwaymullina asks a similar question, too: 'What if the mirrors showed you a distorted image of your own self, one twisted into someone who was stupid or weak or frightening? If that was the only face you ever saw, if that was the image continually reflected back at you, might you not come to believe that it was all you could ever be?' (Kwaymullina in Binks). And finally, as Hirschfelder et al explain, 'It's no joke when a dominant group, with a sorry history of oppression towards its minorities, expropriates a shallow version of a subordinate, relatively powerless group and promulgates that imagery as valid' (viii). In addition to this negative self-

image, ‘studies demonstrate that exposure to stereotypical, outdated Native American mascots is also associated with negative attitudes towards Native Americans by others’ (Friedman); ‘far from being harmless, stereotypes are one of the most common manifestations of prejudice and one of the most persistent’ (Byler in Hirschfelder & Molin). Indeed, Hirschfelder et al discovered that exposure to these stereotypes resulted in children perceiving Native Americans as “bad” people who “kill Americans” (4-6; 55-57).

Not only does the presence of propagandic stereotypes affect the internal lives of Indigenous Peoples, it also encourages and contributes to racism, discrimination, violence, and poverty. These stereotypes contribute to high rates of mental health issues, suicide, lack of opportunity and unemployment, drug use, incarceration, and violence faced by Indigenous communities all over the world (Hunter & Harvey 14-23; Tighe 1-24); they have devastating real-world impacts, thus it is urgent that these misrepresentations are addressed, challenged, and rejected. Mihesuah urges that writers ‘must find ways to recognise stereotypes and bias’ (*So You* 4) and this project hopes to encourage a conversation surrounding Indigenous representation in comics by breaking down what these stereotypes are, how they manifest, why they are problematic, and how creators can do better. In essence, I hope to provide a potential framework to accommodate future studies as well as a springboard from which many more studies can be conducted, and many more comics, characters, and creators examined.

Such an examination proves even more necessary in our current climate, as the phenomenon that is the Marvel Cinematic Universe has brought comics into the mainstream and instigated a rise in comics sales (Drum). Such prominence seems to have triggered the recent drive for diversity, which has seen publications such as Marvel’s Indigenous-created *Indigenous Voices* (2020) and *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection* (2016). In popular media, this drive has produced both successful and incredibly offensive results. For example, the introduction of characters such as Valkyrie, Mantis, Shang Chi, and Kamala Khan into the MCU, the

introduction of Sam Wilson as the new Captain America, and the huge success of *Black Panther* have gained ample praise, the latter even driving fans to tears of joy³ due to the successful, thoughtful, sensitive, and accurate portrayal of T'Challa's culture. On the other hand, films such as *Dr Strange* have been heavily criticised for their orientalism (Willmore; Radillo ['Orientalism'; 'How']; Lachenal), and Fox's recent adaptation of the *New Mutants* was shockingly racist and insensitive to their Indigenous character. As Weekes explains, the film is 'ignorant', 'thoughtless', and 'racist'; not only are Roberto (Sun Spot) and Cecilia Reyes white-washed, viewers have to endure their Indigenous hero being bullied with racial slurs, referred to as "Pocahontas" and "Standing Rock", and one character mocking the issue of sexual trauma in Indigenous communities and the Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls movement. Whilst the film has been heavily criticised in Indigenous communities online (Weekes calls the film a 'shitty experience', claiming that 'Native comics fans should not have to watch one of their few heroes come to life in a narrative where they are being bullied by a white character'), Western media on the whole seems to see no problem with such blatant racism. Whilst many non-Indigenous viewers have complained about the lack of horror and intrigue inspired by the film (Warmann; Rotten Tomatoes), and others have praised it as a fresh take on superhero films (Bradshaw; Rotten Tomatoes), the constant racism is not mentioned or criticised by critics or viewers alike, and Fox is still yet to apologise for such failings.

In a time where the media seems to be making such progress in terms of diversity and representation, the very existence of this film is a potent demonstration of how little this movement currently cares for Indigenous communities. The presence of racial slurs and this racist attitude in a "good" character and future close-friend of Dani Moonstar, who will become a key focus of this study, would be unimaginable in *Black Panther*, showing just how oblivious our society remains to this anti-Indigenous narrative.

³ See Johnson 2018, Smith in TIME, Betancourt as just three examples.

Thus, we see the absolute urgency for more awareness of Indigenous issues and the ways in which contemporary, popular portrayals of Indigenous characters uphold settler colonial propaganda. Studies like this must be undertaken in order to acknowledge and bring attention to the problems in representation and ways in which society can move on from such propaganda and towards a portrayal that achieves the sensitivity, success, and joy that *Black Panther* brought to African communities and those of African heritage all over the world. We must prevent Indigenous comics and film fans alike from being forced to endure yet another experience that facsimiles settler colonial propaganda's narrative and anti-Indigenous attitudes. Quite simply, Indigenous Peoples deserve to see themselves represented in ways that bring joy, pride, affirmation, and confidence.

Characters & Comics

This study focuses on the representation of Indigenous Peoples in popular, mainstream American comics from Marvel and DC (rather than Indigenous-created comics) simply due to their present high visibility. Whilst Indigenous-created comics are hugely important and deserve far more attention than they receive in mainstream culture, the intentions of this study are to focus on the comics that have the biggest impact on mainstream audiences' views and attitudes towards Indigeneity; indeed Marvel and DC are the most-read, most-adapted, and thus the most influential comics publishers in the world and thus hold the most power in reinforcing or defying colonial propaganda. Therefore, I feel their representation of these stereotypes is the most urgently in need of examination, especially with the growing diversity in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the introduction of their first Indigenous character into the MCU: Echo.

Within these parameters, I have chosen to focus this study on eight characters that I have found to be the most prominent, influential, and/or significant in terms of their interaction with colonial stereotypes and prominence in the comics world. These characters are Lucas Bishop (Marvel), Dawnstar (DC), John Trujillo aka Black Condor (DC), Red Wolf (Marvel), James Proudstar aka Warpath (Marvel), Miiyahbin Marten aka Equinox (DC), Raven (Earth One; DC), and, most centrally, Dani Moonstar aka Mirage (Marvel). There is certainly no abundance of Indigenous characters to choose from in comics and these eight are the only consistently prominent, contemporary characters that have received enough focus in comics to make the examination of them worthwhile. Bishop, Dawnstar, John, James, Red Wolf, and Dani all have impressive publication histories with plenty of contemporary material to provide good and in-depth examination, understanding, and analysis of the characters, thus their selection for this study. The two exceptions to this are Miiyahbin and Raven, whose publication history and thus available material is severely limited compared to the other characters. However, their interaction with two of the categories this study examines is far more prominent and consistent than other comics and thus makes them worthy of examination, if only sporadically.

Lucas Bishop

Lucas Bishop first appeared in the *Uncanny X-Men* series in 1991 and has since become an enormously important member of the X-Men, appearing in 2014's *X-Men: Days of Future Past* film, playing a large role in the 1990s animated *X-Men* series, and earning multiple comic book series focused on him (e.g. *The Times and Life of Lucas Bishop*; *Bishop: The Last X-Man*; *X-Men: Bishop's Crossing*, and *Gambit & Bishop*). Bishop is of African American and Anangu (Pitjantjatjara, Aboriginal Australian) heritage: his grandfather was confirmed to be a character known as Gateway; Bishop's mother holds a traditionally Aboriginal Australian name, Kadee Bishop, according to Clave Jones; and his father, Burnum Bishop, seems to be named after the Woiworrung and Yorta Yorta activist, Burnum Burnum. Bishop's Aboriginal heritage is,

unfortunately, overlooked by some writers and casting directors, too: Bishop is voiced by Jamaican-American actor, Philip Akin, in the animated series, and by Omar Sy (who is French with Mauritanian, Senegalese, and Fulani heritage). However, Bishop's identity as the first and most prominent Aboriginal Australian character in the Marvel Universe must be acknowledged, and the character examined as such.

Bishop himself is a time-travelling adventurer, detective, sergeant, X-Man, and revolutionary leader. His powers include energy absorption, accelerated healing, superhuman strength and endurance, enhanced reflexes and senses, psionic resistance, energy conversion, concussive blasts, and energy resistance, and the source of these extensive abilities is his identity as a mutant. As a character, Bishop is most consistently depicted as determined, kind, noble, diplomatic, and very much concerned with justice.

Bishop was born in a dystopian future where the Mutant Messiah, Hope, killed over a million humans, which acted as the final straw in the mutant vs human feud and resulted in all mutants being imprisoned in concentration camps. Bishop's parents fled Australia before a nuclear bomb destroyed their home, but upon landing in the USA were captured and imprisoned in one of these camps, which is where Bishop and his sister, Shard, were born. Bishop and his family suffered horrific abuse in the camps, before a riot killed both of his parents and separated him from his sister and grandmother. Young Bishop escaped but found himself alone on the streets, desperately trying to survive and avoid being captured, both of which he did with help from a mysterious man only known as The Witness. Since then, Bishop has found himself in several timelines, but has spent most of his time in the 21st century with the X-Men.

The comics examined in this study are *The Times and Life of Lucas Bishop (T&L)*, *Bishop: The Last X-Man (LXM)*, *Gambit & Bishop (G&B)*, and *X-Men: Messiah Complex (XM:MC)*.

The focus on these comics amongst the enormous publication history of the character is due to their modernity⁴, consistent focus on Bishop, and popularity at the time of publication. Series such as *Bishop's Crossing*, for example, although more contemporary, has a surprising lack of focus on the character, thus it has been left out for its lack of influence and significance in the comics world and beyond.

Dawnstar

Dawnstar first appeared in *Superboy and the Legion of Super-Heroes* in 1977 and was revived in 2012-2013 as a central character in the Legion after sporadic appearances throughout the decades between. Dawnstar has no specified affiliation to any particular nation, simply described as Native American. She is from the 30th century, and originated on the planet Starhaven, colonised and inhabited by bio-engineered Native Americans. These origins already raise several problems, both in the lack of specificity in her identity and in the uncomfortable attribution of colonisation.

Dawnstar is an adventurer with superpowers including supersonic flight (granted by her 16ft wings) and her ability to track any life form even light-years away from her own location. These powers are due to the bio-engineering previously mentioned and her identity as a mutant respectively. Dawnstar started out as a tracker-for-hire on her home planet, before joining the Legion, with whom she ends up stranded in the 21st century. The depictions of Dawnstar vary greatly even within series, as she seems to flit between being overly emotional and stoic. She is, however, professional, smart, and compassionate.

The comics examined in this study include *Legion Lost Volume 1: Run From Tomorrow* (LL1), *Legion Lost Volume 2: The Culling* (LL2), *Legion of Superheroes Volume 1: The Choice* (LoS1), *Legion of Superheroes Volume 2: Consequences* (LoS2), and *Legion of Superheroes*

⁴ These series were published/ concluded in 2009, 2001, 2001, and 2008, respectively.

Volume 3: When Evil Calls (LoS3). The focus on these comics is once again due to their modernity (all occurring in the 2010s) and partly due to Dawnstar's prominence within them.

John Trujillo

John Trujillo, aka Black Condor, first appeared in the 2006 reboot of *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters*. There were two previous iterations of the Black Condor, the first, Richard Grey Jr., appearing in 1940 as a World War II soldier, and the second, Ryan Kendall, in 1992, before Trujillo appeared reimagined as a Navajo man from Arizona. Trujillo's powers include flight, aerokinesis, superhuman strength, agility, and speed, and pain resilience, all of which were granted to him by the Spider Woman (a Navajo deity) when she chose him as the land's protector.

Trujillo has been a central character in the rebooted Uncle Sam series and has appeared in the 2017 animated series, *Freedom Fighters: The Ray*. However, the actor who voiced him, Jason Mitchell, has no known Native American, let alone Navajo, heritage. Little is written regarding his background or his life prior to gaining his powers and joining the Freedom Fighters. John is a business-focused and at times callous character, but he is shown to care deeply about people underneath his stiff, socially awkward exterior. He is exceedingly tough and dedicated to the notion of justice.

The comics examined here are *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters Volume 1 (US1)*, *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters #1-8 (US#1-8)*, and *Freedom Fighters #1-9 (FF#1-9)*. These comics were published between 2007 and 2010 and are the only comics in which the character appears to date.

Red Wolf

Red Wolf reappeared as part of Marvel's 2015 "All New, All Different" reboot in *Marvel 1872* and has since been granted his own series, *Red Wolf: Man out of Time*. The character

originally appeared as a Cheyenne man called William Talltrees in 1970 and there have been three other versions: Johnny Wakely in 1971, Thomas Thunderhead in 1973, and Wildrun in 1992. When Talltrees was introduced, he was Marvel's first Native American superhero and appeared alongside the Avengers. The second iteration, Wakely, appeared in his own series titled *Red Wolf* published between 1972-1973, where Thunderhead was also introduced, and Wildrun appeared with the Fantastic Four and Anachronauts. The rebooted Red Wolf is Heevahetaneo'o (Cheyenne of the South) and was reintroduced as part of the Secret Wars series with *1872* presenting alternate universe versions of Steve Rogers, Tony Stark, Natasha Romanoff, and Wilson Fisk, amongst others, living in the Wild West era. The popularity of the character saw him transported from this timeline into the main Marvel Universe, eventually teaming up with Clint Barton (Hawkeye) and taking on Hydra as part of the *Occupy Avengers* series.

Red Wolf appears as a sheriff, taking over from Steve Rogers in *1872*, a deputy sheriff working for the Santa Rosa Police Department in the present day, and lastly an Avenger. His powers vary throughout the series, but he generally possesses superhuman strength and senses to some extent. He is also an expert marksman and archer, skilled fighter, and expert tracker. The *Red Wolf* comic expands on this list and grants him the power to commune with and telepathically speak to wolves, but this ability was dropped in the *Occupy* series. The origins of his powers are never stated.

The character starts as a vigilante in *1872* attempting to destroy the dam outside of Timely. He gets captured, and Rogers saves him from being hung without trial. Rogers later frees him from jail and the two work together alongside Iron Man and Black Widow to take down Fisk and his gang. In *Red Wolf*, he finds himself teleported to the present day and is picked up by the deputy sheriff of Santa Rosa before joining forces with them to take down the villains. Upon the sheriff's death, Deputy Ortiz becomes sheriff, and Red Wolf takes on the deputy

position. *Occupy Avengers* follows Hawkeye to Santa Rosa, where he encounters Red Wolf and Ortiz and attempts to discover the source of the town's water problems. Red Wolf ends up saving him and they work together, with help from the Fireheart cousins, to restore water to the reservation. At the end of the comic, Barton asks Red Wolf to accompany him and Red Wolf accepts. When the characters return in *Volume 2*, we are presented with a world in which Hydra has taken over and Barton has been forced to return to the main Avengers. In his absence, Red Wolf leads the group to continue their fight against the evil Hydra.

Red Wolf is a noble, caring, and fair character, devoted to justice and very much concerned with people's wellbeing. He can be stoic and reserved, and a little confused when he first appears in the 21st century, but generally he is a capable and likable character.

The comics examined are *Marvel 1872 (M1872)*, *Red Wolf: Man out of Time (RW)*, *Occupy Avengers Volume 1: Taking Back Justice (OA1)*, and *Occupy Avengers Volume 2: In Plain Sight (OA2)*. The series was, unfortunately, cancelled after Volume 2 and Red Wolf is yet to appear in any other comics to date.

James Proudstar

James Proudstar, aka Warpath, is an Apache character from Camp Verde, Arizona, who first appeared under the name Thunderbird in honour of his brother, John Proudstar (the original Thunderbird), but later changed his name to Warpath. The character first appeared in 1984 in the *New Mutants* comics, starting out as a villain who blamed the X-Men for his brother's death and joined the Hellions. However, after the Hellions murdered James' entire community back in Arizona, he joined Cable's New Mutants and later the X-Force and X-Men interchangeably. James is a mutant like his brother, granting him superhuman strength, speed, stamina, agility, and reflexes, acute senses, invulnerability, regenerative healing factor, and some "shamanistic" abilities (specifically, occasional interaction and communication with the spirit world).

James has featured consistently throughout the *X-Men* comics since his introduction and in 2008 was made a central character alongside Wolverine in a new version of the X-Force, also featuring X-23, Archangel, and Wolfsbane. The series was a dark and bloody take on the team, commissioned by Cyclops to carry out the work the X-Men were not willing to do themselves. In 2019, the team was reimagined again and a series released featuring Domino, Cannonball, Shatterstar, and Boom-Boom alongside James. Throughout most iterations of the character, James has remained a compassionate, kind, and significant character, forming strong relationships with his teammates whilst still dominating the battlefield.

James was the first Indigenous character to appear in a live action film adapted from Marvel comics, playing a minor role in *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. However, like much of 20th Century Studios' casting, their choice has come under heavy criticism. Booboo Stewart claims to be of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Scottish, and Blackfoot ancestry, but the latter has been questioned and the actor has been criticised for never reaching out to, visiting, or engaging at all with his supposed heritage. As the first Indigenous superhero appearing in a major film, the portrayal of James is severely disappointing and the character bears no resemblance (in personality or appearance) to the comic book character.

The comics examined in this study are the 2008-2010 *X-Force* series (*XF#1-28*), *X-Force Volume 1: Sins of the Past (XF1)*, *X-Force Volume 2: The Counterfeit King*, and *Messiah Complex*. These comics were chosen out of the multitude of James' appearances due to their significance in the Marvel Universe, popularity with readers, and their modernity (all written between 2008 and 2019). Other comics and spin-off series had to be removed from my consideration in order to achieve a better depth for this project, and those listed above are in my opinion the most significant in terms of Indigenous representation.

Miiyahbin Marten

Equinox, aka Miiyahbin Marten, is a new character created by Jeff Lemire who was introduced in the first issue of *Justice League United* (2014). Miiyahbin is a 16-year-old First Nations woman, a member of the Cree Nation from Moose Factory in Ontario, who starts out as a regular teenager before discovering her position as a Midayo; that is, a protector of the land. Thus, Miiyahbin transforms into a superhero and joins the Justice League of Canada, with the first volume focusing on her personal journey to defeat the Whitago tormenting her community.

Only two volumes of comics currently feature this character: *Justice League United Volumes 1 and 2* (JLUI and 2), thus the material available for examination is rather limited, especially as both volumes focus on the team as a whole, rather than just Miiyahbin. This character does not feature in this study to the same extent as the others, partly due to the lack of material available but also due to the lack of interaction with some of the stereotypes, such as the Bloodthirsty Savage, of which the comics neither actively challenge nor facsimile. However, the interaction of these comics with categories such as the Romantic Ecologist are so significant in terms of the frequency and prominence of the stereotypes, which far exceeds the other comics in the study, that their inclusion in this study, albeit sporadic, is of the utmost importance. The praise allocated to the character and her creator, Lemire, also make this comic worthy of consideration, if only for one or two of the categories.

Raven

The character, Raven, considered in this study is a variant of the Raven from the popular Teen Titans team. This Earth One version of the team features a Raven reimagined by Jeff Lemire as a Navajo teenager from New Mexico, who discovers her powers alongside the rest of the team. Like Miiyahbin, Raven only features in two volumes to date, both of which also focus on a team, in this case the Teen Titans, but this small amount of material is still worthy

of examination considering the significant interactions with the Romantic Ecologist and Homogenous Relict categories. The volumes in question are *Teen Titans: Earth One Volumes 1 and 2 (TT1 and 2)*.

Dani Moonstar

Dani Moonstar, aka Mirage (originally Psyche), will be the central focus of this study, with the other characters acting as context and comparisons. Dani first appeared in 1982 as a New Mutant and has been the most consistently and prominently featured Indigenous character in the Marvel Universe since; she stars as the main character in multiple series, has been tipped as future leader of the X-Men, and is even central to storylines surrounding Asgard. Dani is a Northern Cheyenne woman who arrives at Xavier's school with the power to create illusions and manifest people's deepest fears and desires. In the original comics of the 80s, she also possessed a psychic link with Rahne Sinclair when the character was in her wolf form, but this power was dropped in later comics. In the comics since the M-Day storyline, where much of the mutant population lost their powers (Dani included), she has continued as a prominent member and leader of the New Mutants. Despite the absence of any technical superpowers, Dani is an exceptionally gifted combatant, archer, marksman, and leader, and was the only member of the team to pass their initial test in the Danger Room. In addition to these feats, she also became a chosen Valkyrie of Asgard after saving Brightwind (her Valkyrie Pegasus), granting her superhuman strength, stamina, speed, durability, and reflexes whilst in her Valkyrie form.

Dani has recently been made the first Indigenous character to appear as a main character in a film adapted from Marvel comics with the release of the *New Mutants*. However, this film was created by 20th Century Studios rather than Marvel themselves and received heavy criticism for their casting choice (there is controversy surrounding Blu Hunt's claims to the

Oglala Lakota community), the actress' lack of resemblance to Dani and the film's blatant racism. However, this film is outside the parameters of this study and I suggest that anyone wanting to read more should be directed to blog posts such as those by Weekes (2020), McNab (2020), and Vassar (2020). It is, however, important to mention that this film and the version of all characters depicted bears no resemblance to the much-loved and continually prominent comics series that has indeed been a pioneer for better representation in comics. Indeed, the original line-up of the team featured one white man (Sam Guthrie aka Cannonball), a 13-year-old Scottish girl (Rahne Sinclair aka Wolfsbane), an Afro-Brazilian man (Roberto), a Northern Cheyenne woman (Dani), and their original leader, a 19-year-old Vietnamese woman (Xi'an Coy Manh aka Karma), from whom Dani took over as leader in later comics. For a 1980s mainstream comic series, the diversity of the team was a huge moment for comics and indeed, many comics today still fail to provide this level of representation.

Out of the huge quantity of comics featuring Dani Moonstar, this study focuses on the 2010 storyline, beginning with *New Mutants Volume 1: Return of Legion (NMI)* and following the series through the seven volumes (*NMI-7*), including the storyline's detour into *Fear Itself: New Mutants (FI:NM)*. The decision to focus on these comics is due to the consistency of the storyline, popularity of the comics, and the contemporariness of their creation. The very existence of seven volumes (excluding spin-offs) is testament to the success, reception, and influence of these comics. The *New Mutants: Back to School* volume will also be considered on occasion as a different perspective on the character; that is, an older iteration of Dani who now works as a teacher at Xavier's school.

Chapters

Sheyahshe explains in the introduction to his book, *Native Americans in Comics*, that the more comics he read, ‘certain patterns started reoccurring [...] The esteemed Indigenous heroes I held so dear seemed to more readily fall into certain categories’ (2). Camille Callison, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Greg Bak also noticed this tendency in their study of Indigenous representation in comics, and identified five common tropes: the warrior, the wannabe or imposter, the sidekick, the shaman, and the artifact (Callison et al 47-64; 56-67). My own study of these comics has resulted in differing categories, but tropes of the warrior, shaman, sidekick, and artifact are all relevant to my own categorisations: The Bloodthirsty Savage, The Naïve Sidekick, The Romantic Ecologist, and The Homogenous Relict. These four categories seemed to more aptly fit the stereotypes I encountered in comics and more appropriately incorporate the variety of existing categories I encountered in theoretical texts. For example, the noble savage category tends to incorporate elements from all four categories I have chosen to use and the boundaries of such stereotypes became difficult to define. Upon further research, it became apparent that there are actually four reasonably well-defined categories that the characters fit into and, whilst some tropes overlap slightly and some characters present traits from all four, the basis of the stereotypes are far more clearly defined and accurate to the portrayal of Indigenous characters in both historical and contemporary media.

The first category, the Bloodthirsty Savage, is the oldest and most wide-spread depiction of Indigenous Peoples in Western media (M. K. Green 324), and they are often depicted as ‘crazed, seeking vengeance or just malicious fun’ (Berkhofer 98). Native characters in this category are presented as violent, murderous, dangerous, angry, apathic, and as natural-born warriors. Early European explorers ‘took back [such] stories of wild savages that fit neatly into the preconceived notions the Europeans had of what a savage would be’ (Kilpatrick 1), demonstrating that such portrayals were an ‘invention’ that preceded any contact with real

Native peoples (Kilpatrick 1). The term “savage” is derived from the latin, *silvaticus*, meaning ‘wild’ and ‘woodland’, thus “savage” ‘connoted originally a state of nature’ (Krech 16-17). However, this definition was soon overrun by the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as barbarous (Bordewich 18; Sheyahshe 9; P. J. Deloria 4; Douglas 12) and these ‘overwhelmingly derogatory connotations effaced the original woodland meanings of savage’ (Krech 17). Any categorisation of peoples is inherently problematic due to the reductive nature of categories, but this category is particularly troublesome due to its usage by the white invaders, who positioned Indigenous Peoples ‘on the earliest and lowest rungs of human society’ (Krech 17) and used this presentation to justify ‘expropriation of native lands’ (Berkhofer 83; Jennings), assimilation (Berkhofer 119), and genocide (Pearce 31, 105; Berkhofer 109, 119, 148; Roberts 26; Leask, ‘Not’; Goff et al 293; Chalk & Jonassohn; Lott; O’Brien; Santa Ana; Meyer and Royer xii; Meade; Salisbury; Slotkin; Cook-Lynn, ‘Lewis’ 30). Throughout the colonisation of the Americas and the wars that ensued, Indigenous Peoples were smeared as ‘hostile’, ‘without mercy’, ‘fierce’, ‘cruel’, and ‘demonical’ (Sparks 6; Rambler 9; LA Times Aug 1885, 2). Despite this view lacking any basis in real observations, this notion of “Indian savagery” defined Indigenous Peoples for centuries and it continues today in several aspects of American culture.

As media grew out of the brazen depiction of Native characters as Bloodthirsty Savages, the second category emerged: the Naïve Sidekick. ‘Indigenous characters evolved slowly from the despised faceless nemesis of the hero to the simple-minded helper. Some Native characters even became popular enough to warrant their own comic book title, but always under the guise of their dutiful subservience to the white man’ (Sheyahshe 9). This stereotype is still prevalent in modern popular culture due to its slightly more subtle racism in comparison to the “savage”. The appearance of the Naïve Sidekick was a significant progression from the former category, replacing the stereotypes of violence and anger with innocence and helplessness, promoting

Indigenous characters to the good sidekicks rather than the evil villain, and replacing the former vilification of them with patronisation.

The category of the Naïve Sidekick is constructed through three key components: simplicity, helplessness, and subservience. Characters in this category are presented as sidekicks / helpers to the white hero, as needing to be saved by the white hero, and as stupid and unassuming. The category is problematic predominantly due to the implication that Indigenous Peoples lack any form of “higher” thinking, by which I refer to the cognitive capacity for imagination, interpretation, and critical thinking. ‘Native peoples have been firmly placed in the lower echelons of intelligence by many Euro-Americans since first contact was made’ (Kilpatrick xvii; see also Gobineau 391-413), and even today philosophical thought is assumed to be beyond their culture (Pomedli xi-xii). These perceptions of Native people have obviously been proved false (R. Byrne 120-122), yet these problematic categorisations persist in contemporary representations.

The Naïve Sidekick category draws on the dominant portrayal of Native characters as ‘child-like’;⁵ ‘bumbling’ and foolish;⁶ in need of / dependent on White people;⁷ naïve;⁸ and as Sidekick/ the White Man’s Helper.⁹

As media progressed further, and tensions between settlers and Indigenous communities mellowed, new stereotypes emerged that were largely seen as “positive stereotypes”. From the naivety of the sidekick, Indigenous characters were promoted to the role of the nature-loving, animal-befriending, exotically beautiful shaman: the Romantic Ecologist. This category consists of three tropes: the “Ecological Indian” (Krech), the “Romantic Native” (Bird), and the “Instant Shaman” (Sheyahshe), all of which function to dehumanise the characters and

⁵ Outlined by Wright (‘Interview’ 10), K. Anderson (302), Raheja (190-191), and M. K. Green (327)

⁶ Discussed by Pewewardy (Studies 9), Wright (‘Interview’ 10), and Stedman (245)

⁷ Examined by Pearce (8), Roberts (25), and M. K. Green (327)

⁸ Discussed by Roberts (25), Sheyahshe (15), Kilpatrick (xvii), Raheja (190-191), and Bird (‘Intro’, 3)

⁹ Outlined by Sheyahshe (9, 39), M. K. Green (327), O’Neill (24), Keiser (78), Friar and Friar (1-12), and Bataille and Silet (116).

people in question. Their previous naivety turned into innocence, their subservience turned sexual, and their sidekick role evolved into a partnership with nature and animals.

The emergence of this more “positive” stereotype, however, was not for the benefit of the Indigenous communities it depicted, but once again to benefit White society’s agenda: the ‘environmentally conscious, flowing-haired, nature-loving, ignorant savages of the wilderness’ functioned to further philosophers’ critiques of materialism in white societies (Mihesuah, *So You* 4-5). Indeed, the “Ecological Indian” represented ‘unity with nature, pristine and authentic’ as ‘a reproach to the artifice of cultivated life’ (Bordewich 34). However, this portrayal came hand in hand with the view of Indigenous Peoples as ‘the archetype of mankind’s infancy’ (Bordewich 34). Not only did this view continue the attitude towards Indigenous intellect that began with the Naïve Sidekick category, it also furthered the claims that Indigenous Peoples were not fully human (Pewewardy, *Studies* 2). Indeed, upon “discovering” the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, ‘Christopher Columbus [...] immediately gathered a few specimens for export and called them “Indios” (Stedman 6). Long before the Indian Wars, the ‘pageant’ began and ‘crowds buzzed about the fascinating creatures’ (Stedman 7; 6). Thus, this romanticisation actually functioned to animalise them and thus enforce colonial narratives regarding the ‘bestial’ existence of colonised peoples (Kilpatrick xvii).

Furthermore, the romanticisation also appeared within similar circumstances as the Naïve Sidekick: ‘as long as Indians were not a threat, their physical beauty was often admired’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 68) and the ‘more erotic presentation of Indian men [and women]’ appeared (Bird, ‘Savage’ 90). As the Naïve Sidekick allowed Indigenous characters to be “good” on the condition of their subservience and mental inferiority, the Romantic Ecologist allowed them to be “good” under the condition that they provided “eye candy” for White audiences. Lastly, the depiction of Indigenous Peoples being inherently spiritual functions to homogenise and patronise their cultures, and to remove them from White “civilisation”. The three tropes that

constitute this category have been explored by other writers: the “Ecological Indian” was discussed in detail by Krech in his book of the same name; the “Instant Shaman” comes from Sheyahshe’s discussion, and the “Romantic Native” from Bird’s writing in particular. These three tropes all rely on and facilitate the dehumanisation of Indigenous Peoples and often overlap and work together in order to assert colonial power dynamics, hence their combination into the “Romantic Ecologist”. Indeed, the “Ecological Indian’s” connection to nature and animals, the “Shaman’s” removal from White society and humanity, and the “Romantic Natives’s” vulnerability and fetishisation all contribute to the dehumanisation of Indigenous Peoples and thus represent colonial propaganda that seeks to “justify” their inhumane treatment.

As time went on and settler countries such as the USA sought to forget their colonial pasts, another stereotype emerged: the Homogenous Relict. This category is made up of two key components: primitivity and homogenisation. Characters in this category tend to be presented as old-fashioned, extinct, without (civilised) language, as one homogenous tribe, and/or in ways that are inaccurate to their specific cultural affiliation. Characters in this category are also continually presented as primitive, living in nature and far removed from cities or any urban centres, as confused by the modern world, as rejecting technology, as dressing in breeches, loincloths, fringed buckskin, feathers, and warpaint, as assimilated into the dominant white culture, and/or as living solely in the past as historical figures and symbols (it is far too rare to find stories of Native peoples that are set in the present). It also examines the homogenisation of Indigenous characters and cultures in order to present the image of “The Indian”, ignoring and obscuring the vastly differing cultures to which the characters belong. This category is problematic due to the implication that Native peoples belong in the past and that the only way for them to exist in the present is to abandon their culture and live as White people.

The first element of this category, the homogenisation of Indigenous Peoples, has been ongoing from first contact and indeed is evident in terms such as “American Indians” and even, some argue, “Native American” and “Aboriginal Australian”. The former term is the direct result of colonial mistakes and the assumption that they had arrived in India, making the term wildly outdated, inaccurate, and offensive. The latter terms, many people argue, are too homogenous and attempt to conflate all the different communities and cultures under one banner, just as the settler colonists did in referring to them as “Indians”. Whilst this latter point has attracted much debate, one agreed point is that specificity is always preferable. Failing to specify the character’s culture at all and only referring to them as “Indigenous” or “Native” is reductive and insulting, suggesting that their identity is insignificant. Thus terms such as “Native American” should be used with the same scrutiny as terms such as “European”; it is sometimes appropriate, but mostly vague and unhelpful when discussing specific cultures and specific people. Indigenous characters in this category are treated with this ambiguity, lack of specificity, and inaccuracy. Often elements of unrelated cultures are incorporated into the character for no other reason than them being stereotypically “Native American” things, for example, wearing feathered headdresses, buckskin, fringed clothing, loincloths, using a bow and arrow or spear, and so on. Indeed, characters are often dressed up in this “Indian” regalia as a continuation of the colonial tendency to stage photographs: ‘Many pictures were staged by a photographer who desired to have his subjects looking as “Indian” as possible: holding war clubs, wearing feathers, and dressing stereotypically’ (Mihsuah, *So You* 22). Often these features are included in entirely inappropriate and inaccurate settings and elements of Plains cultures especially are frequently placed upon characters with no affiliation to the Plains communities whatsoever.

The second element is the presentation of them as relicts. This trope appears to be a direct result of settler countries attempting to continue their erasure of Indigenous communities, only

this time the erasure is epistemic. Indigenous Peoples are written out of the modern world by being almost exclusively presented in past settings or at the very least in old-fashioned, rural environments. These characters have little to no understanding of technology and other elements of the modern world, and are presented as lost, confused, and scared should they ever stumble into the 21st century.

This category is also problematic due to its epistemic erasure of Indigenous Peoples as a continuation of colonialism's literal erasure of Native peoples and its implications of mental inferiority. Furthermore, this propaganda demonstrates a general lack of respect or even acknowledgement of the thousands of different cultures that exist today, and the enormous variety of languages, beliefs, customs, and more that exist between them. Indeed, this presentation is part of what Cook-Lynn calls Anti-Indianism in its intent to displace and exclude Indigenous Peoples (*Anti-Indianism*, 4).

The category draws on scholarship from Sheyahshe, Pewewardy (*Studies; American*), Pearce, Stedman, M. K. Green, Leask ('Totems'; 'Not'; 'Slurs'; 'Shaman'), Bird, Steele, and Lent.

Each of these four categories have been granted their own chapter in order to examine specifically how these propagandic stereotypes are continually used even in contemporary comics. Each chapter examines the category in regards to how they were constructed, the key elements, and how they contribute to racist stereotyping of Indigenous Peoples; the role a variety of contemporary comics play in the continuing existence of this category; and the ways in which these comics challenge, reject, and redefine the category and its core components. In order to do this, each chapter aims to answer the following questions: what is the category and how has it occurred historically? What role do contemporary comics have in the continuing presence of the category? How do these comics start to redefine and challenge the category?

The conclusion then takes a glimpse into the future of representation in comics by considering the result of Indigenous creators writing Indigenous characters. The publication of Marvel's *Indigenous Voices* was a ground-breaking moment in the comics world and marks the first issue from any mainstream publisher that centres on Indigenous characters and is written and illustrated solely by Indigenous creators. Such a moment thus serves as the perfect concluding chapter to this study. To follow an examination of the presentation of Indigenous Peoples by non-Indigenous creators with an examination and comparison of the presentation by Indigenous creators is crucial for the narrative of this study. The conclusion will thus consider how *Indigenous Voices* redefines, challenges, and rejects the settler colonial propaganda present in other comics, and how this rejection differs from comics by non-Indigenous creators.

It is also worth noting a somewhat unusual pattern in my methodology that will, I'm sure, be of note in my bibliography. Whilst the categories themselves and much of my research has attempted to centre Indigenous-authored texts, and indeed has used these wherever they have been found, some old accounts of Indigenous communities written by White colonists, settlers, and anthropologists are referenced briefly in relation to the perception of the communities they write about. However, the lack of focus on such texts is a deliberate decision to reject these standard works of white ethnography that have for centuries underpinned the skewed narratives surrounding Indigenous Peoples. Therefore these works have been rejected in favour of Indigenous-authored texts where possible. This focus, however, has necessitated the decision to collapse the boundaries between "academic" texts and other writings. Whilst academia holds a strong preference for books and published articles, there is a large gap in this field where books and articles by Indigenous Peoples about Indigenous Peoples should be. Thus, in order to research the reality of Indigenous communities' traditions, values, experiences, thoughts,

and opinions, researchers must turn to blogs, websites, articles, comments sections, and such formats that academia historically frowns upon as illegitimate and untrustworthy. However, this is part of a larger trend within academia that is itself leftover from settler colonialism: only the written opinions of the settlers are considered, whilst the voices of the Indigenous Peoples are ignored. The continuing lack of written and peer-reviewed accounts is due to numerous factors, including, but not limited to, lack of access to education (especially higher education) due to geography, poverty rates, hostile environments; publisher bias (Mihesuah, *So You* 4-5); and, quite simply, a lack of opportunity for Indigenous Peoples to tell their own stories in these formats. This attitude, therefore, must be reconsidered in order to decolonise our very field and the very act of research itself must move away from these colonial perspectives that devalue Indigenous knowledges and experiences. True, unbiased, and rounded research can only come by rejecting these conventions and reading, listening, paying attention to all the information by the parties most qualified to provide that information. Thus, a frowned-upon blog post about hair in Cheyenne cultures, written by a member of a Cheyenne nation, is far more reliable and trustworthy than a book from the 1800s written by a White colonist, explorer, or anthropologist, who spent a week staying with one community. Just as a blog post by a dressmaker would be far more helpful in learning about making clothes than a book by someone who had never made any clothes but has visited a factory a few times, we must turn to Indigenous-created resources to learn about Indigenous cultures.

By using all accounts, therefore, this work examines the facsimileing and rejection of the tropes in relation to a variety of comics, in comparison to historical narratives of Indigenous Peoples, and in relation to the more successful portrayal of Dani. By doing this, I aim to show the ways in which these comics continue to reinforce problematic stereotypes and how they can move forward to redefine, challenge, and reject outdated propaganda. Furthermore, it will examine the presence of historical tendencies in 21st century comics, particularly how

Indigenous characters are continually allocated particular traits in order to continue settler colonialism's attempted justification of its actions and the very existence of settler colonial countries such as those currently known as the USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

Chapter One: The Bloodthirsty Savage

Chapter One will focus on the category of the Bloodthirsty Savage, one of the oldest and most prevailing categories that Indigenous characters are written into. This is a well-established category, and this exact phrasing has been used by scholars such as Kilpatrick (xvii), M. K. Green (327), and Berkhofer (98). The broader category and concept of the “savage” is also discussed by Sheyahshe (15-17), Pewewardy (*Studies* 5-6), Pearce (xxi), P. J. Deloria, (4), Stedman (248), Roberts (26), Jackson (677-678), Harvey (525), Douglas (12), Jahoda (15-25), Krech (16), and many other scholars. Very little research, however, has linked these studies to the representation of Indigenous Peoples in comics. I intend to fill this gap by using these studies as a framework for my own research into comics. This chapter will examine exactly where and how representations of Indigenous characters both reinforce and dismantle this category by doing a close-reading of the textual and visual elements of the primary sources (the comics themselves) in relation to such studies.

The main stereotypes embodied in this category are those of violence, anger, murder, and apathy. This type of Indigenous character is wantonly and aimlessly violent, often even enjoying and craving destruction; they lack emotion other than anger and are usually driven by mindless rage; and they are presented as natural-born warriors, whose existence focuses on defending their land and/or enacting revenge. This category is more often embodied by male characters (indeed the name Warpath instantly presents James as aggressive, and Red Wolf and Black Condor are both named after predators), but Indigenous women also suffer this aggressive stereotyping. This notion of “Indian savagery” continues today in several aspects of American culture, including manufacturing (the Tomahawk Mulcher), the armed forces (Tomahawk Missiles), and sports (the Atlanta Braves, Washington Redskins, Cleveland Indians, and Kansas City Chiefs, for example), where Native culture is used to reflect violence,

physical power and to intimidate opponents (M. K. Green 324; Giago). This category, then, is clearly still in use and thus it is important to see how contemporary depictions interact with it in order to pinpoint the areas in need of improvement and determine how writers can do a better job of representing Indigenous Peoples.

The Category

This section aims to outline the category itself, examining how it was constructed historically, how it continues to exist in the present day, the key elements from which it is constructed, and how it contributes to racist views of Indigenous communities.

Whilst Native characters nowadays are less often presented as outright bloodthirsty, some of the components of this stereotype remain prevalent. Old accounts of Indigenous Peoples defined them by their ‘constant’ and ‘incessant warfare’ (Berkhofer 28; see also Sparks 6; Rambler 9; LA Times Aug 1885, 2), and even today this trope of Indigenous violence is continued in comic books. It is worth noting that comic books are, by their very nature, violent; fighting is a central part of any superhero comic, so of course Indigenous superheroes would have to fight, and this in itself cannot be said to uphold the category. The problem occurs when this violence is taken out of the realm of regular comic book violence: (predominantly White) heroes use it as a necessary tool to stop the villains and save the world. In contrast, Indigenous characters’ violence is often foregrounded, decontextualized, presented as unnecessary, and they are presented as enjoying violence and seeking ‘malicious fun’ (Berkhofer 98). As Mihesuah advises, ‘If you present violent Indians, then show their side of the story’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 20). Such pejorative presentations have existed since first contact with Native peoples and, as we will see, persist in some form today. Reports of Geronimo’s raids described the Apache peoples as ‘impatient to maim or kill’ their opponents (Rambler 9) and seeking ‘ultimate and extreme satisfaction in blood and deaths’ (Rambler 9). In the 20th century, many

films portrayed Native peoples as attacking White people for ‘no good reason’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 20), for example in the 1992 film, *Last of the Mohicans*, which depicts an Indigenous character, Magua, as ‘irrational and violent’ without exploring the reason for his hostility; that is, ‘the loss of his family and his understanding that his culture might soon vanish’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 20). As Dunbar-Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker explain, ‘the narrative of Indian savagery is a lie told so many times that it became “truth” in the American mind’ (43) and this representation ‘has yet to be fully transcended’ in the 21st century (38), as can be seen in the writing and illustrating of *Black Condor*, *Red Wolf*, *Warpath*, *Dani Moonstar*, and *Bishop*, which perpetuate this trope by foregrounding Indigenous violence, presenting the characters as naturally violent, and showing them to actively seek out and enjoy violence.

The Bloodthirsty Savage is also constructed through the depiction of Native peoples as murderous and bloodthirsty. Historically, Indigenous Peoples were presented as ‘predatory animal[s]’ that kill ‘aimlessly and wantonly’ (M. K. Green 327), and this can again be seen through newspapers’ depictions of the Apache peoples, which describe how their ‘raiding bands spared none who came on their paths’ (Sparks 6). They also described Apache peoples as ‘leaden messengers of death’ (Rambler 9) who killed ‘in cold blood, over one thousand men, women, and children’ in just two areas (LA Times Aug 1885, 2). Of course, the number of Native Americans killed was not often reported (Allam and Evershed), and when it was, the number was seen as a victory to celebrate, and the raid on their territories an act of heroism, rather than one of barbarity (Grenier 17). Geronimo himself was described as ‘leaving a trail of blood in his wake’ (Rambler 9) and was referred to as a ‘notorious Apache renegade and murderer’ (LA Times Aug 1885, 2), whilst the white invaders who killed Geronimo’s people were simply ‘soldiers’ (LA Times Aug 1885, 2).

Indeed, the language used in regards to Indigenous vs White warfare demonstrates the foregrounding of Indigenous murder and simultaneous cover up of White murder. Whilst

Native peoples' attacks on White communities were labelled 'slaughters' (Sparks 6) and 'butcheries' (LA Times Aug 1885, 2), the massacres committed by White colonists were referred to as "dispersals", "land clearing", "expeditions", and "hunting parties" (Allan and Evershed). These euphemisms were a deliberate attempt to maintain the 'conspiracy of silence' surrounding the genocide and horrendous treatment of Indigenous Peoples. This bias foregrounding of Indigenous Peoples as murderers is even more vigorously constructed through the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as *eager* to kill, which blatantly perpetuates the notion of 'bloodthirsty Indians' (Sheyahshe 9) who are 'always ready to scalp, torture, murder, and menace' people (M. K. Green 328; see also Keiser, 1970; Friar and Friar, 1972; and Bataille and Silet, 1980). Indeed, figures such as Crazy Horse are described as being 'desperate and aching to kill' (New York Times 1877, 5). Furthermore, this notion can be seen to persist in contemporary culture and is even encouraged through textbooks and children's book, as displayed by Hirschfelder et al, who collect numerous examples of children's perceptions of Native Americans, most of which include the assumption they are "bad" and they "kill Americans" (Hirschfelder et al 4-6, 55-57).

Superheroes who are willing to kill are reasonably unusual in comic books and are more often presented as anti-heroes (examples include Deadpool, The Punisher, Cat Woman, and Wolverine), but heroes who are eager to kill are extremely rare and this attitude is more often attributed to the villain – indeed, it is often what makes the villain. Despite this discrepancy, Indigenous Peoples – even when they are the "heroes" – are still presented as being malevolent and actively wanting to kill. Indeed, some characters are still presented as outright bloodthirsty, reflecting the biased and wildly incorrect depiction of 'the cruel horrors of savage warfare' (Berkhofer 95; see also Pearce 162-8; Levin 133-41; Vitzhum). This presentation of Native characters as murderous depicts them in line with Fanon's description of the way Native peoples are demonised as savages: they are said to be 'insensible to ethics' and 'the enemy of

values' (Fanon 32). This trope is facsimiled by the creators of Red Wolf, Black Condor, Bishop, and Warpath, who present their characters as both willing and eager to kill their opponents, which is a divergence from the usual hero's stance, most of whom have strict no-kill policies (Thienenkamp).

Another way in which writers perpetuate the category of the Bloodthirsty Savage is through the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as apathetic and stoic (Thurrow). As Francis explains, 'the wooden-Indian stereotype suggests a lack of emotional range, a failure of feeling', and this 'stern, emotionless, stoical' presentation is 'one of the most common stereotypes non-Natives have about' Indigenous Peoples (Francis). Indeed, Sheyahshe criticises the way in which Indigenous Peoples 'are always either very serious or very malevolent' (15), and points out that 'many individuals associate stoicism as an Indigenous trait' (21). Hirschfelder et al also refer to 'the old "stoic Indian" cliché' (49) and Mihesuah complains that 'we are subject to this type of dull personality in countless works of history and kids' stories' (*So You* 30), demonstrating the extensive history and prevalence of this stereotype. This perception is especially encouraged by old photographs of Indigenous Peoples taken by colonists, such as Edward Curtis, whose photographic subjects never smile and always look serious (Nittle; Keene, 'Smiling'). However, as Mihesuah points out, these 'old photographs we see of Natives were [usually] taken after treaty signings, hardly an occasion to smile' (Mihesuah, *So You* 30). Such portrayals can also be seen in 19th century literature, such as Karl May's many novels centred around Native Americans. In *Winnetou I*, he describes how one character's 'serious expression was that of a true Indian', and most are described as having 'serious, dark eyes' (May 91-93). This stereotype is problematic particularly because its implications reflect notions of Indigenous simplicity; there are, according to many psychologists, both primary and secondary emotions, the former of which (anger, sadness, happiness, etc) requires no complex cognition, whilst the latter (guilt, shame, anxiety, etc) require more complex cognitive

processes (see Parrot 12; Ekman 45-60; Plutchik 3-33; and Handel). Therefore, the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as stoic and thus unable to experience complex, and sometimes even basic, emotions reflects racist claims regarding their supposedly inferior cognitive capacities (Harvey 525; Stedman 251).

The only common exception to this lack of emotion is the presentation of Indigenous anger. Native characters are typically depicted as being ‘devoid of any expression, except when he is enraged’ (Sheyahshe 102). Anger is considered a basic or primary emotion according to many psychologists (see Parrot 12; Ekman 45-60; Plutchik 3-33; and Handel), and not dependant on any form of complex cognition. The presentation of Native characters as lacking all complex emotions is therefore insulting due to the implication of mental inferiority and reinforcement of the science of race concept.¹⁰ Furthermore, their anger is often decontextualized: their historical and current oppression is disregarded and their justified response to this oppression is presented as dangerous and irrational, just as historical retaliations and acts of defence against the colonisers were decontextualized and presented as unprovoked massacres. Even in the 1990s, when a mining firm found themselves in opposition to the Ojibwa Nation, whose land they were attempting to encroach upon, ‘news frames delegitimised the mining opponents, painting them as irrational’ and invalidating their anger at a project that would ‘negatively impact the natural resources of the region’ (Coleman 181). Numerous studies have shown that non-White peoples do not experience stronger feelings of anger than White people and that their feelings of anger tend to be justified responses to the racism and discrimination they face on a daily basis (Mabry & Kiecolt; Feagin and Sikes; Feagin and McKinney; Cose; Fields et al.; Grier and Cobbs; Ross and Van Willigen). However, Indigenous Peoples are more often

¹⁰ ‘The term ‘science of race’ refers to systematic efforts made in various branches of natural history — particularly comparative anatomy, physiology, and zoology — to theorize physical differences between human groups as innate, morally and intellectually determinant, and possibly original.’ (Douglas 5)

presented as angry and hostile without any explanation; the reason they are angry (quite often the usurpation of their land, murder of their people, and in the present day, issues such as increased levels of homelessness, incarceration, and poverty (Tighe 1-18)) is most always omitted, and this in itself is an act of epistemic violence. The stereotype of the angry Native character lacks any truth and is clearly a result of racism and discriminatory stereotyping that seeks to overshadow and erase justified feelings and any acknowledgement of ongoing racism in society. Despite this view being propagandistic and disproved, it is still presented in media today and Native characters such as Thunderbird (Moore et al; Wein et al) and Street Wolf (Harris and Francis) often appear resentful and hostile (Sheyahshe 102, 115). The presentation of Indigenous anger is not problematic in itself – indeed, they have much to be angry about. The problem with the presentation of Indigenous anger is the decontextualization and foregrounding of it, which function to make such anger appear irrational and exaggerated.

Furthermore, this insulting depiction often intertwines with and leads into the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as dangerous, threatening, and evil; the ‘racial threat’ (Wright, ‘Interview’ 10). Old newspapers and narratives presented Indigenous Peoples as ‘demonical’ (Rambler 9), treacherous (New York Times 1877, 5), ‘diabolical’ (Rowlandson), and as ‘sinister’, ‘cruel’ ‘villains’ (LA Times Aug 1885, 2). Indeed, even poets ‘declared the Indians to be irrevocably “Rooted in Evil” (Bordewich 35). Cook-Lynn explains that the ‘distinguishing purposes’ of these colonial narratives were to ‘defame, and to repulse Indigenous Peoples’ (Cook-Lynn, *Anti-Indianism* 4), indicating that such presentations were a deliberate and active attempt to foreground Indigenous Peoples as dangerous in order to justify their attacks as “retaliation” or as “necessary”. Similarly, Fanon also indicates the fabrication of such notions as he describes how ‘the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil’ (Fanon 32), ‘destroying all that comes near him’ (Fanon 32). Fanon’s use of the verb, paint, connotes the idea of covering something up, which relates to the use of language and

narrative explored above in order to enforce a ‘conspiracy of silence’ surrounding the brutality of the colonists, further demonstrating the deliberate nature of this inaccurate foregrounding of Indigenous Peoples as dangerous.

Brian Young, a Navajo filmmaker, claims that ‘cowboys and Indians are the ego and the id of Anglo-Saxon identity’ (B. Young), which reveals much about the typical and antithetic portrayal of Native Americans vs White colonists. The notion of the id and the ego originates in Freud, the former representing aggression and primitive drive, and the latter being rationality and civilised restraint (Freud), so Young’s comparison works to point out the stereotypical portrayal of Indigenous Peoples as dangerous and primitive as compared to the civilised colonists. Furthermore, it is the ego’s job to control the id in one’s own consciousness, lest it be free to rule one’s self with impulse and irrationality, which reflects the colonial narrative that Native peoples were uncivilised and ‘therefore needful of (and deserving) the rule of the empire’ (P. J. Deloria 29) and ‘benevolent control’ (Goff et al 293; see also Pearce 8; M. K. Green 328). Furthermore, Freud describes this “necessary control” of the id by the ego as follows: ‘in its relation to the id, [the ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse’ (Freud 19). Young’s comparison therefore also speaks to notions of Indigenous animality, as Freud’s theorisation directly compares the id (the Native people) to an animal that must be tamed by the ego (the colonists). Indeed, Native populations were often included in people’s consideration of nature as wild and thus dangerous, threatening, and cruel (Shepard 273; Krech 16-17; Gunther), and this is reflected in the categorisation of Native characters as predatory. An example of this is the Comanche characters in *Straight Arrow* (Meagher), who are territorial and ‘ready to fight with little encouragement or reason’ (Sheyahshe 17). Indeed, many 20th century films depicted ‘a villainous Indian image, as in *In the Days of Buffalo Bill* (1921), *The Vanishing American* (1925), and *Redskin* (1928)’ (Price 155). Even when the Indigenous characters are not presented as outright villains, traits which

are usually reserved for villains are still inexplicably attributed to the characters, and thus these depictions reinforce the propagandistic view of Native peoples as ferocious (Mihesuah, *So You* 18; Jane and Vigneras 200) and ‘fiendish’ (Berkhofer 28).

Together, the apathy, anger, and danger tropes feed into one another and result in the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as cold, cruel, and even irrational. Such portrayals, as outlined in the introduction, were a conscious and deliberate decision; Indigenous Peoples were depicted in these overtly negative ways in order to justify settler colonialism. Their “natural” violence, anger, apathy, and murderous tendencies sought to justify the violence and genocide committed against them by the White settlers as merely “self-defence”. It also omits any blame on the settlers through claims that their extreme violence would have led to them all killing each other anyway; that their near-extinction was inevitable. This claim, as outrageous as it is, is far too often taught as fact in American schools and the underlying beliefs presented as truth in the media. Indeed, by presenting Indigenous Peoples in this way, American media continues to justify the settlers’ actions and indeed the country’s very existence.

Black Condor

The *Uncle Sam & The Freedom Fighters* series upholds this category through their presentation of Black Condor as dangerous, apathetic, and the foregrounding of Indigenous violence. From the first contact with Native peoples through to today, the notion that they are



Figure 1: A close-up of Black Condor’s eyes, which are glowing red behind his black mask (FF#6 3).

‘all warriors at heart’ persists (Lent 214), displaying the belief that violence is inherent in Native peoples and that they are ‘genetically prone to fighting’

(Molin 42; see also Berkhofer 93, Cooper, Pewewardy (*Studies; American*) 5, Sheyahshe 157).

Black Condor can be seen to consistently embody this attitude,¹¹ such as in a scene where he survives an assault from an enemy and says, ‘All right, you’ve had your fun. It’s my turn now’ as he goes to attack his opponent (*FF#6* 3). The panel in question, figure 1, contains a close-up of his eyes, which are glowing red behind his black mask, making him appear dangerous and holding connotations of evil. Moreover, the “fun” he refers to can be understood to be attacking one’s enemy, further reflecting the propagandistic view that Indigenous Peoples cherish ‘the pure joy of destruction’ (M. K. Green 327). Black Condor is also directly referred to as the ‘muscle’ of his team (*US#4* 17), which implies that his primary function is violence by focusing on his strength rather than his specific super-powers. This focus is also displayed visually, as Black Condor’s head is often cropped out of the panel whilst his muscular body is in full view, such as in figure 2. This prioritisation of his body implies that his muscles and ability to fight are the most significant and defining features of his character. By defining him by his ‘muscle’ and omitting his face in



Figure 2: Two panels depicting Black Condor’s body with his head not included in the frame (*USI* 143).

favour of his body, John’s writers reduce him to his physicality, through which they commit a type of synecdoche that demeans the character, and thus they perpetuate the view that violence is synonymous with Native cultures. This depiction also facsimiles historical foregrounding of Native violence as a tool to distract from White violence. Pessah examines the discrepancies in the language used in regards to White vs Native violence: ‘Between the seventeenth and

¹¹ Further examples can be found in the following: *FF#1* 4-6; *US#4* 17.

nineteenth centuries, white settlers officially labelled most conflicts with Native Americans as ‘wars’, unlike the ‘massacres’ white settlers experienced’, explaining that this ‘differential description’ was used to indicate ‘each race’s respective ‘civility’ and ‘savagery’ (Pessah 1628). Newspaper reports were full of descriptions of Indigenous Peoples’ ‘Indiscriminate warfare’ (Pessah 1629), whilst the ‘violence directed systematically against noncombatants’ by whites was ignored (Grenier 224).

The Freedom Fighters comics continue this erasure of White violence and foregrounding of Native violence as Black Condor is even more overtly presented as being eager to kill: ‘You seem to have the power of a god. That pleases me... I am the god killer!’ (*USI* 172). Firstly, the term “pleases” indicates his wish to kill his opponent, and secondly, calling himself “the god killer” indicates that he was created for this purpose – he was made to kill, and is glad for the opportunity to put his skills to use. The presence of this attitude in Black Condor feels especially out of place as he is a member of Uncle Sam’s Freedom Fighters, who generally have a strict no-kill policy, so the fact that his right-hand hero demonstrates not just a willingness but an eagerness to kill feels uncomfortable, strange, and singles Black Condor out from the rest of his non-Native teammates. Again in striking contrast to the rest of his team, Condor threatens to ‘paint my face with the blood of my enemies’ (*USI* 94), which is an extremely old and overused trope that emphasises gore and connotes the concept of the “bloodthirsty savage” with its direct reference to blood. The idea of “painting his face” with the blood also invokes images of his warpaint and presents this desire as a specifically Indigenous act of barbarity, thus foregrounding Indigenous murder and continuing the historical tendency to attribute such violence ‘solely to [Indigenous Peoples], despite much contrary evidence’ (Pessah 1629).

Black Condor is also depicted as unsympathetic and apathetic towards his teammates: after Phantom Lady (Stormy) learns of her father’s death, Black Condor finds her standing alone

outside the house where the rest of the Freedom Fighters are gathered. Stormy admits to Black Condor that she is questioning her position on the team – that she originally did it for her father but now that he is dead she is unsure of her suitability (*USI* 154). Black Condor proceeds to accuse her of wallowing ‘in self-pity’, ‘acting like a spoiled child who would rather curl up into a ball than fight for what she thinks is right’, and of ‘feeling sorry for herself’ (*USI* 154). Condor’s response is incredibly harsh and lacks all sympathy. Whilst it does prove surprisingly effective and Stormy even thanks him ‘for the tough love’ (*USI* 157), the callousness of his words still stabilises problematic stereotypes, especially as it is not balanced out with any form of understanding or empathy previously or thereafter within the comic. His apathy is further demonstrated as Human Bomb detonates and appears to sacrifice himself in an effort to save the team from the Cosmigods (*USI* 166-7). After the fight finishes, Condor asks, ‘Is the explosive one dead?’ (*USI* 175), the matter-of-fact tone in addition to the lack of any visible relief or joy when Sam says that ‘He’ll be all right’, presents Condor as uncaring and cold. Black Condor has a similarly cold response to the death of civilians, as he seems satisfied with the success of the mission (‘You did well today’ – ‘our mission is to recover the artefact’), implying that the casualties are less important than fulfilling their mission (*FF*#3 13).

Red Wolf

The *Occupy Avengers* comics also uphold this category through their presentation of Red Wolf as aggressive and apathetic. Red Wolf’s aggression is presented as he shouts things such as ‘I will break you!’ (*OA2* 35) and ‘Bring pain, you get pain!’ (*OA2* 62). These threatening exclamations fit into Hardy’s outline of the “Bloodthirsty Savage” as one who ‘expressed a greater desire for power and revenge’ (Hardy 9), as the latter especially reflects the notion of “pay-back” rather than “justice” through the parallelism of his statement. Red Wolf’s face in these moments perpetuates this stereotype (see figure 3 and 4), as his mouth is wide open whilst



Figure 3: Red Wolf smashing his enemy's head through a window whilst shouting, 'I will break you!' (OA2 35).

shouting a threat in the former, and in the latter his teeth are exaggeratedly bared. Such aggressive depictions of Red Wolf reflect historical portraits of Native peoples as aggressive, such as Theodor DeBry and Jacques LeMoyne's 1564-5 drawing and engraving of Indigenous Peoples scalping an opponent (Hirschfelder and Molin). Indeed, as Johnson states, 'Almost any portrait that we see of an Indian, he is represented with tomahawk and scalping knife in hand, as if they possessed no other but a barbarous nature' (E. Johnson

13).

Occupy Avengers further upholds this depiction in the foregrounding of Red Wolf's aggression in comparison to Barton. In the scene in which figure 5 takes place, Red Wolf and Barton are captured by Hydro Man, and are discussing Barton's (lack of) plan to escape (OA1 33). Figure 5 facsimiles the stereotype of Native anger through the contrasting angles of the frames. In the first panel, Barton is drawn from a low angle, which makes the reader look up at him, his lips are slightly parted, his



Figure 4: Red Wolf smashing his opponent's head into a wall whilst shouting, 'Bring pain, you get pain!' (OA2 62).

eyebrows are raised in the centre in slight concern, and his complexion looks smooth. Overall, he looks angelic and innocent, which is contrasted to Red Wolf, who is drawn from above, causing the reader to look down upon him. In addition, his eyebrows, mouth, and face are tilted down, his eyes are narrow and partially hidden underneath his eyebrows, his complexion is



Figure 5: Barton and Red Wolf side-by-side (*OAI* 33).

interrupted by shadows and shading, and his lips are parted more than Barton's, displaying his teeth. This imagery conveys Red Wolf's apparent anger and the position of the viewer implies a metaphorically "lower" position in comparison to Barton, feeding into the sub-human rhetoric. This discrepancy between the illustration of the White and the Native character in the same situation therefore makes Red Wolf's reaction seem irrational

and perpetuates the view of Native Americans lacking 'emotions other than mindless fury' (Stedman 251).

The writing of Red Wolf, particularly in the *Occupy Avengers* storyline, but also to some extent in *Man out of Time*, has also been criticised for depicting this trope in regards to emotions and humour. Schmidt describes him as a 'stoic sidekick [with] no personality' (Schmidt), and indeed Red Wolf is never shown smiling or laughing across the entire series; he never makes any jokes and is constantly depicted frowning (*RW*; *OAI*; *OA2*). One example is figure 6: in this scene, Barton attempts to speak to Nighthawk, but Nighthawk refuses to listen and proceeds to repeatedly attack Barton, whilst Red Wolf watches with his arms crossed and a completely emotionless facial expression. In this panel, he even acknowledges that Nighthawk 'is inflicting pain upon



Figure 6: Red Wolf standing with his arms folded (*OAI* 48).

my friend' (*OAI* 48), yet his eyebrows remain only slightly frowning, his mouth is neutrally positioned, and his generally serious demeanor betrays no sign of worry or concern. Red Wolf is, as Sheyahshe says, 'painfully expressionless' (21) throughout. In this way, there is very little to specifically analyse, as the issue with the presentation of him in this case is a complete lack of emotional range and personality, which, as discussed above, holds insulting and racist implications regarding his capacity for emotions.

Warpath

The 2019 and, to some extent, the 2008 *X-Force* series also contribute to the continuing existence of this category through their foregrounding, decontextualization, and bias treatment of Indigenous violence. When James intends to seek revenge for the murder of his best friend and his entire community, Wolverine warns him that 'you do this, and you're something else. You're just a killer' (*XF*#1 22). The fact that this warning comes from Wolverine is especially significant, as he was created as a government weapon, killing is practically hard-wired into his brain, and he is well-renowned in comics for his willingness to kill his opponents (something the X-Men constantly have to remind him is not permissible in their team). This warning could therefore be seen as a hypocritical criticism of Warpath, who will no longer be considered an X-Man if he kills even though Wolverine is still accepted as such despite his bloodthirsty inclinations. If this is the case, then it reveals a troubling double-standard between the acceptability of murder when committed by a white man versus an Indigenous man, and this reflects the real-world discrepancy between the treatment of Native and non-Native peoples in the criminal justice system, where Indigenous Peoples are incarcerated at much higher rates and receive longer sentences (Tighe 12), and in the media, where White killers are labelled 'lone wolves' and excused as mentally ill, whilst non-White peoples are classed as

‘deranged terrorists’ (Capellan; S. King). Indeed, a recent study by Allam and Evershed discovered that there were and still are active ‘efforts to cover up the atrocities’ committed by Whites against Indigenous inhabitants, which they refer to as a ‘conspiracy of silence’ (Allam and Evershed). Their study also reveals that ‘Aboriginal attacks on settlers often took place after previous unreported killings’ (Allam and Evershed), demonstrating how Native violence against White colonists was nearly always reported, but the fact that these attacks were retaliations against massacres committed by the colonists was left unreported. Therefore, the foregrounding of Warpath feeds into a long and problematic history of foregrounding and decontextualizing Indigenous violence.

This trope is further presented by Brisson and his team’s depiction of Warpath when he is chosen to aid Domino’s interrogation of a man by inflicting physical pain upon him (*XFI* 6). In this scene, Domino is asking questions in the background whilst James stands silently in front of the man and in the foreground of the panel. This, alongside his victim’s position on the



Figure 7: Warpath stands over a man whilst the rest of the team sit and stand in the background, surrounded by dead bodies (*XFI* 6).

floor, and the broken panel that has his head protruding out of and beyond the frame (figure 7), exaggerates his already large size so that he appears too large

to even fit into the panel. James has no part in the verbal interrogation here, suggesting that his abilities are limited to those of a violent nature. In addition, the illustration of James makes him

look somewhat apish: his head is very small and out of proportion to the enormity of his shoulders and arms. This visual depiction of him reflects ‘the use of animality as a tool of human repression’ (Roberts 182), as non-white and Indigenous Peoples were historically likened to apes and other non-human animals, often placed between White humans and non-human animals on the evolutionary spectrum (Roberts 57; Goff et al 292-4; Dapper; Jahoda, Lott; Douglas 5, 12). This “science of race” was used to justify their elimination for centuries, and this extremely racist likening is still a problem today (S. Young), so this depiction of James continues to perpetuate dangerous and racist stereotypes. The disproportionate illustration is also problematic as it visually foregrounds the comic’s focus on his muscles and ignorance of his intelligence, which is an insulting synecdoche of his person. Whilst many superheroes, especially in the 90s, were often drawn out of proportion, this depiction of James is an extreme example, especially considering that all of the White characters are drawn with reasonably proportioned heads and shoulders. James is the only Indigenous character and simultaneously the only character drawn with such an extreme physique, suggesting that it is his Indigeneity that inspired this depiction, and therefore that this actively encourages such racist views of Native animality. The enormity of James’ body and the literal foregrounding of him in this scene fascimiles the problematic foregrounding of Indigenous violence and encourages the association of Indigenous cultures with violence, destruction, and hostility (M. K. Green 324; Giago; MPR Staff).

Bishop

The *Messiah Complex* comics also uphold the category through their foregrounding and decontextualization of Indigenous violence, murder, and anger. The climax of Bishop’s story arc occurs in this volume, and leads to the character attempting to kill Hope as a baby in order to prevent the terrible future he experienced from happening. However, even as he struggles

with the reality of murdering a baby, he insists to himself that ‘it has to die!’ (*XM:MC* 226-227). This insistence firstly shows that he still believes in the necessity of killing even when the reality of it is more difficult to fulfil, and secondly presents Bishop as attempting to dehumanise Hope through the use of “it” rather than “she” or “they”. Bishop’s attempt to do so is problematic because dehumanisation was a tactic used by colonists against Indigenous Peoples in order to justify the enslavement and annihilation of their peoples and cultures (Roberts 51, 182; Sivasundaram 157; Peterson, *Bestial* 7; Gruen and Weil 480; P. J. Deloria 4; J. Martin 63; Seshadri 7; P. Wolfe 43; M. K. Green 327; Feest 46; Matijasic 31-50), so having Bishop use this attitude against a white baby is an uncomfortable inversion of the racism and genocide against Native peoples. Furthermore, this culmination of Bishop’s story arc is extremely disappointing, and presents to the reader a Bishop who bears no resemblance to the character previously depicted in *The Last X-Man*, who for the most part is sensitive, caring, endearing, and almost always chooses diplomacy over violence. To make matters worse, Bishop’s quest to kill Hope leads to him killing Forge (*XM:MC* 221), shooting Cable (*XM:MC* 221), and he even accidentally kills Professor X (*XM:MC* 317). In this story arc, the writers successfully turn Bishop into an antagonist, so much so that even Stryfe (one of the X-Men’s biggest, deadliest, and most ruthless villains) attempts to stop Bishop from killing Hope, calling him a ‘cold-hearted killer’ (*XF#15* 14-15), which, coming from Stryfe, emphasises the extent of how evil and cruel Bishop is presented in this story. The gore present in the scene also emphasises this depiction of him, as he stands covered in blood, surrounded by dead bodies, and pointing a gun down at a baby (figure 8). The ruthlessness of this depiction of the character is unfitting, unnecessary, and simply insulting, especially considering the ease with which so many non-Native characters overcome their similar dilemmas without becoming murderous villains.

Indeed, this issue provides a troubling interaction with the trolley problem, summarised as follows: a runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five people, who will be killed if the trolley hits them. On the alternate route, there is one person, and you are in control of a lever that could divert the trolley onto this alternate route. Should you leave the trolley to follow its present route and allow it to kill the five people, or divert the trolley and thus kill the one person in order to save five? This dilemma has been discussed by numerous writers, including Philippa Foot, Judith Thomson, Peter Unger, and Frances Kamm, and the theme occurs fairly frequently in comic books (X-Men: Asgardian Wars; Captain



Figure 8: Bishop stands over baby Hope, pointing a gun at her whilst surrounded with blood and the body of Forge (*XM:MC 221*).

America: The Winter Soldier; Amazing Spider-Man #655; Uncanny X-Force; New Avengers #21; Civil War II; even Christopher Nolan's Batman and the 2018 Deadpool face the issue in some form). Many superheroes struggle with the ethical dilemma, but most figure out a way to avoid killing anyone (even Deadpool, who is notorious for killing opponents). Bishop, however, is not so fortunate, and his writers foreground Indigenous murder through his interaction with the trolley problem. Bishop's reasoning for wanting to kill Hope stems from the millions of humans she goes on to kill (and the millions of mutants that are enslaved in

concentration camps as a result), showing Bishop as willing to kill one person to save countless others. His position is firstly problematic due to the fact that so many White heroes manage to overcome the issue and find a way to save everyone without having to commit murder, so Bishop's readiness to kill Hope singles him out and foregrounds his willingness to kill. His position is even more problematic considering that Hope has not yet committed these murders and is merely a baby.

Bishop's willingness to kill one person in order to save many is not necessarily wrong: in fact, most people answer that they would pull the lever and kill the one in order to save the five (Crockett). Indeed, considering the barbarity of the timeline that Bishop comes from, his actions can be understood and sympathised with. Bishop decides that killing one person (Hope) is the right thing to do in order to prevent not just the deaths of those millions of humans, but the incredible suffering this caused to mutants all over the world, including the death of his own parents. Laid out as such, Bishop's decision certainly seems more like a moral obligation. However, the writers fail to lay out his side of the story in this "omnibus"; on the contrary, his backstory is all but ignored, leaving readers of the story arc who are unfamiliar with the rather niche mini-series, *The Times and Life of Lucas Bishop*, with an incredibly bad impression of the character. Indeed, by failing to explain Bishop's actions, his writers present him as an irrational villain. Furthermore, the other characters in the story attempt to convince Bishop that they can change the future; they present him with an alternative to killing the baby, where both Hope and the millions of humans can survive. In contrast to most White characters who accept this way around the problem and succeed in saving everyone (see above), Bishop refuses and continues his effort to kill baby Hope. Overall, Bishop yielding to his desire to prevent even the possibility of his timeline existing is incredibly disappointing, and the decontextualisation of his actions incredibly problematic, as this facsimiles colonial narratives that persistently and deliberately left out the Indigenous Peoples' sides of the story and presented their retaliatory

attacks as mindless and bloodthirsty massacres (Pessah 1628-9; Grenier 224; Allam and Evershed). Therefore, this particular depiction further constructs the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as cruel, barbarous villains (Rowlandson; Pearce xii; Berkhofer 91, 98, 167; Mihesuah, *So You* 19).

Dani Moonstar

New Mutants Volume 1 contributes to the continuing existence of the Bloodthirsty Savage category through their presentation of Dani as instinctively violent and as enjoying violence. Indeed, Dani is often shown punching her teammate, Sam, when he annoys or upsets her (*NMI* 79 & 124). In the first scene, Sam left Dani locked in a jail cell whilst the team went to fight Legion, thinking she would be safer there, but this separated her from her team and she ended up trapped in the cell and at the mercy of Legion. After the fight, Dani storms over to Sam and punches him (figure 9), the force and violence of which is indicated through the motion lines, the explosion bubble where her fist makes contact with Sam's face, and the blood spraying



Figure 9: Dani punches Sam; blood spays from his mouth (*NMI* 79).

from Sam's mouth. Dani's violent reaction is somewhat understandable, as Sam's decision left her vulnerable and nearly proved fatal for her. However, the problem with this reaction comes from the combination of her

violence and her lack of communication – instead of explaining what happened, ensuring Sam knows what he did wrong, or even shouting at him, Dani just punches him and walks away without a word, suggesting that her first instinct is violence. In the second example, Cyclops

tells Dani that Sam (who has been placed in charge of the team after Dani lost her powers on M-Day) has removed her from the New Mutants team entirely, leading Dani to challenge Sam to a spar, and then punch him when he refuses (figure 10; *NMI* 124), the violence of which is again emphasised by the explosion bubble and onomatopoeic “CRACK”. Unlike the



Figure 10: Dani punches Sam after he refuses to spar with her (*NMI* 124).

earlier example, in this instance Dani does go on to explain how his decision makes her feel unvalued and neglected (*NMI* 125) despite her having proved herself an invaluable member of the team countless times, even without her powers,¹² but her initial reaction being one of violence is still potentially problematic. In no way is it Dani’s responsibility to educate Sam regarding his misinformed decisions, nor does she owe him an explanation for her actions, but the long history of Indigenous Peoples being represented as reacting with violence and only with violence means that this depiction is in danger of facsimileing this trope, especially considering that she is the only character to (wittingly) attack one of her teammates (twice). Furthermore, her physical violence in these scenes somewhat overshadows Sam’s epistemic violence against her, shifting the focus onto Dani’s literal attack on him rather than on Sam’s psychological attack on her abilities and worthiness of being a New Mutant. This focus facsimiles the way in which Indigenous communities were historically presented as mindlessly attacking ‘innocent whites’ (Mihsuah, *So You* 19). Indeed, their raids were never considered

¹² Indeed, Dani is the only character who proves herself incredibly valuable as a person and not just a mutant – with or without her powers, and with or without her Valkyrie status, Dani is consistently the most significant and capable member of the New Mutants, so Sam’s rejection of her as a New Mutant in this comic is even more insulting and makes her reaction more understandable.

as retaliation or as an attempt to *reclaim* their land; instead, papers reported how they attacked ‘without provocation’ (LA Times Aug 1885, 2). Thus, the erasure of Sam’s epistemic violence against Dani in favour of foregrounding Dani’s literal violence in retaliation risks facsimileing this “conspiracy of silence” that seeks to ignore White violence against Indigenous Peoples (Allam and Evershed) and present their Indigenous character as ‘ready to fight with little encouragement or reason’ (Sheyahshe 17).

However, there are also elements of these scenes which lessen their potential upholding of the category. In these examples, Dani’s teammates, including Sam, never reprimand her for punching Sam; they do not react with shock, horror, or disapproval, and she faces no consequences, implying their acceptance of her actions as justified. Furthermore, her violence towards Sam seems to be the only thing that eventually convinces him to listen to her at the end of the volume, helping to depict her violence as necessary in this instance.

Volume 1 also risks upholding the irrational anger trope through their presentation of Dani’s anger. For example, she shouts at her teammate, Sam, ‘Don’t you do this!’, when he refuses to



Figure 11: Dani grips the bars of the jail cell, shouting ‘DON’T YOU DO THIS!’ in red font (NMI 69).

let her out of a jail cell in order to join the fight, believing her to be safer in the cell (NMI 69). Dani’s anger here is, again, justified by the situation, but the details of the illustration are

problematic (see figure 11). Her speech is drawn in bold red capitals that stretch beyond the speech bubble, reflecting her inability to contain her own anger. In addition, her extremely sharp and pointed eyebrows, wide eyes with small pupils and irises, wide-open mouth, and bared teeth create an over-the-top facial expression, which, in addition to her fists gripping the

bars of the cell, exaggerates her emotion. Whilst this panel could risk depicting her anger as excessive, this is more likely a result of the illustration style. Importantly, her anger is not decontextualised in this scene, nor is it presented as irrational. Anger is a very human and natural reaction to situations of injustice, so a complete omission of anger here would be unrealistic and would risk condemning the emotion itself, implying that Indigenous Peoples should avoid it. In contrast, the inclusion of Dani's anger demonstrates that it is not Indigenous anger itself that is the problem; it validates the emotion as one that Indigenous characters are allowed to feel and shows that the problem with Indigenous anger is the way that it is decontextualised, foregrounded, and exaggerated in Western media. Contrary to first impressions, then, this scene actually seems to reject the stereotyping of Indigenous anger whilst simultaneously validating it as a very real and rational emotion.

New Mutants Volume 2 also upholds this category to some extent through the presentation of Dani enjoying violence. In one scene, Dani enters a huge battle as a Valkyrie, catches a missile, throws it back at her opponent, which causes a huge explosion, and then smiles and says to her horse, Brightwind, 'I know this is bad but... I've missed this so much' (figure 12; NM2 141). The simultaneity of her words and actions



Figure 12: Dani and Brightwind engaged in an air battle (NM2 141).

indicates that she is referring to fighting and violence as “this”, and the intensifier “so much”, alongside her smile, emphasises the extent of her liking for violence, and even makes her appear somewhat sadistic. In addition, the angles and harsh corners of the panels as well as the use of multiple overlapping and broken panels accentuate the violence of the scene, and the odd angling of the panel holding the close-up image of Dani evokes imbalance and the idiom of someone’s head not being straight, making her appear unhinged and dangerous.

However, this scene also functions to present Dani as powerful, capable, and in control (see Chapter Two for more on this element). Moreover, this declaration could be a reference to her removal from the team and from combat situations especially in Volume 1. As just discussed, Sam refuses to let Dani fight throughout the first volume, so this depiction of Dani fighting solo (and impressively) in the second volume could function to prove Sam’s irrationality and idiocy, and Dani’s statement could be a direct criticism of Sam’s unjust treatment of her.

Volume 4 presents an equally complex scene that depicts Dani as actively seeking out violence. When Sugar Man tries to escape into his own world, declaring his intention to never return to Earth, Dani follows him through the portal and refuses to let him stay there peacefully (*NM4 75*). Instead, Dani defeats him in combat, uses an arrow to stab him through the tongue (figure 13; *NM4 75*), and drags him back through the portal by his tongue (figure 14; *NM4 77*). Figure 13 depicts the violence of her attack, as we see blood splattering from Sugar Man’s



Figure 13: Dani stabs Sugarman’s tongue with an arrow (*NM4 75*).

tongue, Dani’s face looking angry and determined with gritted teeth, and the “chukkkkt” depicting the force with

which Dani stabs him. In addition, her refusal to let him go (even if it meant her world would be safe from him) ‘after all [he’s] done’ (*NM4* 75) implies her desire for revenge, or at least punishment for his crimes, and her willingness to follow him through a magic portal into an entirely different and strange world demonstrates her determination and eagerness to fight and defeat him, thus reinforcing the concept of Indigenous violence.



Figure 14: Dani drags Sugarman through the portal by his tongue (*NM4* 77).

However, once again elements of this scene work to reject the same category it risks encouraging. Similarly to the first example, the reactions of those around Dani mitigate to some extent the potential problems: her teammates and even her enemies are not disgusted, shocked, or against her decision to pursue Sugar Man; on the contrary, they are amazed and impressed with her dedication and ability (*NM4* 70). Even Captain America himself tells Dani that she did a ‘good job’ (*NM4* 80), his unwavering commitment to what is “just” clarifying that Dani’s actions were not simply acceptable, but actually admirable. Furthermore, Dani happily relinquishes Sugar Man to Captain America and focuses instead on ensuring Nate is allowed back to Utopia with them to recover, suggesting that her determination to defeat him was not about personal revenge, but about justice in general.

Volume 4 does also risk upholding the stoic trope of the category through their depiction of Dani’s (lack of) emotional reaction to trauma in comparison to her non-Native teammates, and her relative apathy for their reactions. After a series of traumatic events, including being trapped in Limbo, tortured, and one of their teammates getting killed, the New Mutants team

are on the brink of falling apart and suffering from severe PTSD (*NM3* & *NM4*). Dani (I would argue) received the worst trauma of all throughout this time, yet remains relatively unaffected and finds herself attempting to lead a now-reluctant team. Firstly, this lack of any apparent emotional response facsimiles the perception of Indigenous Peoples as being unable to experience emotions at all, or at least without ‘the same sensitivity that a non-Native person does’ (Francis), and thus risks implying that Dani’s cognitive capacities are inferior to that of her teammates, upholding the trope of Native stoicism and apathy. Furthermore, in order to combat her team’s trauma, Dani seeks the help of an old acquaintance, Gus Grim, a psychotherapist from her reservation. For the most part, the presentation of Gus makes him appear extremely apathetic and rude: Gus runs short sessions with each member of the team and is ‘pretty hard’ on them (*NM4* 100), accusing Cannonball (Sam) of being ‘self-indulgent’ and a coward (*NM4* 90-1) and Shan of being self-absorbed and ‘selfish’ (*NM4* 93); he reduces their PTSD to primary emotions of fear and selfishness, rather than considering their grief and probable anxiety at the prospect of getting back into the field, potentially demonstrating his own lack of awareness of complex emotions and thus perhaps his own inability to feel such emotions. On the other hand, he does suggest to Dani that ‘sometimes people need time’, but Dani cuts him off, citing the necessity for them as X-Men to get over their own trauma in order to be able to save others (*NM4* 100-1). Dani’s reasoning, and apparent instruction to Gus to deal with things ‘quick and clean’ (*NM4* 101), also seems unsympathetic and slightly cold towards her teammates, and thus in danger of perpetuating settler myths regarding Indigenous Peoples’ apathy. Indeed, the presentation of the two Indigenous characters as stoic and apathetic separates them from their non-Native teammates and suggests their inferior cognitive capacities.

However, once again this potential upholding of the category is mitigated to some extent. Firstly, Dani and Gus’ harsh approach is shown to be extremely effective and the team get back

to their usual selves very quickly following the sessions. Secondly, neither Gus nor Dani are presented in any other way that might facsimile notions of intellectual inferiority. On the contrary, Gus' curt but concise analyses of the team demonstrate a very deep knowledge and understanding of the human psyche and his ability to assess and diagnose each character in such a short period of time is extremely impressive. Dani, too, is consistently depicted as clever, intelligent, and wise throughout the series (more on this in Chapter Two), so any potential implication regarding their mental capacities is strongly denied by the rest of the comics. Thirdly, Dani's lack of reaction to trauma could in fact be a representation of her practicality, selflessness, and her sense of responsibility in regards to saving others, rather than any emotional coldness. Indeed, this portrayal is likely intended to emphasise her toughness and commitment to leading the team and saving others. Fourthly, her reaction could even be a commentary on racial trauma, especially considering that this is the only time throughout the series that Dani is presented as apathetic; indeed, she is mostly presented as an emotionally sensitive, sympathetic, and caring friend. Considering this, her lack of reaction to her own trauma could reveal her ability to handle trauma far better than her teammates, and this could be a commentary on the ongoing and generational/historical trauma of many Indigenous communities. Therefore, Dani's (lack of) reaction could be attributed to her being accustomed to trauma and loss, which could function as a commentary on the ongoing painful effects of colonisation, and the incredible (although regrettably necessary) resilience of Indigenous communities all over the world. As Brown-Rice explains, historical trauma refers to the 'cross-generational transmission of trauma from historical losses', including 'loss of people, loss of land, and loss of family and culture' (Brown-Rice 118; see also Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Garrett & Pichette, 2000; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Redefining, Challenging, and Rejecting the Category

Dani Moonstar

Despite the above problems with the depiction of Dani, her writers do actively redefine, challenge, and reject this stereotype and, in doing so, the propaganda from which it originates. By rejecting the category, the writers also reject settler colonial narratives on Indigenous violence, murder, and anger. Firstly, the writers and illustrators reject the foregrounding and decontextualization of Indigenous violence by presenting Dani as diplomatic and tactical. When the New Mutants are sent to stop and imprison the troublesome and villainous mutants, instead of fighting them, Dani makes a deal with them: she tells Cyclops that ‘They’ve agreed to return to the savage land, peacefully, if you can clear it’, to which Cyclops tells her, ‘I’m on it, Dani. Good work’ (NM2 126). Not only does Dani avoid a violent fight in this instance, she manages to arrange for the mutants to leave their world completely, thus preventing any future troubles they may have caused. The series further deconstructs the category when Dani and her team are trapped in a future timeline, attempt to contact Dr Strange, and get attacked by some monstrous illusions. Dani’s team immediately begin to fight the creatures, but Dani points out that, ‘we’re better off stopping the guy behind the spells than trying to fight the spells themselves’ (NM7 80). Whilst everyone else’s first reaction was to attack, Dani assessed the situation, realised that the creatures were the result of magic, and concluded that the most efficient way to beat the creatures was to stop the magic that was casting them. This scene directly contrasts the depiction of Indigenous Peoples as ‘mindlessly’ violent (Stedman 251; Mihsuah, *So You* 8, 19), as Dani is shown to be tactical and finds a way to minimize the violence (stopping the spell and dissipating the creatures instead of fighting them).

Dani is further presented as tactical rather than head-strong, when the New Mutants are in the middle of a huge battle in Hel. Rather than attempting to fight their way through the masses



Figure 15: Multiple panels depicting Dani as she observes the scene of the battle (*FI:NM* 129).

of monsters, Dani thinks tactically and realises that they have a far better chance of surviving by retreating to Hellheim and defending the fortress. She orders her team to ‘Force them back! Hela’s hall is a fortress! Let’s use it! Let’s hold it! I’ll get us some transport! We can fall back to Hellheim and defend from there! [...] Mount up! Follow me! We’ll secure Hellheim and find Hela!’ (*FI:NM* 128-9). The page where these orders take place is broken into numerous panels, none of which are square, rectangular, or have straight panel lines (figure 15). Indeed, the panel lines or gutters are black and jagged. These features reflect and emphasise the chaos of the battle,

making Dani’s ability to assess the situation and devise a plan rather impressive. In addition, in the top panel Dani is looking to the right, in the middle she is looking to the left, and at the bottom she is looking straight ahead and slightly to the right. This positioning shows her observing the entire scene and taking in all of the information available to inform her approach to the battle. Furthermore, she is not illustrated looking angry, ferocious, or threatening; her eyebrows are not scrunched, she is not shouting, and her teeth are not bared in any panel. On the contrary, she looks calm, calculating, and in control of the situation, thus rejecting the trope of the violent, impulsive Native character.

Volume 6 also presents Dani's tactical knowledge in comparison to that of her teammates. When the team are compromised by a mutation-causing virus, Warlock takes charge of leading the team to safety. However, Dani quickly points out that they should not be 'making so much noise and light' as they were under Warlock's instructions, and on that very same page Dani is proven right as Warlock realises that he 'has made a rookie mistake' (*NM6* 28). This passage highlights Dani's tactical knowledge by presenting it as a skill that her teammates do not possess – her cleverness and awareness on missions could easily be taken for granted by her teammates and the reader themselves as it is shown to come so naturally to her, so by presenting this contrast the writers ensure that Dani's skills are recognised as extraordinary.

Secondly, the writers and illustrators reject the depiction of Indigenous Peoples as apathetic by consistently portraying her as a kind, caring, and empathetic character to not only her teammates, but also to strangers and even opponents (some examples include *BTS* 134, 178, 194, 306, 321; *NM4* 81; *NM5* 14-15, 29-30, 105; *NM6* 8-10). Dani's kindness is often shown through small acts, such as her relationship with Mrs Livitz, the elderly Latverian lady who lives in the flat below them. When Mrs Livitz approaches their moving van asking, 'You are people move in?', Nate replies 'No, we just love boxes' and walks away (*NM5* 29). However, Dani steps in, tells her to 'ignore him', and introduces herself, offering her hand to Mrs Livitz. Dani's small act of kindness in speaking to and "reaching out" to their lonely and elderly new neighbour demonstrates that her compassionate nature is intrinsic to her existence and everyday life, rather than manifesting only in grand gestures. Her compassionate nature is also well demonstrated through her relationship with Elixir: Dani and her students find Josh as a member of a mutant-hating gang, and it is during their fight that his powers manifest. Dani offers him a place at the school, which he rejects and calls them 'freaks' before running off (*BTS* 153). As a result of his powers manifesting, he is kicked out of the gang, beaten up by his "friends", and disowned by his parents. Josh therefore follows Dani's advice and turns up at Xavier's school,

but is rejected as a bigot by Dani's students and struggles to make any friends. Dani sympathises with Josh and speaks to David, one of her students and Josh's roommate, encouraging him to befriend Josh: 'People change. And because you and your friends were there [when they encountered and fought Josh as a mutant-hater], you have to be the ones to reach out to him... or else what he did will always hang over him' (*BTS* 178). Dani refuses to discard Josh as a lost cause, or as a terrible person, and encourages her students to give him a chance, demonstrating her open and kind nature. In addition, she recognises that it has to be David and his friends that reach out to Josh to prevent their initial perception of him from overshadowing his time at Xavier's and preventing him from moving on himself. As one writer states, Dani's 'kindness and patience led to her being one of the best teachers at the Xavier Institute' (Century). Furthermore, when Josh's parents arrive at the school to officially disown him and sign custody over to the school, Dani steps up and offers to become his legal guardian (*BTS* 194; 306), explaining, 'I know how hard it is to come here without any family. I wasn't going to let that happen to you' (NM: *BTS* 306). Dani's willingness to take responsibility for Josh, especially considering his background, demonstrates the extent of her compassion. All of Dani's kindness and empathy pay off for Josh, who turns into a good student, caring friend, and an invaluable member of the new "New Mutants" team.

Dani's compassionate nature is further presented through her interactions with her teammates, whom she encourages to be open with their feelings, and always has their best interests at heart. One example of this is her reaction to Cyclops' offer for them to stay on Utopia as the New Mutants or to go with Logan to Westchester and rebuild the school. Dani has come up with a third option – a sort of compromise – that she hopes they will choose, but does not let her own interests affect her team and tells them that "if any of you want or need to go to Westchester with Logan, that's fine. If you want to talk it through with me, please do"

(NM5 14-15). Her speech demonstrates that she considers her team as individuals and as people, not just as X-Men or as fighters, and shows that she is a willing listener and advisor to her friends. As she speaks to them about the matter, she is illustrated with her arms out either side of her, her hands up, and fingers relaxed and loose (figure 16), presenting her as open and inviting. Indeed, her team are incredibly open and comfortable sharing their feelings with her, such as when Doug's first reaction to his bad dream is to say to Dani, 'I need to talk to you about it' (NM6 8), implying her aptitude for being understanding and kind. Moreover, in the panel containing their conversation (figure



Figure 16: Dani talking to her team (NM5 15).

17), Dani is sat sideways on the sofa with her legs pointing towards Doug and one arm slightly



Figure 17: Dani sitting on a sofa talking to Doug (NM6 10).

stretched out towards him. Her body language here indicates that her focus is on Doug and acts as an invitation for him to be open with her. Furthermore, when Doug's dream leads him to decide that he needs to return to the place where he died (before being resurrected), Dani does not push him to explain or try to dissuade him. She does ask, 'is that wise?' (NM6 9-10) to ensure that it is the right decision and will not cause any further trauma, but then immediately gathers the team together and they all go with Doug to revisit the place of his death (NM6 10). Here, Dani is shown to be caring and empathetic, simply accepting Doug's

need to go back despite not understanding his motives. Furthermore, she ensures that everyone accompanies him all the way to Paradise Island and treats the trip with equal importance to a mission, showing how valuable Doug's feelings and mental health are to her, and thus how much she genuinely cares for her teammates and friends.

Dani Moonstar is, by any standards, a remarkably diplomatic and kind character, and her writers and illustrators across the New Mutants series work successfully to present her as a well-rounded, relatable, and lovable member (and leader) of the team.

Black Condor

In later issues of the *Freedom Fighters* series, the writers and illustrators begin to reject the depiction of John as solely and inherently violent by presenting his diplomacy and compassion instead. On one occasion, he says to an opponent, 'We don't have to fight. We work for the government. If you are victims we can see to it that you're pardoned' (*FF*#5 4). This attempt to reason with his opponents presents him as compassionate, as he understands that they may only be fighting because they feel they have no other choice. Moreover, he offers them a lifeline – a chance to stop fighting and to be safe, which is a significant contrast to the earlier depictions of him as unsympathetic. Condor is again presented with this sympathetic attitude, as he explains to his teammates that recessions 'increase street-level crime. When good people start losing their jobs and their homes... they don't have many choices' (*FF*#9 12). Condor's focus on street crime firstly demonstrates that he cares about ordinary people and smaller communities, rather than being caught up with only "world-saving" events. His explanation of the link between financial struggle and crime indicates his understanding of these "criminals" behaviour, and thus implies his attempt to reach out and help these people, rather than to just throw them in jail. John's stance here is again a divergence from the earlier presentations of him and actually presents him as the most caring member of the Freedom Fighters.

Bishop

Contrary to other depictions of the character, *The Last X-Man* wholly rejects stereotypes surrounding violence and aggression. Bishop is instead consistently depicted as diplomatic, kind, and tactical.¹³ Just one example of Bishop's diplomacy is in Issue #9, when Bishop and his companions are approached by a Giant, who accuses them of trespassing on his land and Bishop apologises, 'Excuse us, um... Tull. We had no idea these were your tracks. / Now you know. / Had we known, we would have certainly asked your permission to cross them. My name is Bishop' (*LXM#9* 3). Bishop takes the time to understand Tull's point of view and assures him that they mean no offense. In the panel of this scene (figure 18), Bishop is standing with his arms open and a hand raised, signifying openness and ensuring that Tull does not view him as a threat via passive body language (Kuhnke 143). In addition, Bishop, Tull, and Nom are the only characters drawn properly: the rest of his team



Figure 18: Bishop standing between the unfriendly Giant and his friends (*LXM#9* 3).

stand behind and are drawn only as orange silhouettes, indicating Bishop's prominence in diplomatic matters.

¹³ *LXM#1* 10, 30-31, 37; *LXM#2* 12, 14, 26, 36; *LXM#3* 1-3, 18-19; *LXM #4* 6, 37; *LXM#5* 9-11, 21-22; *LXM#6* 4-6, 26, 36, 38; *LXM#7* 26; *LXM#8* 8-10; *LXM#9* 3, 10; *LXM#10* 21, 22, 24, 26; *LXM#11* 3, 29; *LXM#12* 6; *LXM#13* 6, 8, 12, 14-15, 25; *LXM#15* 4-8, 21, 24-25, 30-31; *LXM#16* 15, 28

Perhaps the most prominent way in which his writers challenge these pejorative tropes is through Bishop's relationship with Michael. From the moment they meet, Bishop instinctively takes care of him, saving him from a falling building and holding him tight to his chest to protect him from the falling debris, all the while talking to him, asking his name, and reassuring him (*LXM#1* 30-31). Furthermore, throughout the series, Bishop's main motivation is to keep Michael safe; his first reaction in any potential conflict is to push Michael behind him so as to shield him with his own body (*LXM#4* 6), to ensure that he is somewhere safe and away from any conflict (*LXM#3* 1-3; *LXM#4* 37), and to make sure that Michael is okay, even when Bishop is on the brink of death himself (*LXM#13* 6, 8, 25). Such interactions display a tender and



Figure 19: Bishop kneels in front of Michael with his hands on the boy's shoulders (*LXM#1* 29).

fatherly relationship between the characters, which certainly contrasts to depictions of Indigenous Peoples as apathetic. Bishop is also illustrated in ways that emphasise his compassionate nature: he is often shown hugging Michael (figure 19-21; *LXM#1* 31; *LXM#10* 21, 22, 24, 26; *MXM#13* 25), kneeling down next to him, and holding his face (figures 19, 22; *LXM#6* 38;

LXM#4 37; *LXM#11* 29). These illustrations connote kindness, reflect the close, caring relationship between the two, and position Bishop as a fatherly figure to Michael. Furthermore, Bishop's facial expressions during their interactions present his soft nature, as his eyebrows are usually raised sympathetically and his mouth is often opened but small (figures 19-22), making him appear reassuring and kind. In addition, Michael's face when hugging Bishop is full of joy – his mouth is open and smiling and his whole face is lifted (figure 21), indicating

that he feels safe and happy in Bishop's presence. At the end of this story arc in the *Last X-Man* series, Bishop is involuntarily teleported out of the timeline with Michael and back into the past timeline that featured the X-Men. Bishop's last word before being ripped away is 'Michael...', and Michael himself narrates, 'I screamed- but it was lost in all the noise like so much else that day. "Don't leave us, Bishop!" I shouted, then sobbed. Over and over... and over again. Please... don't leave... me.' (*LXM*#14 31). Michael's reaction makes for a heart-breaking scene, and demonstrates the strength of their love for one



Figure 20: Bishop embraces Michael (*LXM*#10 21).



Figure 21: A close-up of Michael's face lit up with a smile whilst hugging Bishop (*LXM*#13 25).

another. The parallelism in Michael's statement (when he replaces "us" with "me") especially demonstrates this, as it singles out his relationship with Bishop to the rest of the team's relationship; Scorch, Jinx, and all the other mutants were a team before Bishop arrived, and

still will be now that he has gone, but Michael was there because of Bishop and thus relied on him almost solely as his protector and guardian. This presentation of Bishop as a fatherly figure is especially significant, as Indigenous men in particular are too often presented as 'unfit', 'uncaring' and 'mangy' fathers (Thurow). Indeed, in 2016 a cartoon was published depicting a drunk Indigenous man who did not know his own son's name (Davey).

This cartoon attracted a lot of criticism, as one can well imagine, and a hashtag, #IndigenousDads, was started on twitter as a means to deconstruct this image of Native men. Therefore, this depiction

of Bishop as a thoughtful, caring, and sensitive father figure to Michael works hard to deconstruct a stereotype that is still extraordinarily prevalent today. Indeed, this thoughtful challenging of the propaganda is even more impressive considering the series' early publication dates in relation to the other comics in this study and to the aforementioned advert; the *Last X-Man* series began in 1999 and ended in 2001, and yet, as we have seen, does a far more consistent and successful job at deconstructing notions of Indigenous apathy and anger than many far more recent comics.

Red Wolf

The writers and illustrators of *Man out of Time*, and occasionally *Marvel 1872*, also works to challenge the category through their depiction of Red Wolf as diplomatic and through direct criticism of the stereotype. The *Marvel 1872* comic criticises the category when Red Wolf intends to put Fisk on trial, and Fisk says, 'A man like me is not put on trial', to which Red Wolf replies, 'A rich white man?' (*M1872* 83). Red Wolf's remark directly criticises the category in regards to the negative view of Indigenous Peoples as villains, by referring to and thus challenging the racism of the criminal justice system, where Native Americans suffer racial profiling, are incarcerated at 38% higher than the national rate, and receive longer sentences than any other ethnic group (Tighe 12).

The writers of *Marvel 1872* also actively break the 'conspiracy of silence' and directly criticise colonial narratives that misrepresented Indigenous Peoples. In one scene, Sheriff Rogers questions Ulrich, their local reporter, on his integrity. After Fisk's henchmen attack



Figure 22: Bishop kneeling in front of Michael with his hand under his chin (*LXM*#3 18).

Tony, Steve, and Red Wolf, Steve asks, ‘How are you going to tell the story of tonight, Ulrich? Let me guess: when the bulletin prints, I’ll read how these men died because of another Indian raid? That’s always a good one’ (*MI872* 23). Steve’s statements directly criticise the misrepresentative propaganda surrounding Native Americans during the colonial period, where newspaper reports regularly emphasised their “barbarity”, blamed them for any violence perpetuated by the white settlers, and encouraged the settlers to fear the Indigenous locals in order to distract from and even justify the genocide committed against them (see Berkhofer 28; Sparks 6; Rambler 9; *LA Times* Aug 1885, 2; Pessah 1628-9; Grenier 224). The creators further use the comic to draw attention to such propaganda, as Steve states that his partner, Bucky’s, ‘death was a lie’: he was murdered by Fisk’s men but the townspeople were told that ‘he was scalped’, which ‘was supposed to stop any of us from askin’ questions’ (*MI872* 33), further revealing the fearmongering and blame embedded in colonial newspaper reports. *Marvel 1872* therefore takes a bold stance in not just challenging the category, but actively criticises America’s colonial past and their deliberate misrepresentation of Native Americans.

Man out of Time challenges and rejects the stereotype even further, likely thanks to the presence of Jeffrey Veregge as an Indigenous consultant for the comic, demonstrating the huge progress that can be made through the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the writing of Indigenous characters.

The first time we encounter Red Wolf in *Man out of Time*, he is attempting to calm an argument between two white men, who are threatening each other with violence (figure 23; *RW* 4). The stance of the man to the right (Brock) is predatorial, as his knees are bent and his left arm is stretched behind him for balance, indicating his readiness to attack. The man to the left (Sandy) is holding his left arm out with his palm facing down and fingers closed tightly, which is associated with the assertion of dominance and tyranny (Kuhnke 143) and makes him



Figure 23: Red Wolf stands between two men attempting to fight each other (*RW* 4).

appear immoral and aggressive. In contrast, Red Wolf is positioned between the two men, reflecting his metaphorical position as being “neutral”; the mediator of the argument. His face appears calm, not scrunched in anger like Sandy’s, and his hands

and open fingers assert authority, but in a non-threatening and calming way (Kuhnke 143), unlike the closed fingers of Sandy. In addition, both of his arms are outstretched, one towards each man, with his palms tilted and fingers open. This body language suggests that he is reaching out to the men, both with his arms and with the offering of “reason” (that ‘no dispute over two cows is worth a life’ [*RW* 4]). This attempt at rationale fails; neither of the white men listen and Red Wolf is forced to use physical violence in order to stop the men from killing each other. Thus, the perception of Native people as ‘irrational’ in comparison to the ‘rational Euro-pioneer’ (Pewewardy, *Studies* 3; see also Pearce 5; Kincheloe; Hakluyt vii; Mihesuah, *So You* 20; K. Anderson 302) is reversed, as Red Wolf is the voice of reason, the enforcer of the law, and the calming mediator between two violent, irrational white men.

More potently, Red Wolf’s writers even actively criticise the category of the Bloodthirsty Savage. When Red Wolf visits his mother, who asks ‘How is the civilised world?’, he replies, ‘Not very civil. In frequent need of the law’ (*RW* 8). This interaction directly addresses and

reverses the image of Indigenous Peoples as “savages” and as antitheses to the “civilisation” embodied by White colonisers (P. J. Deloria 3, 29, 36; Pewewardy, *Studies* 3; Bordewich 18, Berkhofer 13, 16, 109; Pearce xxi, 3-4; K. Anderson 302; Roberts 19-20; M. K. Green 327-8; Lent 211-2). The interaction also implies that Red Wolf is needed in order to keep the colonist settlers in check; that he is the bringer and the enforcer of “civilisation”, demonstrating his significance in preventing and stopping the violence perpetuated by the white townspeople.

Raven

Finally, the creators of *Teen Titans: Earth One* succeed in destabilising this trope by presenting Raven as being anti-violence, anti-killing, diplomatic, and even as being completely unversed in fighting. When an evil organisation attacks Raven’s home, where she and her grandfather had been looking after the rescued Starfire, Raven runs out to defend her family, but looks lost as Starfire tells her to ‘fight’ (TT2 56) and gets hit on the head by a baton (TT2 56). Here, Raven is not shown to be a natural fighter like so many other Indigenous characters; on the contrary, she is somewhat inept at violence, and even ends up crouching behind Starfire (figure 24; TT2 60). Later on in the series, once Raven has learnt how to utilise her powers, she uses her telepathy to stop a fight and thus destabilise the view of Indigenous Peoples as being violently inclined. In one scene, Raven shouts, ‘STOP!’ and purple ravens appear around everyone’s head, showing that she has stopped them all fighting with her telepathy (figure 25; TT2 95). Once she has got them all to listen, she says, ‘We can’t keep fighting each other. Don’t you guys see... you’re all the same. All of you.’ (TT2 96), encouraging empathy



Figure 24: Raven crouches behind Starfire as they are approached by their enemy (TT2 60).



Figure 25: Purple ravens surrounding everyone's head (TT2 95).

responsible for her life-long imprisonment and torture, and for the experimentation on numerous babies and children: 'No more killing. No more fighting. It's over for Caulder now' (TT2 128). Despite Starfire's arguably justified reaction, Raven reasons that they have defeated him, so any further violence would be unnecessary and distasteful; an act of revenge rather than justice. In

and using reason and diplomacy to prevent any further violence. In this scene, she is drawn standing with her arms open, hands up, and her palms pointing forwards (figure 26), which again signifies calmness and reflects her verbal attempt to defuse the situation. In addition, the view of the panel is angled to that the reader looks up at Raven, positioning her as a figure of authority and leadership; a capable and rational mediator. Moreover, Raven stops Starfire from killing the man who was



Figure 26: Raven stands with her hands up (TT2 96).

addition, as she says this, Raven puts her hand firstly on Starfire's shoulder and subsequently on either one of her cheeks (figure 27), which is a gentle gesture that directly contrasts the presentation of



Figure 27: Raven holds Starfire's face in her hands (FF2 128).

Indigenous peoples as dangerous and threatening.

Warpath

The 2008-2010 *X-Force* series also challenges and rejects stereotypes of Indigenous violence, murder, and apathy. Firstly, James states twice in issue 10 that he doesn't 'want to be a killer' and works hard to avoid killing his opponents (*XF*#10 20-21, 32), palpably rejecting the depiction of Native peoples as being eager to kill. This is emphasised when a Purifier is about to kill X-23 and James does the only thing he has time to do to save her: he stabs the Purifier. He then explains, 'He was going to kill you. So, I- I killed him' (*XF*#1 26-7). James' explanation itself indicates his guilt over killing a person as he feels the need to justify his actions, even despite the large (and growing) number of people his teammates have killed and how evil and ruthless the Purifiers are. James' stuttering further indicates his reluctance to kill as it signifies his shock at his own actions and even a sense of trauma, as stammering can be a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NHS). This shock and potential trauma therefore suggests that James, up until this point, operated on a no-kill policy, and even now is reluctant to kill his enemies.

The 2008-2010 *X-Force* series also consistently depicts James as a caring and emotional person, and even more so than his White teammates. Kyle and Yost do this firstly through James' relationship with his teammates. His soft nature is most amply demonstrated through his relationship with Rahne: 'When Rahne and I first met, she knew all about my brother and we used to swap stories... I told her about Johnny and she used to talk about Craig' (*XF*#2 20-21). This passage presents their relationship as open and loving by showing firstly that James shares his own feelings with Rahne, and secondly that Rahne is comfortable talking to him about her trauma and her past. Furthermore, Rahne even tells James her biggest secret: that

Reverend Craig was actually her father, demonstrating her level of trust in him, and thus how caring and trustworthy James is.

His kind nature is also depicted through his physical interactions with other characters: after saving Tabitha, Rahne, and Laura, he is drawn cradling them in his arms, their heads are leant against his chest, and his chin is tucked



Figure 28: Warpath carrying Rahne as she rests her head against his chest (XF#3 18).

drawn cradling them in his arms, their heads are leant against his chest, and his chin is tucked over them in a protective and comforting manner (figures 28-30; XF#3 18; XF#6 20; XF#18



Figure 29: Warpath holds and comforts Tabitha after rescuing her (XF#18 6).

6). His body language indicates his strong empathy for his friends and teammates, and theirs, too, implies their trust in him and their feeling of safety in his arms. This is emphasised especially by Tabitha, who says to James,

‘saw you... knew everything’s okay’ (figure 29; XF#18 6), and falls asleep in his arms, showing how firmly she trusts him to protect and look after her. He also provides this reassurance for Laura, who, upon waking up after being tortured, asks, ‘did I complete my mission?’ (XF#6



Figure 30: Warpath holding Laura after rescuing her from her torturers (XF#6 20).

20). Instead of telling her that completing her mission is unimportant and a silly concern, James replies, ‘Yeah... you did good, Laura’ (XF#6 20), as he knows that this will provide Laura more reassurance due to her unwavering focus and how seriously she takes her missions; he knows that vague words of comfort will do nothing for her, but reassuring her that she did well on her mission will make her feel better. Such scenes demonstrate his deep understanding of his teammates as well as his thoughtfulness when it comes to looking after them, through which his writers successfully reject the Bloodthirsty Savage category.

Conclusion

By examining these moments of progress in comparison to previous moments of stereotyping, it becomes clear that comics can and are in many cases doing a better job at depicting Indigenous characters who are fully human and not mere replications of propagandistic stereotypes. Whilst there are still far too many instances of 21st century comics facsimileing the stereotype of the Bloodthirsty Savage, there does appear to be a significant movement towards more progressive and realistic depictions that even go out of their way to openly reject this category and challenge the settler colonial propaganda at its core.

As can be seen through the more complex examples of Dani Moonstar, often the best way to reject the category is not to avoid the components altogether (as would be impossible in relation to violence and unrealistic in regards to anger), but to use the inclusion of them to actively reject and criticise the problematic portrayals of these components, thus highlighting that it is the stereotypical depiction of the components that is at fault, rather than the actions or emotions of the characters.

Chapter Two: The Naïve Sidekick

Chapter Two will focus on the category of the Naïve Sidekick, which is constructed through three key components: simplicity, helplessness, and subservience. This is also a well-established category, although the specific phrasing is not pre-existing and comes from combining many scholars' discussions of the concept. The Naïve Sidekick category draws on the dominant portrayal of Native characters as 'child-like',¹⁴ 'bumbling' and foolish,¹⁵ in need of and/or dependent on White people,¹⁶ naïve,¹⁷ and as a sidekick or White man's helper.¹⁸

By combining the central concepts of these discussions into a brief but clear summary, I arrived at the "Naïve Sidekick". This category is certainly more benign than the first, but its pervasiveness and apparent fixedness (alongside its insulting implications) still makes it inaccurate, unnecessary, and racist. Too often are the Indigenous characters used as comedic interludes to the story (mostly through the notion of Native "stupidity"), positioned as the sidekick to the White hero, left helpless and in need of rescue by the White characters, and incredibly gullible.

The Category

The first component of the Naïve Sidekick is simplicity, which describes the tendency of writers to present Indigenous characters in a 'patronising' and 'condescending' manner (Stedman 250; Sheyahshe 6). Stemming from the depiction of Indigenous Peoples as lacking the capacity for complex emotions in the Bloodthirsty Savage category, this trope furthers this

¹⁴ Outlined by Wright ('Interview' 10), K. Anderson (302), Raheja (190-191), and M. K. Green (327)

¹⁵ Discussed by Pewewardy (Studies 9), Wright ('Interview' 10), and Stedman (245)

¹⁶ Examined by Pearce (8), Roberts (25), and M. K. Green (327)

¹⁷ Discussed by Roberts (25), Sheyahshe (15), Kilpatrick (xvii), Raheja (190-191), and Bird ('Intro', 3)

¹⁸ Outlined by Sheyahshe (9, 39), M. K. Green (327), O'Neill (24), Keiser (78), Friar and Friar (1-12), and Bataille and Silet (116).

perception by displaying Indigenous characters as overtly simplistic. Indeed, Indigenous Peoples have been presented as ‘deficient in intellect’,¹⁹ ‘naïve’,²⁰ ‘simple-minded’,²¹ ‘dumb’,²² ‘ignorant’,²³ and ‘stupid’.²⁴ Indigenous characters are too often ‘endowed with little intellectual ability’ (Sheyahshe 169) and this continuing trend facsimiles colonial narratives regarding the science of race, particularly the so-called “studies” into the cranial capacities of different races (Roberts 22). As Roberts states, ‘theories of racial inferiority have a long and lamentable history in the West’ (Roberts 18). One of the founders of such theories, Blumenbach, devised a fivefold racial classification system but, in doing so, ‘ended up affirming racial hierarchy by way of geometry’ (Gould), particularly through his claim that “Caucasian” (White) people were the original race and the others occurred due to environmental degeneration (Blumenbach 411). His theories of racial differences were adopted to a greater extent as the Enlightenment period began and European countries particularly sought to ‘define the origin of [their] people’, resulting in the conception of the Aryan race (Regal 72) and embedding notions of racial hierarchy that led to multiple holocausts. Such scientific racism was so prevalent that even Thomas Jefferson, a celebrated abolitionist, ‘held an intuitive belief in the inferiority’ of all People of Colour, including Native Americans (Cohen 505; see also Jefferson 137; McColley 124; Jordan 429-31) and advocated that the slaves would be freed, but immediately deported (Cohen 524). He also attempted to ban former slaves from residing in Virginia, leaving them ‘subject to re-enslavement or even to murder at the whim of their neighbors’ (Cohen 509). Such beliefs and writings led to Gobineau’s prominence, with his theory of race claiming that non-White peoples had only ‘feeble’ intellect, and grouped them amongst ‘mindless’ ‘brutes and beasts’ (Gobineau in Roberts 18). Indeed,

¹⁹ Hanson and Rouse 34; Callison and Rifkind 141; Justice 2.

²⁰ Troy.

²¹ Hirschfelder et al 115; Francis

²² Hirschfelder et al 305; G. Wilkinson 29-31

²³ Sheyahshe 15.

²⁴ Sheyahshe 87.

many “studies” stated that non-White peoples had ‘significantly lower cranial capacity’ (Roberts 22), compared this supposed lack to animals, and even the more ‘acceptable’ studies positioned their intelligence in line with White toddlers (Roberts 25).

Whilst these violently racist claims are no longer held as truth by the majority, this stereotype is still present today and is exacerbated by Indigenous communities’ lack of access to education (Tighe 1). Part of the reason for these ‘fewer educational opportunities’ is that ‘Native Americans are the most economically impoverished ethnic group in the United States’ (Tighe 1). Indeed, poverty rates for Indigenous Peoples all over the world are far higher than White communities: according to the 2018 census, Native Americans suffer a 23.7% poverty rate in comparison to 10.9% for White peoples, and even above the 22.5% for Black communities in the USA (US Census Bureau); Aboriginal Australians suffer a 31.4% poverty rate, as opposed to a 13.2% poverty rate for Australia as a whole (ACOSS 66; 12); and in Canada, First Nations people face a 25% poverty rate whilst the general population suffers only an 8.7% rate (Canadian Poverty Institute; Statistics Canada). Thus, education becomes unaffordable for many members of the community. Education is also inaccessible for many of these communities: geographic isolation plays an important role, as schools are often physically inaccessible to children who live on reservations, with little to no public transport to aid their travel (Tighe 1). Furthermore, only 73.1% of Native American households have internet access: it is unaffordable or simply unavailable on many reservations (U.S. Consensus Bureau; Beer). Indeed, these factors have resulted in just 44.7% of the population being enrolled in elementary school, a mere 23.7% in high school, and 20.9% in college, but only 15.2% achieving a degree (U.S. Consensus Bureau), further highlighting the continuing presence of educational inequality and, by extension, the enforcement of the simplicity trope. Despite the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples trying to gain a formal education, however, the ‘number of Native

intellectuals is growing and they are challenging the way Natives are portrayed in fiction and non-fiction' (Mihesuah, *So You* 5).

However, such growth is not often reflected in the media: even today, comedy often stems from the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as stupid and bumbling (Sheyahshe 6, 87; Pewewardy, *Studies* 23; Stedman 245); we are taught to laugh at the characters rather than with them. Red Ryder's sidekick, Little Beaver, is a prime example of this, as his 'buffoonery' provides comic relief for the white hero and demeans the culture he is supposed to represent (Sheyahshe 41). In addition, Native characters are typically presented as being 'bereft of a sense of humour' (Sheyahshe 21), such as the Native characters in *White Indian* (Franzetta), Shaman in *Alpha Flight* (Byrne et al; Mantlo et al), Marvel's American Eagle (Moench et al), DC's Tomahawk (Kubert), and Thunderbird in the *X-Men* (Moore et al; Wein et al), all of whom lack a sense of humour, and fail to understand or appreciate even the simplest jokes. Such portrayals are insulting to the characters' intelligence, and the extent of this insult can be understood by turning to the psychology of humour. The dominant and most accepted theory of humour in modern psychology and philosophy is the "Incongruity Theory", first discussed by Beattie, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard, and developed by modern researchers such as Hurley, Dennet, and Adams; Suls ('Cognitive'; 'Two-Stage'); and Deckers and Buttram. According to the incongruity theory, humour requires three key abilities: imagination in the ability to 'mentally represent the set-up of the joke'; critical thinking in the ability to 'detect an incongruity'; and interpretation to 'resolve the incongruity by inhibiting the literal, non-funny interpretations, and appreciating the meaning of the funny one' (Gibson; see also Suls, 'Cognitive' 39-40; Deckers and Buttram 53-64; Hurley, Dennet, and Adams 45-52). Essentially, humour requires the capacity for the kind of "higher" thinking explored previously.

The most obvious and famous example is Tonto from *The Lone Ranger* (Lansdale et al), whose name literally translates to "silly", "fool", and "dumb" in Spanish, Portuguese, and

Italian respectively. Another example is Adam Sandler's recent film, *Ridiculous 6*, which came under fire for insulting Native Americans, mocking their culture, and playing on the "dumb Native" stereotype (Schilling; Moyer). The 2015 film is an explicit example of the continuous presentation of Native Americans as lacking intelligence. It is worth noting that the filmmakers have attempted to defend such presentations by claiming that they were part of the satiric nature of the film (Moyer), but the stereotypes that it presents are too prevalent and are too much the norm in Western culture for the film to avoid feeding into and enforcing such dangerous and disrespectful views. As Mihesuah explains, 'imagine how modern-day Natives feel when they read' such accounts of Indigenous stupidity (*So You* 17). The problem that arises with such depictions is further outlined by Berger, who explains how the 'circulation of images that deny or question the humanity of [...] politically disempowered groups plays a supporting role in normalising discriminatory, violent, and potentially even genocidal behaviour against individuals from those groups' (M. Berger 133). Considering, then, the continuing institutional racism faced by Native American communities, depictions such as Tonto and the characters in Sandler's film cannot exist innocently or ironically; they can only add to the discrimination already faced by these groups by repeating and legitimising these racist views of mental inferiority.

The second way in which the Naïve Sidekick category is constructed is through the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as helpless. Whilst the Bloodthirsty Savage was naturally violent and murderous, this category reverses the trope and presents Indigenous characters as hapless, helpless, and unable to defend themselves. This subversion is directly correlated to the Indigenous characters' loyalties: the Bloodthirsty Savage as an apt fighter was the White people's enemy, but if the Indigenous character was helpless and thus posed no threat, they were allowed to fill the role of Naïve Sidekick.

This category was present in colonial narratives: firstly, the colonists used it to present the Indigenous inhabitants as in need of saving by White culture and religion: colonial views claimed that ‘Indigenous Peoples need to be saved from their animal-like existence by the knowledge of the West’ (M. K. Green 328). The implications of this attitude are that Indigenous Peoples are incapable of living without the help of White people; that they are ignorant, hapless, unable to look after themselves, and ultimately doomed. This presentation has been pervasive ‘throughout America’s dealings with Indigenous Peoples’ (Sheyahshe 39), and was used to justify colonisation by presenting the Indigenous Peoples as victims of their own ignorance. Secondly, the trope was used by those who sympathised with the Indigenous Peoples to encourage sympathy for them by presenting them as ‘helpless’ victims of colonialism itself (LA Times 1891; Sheyahshe 39). Even the less insulting media of the 20th century presented the White hero as ‘the protector of the helpless red man’ (Sheyahshe 39) and such depictions are ‘one of the dominant portrayals of Indigenous Peoples’ (M. K. Green 327; see also Keiser; Friar and Friar; Bataille and Silet; Guzmán 192). Indeed, this attitude is still prevalent today in the form of the “white saviour complex”, which refers to White people’s tendency to present themselves as “saving” or “helping” people in third-world countries or from minority groups whilst actually serving their own interests (Bakar), and these attitudes are still too often reflected in the media. Examples in mainstream media include the 1990 film, *Dances with Wolves*, which sees a White man lead the Sioux peoples to victory against their rivals and save them from the Union army; *The Blind Side* (2009), which essentially credits a White woman for the successful career of Michael Oher; and even *Avatar* (2009), where a White hero enters the Indigenous inhabitants’ culture, becomes better versed in it than the Native peoples, unifies all the tribes, and saves them all from the advances of the White warmongers.²⁵ Most such

²⁵ Other films that have come under criticism for perpetuating this trope include *12 Years a Slave* (Berlatsky; McCoy and Rodricks; Goff); 42 (Schultx 205-213); *Basmati Blues* (Gleibeman); *Blood Diamond* (Lacy 13); *Django Unchained* (Berlatsky); *Free State of Jones* (Newkirk; Hornaday).

films 'have received major Hollywood award nominations' and many have won, demonstrating 'Hollywood award organizations' specific affinity for the White Savior' (Sirota; see also Berlatsky; McCoy & Rodricks; Goff; Schultx 205-213; Gleibeman; Lacy 13; Newkirk; Hornaday).

The final trope through which the Naïve Sidekick category is constructed is subservience. Like the helplessness trope, this stereotype was employed as a condition for the Indigenous character to ascend the position of enemy. As Sheyahshe states, Indigenous characters were only allowed to evolve from their role of the villainous "savage" 'under the guise of their dutiful subservience to the white man' (Sheyahshe 9), suggesting that Native peoples can only be "good" when subservient and obedient to their White superior, facsimileing notions of slavery under the guise of "progress" (Wright, 'Interview' 10). Indeed, this component has been prominent from the very first contact between the "West" and Indigenous Peoples: one of Columbus' first observations of the Taino people was that they would make 'ideal servants' (Stedman 42), demonstrating that, from the very beginning of contact, White people viewed Indigenous Peoples as nothing more than servants and helpers; in other words, they were viewed for what they could do for White people (P. J. Deloria 5), much like the above attitude of the White saviours. Even today Indigenous characters are consistently depicted as 'the sidekick' to the White hero (Callison and Rifkind 141) and are in 'subordinate positions as laborers, sidekicks, or faithful Indian companions' (Pewewardy, *Studies* 12; see also Savage 7). Such characters are often used as 'plot devices to move the story along and make the central character (almost always a White man) more heroic' (Sheyahshe 9), emphasising their position as subordinate and as secondary to the White hero.

Portrayals of Indigenous characters in this category were once again a conscious decision and deliberate attempt to justify settler colonialism. By depicting Indigenous Peoples as simple, helpless, and subservient, settlers were able to justify their invasion, murder, and indoctrination

of the Indigenous populations by claiming that they were less than human (and therefore not worthy of fair treatment), in need of “saving” by the White settler culture, and in desperate need of “guidance” (control) by the settlers. Such myths are continually perpetuated in American media and continue to justify the USA’s existence and history.

Bishop

The *Gambit & Bishop* series uphold this category through their presentation of Bishop as simple. Whilst Bishop is never presented as overtly ignorant, he is sometimes presented as incapable of using critical thinking and imagination, especially in comparison to Gambit. In Issue #4, Bishop turns to Gambit for information, and Gambit’s replies seem patronising:

Gambit, do you have any clue where Cable would have taken them?! / ‘Kay, let’s t’ink ‘bout dis for a minute. ‘Spose Stryfe’s right an’ Cable is out to finish off Stryfe once an’ for all- dat bein’ de case, he’s goin’ to hafta kill ‘im at a nexus place in time- or else Stryfe’ll always have de option of returnin’ before or after his death like he did de last time we all thought ‘im dead. You bein’ a time-traveler an’ all, you should be knowin’ dis stuff. / Fine. Where do we find a nexus point in New Orleans? / T’ink ‘bout it. You ‘ready know de answer to dat one, Bishop. / Witness’s mausoleum? / Bingo! (*G&B*#4 28-29).

Bishop appears clueless in this situation, only able to figure out an answer when prompted by Gambit, even despite, as Gambit points out, Bishop’s vastly superior experience with time-travel. Bishop’s apparent inability to deduce this information on his own presents him lacking the abilities of imagination, interpretation, and critical thinking, thus facsimileing propagandistic notions of Indigenous inferiority claimed by 19th century writers, anthropologists, and ethnographers such as Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, an “Indian Agent” who wrote of the Native Americans’ supposed ‘idle habits, vices, and short-sightedness’, ‘mental peculiarities’, ‘simple, and, in some respects, childlike attainments’, and described them as incapable of mental ‘exertions’ (Schoolcraft 14; 10; 9; 7). Furthermore, Gambit’s lengthy explanation of their situation is reminiscent of the way one would encourage a child to think for themselves: Gambit does not answer Bishop, instead he lays out everything Bishop already

knows in order to help him reach “his own” conclusion. This tone is incredibly condescending towards Bishop’s intelligence, especially considering that he should be the knowledgeable one in this situation, and thus continues the comparison between Native peoples and ‘children’ that writers such as Bird (‘Intro’, 3) and Roberts (25) criticise.

Dawnstar

The writers of *Legion Lost Volume 1* and *Legion of Superheroes Volume 2* are guilty of upholding notions of Indigenous subservience. In the former, Dawnstar is sometimes absent entirely whilst the rest of the team discuss important matters (*LLI* 54) and consistently contributes very little to conversations. In one example, Dawnstar speaks only once during the whole discussion, and when she does so, the illustration presents her as insignificant (figure 31; *LLI* 26). Firstly, Dawnstar is drawn in the background of the panel behind Tellus, which is especially strange considering that he is not speaking in this panel, thus implying that her speech is less important than his mere presence. Secondly, Dawnstar is almost entirely hidden from sight: only her head and the top of her wings are visible, and lastly, she is positioned as the lowest priority of the scene through her placement in the bottom right-hand corner of the panel. These visual elements imply her irrelevance, especially in comparison to her teammates



Figure 31: Tellus in the foreground, standing in front of Dawnstar and almost completely obscuring her (*LLI* 26).

who are consistently placed in front of her, reflecting the tendency of writers to omit ‘Native voices or perspectives’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 3).

This trope is further repeated in the comic: in other scenes where Dawnstar speaks, she is either ignored or patronised by her teammates. In one scene, she starts to explain that she can sense a bioheat signature that she believes is Chameleon Girl, but Gates interrupts her, saying, ‘Two flights down. Shapeshifted into a scary, hairy thing. But unguarded. Oh... sorry... splotzed all over your hard work, eh?’ (LL1 123). Firstly, Gates’ interruption of Dawnstar continues to facsimile the omittance of Indigenous voices as he quite literally silences her. Secondly, and as Gates himself admits, he ‘splotzed’ all over her work and her abilities: whilst she was using her powers to slowly piece together the information, Gates teleported around and returned with all of the information that Dawnstar was still trying to gather, thus rendering her efforts pointless and implying that she is unnecessary and therefore subordinate to her teammates. This patronising moment reflects the tendency for Indigenous superheroes’ powers to be ‘pale in comparison to other mainstream heroes’ (Sheyahshe 2).

This is seen again in *Justice League United Volume 2*, where the secondary cover page of one of the issues features the whole of the JLU on the left, and then the Legion on the right, but not only is Dawnstar at the very back of the image, behind all the other Legionnaires, she is the



Figure 32: Cover page depicting all members of the two teams, except for Dawnstar (JLU2 116).

only character there who does not have an introductory profile (figure 32; *JLU2* 116). Moreover, characters such as Saturn Girl, Phantom Girl, and Mon-El are not even present in this scene and yet they are given a profile, whilst the only Indigenous character is inexplicably left out. Such an omission facsimiles the epistemic violence of colonial propaganda and delegates Dawnstar as secondary to the White heroes.

Red Wolf

Occupy Avengers 1 and *Marvel 1872* also facsimiles this trope through their presentation of Red Wolf as lacking the ability for “higher thinking”. In one scene, Red Wolf appears incapable of understanding tactics or even basic psychology: he asks Barton ‘Why are you taunting [an enemy]’ (*OAI* 29), and Barton replies that he is ‘messin’ with his mind – creating a tactical advantage’ (*OAI* 29). Insults have a negative effect on one’s mentality due to the influence of social hierarchy on the human psyche: insulting someone, belittling them, or mocking them, as Barton does, undermines their conviction of themselves (Irvine). Red Wolf’s question and Barton’s subsequent explanation implies Red Wolf’s lack of understanding of these tactics, and indeed the fairly basic psychology they are based on, as he appears unable to figure out the consequences of Barton’s words on the man’s mentality and thus incapable of imagination or interpretation. This naivety is even more problematic when one considers the prevalence and significance of teasing, taunting, and jibing to many Indigenous cultures, especially Cheyenne and Ojibwe. Deloria explains that teasing was used as a means of socialisation: ‘Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion [...] people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility’ (V. Deloria 263). In Red Wolf’s own culture (Cheyenne), ‘rough teasing [is] a true expression of Cheyenne affection’ (Caufield) and ‘the traditional Cheyenne family structure facilitated and fostered teasing’ (Killsback 35).

Furthermore, Spielmann describes how teasing is not only accepted but participated in by all parties in Ojibwe culture (Spielmann 123), whereas in non-Native interactions, the recipient tends to ‘correct’ the tease despite their supposed understanding of the humorous intentions (Spielmann 122; see also Drew); that is, teasing is actually better understood and more frequently and authentically participated in by Ojibwe and Cheyenne people than in non-Native cultures. Thus, this interaction between Red Wolf and Barton not only insults Red Wolf’s mental capacity, but attempts to provide “humour” at the expense of the Indigenous character with no regard for his culture.

Such displays of “humour” also facsimile perceptions of colonial intellect vs primitive violence by positioning psychological tactics with White culture and physical violence with Cheyenne culture. However, this perception once again demonstrates a lack of knowledge on the writers’ part, which can be seen by consulting Margolin and Holm’s writings on Indigenous warfare. The Ohlone people, for example, waged “war” by ‘exchanging insults’ (Margolin 108-14) so their “battles” were ‘almost bloodless’ (Holm 158). Thus, the likelihood of Red Wolf not understanding taunts and verbal tactics is extremely slim and this reduction of his tactical understanding to physical fighting only an insulting and inaccurate depiction of the character. Indeed, this presentation seems to facsimile the colonial alignment of civilised tactics vs primitive violence to settlers and Indigenous Peoples respectively, and acts as a disappointing repetition of the simplicity trope, even in a comic as recent as 2017.

The comic also sustains racist assumptions and stereotypes through the use of comedy ‘based on the notions of the “stupid Indian”’ that Sheyahshe criticises (87). The presentation of Red Wolf, Silas, and Frank facsimiles these stereotypes, firstly through Silas’s confusion over the words fruition and frutation (*OAI* 29). Not only does this confusion attempt to provide comedy at Silas’ expense, it also makes him appear illiterate and reflects the portrayal of Indigenous Peoples as having ‘minimal linguistic skills’, possessing ‘only the rudiments of

language, if that', and using 'only one-syllable words' (Hanson and Rouse; see also M. K. Green 327). The presentation of Red Wolf also upholds this perception through his inability to understand or appreciate humour. In line with the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as lacking this capacity (Hanson and Rouse 34; Roberts 25), *Occupy Avengers 2* facsimiles this presentation through their depiction of Red Wolf. In one example, Red Wolf fails to understand Barton's pun when he claims that his new van is "vantastic", explaining that 'there is no such thing as "vantastic" – that word does not exist' (figure 33; *OA2* 46). Here, Red Wolf is presented as lacking the abilities of humour, particularly the ability to inhibit the literal. This misunderstanding is made even more insulting by the relative obviousness of Barton's word play, and thus indicates a severe inability to think critically. In addition, we can see that Red Wolf has searched the word on his phone to find out the meaning (figure 33), and has come to the conclusion that the word does not exist as, we assume, no results matched his search.



Figure 33: Red Wolf using his phone to search for the term, vantastic (*OA2* 46).

However, even when predictive text is turned off, smart phones and most search engines will suggest a similar word that the computer believes you may have misspelled or mistyped; when I typed "vantastic" into an online dictionary, it suggested, as one

would expect, that I might mean "fantastic" instead. It would be surprising, then, if Red Wolf's search did not offer him the same alternative, in which case he appears even more lacking in intelligence by failing to connect the similar phonetics of the two. This failure to present Native humour is, according to Deloria, 'a great disappointment' (V. Deloria 146) as humour is a 'vital element of Native life' (Sheyahshe 15), so the depiction of Native characters as lacking all

humour, as well as the intelligence to understand this humour, demonstrates the writers' ignorance of Indigenous cultures more generally, and Cheyenne culture specifically.

Occupy Avengers 1 was also criticised for upholding the hapless Native trope by glorifying the white saviour complex (Schmidt). In this comic, Barton takes agency away from Native characters, as he shows up and intends to save the reservation by discovering the source of the water contamination – something the Native people whom it affected were apparently unable to do (*OAI* 42). Marvel appear to have responded to this criticism to some extent, as it is Silas and Frank who discover the water pumping station in the second issue. However, there are still several issues with this narrative: the cousins stumble upon the water station by accident, the water supply had been contaminated for *five years* (*OAI* 4), the locals apparently never noticed an enormous water station positioned on their tribal land, and apparently merely accepted their water being contaminated and never investigated it themselves. Therefore, a storyline that had the potential to meaningfully engage with and comment upon the Standing Rock protests that were occurring during the writing and publication of these issues, and to provide a refreshing depiction of problems faced by real Native populations (water contamination as a deliberate action of corrupt, White companies seeking further profit) ends up enforcing the White Saviour trope, once again demonstrating the prevalence and normalisation of this category even in well-meaning and potentially radical narratives.

The writers and illustrators of *Marvel 1872* also stabilise this trope in their depiction of Red Wolf. The first time Red Wolf is introduced into the narrative of Steve Rogers, he is about to be lynched by some of Fisk's men; his arms are tied behind his back, he has a rope around his neck, and he is sat on a horse (*M1872* 10). In figure 34, we are positioned behind Red Wolf, which could imply his significance to the story and encourage the reader to empathise with him, as we are made to see things from his perspective. However, Red Wolf's body is slumped, his head is lowered, and his face is obscured partly by the angle of the panel and partly by his

hair. Overall, he is drawn in a way that facsimiles the presentation of Indigenous peoples ‘as defeated and unable to act’ (Bird, “Fantasy” 256). This is further reflected in the absence of any speech or action attributed to Red Wolf (despite the racist abuse he is suffering at the hands of the White men); he is not depicted as resisting or fighting back, which, alongside the obscuration of his face, refuses him any presence, agency, or individuality, and the reader is simply presented with yet another helpless Native character. Whilst he is technically

foregrounded
in the scene
due to his
placement in
the top left of
the panel
(which
privileges
him in the



Figure 34: Red Wolf sits on a horse with a noose around his neck as Fisk’s henchmen shout at him (*M1872* 10).

left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading style), considering the presentation of him as helpless in this scene, the foregrounding of him succeeds only in foregrounding this helplessness. Moreover, when Fisk’s men slap the horse, causing it to run off and thus hang Red Wolf, Rogers shoots through the rope as Red Wolf falls and saves his life. This page (and indeed the story overall) is a clear example of the white saviour complex, as a “good” White man saves the Indigenous person from the “bad” White men, positioning the former as the hero and saviour of the Indigenous victim. Furthermore, the panel depicting Rogers’ heroic entrance (figure 35) has him standing facing the reader, and he is positioned in front of and standing over Red Wolf, who is lying on his side on the floor behind Rogers’ feet. There are several aspects of this panel that require further attention. Firstly, Red Wolf’s position on his side with

his left leg bent and resting over the right leg is somewhat reminiscent of the recovery position, which is usually used on casualties who are unresponsive and therefore unable to help themselves, thus emphasising his vulnerability. Secondly, in comparison to Red Wolf's



Figure 35: Rogers stands over Red Wolf after rescuing him and confronts Fisk's henchmen (*M1872 11*).

vulnerability, Rogers is illustrated in a pose that denotes power and control: his chin is tilted up, displaying confidence and authority, his legs are very far apart, with one foot on higher ground and thus one knee slightly bent, one arm is tilted out and away from his body, his fingers are spread in anticipation, and the other arm is stretched in front of and across his body with a gun in his hand in a defensive manner (Lebowitz; see also Cuddy). In short, Rogers' pose emphasises his position as the White Saviour ready to defend the comparatively helpless and vulnerable Red Wolf. The third aspect that requires attention is the immediate presentation of Rogers' face in the panel. Whilst it takes four panels from Red Wolf's introduction in the scene for the reader to be shown his face (and when we do, he is behind Rogers' feet), Rogers' face is clearly visible upon his introduction, indicating his importance, agency, and control in the situation, which is again contrasted to Red Wolf's vulnerability and prior anonymity.

Rogers is further positioned as the hero through the broken panel in figure 35, where his head protrudes out of the panel he is in and into the panel above, which is a technique used to

indicate importance. Furthermore, the panel that Rogers' head protrudes into and is placed in front of, is the panel depicting Red Wolf's hanging; the horse is just leaving the frame and Red Wolf swings forward on the rope and is about to be hanged. This arrangement implies that Rogers' presence is more important than Red Wolf's near-death; that is, Red Wolf's presence and near-death experience is merely a background event used to establish Rogers' position as Sheriff and hero. This use of Red Wolf as a plot device is emphasised when Rogers' rescue is used as an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to "justice" by lecturing Fisk's men on the injustice of hanging someone without trial (*MI872* 11). It also sets up the narrative and provides the reader with background information regarding Rogers' conflict with Fisk. Thus, the narrative backgrounding of Red Wolf's story in this scene reflects the visual backgrounding of the character above, and both demonstrate his function as a plot device used to set up the White hero's character and story

Warpath

The 2008-2010 *X-Force* series also upholds the category through the inclusion of a White saviour. There are four instances in the series where James needs rescuing. The first occurs in issue #22, where James is saved by Archangel after being captured by Bard (10); the second in issue #24, where he is captured by Selene and the entire X-Force turn up to save him (4; 10); and the third later in the same issue, where Vanisher, who apparently abandoned the team, appears and rescues James (24). Whilst any presentation of the White Saviour Complex is, of course, problematic, the offensiveness of these scenes is softened by their central function, which is actually to centre James and his importance in the story. James is captured and in need of rescuing in these examples because he is the main character of this story arc and he poses the biggest threat to Selene and her gang. Furthermore, these scenes also function to show his

importance to his teammates through their willingness to run into what they conceive to be a suicide mission in order to attempt to rescue him.

The fourth instance of this trope, however, has no such justification. In issue #9, James is fighting a demon bear and promptly begins to lose (*XF#9* 6-7). As he is about to be killed, Ghost Rider appears on the scene and saves him just as James passes out (19-20). In isolation, this scene is not exceptionally problematic, as it would be infeasible for James to defeat such a powerful entity alone, and even the most powerful superheroes need saving sometimes. However, the follow-up to this scene in issue #10 does make this incident extremely problematic. After rescuing James, Ghost Rider proceeds to explain Apache culture to him: ‘The Natives of these lands were among the first to walk within the spirit plane [...] Your people have long known about the threat we face now, James Proudstar [...] Your blood and your birthright connect you to these forces. However, you are no shaman and do not know how to access your abilities. I will show you the path lost by the deaths of your ancestors’, and he proceeds to teach James how to kill the demon bear (*XF#10* 2). Having a White character “teach” an Apache character about his own people, history, and culture reflects the variation of the White Saviour that sees the White character become an expert on the Indigenous culture and use their apparently superior knowledge of this culture to save the Indigenous character (see *Avatar*). This concept repeats propagandistic notions of Indigenous simplicity as well as helplessness, as it shows James to be clueless and in need of guidance even in regards to his own culture. This scene is also a blatant example of what is referred to as “whitesplaining”: the tendency for White people to unnecessarily and often condescendingly “explain” things to people of colour, particularly topics that the person of colour in question has greater knowledge and experience of. This scene therefore upholds the category of the Naïve Sidekick by presenting James as ignorant, simplistic, helpless, and in need of saving.²⁶

²⁶ This scene also speaks to the Instant Shaman trope – more on this in Chapter Four.

The 2019 *X-Force* reboot is also guilty of facsimileing this attitude: whilst the 2008-2010 series consistently presented James as an equal to the team's official leader, Wolverine, the new series places Domino in charge (despite her being a new member of the team in the previous series) and James, an original and long-standing member, is now subservient to her and even to the young and relatively inexperienced Sam (e.g. *XF1* 7, 16). This is firstly demonstrated through Domino's demand to know 'which of us was responsible for doing a

sweep? How did we miss these guys?!' when they are ambushed by antagonists, to which James sheepishly replies,



Figure 36: Domini and Sam sit in the front of the X-Force jet, whilst Warpath sits in the back (*XF1* 16).

'Sorry, Domino. Boom-Boom was supposed to be here. We're shorthanded' (*XF1* 7). James' apology and apparent need to come up with an excuse displays a hierarchy between the characters, as does the implication that Domino is "telling him off" (through the interrogatives and the exclamative). James' subordinate position is further emphasised through the illustration of the team in figure 36: James has been delegated to the back seat whilst Domino is flying and the other new-comer, Sam, is in the passenger seat beside her (figure 36; *XF1* 16). This demotion of the character who has played such an important, central, and superior role in previous *X-Force* comics,²⁷ and whose experience and ability is pushed aside in favour of two White characters, continues the patronisation and reduction of Indigenous Peoples and the roles they play in society.

²⁷ Discussed later in this chapter.

Bishop

The writers of *The Last X-Man* and *Gambit & Bishop* also stabilise Indigenous helplessness to some extent. There are two instances in the former comic where Bishop is depicted as helpless, or at least in need of saving. In issue #6, Bishop gets cornered at a dead-end alleyway by a group of Chronotroopers, when Samara (a stranger to Bishop) appears, helps him fight

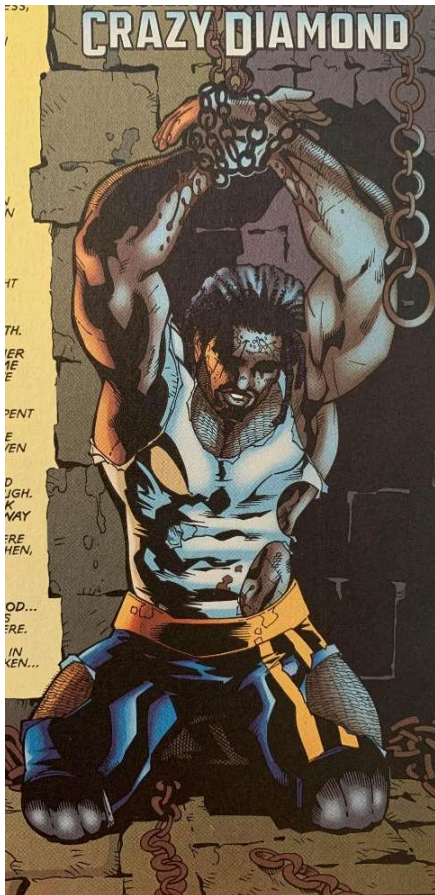


Figure 37: Bishop kneels with his hands chained above his head and his clothing ripped (*LXM*#13 1).

them off, saves him from a crumbling wall, and then teleports him and his companions to safety (*LXM*#6 30-32).

Samara's explanation for her actions is as follows: 'You are important to me and mine, Bishop. In time, I will explain what I mean. But first I must be certain – that you live through this day!' (*LXM*#6 34). Not only does this scene stabilise the White Saviour, it also demonstrates an ulterior motive: Samara saves Bishop not for his own sake, but because he is important to her own plans, thus diminishing his life as a person and foregrounding his usefulness to others. This incident would be less problematic if not for this troublesome explanation, as

Bishop spends a great deal of time in the comics saving others and he is undoubtedly the central hero to all other characters. The second incident is equally as ambiguous:

in issue #13, Bishop is captured and tortured by his nemesis, Fitzroy, and the artists present him on his knees with his hands chained above his head (figure 37; *LXM*#13 1). Bishop's position here is submissive and vulnerable, his head is hanging down, and his eyes are encased in shadow, making him appear defeated and helpless. Bishop remains at the mercy of Fitzroy

until later in the issue, when Link and Michael find and free him (*LXM*#13 26). Once again, Bishop is rescued by a White character, inherently stabilising the White Saviour trope. However, much like the instances of this trope in the *X-Force* series, the power is instantly allocated to Bishop once he is freed, as he takes control of the situation and resumes his position as leader immediately: ‘Link... get Michael outside. Find the others... And take this keep. I’m going after Fitzroy’ (*LXM*#13 26). Bishop’s determination and control even when he is badly beaten and half dead certainly goes some way to negating the former presentation of helplessness and actually seems to function to emphasise his toughness and impeccable leadership.

The *Gambit & Bishop* series also briefly facsimiles the White Saviour Complex, as the very first issue has Bishop at the mercy of the villain (who is controlling several of the X-Men), and Gambit figures out that something is amiss and rescues Bishop (*G&B*#1 12). Whilst this action in itself stabilises the category, Gambit’s motivation for the rescue stabilises and deconstructs the trope simultaneously. On the one hand, power and agency is instantly allocated to Bishop by indicating that Gambit now needs him to rescue them both. On the other hand, Gambit’s motivations are not merely to save his comrade, but to stop Stryfe from accessing and using the powerful symbiote that resides in Bishop at this point. This rescue, then, demonstrates both Bishop’s power and importance, and simultaneously reduces his importance by emphasising that Gambit saves him in order to save the world.

Equinox

The writers of *Justice League United* also stabilise Indigenous helplessness through their presentation of Equinox. In Volume 2, Miiyahbin and Alanna struggle to fight Mon-El before J’onn appears and saves them (*JLU*2 62). Whilst J’onn is a green alien and thus not technically a White Saviour, this scene still depicts two women of colour being saved by a non-Indigenous

and non-Black man, thus stabilising Indigenous helplessness. Further examples include when Black Mass kidnaps Mii and Ultra (*JLU2* 103) and Stargirl rescues her (*JLU2* 108), when Dawnstar rescues her from Byth (markedly less problematic as Dawnstar herself is an Indigenous character) (*JLU2* 118), and when Stargirl and Supergirl save her from being dragged into a black hole by Byth (*JLU2* 188-190). On the one hand, Mii is only a teenager and is new to her powers and to being a superhero, so this need for help from her older and far more experienced teammates is justified in this manner. However, on the other hand, the frequency with which Mii needs saving still unavoidably stabilises the trope of helplessness, especially considering the prevalence of the trope both in the comic and in wider media. Therefore, whilst the examples are individually far less problematic, as Dunbar-Ortiz and Gilio-Whitaker explain, the attitude that, ‘in order for Indians to be authentically Indian they need to be poor and helpless’ (121) is far too prevalent for such examples to avoid feeding into colonial propaganda. Indeed, Hirschfelder et al and Raymond state that ‘Native children are hindered in developing healthy self-images and racial identities; [...] they learn helplessness, the idea that they are incapable of making decisions for themselves’ (Hirschfelder et al xiii; Raymond), thus any stabilisation of this stereotype is dangerous and harmful to the communities they depict.

Dani Moonstar

The *New Mutants* series began by facsimileing the subservience trope: in Volume 1, Sam (the only White man on the team) is the official leader despite his incompetence in the role. Sam continuously makes poor decisions and endangers his teammates, unable to recognise his own incompetence and insisting that everyone follow his orders (*NMI*). Despite this, his position is never challenged or questioned and his far more competent teammates (women and

people of colour) are left following his orders, reflecting the tendency for incompetent White men to gain positions of power and influence over their more qualified competitors (Rabelo et al 1840-1858; Gray). Sam's leadership is therefore unjustified, uncomfortable, and facsimiles colonial apparatus. The component is further presented as Sam abuses his position of power by consistently undermining Dani's abilities. In one example, Sam refuses to let her fight Legion alongside the rest of the team, despite the fact that it was Dani, alongside Shan and Xavier, who saved David and stopped Legion's tyranny before (*Demon Bear Saga*) and thus knows how to combat him far better than the rest of the team. Despite this, Sam tells her that she cannot fight Legion with them because 'You're not a mutant anymore. Stop pretending you are. I'm in charge and that's an order' (*NMI* 87-88). Whilst it is true that Dani has lost her mutant abilities, Dani's value to the team never relied on her powers alone; she is an incredibly skilled fighter, tactician, Valkyrie, and has proved her capability plenty of times over the course of the *New Mutants* comics. Sam's suggestion, then, that she is "pretending to be a mutant" by insisting that she can look after herself, is insulting and shows him to overlook her non-mutant abilities. Indeed, Sam's attitude here is reflective of the presentation of Indigenous sidekicks as only 'half a hero' in comparison to the White man (Savage 7). In addition, the use of multiple simple sentences alongside the imperative ('stop pretending you are') and mostly monosyllabic words makes him appear curt, rude, and contemptible towards Dani, enforcing her subservience to him. The writers, thankfully, go some way to demonstrate the inaccuracy and unfairness of Sam's attitude, as she ignores his order and saves his life (more on this in the next section). However, instead of realising that he was wrong and rewarding Dani for her heroism and bravery, Sam drops her from the team for 'disobey[ing] a direct order' (*NMI* 114), and only agrees to allow her back if she promises to follow his orders (*NMI* 126). Thus, Dani is punished for refusing to be subservient to her incompetent White male leader, and is forced to promise to be so in the future, repeating the colonial apparatus of subordination.

Thankfully, this power structure is removed after the first volume, and the comics go on to become an incredibly successful example of comics creators rejecting and challenging the category.

Redefining, Challenging, and Rejecting the Category

Dani Moonstar

After the first volume, the *New Mutants* series consistently rejects the subservience trope by explicitly presenting Dani as a capable leader and the main character of the series (some examples include *BTS* 226, 322-3; *NM2* 113, 127-9, 131-3, 138; *NM4* 10-13, 29, 79; *NM5* 3, 16-18, 42, 53-6, 62, 72; *NM7* 50-1, 67, 110, 111, 114, 154; *FI:NM* 74, 81, 106-7, 126-7, 138, 145-6). Whilst the first three volumes of the *New Mutants* technically present Dani as subordinate to Sam, they continuously challenge her position and Sam's supposed authority. For example, when Emma Frost challenges Cyclops' decision to appoint Sam as the leader, Cyclops explains that he's 'gathering data [...] I'm looking for the next leader of the X-Men... I never said it had to be Sam' (*NM2* 127-8). These comments are immediately followed by a full-page spread/ cover page of Dani (*NM2* 129; figure 38) and a story focused entirely on



Figure 38: Cover page featuring Dani riding Brightwind whilst wielding a gun (*NM2* 129).

her as she completes a personal mission set by Cyclops whilst the other members of the team go to the casinos and are almost entirely omitted from the issue (*NM2* 130-5). The implications of this narrative and visual syntax present Dani as the main character of the series and setting her up as leader of not only the New Mutants, but as future leader of the X-Men themselves; an enormous improvement from the Naïve Sidekick that remains so popular in Western media. Furthermore, Dani is illustrated with Brightwind, her Valkyrie armour, and her New Mutants suit underneath with a gun and a sword, looking directly at the reader. This visual reminder of her multi-faceted skills and dual significance, alongside the powerful body language, presents Dani as being strong and in control. In addition, the placement of Dani and Brightwind with the sky behind them removes her from the realm of human and makes her appear god-like, reminding the reader that, whilst she is no longer a mutant with powers, she is certainly more than simply human.

Indeed, most of the cover illustrations depict Dani at the front of the group and many are dedicated entirely to her throughout the series (*NM*#3, #11, #15, #19, #29, #31, #32, #33, #38, #46, #47, #49, #50, *UXM: War of the Realms* #1, #3). Even before she is officially the leader of the team, Dani Moonstar is without a doubt the main character in the series and is certainly no one's sidekick.

Dani's leadership is also evident as her friends and teammates all go to her for approval, even before her official appointment as leader. In Volume 2, Roberto addresses Dani, who is stationed in the plane above, 'We've got four mutates on deck, Boss. Lupos, Amphibius, Barbarus and Worm. I might need more than the broken furby and the nerd who speaks latin. / Copy. I'm heading down. Hold on!' (*NM2* 113). At this point in the comic, Sam is still technically the leader of the team, but Roberto addresses Dani as "boss" (*NM2* 113). Furthermore, the positioning of Dani in the plane watching over the fight also shows her to be in charge of the situation: she has the vantage point, relays information to the team on the

ground, and intervenes to stop Worm, thus winning them the fight and demonstrating her importance. Wells and Neve further challenge the sidekick trope through Dani's journey into Helheim: when she comes across a large group of fallen warriors, Dani asks, 'who's in charge here?', to which the warriors' leader states that he is 'Tyr of Battles', but Dani cuts him off saying, 'No, you're not in charge. Who's in charge here?', and Tyr then replies 'you are' (NM2 138). Dani's boldness in this scene and Tyr's quick acceptance that she is in charge indicates Dani's natural authority even in unfamiliar and chaotic situations. *Fear Itself* further emphasises this when Nate informs Dani that the monsters 'don't like Warlock. They recoil from him. His touch turns them... they blister and shred into feathers', advises Hela to 'make



Figure 39: Dani leaping over Wolverine whilst aiming her bow and shouting orders to the team (NM4 10).

my life flash before their eyes', and Hela, the Goddess of Death herself, looks to Dani for approval, to which Dani answers 'Do it' and Hela complies (FI:NM 145-6). This interaction positions Dani

as in charge of not just her own team, but as a leader even to Hela herself, emphasising her capability and natural authority.

Dani's capability is further demonstrated before her official promotion in *New Mutants 4*: when the team are on a mission led by Wolverine, Dani is drawn leaping over him and shooting an opponent, whilst shouting imperatives: 'Spread out. Find it and contain it while it's weak and its capabilities are still incomplete!' (figure 39; NM4 10). The perspective of the panel is positioned above the rest of the characters and thus places Dani in the centre and in the foreground, indicating her prominence in the mission and in the team. The placement of her

above Wolverine emphasises her natural leadership ability, as she is literally and metaphorically going “over his head” to give orders and lead the team. Moreover, Wolverine even turns to her for advice, knowledge, and instruction, asking, ‘Moonstar, what’s the score?’ (NM4 11), and the only orders he gives are to do ‘What she said’ (NM4 13). These scenes further demonstrate her natural leadership and her effectiveness as such through both Wolverine’s agreement with her instructions and her apparent ability to devise a plan quickly and before he could do the same despite his greater age and experience. Indeed, in the next

issue



of the

Figure 40: Dani at the centre of a large group of superheroes, giving orders as they all prepare to fight (NM7 152-3).

volume, Dani’s leadership is finally recognised, and Cyclops asks her to head the team officially, stating ‘From what Logan says, you already do’ (NM4 29). Throughout the rest of the series, Dani adopts this position with ease and skill and proves herself to be the most capable leader of the New Mutants.

Some examples include the end of Volume 7 when the New Mutants’ party is interrupted by the abduction of Warlock. The vast array of superheroes, including Wolverine, Doctor Strange, the Valkyries, and the Warriors Three, go after Warlock and his abductor, with Dani

at the head (figure 40). Her position is firstly indicated by her orders to ‘keep it distracted! We have to get Warlock clear!’ (*NM7* 164), and secondly by the double-page bleed panel (figure 40; *NM7* 152-3), in which she is depicted at the centre of the group and is the only character with speech, separating her from the rest of the group and thus centring the reader’s focus on her. Furthermore, having Dani lead and command such an array of powerful and experienced superheroes potently rejects the sidekick and helplessness tropes.

Abnett and Lanning also present her leadership in non-combat situations, such as the beginning of Volume 5, where Dani has found a flat for her team to move into and asks them, ‘Are we... sure we’re sure about this?’ before finalising the decision. When her team all confirm, she simply says ‘All right. We’re doing it’ (*NM5* 3). By making sure that her team are all absolutely certain about the decision before acting upon it, Dani is shown to be a brilliant and considerate leader by not only taking into account her team’s opinions, but making sure that they are valued. Indeed, Dani is consistently shown leading the team in a democratic way, consulting her team whenever she can rather than insisting that everyone follow her orders or agree with her decisions as Sam did.

This presentation of Dani as a leader (in addition to her official appointment as the leader of the New Mutants and as future leader of the X-Men) is a huge step in the representation of Indigenous characters, especially considering their difficult and problematic origins in comics. It is, however, extremely fitting and even more significant considering the origins of the mutants and of the X-Men storylines in the Marvel Universe: it is well-known that the X-Men and mutants were created as a metaphor for racism. The discrimination they face in the comics, particularly the dehumanisation of them and the use of scientific racism against them, is and always has been an explicit commentary on racism in society. Therefore, having a Cheyenne woman as the leader of the team is a meaningful and much-needed step in acknowledging the comics’ origins and furthering the message. Having White men as the leaders and majority

members of the team was likely thought to be necessary at the X-Men's conception in order to convey their anti-racism message to the people who needed to hear it (White readers). Perhaps, then, the transition to having a Cheyenne woman as the leader is an indication that society has finally progressed enough to be able to convey their ongoing message in a more explicit and appropriately diverse way.²⁸ Indeed, the ongoing and increasing popularity of the team is testament to both the writing of the characters and an indication of progress in terms of diversity in comics.

The series also rejects and challenges the trope of simplicity through their presentation of Dani's humour as not only present but consistently exceeding that of her non-Native teammates and thus countering racist perceptions of mental inferiority. Abnett and Lanning in particular do a very good job at depicting the kind of humour V. Deloria describes as intrinsic to Indigenous cultures (146-7) in Volumes 4 and 5 of the series. In the former, Cyclops explains to Dani that he wants her team to 'start clearing up all of the X-Men's unfinished business', to which Dani replies, 'Once a week, we could wash your car and take out the trash, too' (*NM4* 29-30). Dani's reply is clearly a sarcastic offer in response to the somewhat odd request for her team to go around "clearing up" after the X-Men, and this use of sarcasm is not only amusing, it also has implications regarding her hierarchical position, her mental capacity, and her relationship with modern society. Firstly, her use of sarcasm to Cyclops demonstrates a level of camaraderie and thus a kind of equality between Dani as the leader of the New Mutants and Cyclops as the leader of the X-Men, which in turn demonstrates her agency and significance in the storyline and in the world of Marvel. Secondly, Haiman explains that sarcasm is so common in modern society that 'it's practically the primary language' (Haiman), meaning that

²⁸ Indeed, the New Mutants team has been admirably diverse from its conception in 1982, boasting only one White male member (Sam), Dani as a Cheyenne woman, Shan as a Vietnamese-American woman (and the original leader of the team), Roberto as a Latino man, and Wolfsbane, a young Scottish girl.

it functions to counter perceptions of Indigenous Peoples as “Old-World Beings” who do not understand modern slang or colloquialisms. Lastly, the usage challenges notions of simplicity: Mirson-Spektor explains that sarcasm ‘appears to stimulate complex thinking’ (Miron-Spektor et al 19) in that it requires the ability to see beyond the literal interpretation of the words, understand context-sensitivity in regards to linguistics, and identify the intended meaning. Therefore, Dani’s ability to not just understand sarcasm, but to use it, presents her ability to think quickly as well as the abilities of critical thinking, interpretation, and imagination.

Dani’s sense of humour is further demonstrated by the writers when a government official is rude to her. At first, Dani brushes off the comments, but upon leaving and wishing Rogers ‘good luck with this site’, she also wishes the official in question, Miss Hand, ‘good luck with the personality’ (*NM4* 50). The contrast here between her professionalism to Rogers and the paralleled statement to Hand provides much of the humour here, but the statement also defies stereotypes in another way. Dani’s comment is a retaliation against Hand’s rudeness, but instead of getting outwardly angry or violent, Dani does not let Hand’s comments affect her demeanour throughout the conversation. On the contrary, she remains calm and professional, showing her to be in control of her emotions and in a morally and intellectually superior position to the White character (Hand). This calmness also amplifies the humour of her parting statement, as it is unexpected and surprising in comparison to her previous manners. Moreover, the statement is not an outward insult; it is a covert way of saying that Hand has a bad personality, but cleverly she does not say anything literally rude whilst still standing up for herself, further rejecting notions of Indigenous simplicity, and even tropes of anger and violence from the previous chapter.

Abnett and Lanning further demonstrate Dani’s humour through her interactions with her teammates and her use of humour as a coping mechanism. When Blink asks why Dani hasn’t ‘smothered’ Nate (her teammate) ‘in his sleep yet’, Dani replies, ‘I figure I take him on a few

more missions and some giant robot will do him in for me' (NM5 52). This interaction firstly demonstrates the camaraderie between Dani and her team, indicating a close and jovial relationship between them. Secondly, it shows Dani's use of humour as a way to deal with the dangerous and traumatic situations they encounter on a daily basis. Humour is used by many people who work in dangerous and stressful environments (EMTs, nurses, the armed forces, firefighters, etc) in order to deal with the stress of their work (Fritz et al 845; Maiolino & Kuiper 557; Pérez-Aranda et al 220; Gerbino et al 409; Sirigatti et al 219; Edwards & Martin 505; Dean & Major 1088-1095; Kuiper et al 475-491). In this case, Dani uses humour to deal with her fear of losing a teammate and friend by joking about it. This usage also reflects the way that V. Deloria describes Indigenous Peoples using humour to deal with the very real and upsetting issues faced by their communities (146-7). Therefore, Dani's seemingly insensitive joke about Nate being killed actually demonstrates a sensitivity of emotion on her part, a genuine worry about her teammates, and a strength of personality that she is able to deal with this fear and danger, and keep her teammates' spirits up by making jokes and making them laugh.

This use of humour is also demonstrated by Abnett and Lanning in *Fear Itself: New Mutants*, when Dani gets swallowed by a giant monster. Instead of panicking or becoming overwhelmed with dread, fear, or horror, Dani simply remarks that 'There's got to be better work around than this' (FI:NM 116). The declarative rejects the trope and conveys humour by juxtaposing the surrealism and horror of the situation to her mundane and relatable exasperation with her "job". The writers further challenge the category when Dani manages to escape by cutting the monster



Figure 41: Dani emerges from the monster's stomach, surrounded by guts and wielding a sword (*FI:NM* 126).

open from the inside and bursting out in an explosion of intestines and bodily fluids (figure 41; *FI:NM* 126). When her teammates look at her in shock and horror, she asks, 'What? Have I got something on my face?' (figure 42; *FI:NM* 126-7). Once again, the humour of her reaction is in the juxtaposition between her casual reaction and the gore and horror of the situation. The humour also stems from

the underwhelming nature of her question: asking if she has something on her face whilst standing covered in the monster's guts, and using an everyday expression and apparent concern for her appearance in a very much extra-ordinary situation. Dani's humour then can be seen to stem from her understanding of context-sensitivity, as she deliberately juxtaposes mundane and everyday language to dangerous situations, thus demonstrating the ability Deloria describes of Indigenous Peoples being able to create humour from any and every situation:



Figure 42: Dani's teammates look at her in horror as she stands covered in the monster's guts (*FI:NM* 127).

Indigenous peoples are 'exactly opposite of the popular stereotype... [and] have found a humorous side of near every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well

defined through jokes and stories that they have become a thing in themselves' (V. Deloria 146-7). Therefore, the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as possessing the abilities of humour is not only an important rejection of racist stereotypes, but a far more accurate representation, so Dani rejects and redefines the representation of Indigenous Peoples as simple by consistently being the source and creator of humour.

This simplicity is also challenged through the presentation of Dani as incredibly wise and intelligent throughout the long history and substantial presence of the character in the Marvel Universe: Dani 'has always been articulate', clever, and capable (Sheyahshe 169). As a result, there are ample examples to explore in regards to this section, just some of which will be explored below, and some of the better additional examples can be found in the following: *BTS* 70-72, 93, 95, 298; *NM2* 148-9; *NM4* 87; *NM5* 14-18; *NM6* 28. In Claremont, Weir, and DeFilippis' *Back to School* series, the most poignant examples are on pages 93 and 95: in the former scene, Dani is talking to Kevin (Wither), a new student with an uncontrollable power to "wither" anything he touches, including his own clothes. Dani discerns that his powers are likely concentrated on organic matter and therefore he should be able to wear 'synthetic fiber'. Indeed, her theory is proven to be correct when she offers Kevin polyester clothes and they remain in one piece, demonstrating her intelligence, especially as no other character had this realisation (*BTS* 93). In the latter scene, Professor X has a crisis of confidence and starts to worry that the school is not safe, to which Dani replies, 'Safe? When I found Kevin, they were beating him with a lead pipe! The world isn't safe. You've created a haven for mutants. Of course people will attack it. But it's better than the alternative. And you should never forget that' (*BTS* 95). Here, any problematic pedagogical hierarchy is reversed, and Professor X, characterised by his genius-level intellect, is now the student to Dani's wisdom and reassurance, emphasising her own intelligence and rejecting assumed intellectual hierarchies.

Dani's intelligence is further displayed by Abnett and Lanning in *New Mutants* 5 through her handling of the Cyclops vs Wolverine feud. Dani explains that,

Logan wants to defend the children. Cyclops wants to defend the species. Both of those views require a certain separation from the real world. The actual world. I believe in the struggle for mutant rights, but I also believe that part of that fight is interacting with that world so you can change it. You can't sequester yourself from the outside world until it's the way you want it to be. You have to go out there and be part of it (NM5 17-18).

Dani's claim here alludes to Patricia Hill Collins' arguments in *Black Feminist Thought*, where she explores the concept of objectivity vs lived experience, essentially arguing that detachment and impersonal views are more academically and scientifically valued because they benefit the powerful. Those with no lived experience, personal understanding, or real stake in matters of social justice are calmer and more collected in discussions regarding the topic because it has no effect on them, making them appear more rational. On the other hand, the often (and understandably) emotional response from those with the lived experience, personal understanding, and real-life stake in the matter is dismissed as irrational, overly emotional, and too subjective (Collins, particularly ix and 297). Dani's statement that trying to fix the world from a place of isolation and without any interaction with it seems to follow a similar train of thought: that lived experience and interaction is far more valuable than objectivity and second-hand knowledge. Therefore, whilst Wolverine and Cyclops function from a position of privilege (which fits well with their identities as straight, cis, White men) and avoid getting involved in the world in a hands-on way, Dani understands that in order to fix something, you have to be a part of it. In short, Dani's conceptualisation of the situation displays her intelligence and her natural leadership by demonstrating her deep understanding of the world and the way it works, and her willingness to take a "hands on" approach in the fight for equality.

The *New Mutants* also rejects the presentation of Indigenous Peoples as helpless by consistently presenting Dani as tough and capable. Considering the historical and ongoing oppression and challenges faced by Indigenous communities everywhere, such cultures are,

generally speaking, far more resilient (McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Fromer), as is demonstrated by the continued existence of so many cultures and the reclamation of traditional values despite settler colonialism's attempts to eradicate the cultures, and its continuing efforts to oppress and erase their existence. Throughout the series, Dani consistently embodies this resilience and capability. As Sheyahshe describes, Dani is 'tough as nails', a 'capable figure on the battlefield' (Sheyahshe 171), and exemplifies 'the strength and beauty inherent in Native women' (Sheyahshe 2).

Indeed, early on in the 2009 revival of the New Mutants, Fraction, Deodato, and Dodson demonstrate explicitly and poignantly Dani's toughness, as she not only battles Ares, the god



Figure 43: Dani stands over Ares, pointing her sword at him as her teammates stand in the background (*Exodus* 30).

of war, one-to-one, but wins the fight and secures victory for the X-Men against the Dark Avengers (*Exodus* 16 & 30). The pages that depict the battle and her victory emphasise her power and strength through the use of perspective (figure 43). Firstly, the foregrounded overlapping and inset panel positions the reader behind Dani, looking over her shoulder at Ares, placing the reader on her side and giving her the agency. In contrast, the bleed panel shows the scene from Ares' perspective yet he is omitted from view, removing his agency, indicating his insignificance and his lack of power in the scene. In addition, in the former panel, Dani views Ares picking

himself up from the ground and looking up at her, and in the latter, the reader looks up at Dani, visually indicating the hierarchy between them and thus emphasising Dani's position. This is also shown by Dani's powerful yet relaxed stance in this scene, illustrating her control over the situation. The bleed panel further demonstrates her superiority through the illustration of Dani pointing her flaming Valkyrie sword towards the panel perspective, and the nature of the bleed panel itself functions to give the scene and, by extension, Dani, a feeling of expansion and even infinity. The last visual technique used to emphasise Dani's power and agency is the illustration of her in the foreground, looking extremely muscular (the clear sexualisation of her, and the other female characters in the comic, will be addressed in Chapter Three) and drawn in great detail, as opposed to the illustration of the rest of the New Mutants team, who are delegated to the background, behind Brightwind, and with their faces obscured by shadow, indicating Dani's prominence and rejecting the position of sidekick.

Dani's toughness and skill as a fighter is also demonstrated by Wells, Neves, and Baldus in *New Mutants 1*: transformed into a werewolf, Legion attacks the New Mutants and is about to kill Sam (Cannonball) when Dani crashes a car into Legion and drives him into a wall, saving Sam but breaking her own leg in the process (*NMI* 103-5). However, Dani continues to fight back, even managing to stab Legion whilst being strangled (figure 44). This scene firstly challenges the Naïve Sidekick category through its rejection of the White Saviour Complex:

here, and many times elsewhere in the series, Dani is the saviour of her teammates (see *BTS* 90; *NMI* 103; *NM2* 122-3; *NM3* 133, 135-6, 147; *NM5* 75; *FI:NM* 138; and many, many others). Moreover, Dani is



Figure 44: Dani stabs Legion (currently in the form of a werewolf) as he strangles her and tries to claw her face (*NMI* 104).

often shown to be her own saviour and rarely needs rescuing by anyone else (see *NM1*: 81, 1045; *NM7* 119; *FI:NM* 126-7, etc). Indeed, Dani is never presented as helpless and her determination and ability to fight back against the most powerful mutant in the world displays her bravery, resilience, and toughness.

Wells and Kirk also subvert the White Saviour trope in *New Mutants 3*: back in Limbo, the team stumble upon Project Purgatory, are captured, and tortured by the (now adult) Inferno



Figure 45: Dani uses her foot and arm to aim her bow whilst her other arm is in a splint and she is covered in blood (*NM3* 136).

babies. Dani receives the worst of this treatment and her arm is broken before she is left alone in her cell at the mercy of the Limbo demons. During her brief time alone, Dani manages to make and attach a splint for her broken arm, fight off a hoard of the Limbo demons, retrieve a bow and some arrows (see Chapter Four for the problems with this weapon of choice), and kill her torturer by holding the bow with her foot and shooting the arrow with her one working arm (figure 45; *NM3* 133-136).

Not only does Dani free herself despite her dire physical condition, she goes on to rescue Sam, Roberto, and Amara, all of whom are suffering far fewer injuries than her, were in the same room together, and yet were unable to escape or help each other (*NM3* 147). Dani is thus shown to be the toughest member of the team, both physically and mentally, as well as the constant saviour of her teammates, including her White male team “leader”, Sam, thus subverting and challenging the White Saviour Complex and the tendency for White writers to present their Indigenous characters as helpless.

Another prominent subversion of the White Saviour is written by Lanning and Abnett in *Fear Itself*: when Helheim comes under attack by the Draumar (Norse nightmare creatures), Hela sends her soul to Dani to call for aid, stating that she ‘needed someone to safeguard my soul [...] and return it’ to her (*FI:NM* 138), to which Dani exclaims, ‘You trusted me to look after your soul?’ (*FI:NM* 138). The notion that Hela, the Norse Goddess of Death and an extremely powerful being, both trusted Dani above anyone else to look after her soul and knew that Dani would be able to battle her way through the Draumar to return the soul to her, emphasises Dani’s capability. It also subverts the helplessness trope by presenting the Indigenous character as the saviour of not just a White person, but a Norse Goddess.

Abnett and Lanning continue to oppose the trope of helplessness through the New Mutants’ encounter with Sugar Man. In *New Mutants 4*, the writers include a small flashback scene to the team’s briefing on Sugar Man, where Cyclops explains that he is ‘one of the single most capable hand-to-hand combatants’, which they directly follow with a full-page spread of Dani



Figure 46: Multiple panels depicting Dani’s combat with Sugarman (*NM4* 70-71).

attacking him, and then with a double-page spread of Dani fighting him (figure 46). The full-page and double-page spreads in themselves indicate the significance of Dani's ability by affording so much space to her one-on-one battle with Sugar Man. Indeed, the issue itself is merely 20 pages (*NM4* 63-82), 9 of which are entirely dedicated to depicting Dani's fighting skills (*NM4* 64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 74, 75, 76, & 77). This is a huge proportion of pages to dedicate to one character out of the six members of the team, indicating not only her capability in battle, but her overall importance in the comic. Her impressive proficiency is even noted by her opponents and teammates on the page, one exclaiming 'Holy crap!', and Roberto (Sunspot) saying, 'Madre de dios...' (meaning Mother of God) whilst he and Amara (Magma) watch with open mouths (*NM4* 70-71), demonstrating that her fighting abilities and toughness are not just impressive to the non-superpowered reader, but even to her superpowered teammates and opponents. Her skill is even more impressive considering that Dani herself is no longer superpowered, having lost her illusionary abilities during the M-Day storyline, and that she is not in her Valkyrie form. Furthermore, the New Mutants and Sugar Man's minions all stop fighting to watch the battle between them, implying that the fight is so impressive that it actually distracts them from their own battles. Moreover, Roberto and Amara do not make a move to try to help Dani in her battle, showing that she does not need saving, or even any help from her teammates and that they recognise and understand her capability. Sugar Man's minions make no move to interfere either, which could perhaps indicate that they are scared of or intimidated by Dani. Indeed, the positioning of the team fighting the minions and Dani fighting Sugar Man himself emphasises her superiority in the team, showing her to be the most capable combatant and rejecting all notions of subordination or helplessness.

Warpath

Yost, Kyle, and Crain reject the stereotype of simplicity in regards to humour in the 2008-2010 *X-Force* series, through their presentation of the camaraderie between Warpath and his teammates. In the first issue, James is reunited with his old friends, and Wolverine “greet” him by simply giving him the information he has gathered thus far: ‘The item is here, as is Risman. There are seven guards concealed around the exterior of the building’, to which James replies, ‘Well “hello” to you, too’ (*XF*#1 21). Almost immediately in the comic, the trope is reversed: Wolverine is presented as a stoic, serious, and mission-focused warrior, whilst James appears witty and personable. This role reversal is further demonstrated in issue #6 when Wolverine is burnt to a state that would have killed him instantly if not for his healing factor. Instead of ignoring it or even showing concern for him, James once again demonstrates his wit and his friendship with Logan by commenting, ‘Dam but you smell, old man’ to which Wolverine tells him to ‘shut up’ (*XF*#6 28). James’ ability to joke about the smell of Wolverine’s burnt skin after the massacre that had just taken place reflects Dani’s humour as well as the previously discussed tendency for Indigenous Peoples to create humour about anything and everything (V. Deloria 146-7). His comment also indicates a sensitivity and deep understanding of the value of humour by using it as a coping mechanism to deal with the traumatic situation. In this comic, James’ unwavering wit is a successful rejection of the Naïve Sidekick stereotype.²⁹

Yost and Crain also reject the trope through James’ tactical and psychological intelligence. In the 2008-2010 *X-Force* series, the Leper Queen (a villain renowned for her anti-mutant, pro-human position) is abducting mutants, turning them into involuntary suicide bombers, and targeting humans. Whilst the rest of *X-Force* are bemused as to her motivations, James explains that she is using mutants to kill humans in order to generate ‘hate and fear’ and ‘create an anti-

²⁹ James’ sense of humour is further presented in the following comics: *XM:MC* 267, 300; *XF*2; *XF*#13 9; *XF*#14 21; *XF*#20 12; *XF*#25 26-7, but once again there are far too many examples to explore.

mutant hysteria' (XF#13 8); she is sacrificing comparatively small groups of humans in order to turn everyone else against the mutants and thus further her own agenda. James' recognition of these tactics does more than simply indicate his own intellect and tactical intelligence; it also alludes to colonial narratives and tactics used to turn the colonial settlers against the Indigenous populations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Indigenous Peoples were misrepresented as barbarous and evil, and blamed for any and all violence perpetuated by the White colonists; they were defamed, repulsed, and the settlers were made to fear them, in order to justify the colonists' attacks on the Indigenous locals as "retaliation" and even present their genocide as necessary (Berkhofer 28; Sparks 6; Rambler 9; LA Times Aug 1885, 2; Pessah 1628-9; Grenier 224; Cook-Lynn, Anti-Indianism 4; Fanon 32). Thus, James perhaps recognises the Leper Queen's tactics so easily because they have been used on his own people for centuries, subtly critiquing colonial misrepresentations whilst also challenging the Naïve Sidekick category.

Lastly, the creators challenge the helpless trope by presenting James as the saviour of both himself and his teammates on multiple occasions. James rescues Laura from a vampiric being in Issue #6 (XF#6 19-20), saves Tabitha from two Hammer agents in issue #18 (XF#18 3-4), and even manages to free himself from Stryfe's contraption and stop him from manipulating and kidnapping Hope (XF#15 4-5). Furthermore, in the climax of the series the other members of X-Force distract the ascended, now God-level Selene whilst James manages to stab and kill her (XF#25 26-7), positioning him as the saviour of the world and, quite probably, the universe, which is a significant improvement from the easily duped and constantly captured Indigenous characters of the past.

Red Wolf

Following the *Marvel 1872* spin-off, the character was picked up by Edmondson and given his own comic series: *Red Wolf: Man out of Time*. This was a huge step for Marvel comics and

for Indigenous comics fans everywhere, and the comic rejects the subservience trope by presenting Red Wolf as a sheriff and a leader of the community. Whilst he does work alongside Sheriff Knight and Deputy Ortiz in a technically subordinate position, he is consistently shown to be the one in control of the story and with agency over the situations. Indeed, it is Red Wolf who saves Deputy Ortiz from a deadly snake (*RW* 68), realises something is wrong when the Sheriff gets bitten by the snake (*RW* 64), recognises the man responsible (*RW* 68), finds the caravan where the snake handler lives (*RW* 89), defeats the time travelling villain (*RW* 114-5;



Figure 47: Red Wolf surveys the crime scene as the police officers talk (*RW* 51).

119-120), and so on; it is without a doubt his story and the creators do not allow him to be overshadowed by any non-Native hero.

The comic also challenges the simplicity trope by presenting Red Wolf as incredibly capable and intelligent. In figures 47 and 48, Red Wolf silently walks around the scene, surveys it from different angles, and corrects the White detective's assumption (*RW* 51-52). Red Wolf explains that there were actually just three men, not an entire gang, and he is able to track their movement, where they went, what shoes they were wearing, and recognise that one of them had

a limp. When asked how he knows all this information, Red Wolf simply replies that he 'looked' (*RW* 52), implying the ease with which he is able to interpret the environment. This reply also suggests that he believes this ability to be easy and simple, especially as he does not feel the need to explain exactly how he has come to these realisations, perhaps assuming the

answer is obvious. Thus, the non-Native officers are left confused and appearing incompetent. The scene continues to show Red Wolf's competency, capability, and agency through the imagery. The middle right panel of figure 48 shows Red Wolf at the front and centre, and the bottom panel shows him positioned ahead and looking back at the officers; his literal position in front of the others reflects his psychological position as "ahead" of them; he is leading the way in discovering information that will help to track down the attackers, whilst they are still debating



Figure 48: Red Wolf explains his discoveries to the officers (*RW* 52).

irrelevant theories. Red Wolf is also depicted using arm gestures to explain his knowledge to the officers (middle right of figure 16), which is reminiscent of the way one might attempt to explain something difficult to a small child. His expression is one of concentration and his extended arms give the impression of control, as he literally appears to grasp the scene in his arms. In contrast, the supposed experts in the background have body language and expressions of confusion: the Sheriff's eyes are narrowed, the lines on his forehead indicate that he is frowning, and he is standing with his hands on his hips, all of which can indicate inquisitiveness or assertiveness (Parvez). The former would suggest that the sheriff did not pick up any of the

information that Red Wolf gathered and is curious as to how he did so. The latter could indicate a feeling of inferiority; Red Wolf has proved himself to be more capable than the Sheriff, who may be attempting to compensate for this challenge by taking up an assertive stance. Similarly, the officer on the left looks surprised and somewhat gormless, with his arms hanging uselessly and passively at his side, but also slightly outstretched as if he has been stopped mid-action, suggesting his incomprehension. Finally, the officer in the background is fairly expressionless; his face looks “blank”, also indicating that he does not understand what Red Wolf is explaining. This scene, then, certainly rejects the notion of Native people as ‘incompetent’ (M. K. Green 327) and gives Red Wolf agency over his own story.

The presentation of Silas and Frank as simple is also rectified by Walker and Walta in *Occupy Avengers 1 & 2*, as their conversations become far more substantial. For example, Frank quotes a famous Lakota saying: ‘Today is a good day to die’ (*OA2* 85), which, although debated, is most often attributed to Crazy Horse (Kramer 169), and they also refer to Custer (George Armstrong), who was a US officer in the American Indian Wars and was defeated by Crazy Horse (Brimmer 32), demonstrating a connection to and awareness of their history (the cousins are members of a fictional tribe called the Keewazi based in New Mexico, and Crazy Horse was a leader of the Oglala of South Dakota, so although their cultures are not the same, the reference demonstrates the cousin’s awareness of the shared colonial history of many communities). The cousins also reference several important texts: *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* by Peter Matthiessen (*OAI* 26), and *Custer Died for your Sins* by Vine Deloria Jr. (*OAI* 38). These texts explore and outline injustices towards Native Americans, both historically and in the modern day, also indicating knowledge of their culture, political awareness, and suggesting that they are well-read. Moreover, these allusions function as more than merely a demonstration of their erudition; they also hold the potential to teach the reader about the erased history and ignored present of Native American communities, by directing the reader to these resources.

The inclusion of Matthiessen's text is a particularly bold statement on the necessity of hearing the Native Americans' side of the story, as the book was hugely controversial and a lawsuit was filed against Matthiessen and his publisher by Governor William Janklow and FBI agent David Price, who accused him of telling a 'one-sided' account of Leonard Peltier's story and of the FBI's conflict with the American Indian Movement, when Matthiessen was merely telling the "other" side of the story to the propagandic narratives that were considered unbiased and acceptable due to their White settler colonial perspective (Mehren; McDowell; Mitgang). Thus, these intertextual references act as much-needed reminders of Native American history and as counter-narratives to the mainstream, White-American versions of events.



Figure 49: Silas and Frank (*OA2* 82)

The comic goes on to do this even more explicitly when Silas and Frank directly reference events in American history, such as Frank's question: 'You ever hear of Wounded Knee?' (*OA2* 82). Here, Frank directly references the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890, 'where 120 men and 230 women and children were encamped in a military controlled area and then strafed by carbines and shrapnel cannons' (Roberts 56), killing nearly 300 of the 350 Miniconjou and Hunkpapa people there (D. Brown 444). This question also appears to be addressed to the reader, as the other characters within the scene ignore this question, and Frank is illustrated looking directly through the panel at the reader (figure 49). In addition, the cousins are illustrated in relaxed poses: Frank is leaning against a wall with his hands in his pockets, and Silas sits with his hands resting on his knees.

There is no tension or aggression in their poses. Frank's question, then, acts not only as a reminder of this often-omitted colonial horror, but also comments on and critiques this

omission itself by questioning the reader's knowledge and challenging us to learn American history in a non-confrontational way, in turn challenging the stereotype of the naïve simpleton.

Moreover, Frank's statement that 'Hydra can't do anything worse to us than what's already been done' is a haunting reference to the genocide and dispossession committed by settlers against Indigenous communities (Dippie; Marks; Roberts 51, 182; Sivasundaram 157; Peterson, *Bestial* 7; Gruen and Weil 480; P. J. Deloria 4; J. Martin 63; Seshadri 7). At this point in the comic, the evil Hydra have taken control of the USA, and are committing genocide both through direct violence and by cutting off access and food supplies (*OA2* 69). Whilst such an apocalyptic scenario is new and terrifying to most characters, Silas and Frank remind the reader that both direct and indirect genocide is nothing new to Indigenous communities. In the USA, for example, in addition to the violent holocaust of the Native population of the USA (Jaimes 3) and the forced sterilisation of their people (Jaimes and Halsey 323), the US government took control of 'Indian land, lives, and resources through such legislation as the General Allotment Act [...], the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, and the Indian Reorganisation Act of 1934' (Jaimes and Halsey 323). Native populations were also depleted by the introduction of European infectious diseases (McBrien 120) and the malaria and tuberculosis caused by 'malnutrition, lack of sanitation, overcrowded labor settlements, and lethal exploitation' (McBrien 120; see also Packard 55; Arnold 77). Indeed, Indigenous communities continue to suffer overt, subtle, and institutional discrimination (Tighe 10) that has resulted in them being 'the most economically impoverished ethnic group in the United States' (Tighe 1); they have been forcibly removed from their land, confined to reservations, their access to resources has been restricted, they have fewer educational and employment opportunities, suffer increased levels of homelessness, are subject to more violent crimes than any other group, and experience the highest rate of incarceration (Tighe 1). Such discrimination and inequity remains similarly prevalent in settler colonial states such as Canada and Australia (ACOSS 12, 66; Canadian

Poverty Institute; Statistics Canada). Frank's brief comment, then, alludes to this long history and the continuing reality of discrimination and suffering, as does the illustration of the panel itself. The red lighting connotes blood, danger, and courage, reflecting the bloody massacre and continual genocide against their people as well as the resilience of their community and their continuing resistance to colonial regimes. Through this brief panel, then, the cousins are further shown to be well-read and well-versed in Indigenous history. Therefore, the end of the second volume does challenge the category of Native simplicity through the Fireheart cousins, who act as teachers to the reader, thus also subverting the problematic pedagogical hierarchies present elsewhere.

Bishop

The Last X-Man and *Gambit & Bishop* series also reject the category through the presentation of Bishop's knowledge, intellect, and humour. In issue #2 of the latter, Gambit leads Bishop to the mausoleum where the Witness lives, and the two stand at the entrance looking down at 'a stairway that descends into absolute darkness', to which Bishop comments, 'Why does Dante's verse, "abandon hope all ye who enter here," continue to run through my mind?' (*G&B*#2 22). Firstly, this comment functions as another display of Bishop's humour and his jovial scepticism of Gambit by suggesting that Gambit has led them to hell. More prominently, though, Bishop's use of the quote from Dante indicates that he is well-read and well-educated, especially considering the age and difficulty of the text in question, opposing the supposed illiteracy of so many Indigenous characters. Furthermore, Dante's *Inferno* functions to outline Christian doctrines, present evil as the contradiction of God's will, and emphasises the perfection of God's justice. Thus, Bishop's familiarity with the text, despite his Indigenous heritage, indicates his own intercultural sensitivity and understanding, as well as a potential interest in classic literature.

The comics also reject subservience, consistently presenting Bishop as the saviour of both himself and other (mostly White) characters (*XF*#15 12; *LXM*#1 24; *LXM*#3 2-3, 18; *LXM*#5 30; *LXM*#6 1-3; *LXM*#10 26; *LXM*#12 1; *LXM*#13 18, 20-21; *LXM*#15 19; *LXM*#16 4-6; *XM:MC* 226-7; *UXM* 208-9; *G&B*#1 23; *G&B*#5 29; and so on). In one such example, the demonic Kith attack the city of Dunduine, leaving the townspeople helpless and too scared to fight back (*LXM*#5 30; *LXM*#6 1-3).

However, Bishop appears on the horizon riding on the back of Kinlan, the true heir to the Kith throne (*LXM*#6 1-3); his appearance rallies the town guards and gives them the hope they need to fight back, but it is ultimately Bishop and his befriended Kith king that fight off the evil Kith and save the entire town, including Bishop's teammates. Not only does the narrative reject the category through the positioning of Bishop as the saviour of a (mostly White) town as well as his (mostly White) teammates, he defeats an entire army of incredibly powerful, ancient creatures. The full-page spread that



Figure 50: Cover page featuring Bishop riding Kinlan into battle against a pink sky (*LXM*#6 3)

depicts his entrance into the battle further demonstrates this, firstly through the colouring of the background: the sky behind Bishop and Kinlan is a pink gradient without any orange or red tones that would usually accompany a sunrise (figure 50). The lack of other colour tones in addition to the consideration that Bishop's mutant powers manifest as a pink glow suggest that the sky colouring is intended to emphasise Bishop's powers and evoke a sense of omnipresence

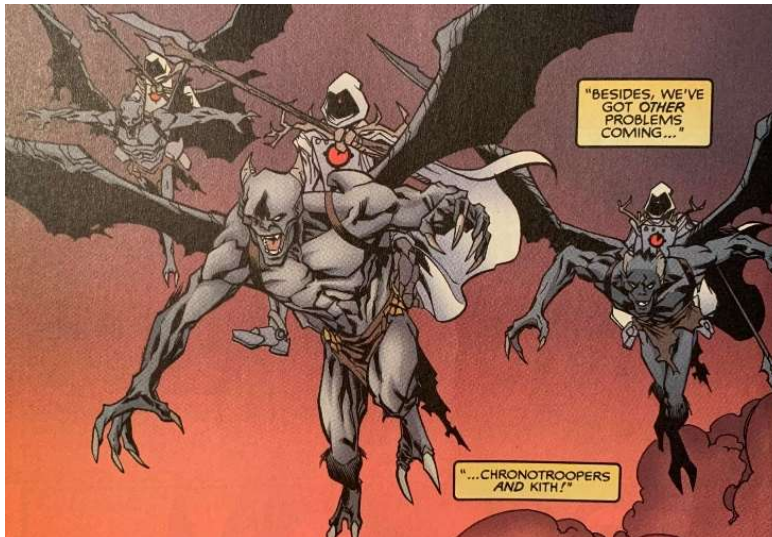


Figure 51: Three Chronotroopers ride Kith into battle against a pink sky (LXM#6 2).

by having his trademark colour surrounding the battle, the town itself, and “bleeding” off the page. Moreover, Kinlan is angled downward so that Bishop is fully visible in the panel, which contrasts to the way in which the Chronotroopers are mostly

hidden behind the Kith, the latter of whom are angled upwards and placed in the foreground of the panel (figure 51). This contrast, then, appears a deliberate effort to centre Bishop and thus present his significance, control, and power in the situation.

Bishop is also presented as a central and main character in the Marvel comics in which he appears, through which the tendency to place Indigenous characters as sidekicks is rejected. Indeed, the existence of comics such as *Bishop: The Last X-Man*, *The Times and Life of Lucas Bishop*, and *Gambit & Bishop* are testament to his ongoing prominence and prevalence in the Marvel universe. Having not just one but multiple series dedicated to and named after him is a huge step for Indigenous representation in comics. Harris and Jeanty in particular successfully reject the Naïve Sidekick category in regards to leadership and subservience. In *The Last X-Man* series, Bishop is consistently represented as a natural leader, some of the most potent examples of which are as follows: LXM#2 4, 8, 32; LXM#3 27-31; LXM#4 2-4, 7, 25, 37; LXM#5 18-19, 25; LXM#6 6, 10-11, 14; LXM#7 6, 14, 26; LXM#8 4, LXM#9 21; LXM#10 1, 2, 6, 8, 12-14; LXM#11 28; LXM#12 1, 2, 18; LXM#13 26; LXM#14 29. Once again, there are far too many examples to examine them all, so only a minority are explored below. In issue #7, Shaw states that, in the process of chasing Fitzroy to stop his tyrannical reign of the country,

Bishop ‘defeated the Kith, liberated an entire city... and gained allies who will spread your word to any that might listen’ (*LXM#7* 6), and even Fitzroy’s servant notes that he is ‘rallying the people [...] with talk of revolution [...] he] grows a legend as he marches on’ (*LXM#10* 2). The narration, too, states that, his ‘own legend beginning to spread, Bishop has since gathered his growing forces into a ragtag army’ (*LXM#10* 1). Such comments display Bishop’s position in the comic as the leader of not just the mutant rebels he encounters at the beginning, but of a growing force of mutants and humans alike, demonstrating his reputation amongst the mutants as a ‘hero’ and ‘legend’ (*LXM#2* 8), and potently rejecting the stereotypical portrayal of Indigenous characters as sidekicks to White characters.

The scene that most aptly demonstrates Bishop’s leadership is in Issue #10: Bishop addresses hundreds of people in a cave and asks them to fight alongside him to end Fitzroy’s reign. Bishop’s speech is moving and motivating through his talk of ‘freedom’ and ‘pride’, and his words are carefully chosen to inspire a sense of unity (through the repeated use of plural pronouns such as ‘us’ for instance). Overall, he is eloquent and appears to be an exemplary public and motivational speaker, but it is the imagery that elevates his skill and ability. In the top panel in figure



Figure 52: Bishop stands on a high rock in a cave, addressing a crowd of people looking up at him (*LXM#10* 13).

52, the scene is illustrated from the crowd's perspective and the reader is placed amongst them, viewing Bishop's followers in the foreground and Bishop himself as a silhouetted figure standing high above them. This perspective causes the reader and followers to look up at Bishop as a literal representation of their metaphorical hierarchy (indeed, the crowd has followed Bishop to the mountain and looked to him for leadership throughout the series). In addition, the middle-left image in figure 52 is also angled upwards whilst the right-hand overlapping panel is drawn from Bishop's perspective looking down at the crowd, further displaying the crowd's admiration of Bishop, whilst also conveying a sense of unity by switching from the crowd's perspective, to Bishop's, then back to the crowd's (bottom panel of figure 52). Despite this unity, Bishop is simultaneously presented as being of higher importance through the use of panels. The white background surrounds both Bishop and the other panels; he is illustrated in the gutter of the page. This positioning of Bishop outside of the panels themselves removes him from the realm of the ordinary; he literally and figuratively ascends the boundaries of the story, implying an almost god-like position and emphasising



Figure 53: Close up of Bishop's face, followed by a panel depicting him standing above the crowd who have their weapons raised in the air (*LXM*#10 14).

Bishop's power and significance via a sense of omnipotence. The illustration also indicates an unwavering focus on him, as the panels all depict him from different angles, furthering the sense of omnipotence and also conveying the huge scale of the crowd he addresses.

Figure 53 on the following page further demonstrates Bishop's power as a leader. The top panel contains the

last line of his speech, where he addresses the crowd, asking ‘will you bleed with me?’ (*LXM#10 14*), alongside an extreme close-up of Bishop’s face, in which the background of the cave is now present and the gutter surrounds the panel like it does the others. These visual features function to ground Bishop back into the same realm as his followers, visually aligning him with the civilian s as he seeks to unify them with his last question. Indeed, this effect is made more potent by turning to the bottom panel of figure 53, which mirrors the bottom panel of the previous page. Whilst the panel in the first page holds an uninterrupted view of Bishop standing on the rock, surrounded by his speech, the latter panel holds the same image, but instead of the speech bubbles surrounding him, the raised fists and weapons of his followers are displayed in a signal of unity (*LXM#10 14*). The illustrators thus succeed in simultaneously depicting Bishop as a leader of others and as a unifying force, whose words have the power to surround him with allies and followers. Moreover, the raised fists facsimile the symbols used for civil rights movements including the Black Panther Party, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the American Indian Movement, thus connecting and recognising Bishop’s (dual) heritage by positioning him as a hero and leader of a revolution in line with figures such as NeeGawNwayWeeDun (Clyde Howard Bellecourt), Nowa Cumig (Dennis Banks), George Mitchell, Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi.

Black Condor

Palmiotti and Gray also reject the simplicity trope with Black Condor: despite his lack of humour, John is consistently presented as clever, tactical, and strong-willed. Condor’s mental strength is displayed in *Uncle Sam #6* and *Freedom Fighters #6*, both of which show John managing to escape from mind-control. In the former, Red Bee has them under her control and hallucinating. Whilst the rest of the team are consumed by the illusion and the fear it causes, John is able to break free from Bee’s control enough to realise that it is an illusion, stating, ‘I

must not fear- what is not real!’ (*US#6* 23). Similarly, in the latter comic, the Freedom Fighters are captured and “restraining collars” are placed on each of them in order to block their superhuman powers. However, Condor realises that ‘the restraining collar the inmates put on me shouldn’t work. I’m not superhuman. I possess supernatural powers given to me by the goddess Toci. No technology should hinder my abilities. The only other explanation is that the restraints are psychosomatic, possibly sending a signal to my brain that makes me think I have no powers’ (*FF#6* 3). John proceeds to prove his theory correct by managing to use his powers to escape and save the other Freedom Fighters. John’s powers of deduction, then, are proved to be far greater than his non-Native teammates, as are his strength of will and his understanding of technology and psychology (regarding his knowledge of psychosomatics).

Gray and Palmiotti also successfully challenge the trope of helplessness through Black Condor, positioning him as the saviour and as the toughest member of the Freedom Fighters (see *USI* 83-86, 92, 95, 118; *US#1* 2-3; *US#8* 7; *FF#1* 4, 6, 15; *FF#5* 15-17; *FF#6* 3-4, 8; *FF#9* 5, 8, 21, 22). Upon his introduction to the team, Uncle Sam and the others have been defeated by First Strike and are about to be captured and killed by Father Time. However, Condor appears and saves them all by breaking through First Strike’s shields, effortlessly defeating two enemies single-handedly, and sends the others back to Father Time (*USI* 91-4). Thus, from the character’s very introduction, Palmiotti and Gray subvert the White Saviour trope by presenting him as the saviour of the White characters and by showing him to be incredibly powerful, as it should have been ‘impossible’ for anyone to break the shields and defeat the enemies as he did (*USI* 92). Furthermore, having Black Condor save Uncle Sam (the embodiment of the spirit of the “New Nation” aka colonial America) could be a commentary upon the importance of Indigenous Peoples to the USA as a country, both in terms of the Indigenous Peoples being

enslaved and literally forced to build it, and in terms of their importance, knowledge of, and right to the country and the land.

John's power and significance is signalled through the full-page bleed panel depicting his entrance into the story (figure 54; *USI* 86), endowing him with a sense of omnipotence due to the nature of the panel extending off the edges of the page and the sheer size of the illustration. In addition, the perspective of the panel positions the reader and characters looking up at Condor, which makes him appear powerful and in control. The background of the panel emphasises this, as the light behind Condor's head and shoulders frames his person

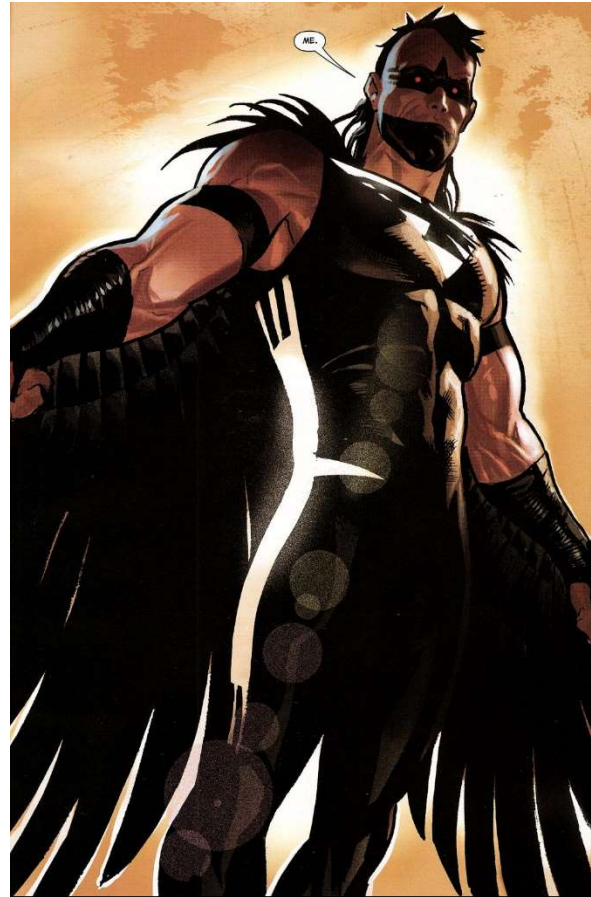


Figure 54: Black Condor stands with his wings slightly outstretched and the sun behind him (*USI* 86).



Figure 55: Black Condor and Uncle Sam sit next to each other on a rock in the desert (*US#8* 29).

and even “creates” a lens flare. This illustration mimics the photographic effect that occurs when a bright light is focused upon, and connotes divinity, presenting him as a kind of deity or saviour, the former of which is emphasised by his large black wings.

Moreover, John is consistently presented as Sam's right-hand and the two are often illustrated separately from the rest of the team, with John usually placed on Sam's right-hand side (e.g. *USI* 105, 125, 185, 195, 204), suggesting that John is more of a co-leader than merely a member of the Freedom Fighters. Indeed, when the rest of the team disband and go their separate ways, the last pages of the comic show Sam and John sitting together in the Arizona canyon that John calls home (figure 55; *US#8* 29). In addition, the two characters use third person pronouns, 'them' and 'they', when referring to the other members of the team: instead of saying, 'you all need time away' and thus including John, Sam refers to the team using third person plural pronouns (*US#8* 29), distinguishing John from the others. This presentation of an "us" and "them" distinction further implies John's position as Sam's deputy or even co-leader. The creators make this position more explicit in the *Freedom Fighters* series, where John takes over as leader upon Sam's absence, demonstrated by the cover of #9 (figure 56) which depicts John at the front and centre of the image with the others partly hidden behind him, emphasising his centrality and leadership in addition to his position as the main character of this series and as Uncle Sam's successor, which holds significant implications. If we consider that Sam is the "spirit of the New World", then John's partnership and position as his successor could function as a commentary on the importance of the Indigenous inhabitants of America; it appears to suggest that the very



Figure 56: Cover page featuring Black Condor standing in front of his teammates (*FF#9*).

essence of the country lies in partnership with the Native American communities at the very least. Indeed, the hypocrisy of basing a “Free Country” on genocide and slavery is subtly critiqued through the presentation of John’s significance and the above implications by suggesting that the current oppression and ignorance of the Indigenous communities is contrary to the supposed “spirit of the nation” and its supposed founding principles. Therefore, whilst this commentary could and perhaps should have been made more potent throughout the series, it is still a successful rejection of the stereotype.

Raven

Lemire’s Earth One version of the Teen Titans also deconstructs the category of the sidekick, as his re-imagined Raven is firmly placed as the main character of the two-volume series. Her centrality is immediately indicated by the cover of the first volume (figure 57),

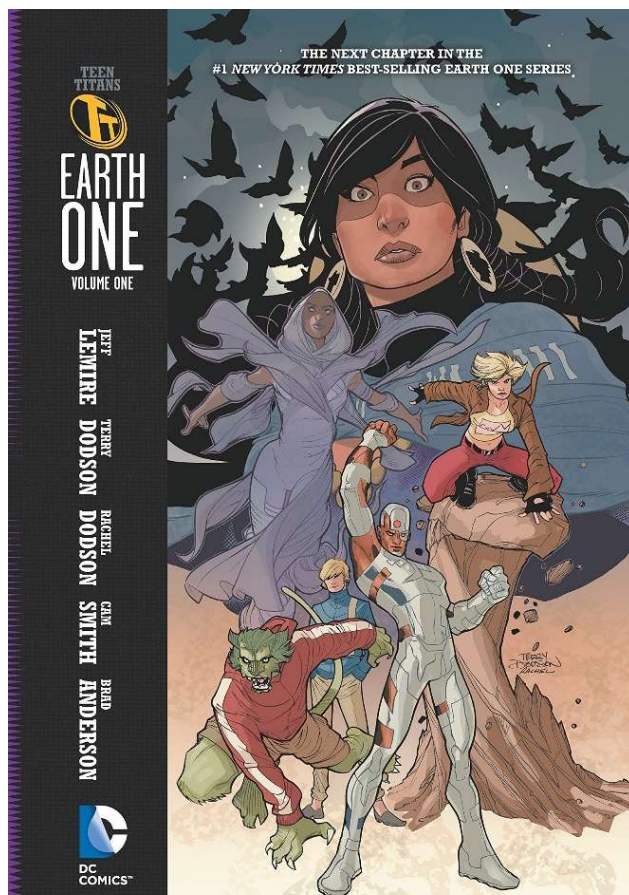


Figure 57: Cover page featuring Raven and her teammates (*TT1*).

which depicts the majority of the teen titans at the bottom of the page and Starfire a little higher up and larger in the background, but Raven is given almost the entire top half of the cover with a close-up portrait of her and silhouettes of ravens flying outward from her in the background. She is undoubtedly positioned as the main character through this cover, and Lemire’s narrative enforces this. Raven’s grandfather shows her an engraving/painting on a cave wall inscribed based on his own visions, which depicts a raven in the centre, with multiple lines

reaching from the bird to ten other images, each of which appear to represent the other members of the Titans (the green creature representing Beast Boy, the robot representing Cyborg, and so on) (figure 58; *TTI* 60-61).

The central placement of Raven's namesake as well as

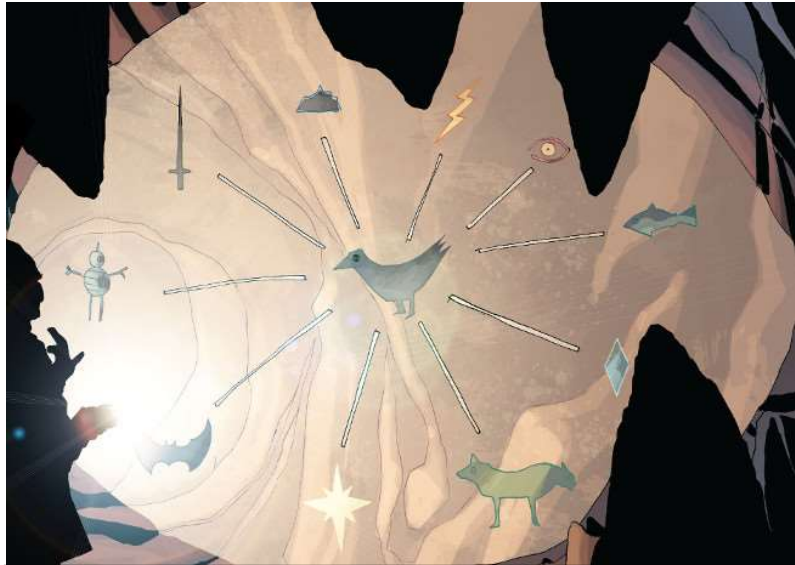


Figure 58: A cave wall with a raven drawn in the middle and an array of other symbols surrounding it (*TTI* 61).

the lines stemming from her and connecting her to all of the other members indicates her



Figure 59: Cover page featuring Miiyahbin set against the outline of the Whitago (*JLUI* 129).

metaphorical centrality and positions her as the most significant member of the team and the main character of the series, by literally depicting her at the centre of the team.

Equinox

Lemire's original character, Equinox, is also positioned prominently throughout the *Justice League United* series, the first volume of which dually focuses on the Justice League's discovery of Ultra and on Miiyahbin's backstory. DC giants such as Green Arrow, Hawkman, Super Girl, and Martian Manhunter are all placed in the former story together,

whilst the other half is dedicated to Miiyahbin and her discovery of her powers. Indeed, issue #5 is titled, 'The Midayo and Whitago', referring to Mii's title as a Midayo (protector of the people), and her personal battle against the Whitago entity that has taken over her father's body. In addition, the cover image of this issue is entirely dedicated to Mii, featuring a large portrait of her in her Midayo costume and the silhouette of the Whitago figure behind her (figure 59). Placing such emphasis on this new character in a comic book series with the title of Justice League (United) and involving such prominent and well-known characters is a bold move and further destabilises the most common and prevalent stereotype by not allowing the Indigenous newcomer to be overshadowed by the well-established White (and green) characters.

Conclusion

Like the Bloodthirsty Savage, there are still far too many instances of 21st century comics facsimileing the stereotype of the Naïve Sidekick. However, there does appear to be a significant movement away from propagandistic tropes and towards more progressive and realistic depictions of Indigenous Peoples. Dani Moonstar provides an exceedingly excellent example of how Indigenous characters can be written to be fully human, three-dimensional characters who redefine what it is to be an Indigenous superhero. As a character, Dani is not perfect and she is never beyond needing or asking for help, but her consistent capability, collected demeanour, tactical and emotional intelligence, natural leadership, and relatable humour make her an unforgettably strong and respectable character. Moreover, other characters are gradually being allowed to leave their roles as sidekicks and mere team members, and slowly but surely more Indigenous leaders are emerging in comics, and more characters are being granted their own series.

Chapter Three: The Romantic Ecologist

Chapter Three will focus on the Romantic Ecologist, which refers to the animalisation, shamanisation, and fetishisation of Indigenous Peoples. The basis for this category comes from Krech, Bird ('Fantasy'; 'Savage'), Sheyahshe, Horn (*Comics*), Pearce, P. J. Deloria, Woodward and McHughs, M. K. Anderson, Roberts, Kilpatrick, M. K. Green, R. Green ('Indian'; 'Pochahontas') and Schlesier. The Romantic Ecologist draws on the stereotypical presentation of Native characters as being inherently close to and having an affinity with nature and animals, as possessing an innate tracking ability, being naturally spiritual and possessing shamanistic powers that relate to and/or are drawn from the environment, and as being natural ecologists. Indeed, the very term "savage", as Krech points out, originally meant "in a state of nature".

It will also explore the idealisation, romanticisation, and fetishisation of Indigenous cultures as an attempt to recapture the "purity" of the past and/or to assert colonial dominance. This section draws on scholarship from Pewewardy (*Studies; American*), P. J. Deloria, Stedman, M. K. Anderson, Kilpatrick, Krech, Bird ('Fantasy'; 'Savage'), and Lent, all of whom discuss and critique the romanticised depiction of Indigenous Peoples as the pinnacle of physical abilities, as living in a nobly simple society, as self-sacrificial, and as the hunky Native man with long flowing hair or the beautiful "Indian Princess" who is virginal and selfless. It is also worth noting that both of these archetypes are positioned with a White love interest, suggesting that Native Peoples can only be desirable if they are fulfilling the fantasies of White people. In comparison to the previous two categories, this category is not as obviously insulting due to the "positive" way in which these characters are portrayed, and indeed many Indigenous communities did hold nature and the environment in far higher regard than White societies (Mihesuah 21). The problems with this category are the subhuman status such depictions imply, as the above tropes all function to animalise the Native character and to place them closer to

nature and to animals than to White humans. Other problems include the overt objectification of the Indigenous characters in question, and the implication that Indigenous Peoples embody “nature” as an opposition to White “culture”, and the use of these tropes to enforce notions of colonial domination.

The Category

The three main tropes of this category (animalisation, shamanisation, and fetishisation) all interact in order to dehumanise, patronise, and assert power over the Indigenous characters depicted. The “Ecological Indian” concept is part of the animalisation of Indigenous Peoples: as Sheyahshe explains, Hollywood has ‘for many years and countless films, portrayed Indigenous Peoples as wanton children of nature (Sheyahshe 169) and encouraged ‘the stereotype of the Indian-at-one-with-nature shtick’ (Sheyahshe 169). As Sheyahshe’s use of the word, shtick, indicates, this means of presentation is a performance of Indigenous culture: of course, many Indigenous Peoples traditionally ‘knew a lot about the earth because they had to live with her. Out of necessity, they learned about food, what could be used as medicine, and that if one harvests too many plants or animals then the supply runs short’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 21). However, the continuing and unrelenting presentation of Indigenous Peoples as being ‘natural-born ecologists’ only functions to further narrow people’s understanding of Indigenous cultures and ignores the large percentage of Indigenous Peoples who live and grew up in urban centres.

In addition to this, the depiction of Indigenous characters who can ‘meld into the environment’ (Mihesuah, *So You* 21) also functions to animalise and thus dehumanise them. These Indigenous characters can often ‘change into animals’, ‘carry on a meaningful conversation’ with them (Mihesuah, *So You* 21), and their tribes are equated with animals (Mihesuah, *So You* 17). Another way in which Indigenous characters are animalised is through

an innate tracking ability: as Sheyahshe explains, ‘Another major stereotype in comic books is the portrayal of Indigenous Peoples as skilled trackers with supernatural sensory perception’ (Sheyahshe 79). This implication that all Indigenous Peoples possess ‘an innate tracking ability’ (Bordewich 33-4) functions to liken them to animals by depicting them as predators tracking their prey. Indeed, this continuing animalisation of Indigenous Peoples facsimiles colonial descriptions of them as a ‘troublesome and dangerous species of wild beast’ (Parker in Berkhofer 96) who ‘denied their holy, human selves’ and were ‘more animal than rational’ (Pearce 5; see also Haklyut vii). This dehumanisation has been an ongoing battle since first contact, as in 1879, an attorney in the Standing Rock vs Crook case explicitly claimed that Native Americans were ‘not persons within the meaning of the law’ (Brown in Pewewardy, *Studies* 2); ‘the United States required a court case and legal documentation in order to prove that First Nations peoples were, indeed, real human beings’ (Pewewardy, *Studies* 2); and ‘as recently as the early 1990s’ some states referred to cases involving People of Colour as ‘N.H.I. - No Humans Involved’ (Goff et al 292; Wynter, 1992). Therefore, any implication of Indigenous Peoples as more aligned with animals and nature than humans functions to hinder the ongoing struggle of Indigenous Peoples to reclaim their full humanity.

Furthermore, this alignment of Indigenous Peoples with animals was not merely insulting; it was tactical. As Roberts explains, ‘If an individual or racial group could be empirically determined to be in any way connected with animals, this would serve as an objective indication of their less-than-human standing’ (57). That is, the animalisation of Indigenous Peoples serves not only to insult their intelligence and humanity, but to make them exempt from all forms of fair and humane treatment. The atrocities committed against them by the settlers were thus “justified”; Indigenous Peoples could be hunted, exterminated, and tortured like animals, and their bodies desecrated without any moral concerns as they were not considered human (Bordewich 35). Similarly to the Naïve Sidekick and the use of cranial capacity and

intelligence, the supposed inhumanity of Indigenous Peoples functioned to justify the actions and existence of settler colonial states. The depiction of characters who are close to nature, linked to animals, and natural ecologists, then, ultimately risks encouraging and continuing this propaganda and the genocide it facilitated.

The fetishisation of Indigenous Peoples was also prominent at the very beginning of the colonial period: ‘from first European contact, much was made of the physical nature of the natives of America’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 68); he was the ‘master of the wilderness’ (Berkhofer 98), ‘possessor of physical prowess’ (Berkhofer 98), and had ‘superb physique [and] proficient wilderness skills’ (Hirschfelder et al 260). The presentation of Indigenous men, in particular, as the peak of physical ability functioned to remove them from the realm of human and emphasised the positioning of them in line with animals that are perfectly adapted to their environment. It also functions to romanticise and fetishise them through the emphasis on their bodies and consequential encouragement of fascination. It is also worth noting that these archetypes are positioned with a White love interest: ‘each is presented separately for white perusal’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 83). Indeed, Native characters can only be desirable if they are fulfilling the fantasies of White people (Mihesuah, *So You* 18; Bird, ‘Savage’ 79, 83, 87, 89; Bird, ‘Intro’ 3) and acting as objects for the “White Gaze” (Bird, ‘Savage’ 79) which, much like Mulvey’s concept of the Male Gaze, refers to the assumed Whiteness of the consumer and thus the media’s efforts to appeal to the desires of this consumer (Morrison).

This image of the “Romantic Native” died down during the Indian Wars as the Bloodthirsty Savage image took over, but ‘as the “Indian problem” grew less pressing in the middle of the nineteenth century and into the 1890s, the noble and often eroticised savage gradually ascended, as the physical appeal of the imagined Indian body grew increasingly overt’ once again (Bird, ‘Savage’ 68). Since then, this category has been consistently present throughout a variety of mediums, but Romance Novels especially have ‘frequently depict[ed]’ sexualised

Indigenous characters (Pewewardy, *Studies* 5). Titles such as *Too Tough to Tame* by Deborah Camp and *Scarlet Plume* by Frederick Manfred are potent examples of pornographic literature featuring Indigenous men in particular.

For Indigenous men, depictions of this trope include the ‘Indian Lancelot’: Indigenous men who are physically attractive to White women, but only for lust and the satisfaction of ‘an animalistic desire’ (Stedman 89-90). This figure, of course, also feeds into the animalisation trope by presenting Indigenous sexuality as ‘animalistic’, simultaneously denying their subjectivity and enforcing notions of superiority by depicting their subservience to the White women whose desires they exist to fulfil (Bird, ‘Savage’ 89, 66). Another depiction is the ‘noble, defeated, scantily clad Indian warrior’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 70) who is ‘tied up for days on end, tortured, or [...] murdered’ (Lent 224), and is thus simultaneously sexualised and victimised. This depiction functions as an exertion of power over Indigenous Peoples and reminds readers and onlookers of ‘the essential power of white men, in that Indian men could be displayed, naked and powerless’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 90). The prevalence of vulnerability in such depictions ‘lies in the familiar process of image control’ (Lent 225); by displaying vulnerable, victimised Indigenous men, the society enforces their subservience and oppression. It also appeals to the ‘age-old response of being needed and providing comfort’ for the White audience, further providing “eye-candy” and even a sexual fantasy for the White reader (Lent 214).

For Indigenous women, who have been ‘highly sexualized throughout history and in pop culture’ (Keene, ‘Nudie’), depictions include the ‘Pocahottie’ figure who functions only as an ‘object’ ‘meant for sexual gratification’ (Hopkins; see also Baldy and Atkins). Examples of such characters include ‘Pocahontas, or Tiger Lily in *Peter Pan*, or Cher in her “half breed” video, or the land ‘o’ lakes girl’; ‘almost any image of a Native woman that you’ve seen in popular culture’ (Keene, ‘Nudie’). As Scott details, Indigenous characters are ‘normally given

no sexual identity, either artistically or through the plot. She is clearly sexual, but only in appearance. She does not act upon any of her own desires. She is sexually passive. All sexual overtones are created around her. Sexuality does imply power and it was necessary to make her powerless' (Scott 25). This depiction facsimiles the historical and ongoing exploitation of Indigenous women, who 'have been exploited by colonisers for prostitution since the days of Christopher Columbus, and the impact of this history of sexual violence still rears its ugly head today' (Charleyboy; see also Keene, 'Nudie'). Indeed, any depictions that facsimile and encourage this view of Indigenous women as passive, powerless sex objects contribute to the disproportionate rates of violence against Indigenous women, who experience 'the highest rate of domestic violence' (Atkins) and are '2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than non-Native women, with 86% of the perpetrators being non-Native' (Charleyboy). The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls movement is attempting to raise awareness of these issues and the real-world impact of these depictions. Indeed, as Keene explains, 'This is about a serious, scary, and continuing legacy of violence against women in Indian Country [...] by perpetuating the stereotypes of Native women as sexual objects, they are aiding and continuing the cycle of violence' (Keene, 'Nudie'). Put simply, the 'sexualisation of dominated races was and is an important component of colonial domination' that is continuously used in media today (Bird, 'Savage' 90; see also Hall).

Lastly, the shamanization of Indigenous Peoples also functions to dehumanise them by presenting them as inherently spiritual beings who are strange and inhuman in their knowledge, practises, and abilities. This trope ties in heavily with the "Ecological Native" stereotype, as Indigenous characters who 'fall under this trope have magical powers coming from innate spirituality or closeness to nature' that 'usually involve influence over nature or animals, or other spirit powers' (Schoentrup). Indeed, as Sheyahshe explains, 'The idea that all Indigenous people have some innate shamanistic/mystic ability is a stereotype found in comic books and

other forms of popular media, [that includes] elements such as animalistic (totemic) characteristic or just generic Indian “spirituality” (Sheyahshe 55). Such depictions are problematic for several reasons, firstly because the powers usually granted to these characters are incongruous with those granted to non-Indigenous characters, and their magical and spiritual powers position them as ‘exotic outsiders’ (Schoentrup) who function outside of ‘White understanding’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 76). In addition, the shaman trope ‘trivialises deep spiritual traditions as mere fantastical magic in a manner that many real indigenous people view as disrespectful’ (Schoentrup); it presents a role that ‘requires a lifetime of knowledge, learning, and practise’ as a party trick and a means to aid the White characters on their own journey (Sheyahshe 55). A common embodiment of this trope is ‘The Wise Elder’ figure who possesses ‘vast (and sometimes mysterious) wisdom’ (Gaines). Bird describes this stereotypical figure as ‘The Indian Elder who is close to nature and wise beyond White understanding’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 76). Such a figure has appeared in numerous media, including films such as *Little Big Man*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and *Dances with Wolves*, and these portrayals have come under heavy criticism for the way in which Indigenous culture is ‘only relevant in so far as it serves the White hunger for spiritually’; it is ‘coopted as a spiritual resource’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 78).

Furthermore, the use of the term, shaman, is problematic as it is not an Indigenous term and was first applied to Medicine Men and Women by colonists (Penelope) and was used to signify a ‘non-Western Indigenous religious practitioner’ who did not operate ‘within a socially stratified “advanced” civilisation’ (Penelope). The usage of the word in itself represents the ‘trivialization and commercialization of Native American spirituality’ that the trope as a whole perpetuates (Aldred 332).

Settler colonial propaganda aims to continually justify their actions by presenting Indigenous Peoples in these ways that undermine their very humanity; they were and are

presented as objects and as creatures closer to non-human animals in order to justify the colonists' lack of humanity.

Red Wolf

The writers of *Occupy Avengers* facsimile this category through the presentation of Red Wolf, who is immediately connected to animals through his name. For a number of Native American communities, 'it was a great honor to [...] adopt [animals'] names' as is evident in figures such as Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, White Eagle, Standing Bear, White Antelope, and many others (Roberts 182). Roberts describes this tendency as a reflection of their beliefs in a 'seamless continuum that included all living things' (Roberts 182). Red Wolf in particular is actually a very fitting name that demonstrates at least some cultural awareness, as one of the Cheyenne Maiyuns (gods), Maheone'honehe, takes the form of a large red wolf (Schlesier 9; see Chapter Four). Thus, the character's name is culturally appropriate and fitting considering the time period in which we encounter the character. This connection between human and namesake is continually present throughout the series, firstly in the medallion that Red Wolf wears throughout *Man out of Time*. In figure 60, the medallion can be seen to contain the rough outline of an animal head that looks canine in nature, leading one to assume it is a symbol of his namesake.

The medallion is hung on a necklace that features multiple canine teeth, further reflecting the traditional Cheyenne attitude that it is 'a great honor to wear the skins, horns, and feathers of animals' (Roberts 182). Therefore, whilst this technically perpetuates the category by visually connecting the character to



Figure 60: A portrait of Red Wolf featuring where his wolf medallion is visible (*RW* 10).

animals, it is culturally specific and somewhat appropriate in this context.

However, the comic goes on to more problematically uphold the category through Red



Figure 61: A panel depicting Red Wolf surrounded by wolves, with read and yellow “speech” bubbles, followed by a close-up of his eyes (RW 116).

Wolf’s interaction with animals and through his superpower. In the climax of *Man out of Time*, Red Wolf, finding himself hopelessly outnumbered, activates a power previously undisclosed: he closes his eyes and says, ‘Listen to me now, now. Listen, I need you’ (RW 114). The speech bubble that contains these words changes from white with black text and outline to a dark, rusty red with yellow text and outline, indicating that the words are not being spoken aloud, but also not merely being thought – it is an unfamiliar presentation. Over the next few pages, Red Wolf

explains that he has ‘summoned help’ and this is followed by a full page spread of Red Wolf surrounded by wolves and saying in another red and yellow bubble, ‘Something is wrong here. Let us right it’ (figure 61; RW 116). The “speech” bubble we now learn indicates a telepathic link between Red Wolf and the wolves, demonstrating an ability to speak to animals. This facsimiles multiple stereotypes in regards to this category, including the tendency to have an Indigenous character ‘call upon his spirit-animal friends to come to his aid in times of need’

(Sheyahshe 21). Indeed, Indigenous characters who can talk to animals are one of the most common stereotypes (Mihesuah, *So You* 3, 21), making this scene a troubling continuation of an already pervasive trope.

The colour scheme further emphasises this connection, the rusty red reflecting the wolves' coat and the yellow reflecting their eyes. The equation of human with animal is also demonstrated through the imagery in figure 62. Firstly, Red Wolf is literally surrounded by the wolves, presenting them as a collective entity. Secondly, the character uses the collective pronoun "us" to position himself alongside the animals and thus equating himself with them. Furthermore, the wolves' eyes are glowing yellow in the top panel, which is then



Figure 62: A close-up of Red Wolf's face next to a close-up of a wolf's face, both of which have glowing orange eyes (*RW* 117)

immediately followed by a close-up of Red Wolf's eyes glowing the same shade. This visual comparison is presented again on the next page where a panel containing a portrait of Red Wolf's face is immediately followed by a panel of the same size and shape containing a portrait of a wolf's face (figure 62). This visual parallel between the two implies a connection between the human and the animals, potentially facsimileing problematic colonial narratives of Indigenous animality and their 'less-than-human standing' (Roberts 57). Thus the connection between Red Wolf and his animal namesake, whilst somewhat fitting considering the cultural specificity of his Cheyenne heritage, feeds into this dangerous dehumanisation of Indigenous Peoples as a means to 'validate' colonial claims of their 'inferiority' (Roberts 57).

Occupy Avengers 1 continues this trope: although Red Wolf appears to have lost his powers in this comic, they are still referenced when the character explains that, ‘In my day, I could commune with wolves – a gift from both the spirit of the land and the spirit of the sky’ (*OAI* 24). This depiction thus continues the animalisation of Red Wolf and reflects the stereotypical presentation of Indigenous characters as natural shamans and for their shamanic powers to come as a blessing from nature-based spirits.

The creators of *Marvel 1872* uphold the romanticisation and fetishisation of Indigenous Peoples through their depiction of Red Wolf. The very beginning of the comic holds a double-page spread of Red Wolf travelling through the Valley of Doom (figure 63; *M1872* 6-7). This opening scene upholds both the depiction of Indigenous men as the pinnacle of physical abilities and the objectification of them. Regarding the former, the text reads that ‘crossing the desert from the native territories is considered suicide by most everyone in town [...] One man proved that notion to be pure hogwash’ (*M1872* 6-7). This demonstration of Red Wolf’s physical ability facsimiles the ‘great stamina and endurance’ that has traditionally been

attributed to Indigenous Peoples in order to liken them to a well-adapted species of non-human (Berkhofer 28). The scene also objectifies Red Wolf through the bottom panels. The ‘erotic appeal of the male Indian body’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 68) is here



Figure 63: A collage of panels depicting Red Wolf dragging supplies across the dessert and washing his face in a stream (*M1872* 6-7).

showcased through Red Wolf's naked and very muscular torso, encouraging the reader to gaze upon him and positioning him as an object of the White Gaze. His facial expression in the right-hand, middle panel also perpetuates the trope through his closed eyes, parted lips, and the water running down his face, making him appear sensual and thus attractive to the reader. He is also illustrated struggling to drag along a large crate and bending over a stream, washing his face, placing him in a vulnerable position and thus facsimileing presentations of the 'exhausted, victimised warrior' (Bird, 'Savage' 70). The positioning of the panels also speaks to this notion, as the bleed panel of the desert with the small figure of Red Wolf in the middle sits on top of the close-ups of him, contrasting the enormity of the environment to his figure and placing the "weight" of the situation (and presumably the heat) on top of his person, further presenting his vulnerability as a continuation of the exertion of power over Indigenous communities.

Red Wolf is again sexualised on the cover of Issue #4, this time more in terms of the 'fearless warrior' icon (Lent 212). Lent describes how 'media presentations have conditioned us to picture a young male on a horse, his bare chest streaked

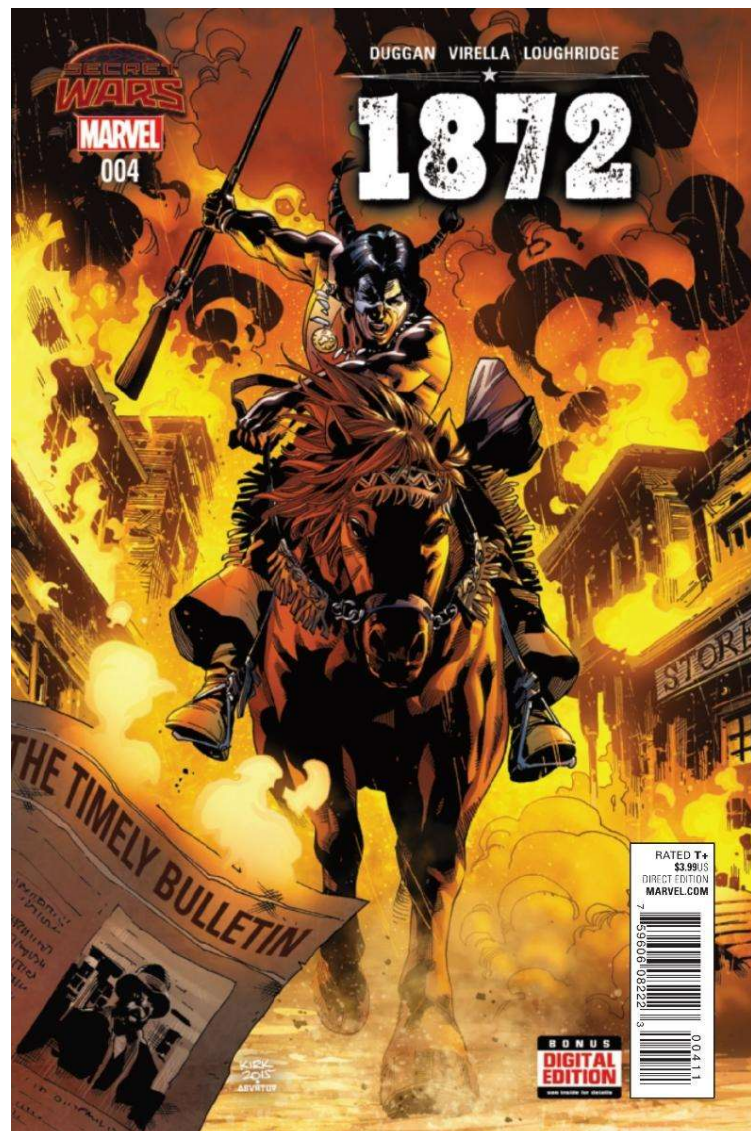


Figure 64: Issue cover featuring Red Wolf riding a horse and wielding a gun, with the town ablaze behind them (*M1872* #4).

with war paint, wearing a full-feathered warbonnet; he is situated above the horizon on a bluff, waving a feathered spear' (Lent 212). Whilst Red Wolf does not wear a warbonnet and is waving a gun instead of a spear, the rest of Lent's description is clearly applicable to this panel: Red Wolf is on a horse with a naked torso, covered in warpaint, riding triumphant through a huge battle (indicated by the flames surrounding him), and the angle positions the reader to look up at him and his steed (figure 64). As Lent further explains, 'these forms all fulfil a certain formula of sexiness linked to past archetypes and are carefully crafted to present a sexual image' (Lent 214). Red Wolf's long braided hair, fang necklace, and even the horse's



Figure 65: Full-page spread of Red Wolf on horseback wielding an axe, with two wolves running either side of him (*OAI* 13).

fringed reigns and headband present 'a general aura of romance and nostalgia' (Gerdt 129), again presenting him as an object for White consumption.

Occupy Avengers Volume 1 presents the reader with a very similar image (figure 65; *OAI* 13), depicting Red Wolf riding bareback on a horse, surrounded by wolves, wielding a tomahawk, and charging into battle to save Barton. Whilst Red Wolf is not bare-chested in this image, his vest top still ensures that his ample muscles are on display to the reader. His long hair flows behind

him and even the horse he rides is drawn looking majestic and almost romanticised. Furthermore, the inclusion of wolves speaks to the “Ecological Indian” who is in tune with nature and can communicate with animals. This panel is a prime example of Kitzmiller’s description of ‘the stoic Indian brave with his long, black hair, riding bare-back across the plain... the half-naked warrior fighting to preserve his home, his family, his people and his way of life [...]’ (Kitzmiller). The night sky behind him is full of stars and the walls of the canyon frame his entrance, emphasising the romanticisation of his presence. This romantic framing is further displayed as the image is accompanied by Barton’s statement that, ‘there’s a guardian angel’ come to save him (*OAI* 16), thus fully removing him from the realm of the human and offering him as an object of the White gaze.

In addition to Red Wolf being sexualised for the sake of the reader, he is also sexualised by other characters within the comics. From his very first introduction to Tilda in *Occupy Avengers 1*, she relentlessly makes sexual comments to him despite his lack of reciprocation. Some examples of these are as follows: ‘Damn, you are hot. I’ve never done it on a fire escape before’ (*OAI* 48); ‘Damn. Just when I thought you couldn’t get any sexier’ (*OAI* 51); ‘Hunky McSexy’ (*OAI* 52); ‘Wolf and I can share a bed. Hope you brought some earplugs, Barton – because I’m gonna make him howl at the moon’ (*OAI* 7). These comments are made even more uncomfortable through Red Wolf responses, or lack thereof: he often does not respond or even acknowledge these comments, and on the rare occasion he does, he simply asks what she means (e.g. ‘It?’ in response to the first comment), demonstrating his inability or perhaps unwillingness to understand her intentions. These (non-) responses and his apparent lack of reciprocation or perhaps naivety regarding Tilda’s sexualisation of him make her comments feel inappropriate and uncomfortable. Furthermore, at the very end of Volume 2, Red Wolf admits that he has feelings for her and she kisses him before they run into battle (*OAI* 107-8). Having Red Wolf suddenly reciprocate Tilda’s attraction feels unnatural and acts to justify the

sexual harassment he has faced throughout the comic. Thus, this conclusion to their story trivialises his experience and encourages the objectification of Indigenous Peoples by presenting a “happy ending” to their relationship.

Dawnstar

Dawnstar, too, facsimiles the perception of Indigenous Peoples as ‘natural ecologists’ (Kilpatrick xviii). When the Legion find themselves transported into the past, Dawnstar notes that ‘the pollutants... are proving difficult... to adjust to...’ (*LLI* 13), but the rest of her team appear unaffected by the atmosphere of the planet. The claim that Dawnstar is sensitive to air pollution and struggles to cope suggests that she needs “pure” air to survive and is used to an unpolluted and pure atmosphere, thus upholding the stereotype that Indigenous Peoples are in ‘unity with nature, pristine and authentic’ (Bordewich 34) and are naturally incompatible with urban environments. The writers further facsimile this implication as Dawnstar explains that she ‘grew up on a world named Starhaven, where we lived as one with our planet, not in constant opposition to it’ (*LLI* 86). Starhaven, as explained in *Superboy and the Legion of Superheroes Volume 1*, is a world inhabited entirely by ‘descendants of American Indians’ (298). Considering this, such a statement replicates Mihesuah’s description of the stereotype that claims that all Native Peoples ‘live in harmony with (and, conversely, all White people sabotage) the environment’ (*So You* 21).

Another way in which Dawnstar embodies the category is through her tracking ability: ‘I am a hunter – a tracker!’ (*LL2* 219), which, as discussed previously, holds implications of predators and thus the animalisation of Indigenous Peoples. Dawnstar is further likened to a predatory animal when we are shown the world from her perspective and the scene around her is illustrated in bright light reminiscent of the type of infrared / ultra-violet vision experienced

by some birds of prey and other (usually predatory) animals (figure 66). Whilst this constitutes a beautiful illustration, the implications that accompany it are in danger of facsimileing racist claims of animality. Dawnstar's vision in this scene is explicitly non-human and shows the reader that she experiences the world in a similar way to predatory



Figure 66: Dawnstar flies above the ground with the world illustrated in bright colours and lines (LL1 20).

animals, thus aligning her with them and contributing to views that meant that Indigenous Peoples 'had difficulty in being accepted as possessing full humanity' (Pewewardy, *Studies* 2).

The creators of the *Legion Lost* and *Legion of Superheroes* comics also continually perpetuate the objectification of Indigenous women through their illustration and narration of Dawnstar (examples include LL1 19, 20, 36, 37, 58, 73, 121; LL2 21; LoS1 15, 30; LoS2 104, 107, 170, 200; LoS3 230). Firstly, Dawnstar's outfit has a wide neckline that goes down to her stomach, revealing far more of her cleavage than any of the other women characters. There are far too many examples to examine them all, as her costume is consistently inappropriate in every panel in which she is depicted. Some particularly prominent examples, however, can be found in figures 66, 67, and 68 (LL1 20; LoS1 31; LoS3 230, respectively). In addition to the impractical and objectifying neckline, her proportions are grossly exaggerated, and in the second and third images she is drawn without trousers, wearing only a leotard with sleeves. In the third image, too, the hip-line of her leotard is impractically high and narrow, and the crease

between her thigh and crotch is clearly visible. Such depictions facsimile the sexualisation and fetishisation of Indigenous Peoples that has been prevalent since first contact (Keene). Figure 66 is particularly problematic due to the shading to the right behind the string that holds her



Figure 67: Dawnstar with her wings spread, wearing an extremely revealing leotard (*LoSI* 31).

outfit in place, as it appears to show her nipple protruding out of her costume. This nudity is inappropriate, unnecessary, and incongruous to the context of the comic, especially considering Dawnstar's stoic, serious, and unwaveringly professional demeanour. This panel speaks to Scott's discussion of sexuality and power, where he claims that

'the woman herself is normally given no sexual identity [because...] it was necessary to make her powerless' (Scott 25). Scott's explanation reveals that this imagery of Dawnstar functions to remove her power and agency by displaying her sexual appearance in contrast to her non-sexual identity. This is further seen as the exposure of her breast would appear to be "accidental" due to Dawnstar's personality and the context of the panel (the team have found themselves lost in the past and Dawnstar is attempting to investigate whether or not they have arrived at the right time to stop the release of a dangerous pathogen). That this nudity is unintentional and unknown by Dawnstar herself raises issues of consent. Whilst characters

cannot literally consent to be drawn in a sexualised way, they can be drawn to consent to their own in-comic nudity, such as Shaw in *The Last X-Man*, who takes off her clothes in a deliberate effort to seduce and distract Bishop. Dawnstar,



Figure 68: Dawnstar's exaggerated proportions and revealing outfit (LoS3 230).

however, does not consent to this nudity in any form: it is not a deliberate decision by the character and is thus exploitative and reflective of, and even at risk of encouraging, the sexual violence faced by so many Indigenous women (Charleboy; Keene).



Figure 69: Dawnstar flies on her back with her eyes closed and arms above her head (LL1 37).

Similarly, in figure 69 (LL1 37), Dawnstar is depicted flying on her back, bent backwards with her chest thrust forward, and with her eyes closed and mouth parted, all of which depicts her as sensual and vulnerable. Moreover, this panel takes up over half the page, which is a lot of space considering that nothing is actually happening in it. The presence of this image alone

upholds the ‘Pocahottie’ imagery that fetishises and turns Native women into ‘objects meant for sexual gratification’ (Hopkins; see also Baldy and Atkins). The narration of the panel makes this scene even more problematic, as Wildfire narrates that he knows ‘she’s still suffocating’ (LL1 37), feeding into the sexualisation of Indigenous Peoples’ suffering (Lent 224) and presenting her as passive and therefore vulnerable. Wildfire’s narration of her also facsimiles the co-option of Indigenous narratives by White people (Kovach; L. T. Smith), removing her agency and further objectifying her.

Legion Lost 2 continues to uphold this trope: in a scene where Dawnstar fights Ridge, he tells her to ‘forget about spreading those pretty wings, dearie’ before landing on top of her, his legs pinning down her wings and her arms raised above her head (figure 70; LL2 21). Firstly, the phrase “spreading those wings” is reminiscent of “spreading those legs” as an idiom for sexual intercourse, and the adjective “pretty”

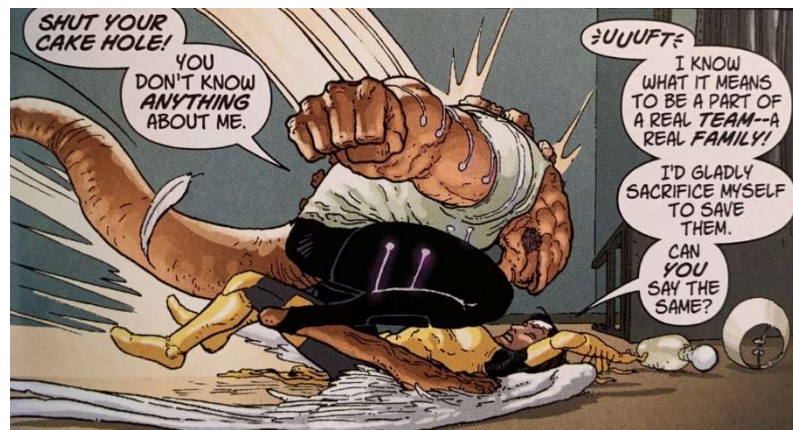


Figure 70: Ridge attacks Dawnstar and lands on top of her (LL2 21).

implies an attraction. This objectification of Dawnstar is problematic on its own, but its presence alongside the context of physical violence is exceptionally troubling. Dawnstar’s position in this scene is reminiscent of the ‘physical bondage’ ‘common’ in comics (Hayton 9). Indeed, one 1948 Wonder Woman comic contained ‘no fewer than seventy-five panels depicting women or men tied with ropes’ (Lavin 95-6), and Hayton explains that ‘bondage covers’ traditionally elevated a comic ‘in terms of monetary value and interest’ (Hayton 17). Although Dawnstar is not technically bound with anything, the positioning of her arms and hands facsimiles such bondage, presenting her as submissive and vulnerable. Furthermore, the

presence of Ridge on top of her with his legs either side and tail quite clearly between her legs amplifies the sexual tones of the scene. Dawnstar is here presented as a victim of sexualised violence, connotative of sexual violence, which is dangerous and harmful to Indigenous women. Such images perpetuate the fetishisation of Native women and, in doing so, aid the ‘cycle of violence’ against them (Keene, ‘Nudie’).

Black Condor

The creators of *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters* also facsimile this category through their depiction of Black Condor. Like Red Wolf, this character’s name is taken from an animal, a consistent trend for Indigenous characters, but, unlike Red Wolf, Black Condor does have his own name: John Trujillo. Black Condor is simply John’s “superhero name” and facsimiles the likes of Wolverine, Black Canary, Batman, Spiderman, and many more. Thus, his animal-derived name follows the superhero tradition and is less open to accusations of presenting Indigenous animality because of this. However, Condors specifically are a type of vulture; scavengers stereotypically presented as bad omens or evil spirits (Navajo legends especially – see Chapter Four). John’s name is certainly less than flattering, then, and could even encourage a similar attitude towards him as many societies hold towards vultures.

Black Condor is also animalised through his sense of smell: in *Freedom Fighters* #5, he describes that the cave ‘smells like death’ (12), and in *Uncle Sam* #8, he states that the creatures ‘stink of hate and hunger’ (3). Being able to smell abstract concepts is an ability often attributed to predatory animals, such as the claim that canines can smell “fear”. Thus the claim that Black Condor can smell such concepts aligns him with predators and non-humans.

The stereotype is further expressed in *Freedom Fighters* #2 in relation to the closeness to nature and shamanism tropes. This issue tells the story of four renegade shamans who ‘bargained with elemental demons’ and were turned into evil entities, each representing an



Figure 71: Full-page spread featuring the four renegades (FF#1 31).

element (FF#2 1): Fire Horse (FF#2 5), Tall Trees (FF#2 6), Wind Storm (FF#2 7), and Thunder Cloud (FF#2 11). Figure 71 shows their first appearance in the comic, which depicts Wind Storm in the top right, Tall Trees in the middle left, Thunder Cloud middle right, and Fire Horse at the bottom left. The alignment of these characters with elements further cements the alignment of Indigenous Peoples with nature by suggesting that, even renegades of Indigenous cultures (that is, deserters) cannot or will not desert their inherent connection to the

environment. This is further presented through the illustration of the “shamans”: Fire Horse has a skull as a face and is constantly surrounded by flames; Thunder Cloud’s head and shoulders are emersed in a cloud with lightening extending from his fingertips; Tall Trees’ skin is made of bark with leaves and branches for hair; and Wind Storm has wings, a feathered headdress, talons for feet, and more feathers extending across his shoulders. The “shamans” are a combination of human and nature (literally only half human) and this risks continuing the depiction of Indigenous Peoples as closer to nature than to humans, attributing ‘to them an animal and sub-human sort of existence’ (M. K. Green 328). The very use of the word,

“shaman”, is, as we have seen, a problematic and offensive tendency amongst White writers that trivialises Indigenous spirituality (Aldred 332). Thus the description of these religious leaders and Medicine People from ‘a hundred tribes’ (*FF*#1 31) as “shamans” encourages the application of this problematic and often offensive word imposed on Indigenous communities.

In a further depiction of the shaman trope, Black Condor is granted his powers by the Spider Woman (Na'ashjé'íí Asdzáá): ‘I choose you, John Trujillo, as the land’s warden... the sky and earth elemental’ (*USI* 70). The inclusion of Spider Woman in the comics does demonstrate a level of understanding and knowledge by the writers, as the goddess Na'ashjé'íí Asdzáá is the protector of humans in Navajo cultures. However, the origin and nature of John’s powers could be seen to encourage stereotypes regarding Indigenous shamanism and the natural ecologist tropes. John’s powers are the result of an ‘ethnically based source – e.g. the Great Spirit’ that Sheyahshe criticises (83) in contrast to the apparently random origins of the rest of his teammates. In addition, his powers are based on nature, reflecting Bordewich’s description of Indigenous characters whose powers ‘relate to and/or are drawn from the environment’ (Bordewich 33-4).

The creators of Black Condor are also guilty of sexualising, objectifying, and fetishising the character. Throughout the *Uncle Sam and the Freedom Fighters* comics, John is often depicted unnecessarily shirtless. In Volume 1, the reader is introduced to John’s backstory through a five-page flashback depicting the origin of the Black Condor mantle and his personal



Figure 72: Three panels featuring Black Condor climbing a cliff, crouched on top of the cliff, and a giant spider web stretched across the night sky (*USI* 69).

journey, including a panel where he climbs up a canyon wall in full length jeans but no shirt, then appears to collapse at the top as he is hunched over on his knees (figure 72; *USI* 69). In



Figure 73: Two panels depicting Black Condor's body with his head not included in the frame (*USI* 143).

both panels, his muscles are exaggerated, especially with the glow illustrated on his biceps, and his lack of shirt seems odd and unnecessary considering his impractical jeans. Thus, the display of his muscles seems to function purely to appeal to the White gaze. This appeal is further demonstrated through panels such as those in figure 73 and 74, which have already been discussed in the first

chapter. The omittance of John's head in the panels but inclusion of his body, as mentioned, directs the reader's focus entirely to John's muscular body and prioritises his physicality over his emotional or psychological presence.

Whilst this could function to foreground physical violence as argued in Chapter One, it could also foreground his



Figure 74: A third panel depicting Black Condor's body with his head not included in the frame (*USI* 143).

body in terms of sexuality. The omittance of his head and therefore his brain, thoughts, and personality by connotation, encourages and almost forces the reader to gaze upon John's body, view him as merely a physical being and object, and thus denies his full humanity.

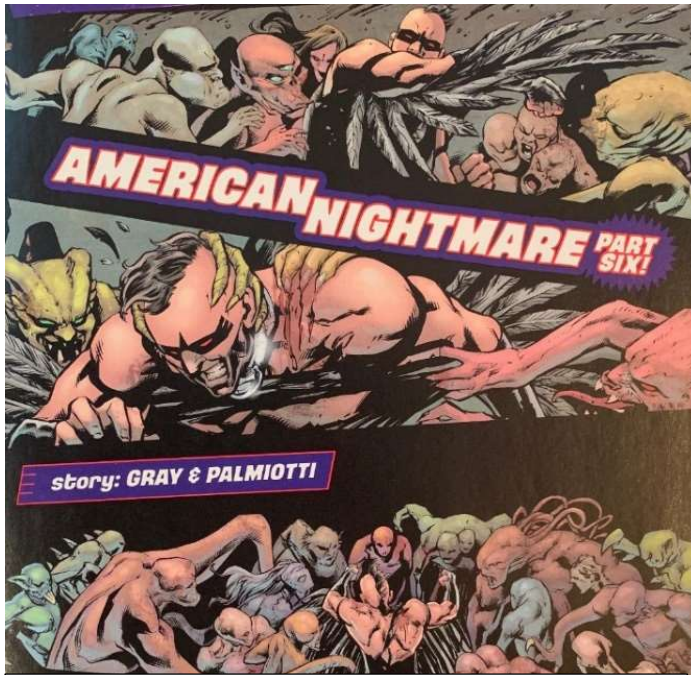


Figure 75: Cover page featuring Condor fighting a horde of creatures as they tear his clothes off (FF#6 1).

biting down on his chest, another is scratching his stomach with its head positioned directly in front of and facing John's crotch, and tentacles wrap around his upper thigh and arm. These visual elements hold strong and clear connotations of BDSM and fellatio, simultaneously positioning John as a victim and as a sex object, and holding implications of sexual violence via this sexualised violence as in *Legion Lost 2*.

Like Red Wolf, Black Condor is also sexualised by other characters within the comic. Upon their introduction, Stormy notes that 'he might not have much when it comes to tact, but he's definitely got the raw sexuality working for him' (US1 95). Her instant attraction to him despite his lack of 'tact'

indicates that this attraction is entirely physical, as does the adjective 'raw'. This appears to

Issue #6 of the *Freedom Fighters* further sexualises and objectifies the character, as the opening pages depict him fighting a hoard of underlings whose goal appears to be to strip Black Condor of his clothes (FF#6 1-3). In figure 75 and 76, the creatures' hands cover his torso as they tear his costume off and reveal his bare chest. In figure 76, not only do the creatures' hands cover John's body, one underling is



Figure 76: Condor is stripped and restrained by the creatures (FF#6 3).

facsimile the 'Indian Lancelot' trope described by Stedman as Indigenous men who are physically attractive to White women, but only for lust and the satisfaction of 'an animalistic desire' (Stedman 89-90). Indeed, the presentation of Indigenous sexuality as 'animalistic' is a common way to deny their subjectivity and enforce notions of superiority (Bird, 'Savage' 89, 66). This animalistic attraction is further demonstrated through Stormy and John's relationship. Later in the same issue, Stormy throws herself onto the mostly-naked John and kisses him. When John protests, claiming that he's 'not sure this is a good idea', and asks Stormy what her feelings are for him, she simply replies 'Come on and I'll show you' (*FF*#6 20). Her lack of any declaration of love or even liking for John alongside her insistence of 'showing' him her feelings through a sexual relationship suggests a lack of feeling other than lust and positions John as an object through which she satisfies her desires and physical attraction to him.

Raven

The depiction of Raven from *Teen Titans: Earth One* also facsimiles this category in regards to the shaman and animalisation tropes. Whilst the name of the character pre-existed and she was re-imagined by Lemire as an Indigenous woman for this series, the character's real name (Rachel) was dropped in this transition and her superhero name adopted as her only name. This decision centres the character's relation to the animal, as does the way in which her powers manifest. In figure 77 (*TTI* 86), for example, Raven's powers are visually represented as a purple raven and she is able to absorb herself into the silhouette of this bird and fly. Furthermore, her grandfather tells her that she is 'a bird. A beautiful raven' (*TTI* 85), which explicitly animalises her, as does the illustration of her enveloped by the silhouette of a raven as she appears in the sky above the other Titans. In this image, she is illustrated to mirror the outline of the bird, with her arms raised and spread out, her cloak flying behind her to reflect the wings, and one leg held up to mirror the shape of the tail. This alignment of Raven with her



Figure 77: Raven appears in the sky within a glowing purple shape of a bird (*TTI* 86).

namesake is far starker than that of the non-Indigenous versions of the character and thus must be assumed to be a direct result of her Indigenous identity in this series, unavoidably encouraging the assumption that Indigenous Peoples have an inherent connection to the natural world and supporting the animalisation of them (Mihesuah, *So You* 3).

The creators also facsimile the shaman trope through Raven's

visions. The writers do make an attempt to lessen this stereotype by having the character herself claim that she doesn't 'believe all that old Navajo stuff' (*TTI* 13). However, this effort fails to negate the presence of the stereotypical visions and could even prove offensive in her initial rejection of her own culture. Furthermore, the "vision quests" typically associated with Native American cultures were mostly a feature of Plains communities and not something relevant to the Navajo, making this trope more of a stereotype due to the misplacement of it.

The comic further upholds the category by presenting Raven's grandfather as a typical shaman: in Volume 1, when Raven first discovers her powers and goes into a trance-like state, her grandfather draws a circle around her and begins waving a smoking bowl above her, stating that 'The spirit has you now, girl. But do not be scared. Courage is it's doorway. Let my blood guide you. Feel it in you, Raven. The old ways. The Navajo way. Let it cleanse you' (*TTI* 84). This scene shows that Grandpa is unaffected and unsurprised by Raven's powers, suggesting

that he is familiar with magic. This is further presented as he claims that this is the ‘Navajo way’, facsimileing the perception of inherent shamanism in Indigenous cultures. The use of the word shaman within the comic has also been criticised by its Indigenous readers, one such fan commenting that ‘a problem I have with the Earth One version of Raven is that they use the terminology “shaman” which is not an Indigenous concept, and comes with a bunch of inaccurate stereotypes attached’ (Jason in Gaines). Raven’s grandfather also fulfils the position of ‘The Wise Elder’ who aids White people’s spiritual journeys (Bird, ‘Savage’ 78). Whilst Raven is not a White character in this comic, her and her grandfather’s culture can be seen to be used as a resource with which to aid the group of non-Indigenous heroes and to



Figure 78: Raven’s grandfather kneels next to her waving a smudge stick as she is in a trance (TTI 84).

provide the element of spiritual gratification that White audiences are used to consuming.

Bishop

The creators of *Bishop: The Last X-Man* and *Gambit & Bishop* also encourage the fetishisation of Indigenous characters in two instances. In the former series, Bishop is illustrated on his knees, with his arms chained above his head, and with rips in his tight trousers and low-cut vest from being tortured by Fitzroy (figure 79; *LXM*#13 1). Such a depiction feeds into the portrayal of ‘a noble, defeated, scantily clad Indian warrior’ (Bird, ‘Savage’ 70) who is ‘tied up for days on end, tortured, or [...] murdered’ (Lent 224), simultaneously sexualising

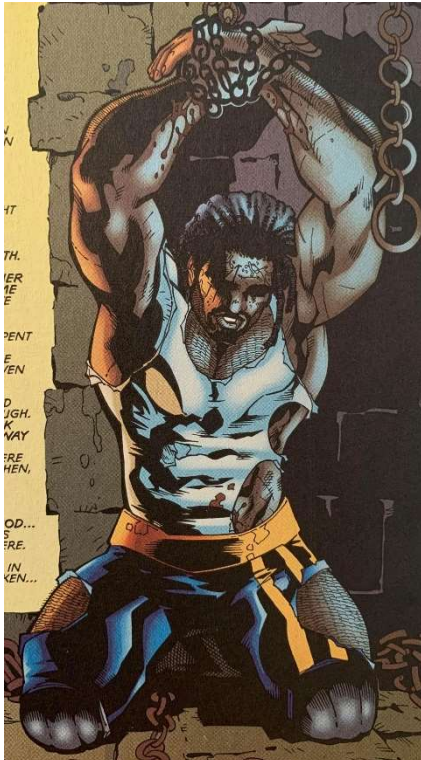


Figure 79: Bishop kneels with his hands chained above his head and his clothes torn (LXM#13 1).

and victimising him. Similarly, in *Gambit & Bishop*, the series begins with the discovery of a symbiote living inside Bishop's body and the characters learn of its existence by running tests on him in Xavier's laboratory. The panel that depicts these tests places Bishop wearing nothing but his underwear, strung up and floating in a test tube with his arms and legs spread outward whilst the rest of the X-Men watch, and the panel is drawn at a strange angle, positioning the reader by Bishop's feet whilst also indicating that he is upside down (figure 80; *G&B*:A 24-25). Once again, Bishop appears vulnerable in his physical position and entirely at the mercy of those whom he believes to be his teammates. The presence of the other characters watching him rotate in

the tank is especially uncomfortable, subjecting the character to the "White gaze" both within and outside of the comics, and thus encouraging the reader to gaze upon him in a vulnerable and somewhat sexualised position.

Dani Moonstar

When Dani Moonstar first appeared in the Marvel Universe, she was a mutant with the ability to project spirit illusions alongside the inexplicable ability to communicate with the character

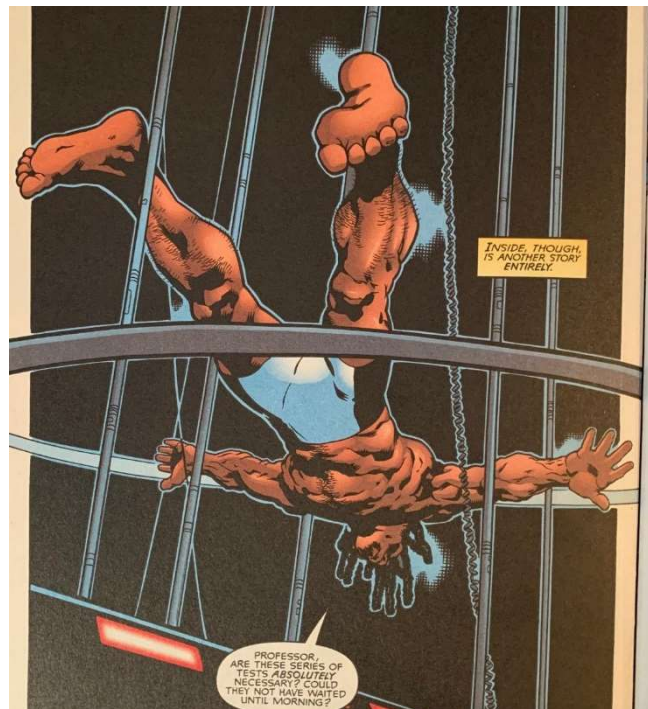


Figure 80: Bishop is suspended in a cage wearing only his underwear (*G&B*:A 24-25).

Wolfsbane when she was in her wolf form. One comic, *Back to School*, has returned these powers to her. As Dani herself explains, ‘the telepathic link [Wolfsbane and I] used to share. I think it’s returning. It makes sense, I guess, if she’s back in wolf form’ (*BTS* 290). This text specifies that Dani’s link with Wolfsbane only exists when she is in her animal form, suggesting an inherent link between Dani and the animal world. The reason for this link is never explained or even questioned in the comic; it appears natural that Dani would have a psychic link with a wolf and, as she is the only Indigenous character in the comic, suggests that it is her Indigeneity that causes this link. As already explored, such a suggestion facsimiles old notions of Indigenous animality and problematically aligns Dani, and by extension Indigenous Peoples, with non-human animals. This comic also facsimiles the ecological stereotype through the claim that Dani is ‘not usually a ski lodge kind of person. I prefer my nature in a more natural state. It’s my Cheyenne heritage’ (*BTS* 5). The inclusion of this claim within the comic is inconsequential, bears no relevance to the story, and seems to function only to draw attention to Dani’s culture without recognising any legitimate cultural connections. Indeed, the clear assertion that it is her Indigeneity that makes her dislike “unnatural” nature is overtly stereotypical.

The only two instances of objectification or fetishisation found in the array of New Mutants comic examined are committed by the illustrators of *Exodus* and the cover illustrators of Issue 3 of the main series. In figure 81 (*Exodus* 16), Dani is drawn with severe disproportions and an incredibly tight suit. Whilst all the characters are drawn with such skin-tight outfits, her disproportionate body shape is far more exaggerated than the other characters and thus can be seen to ‘fetishise Indigenous femininity’ (Callison and Rifkind 152) and purvey the ‘Indian princess as sex-pot ideal’ (Sheyahshe 169). Her exaggerated and extreme muscles, however,



Figure 81: Dani stands over Ares with Brightwind and her teammates in the background (*Exodus* 16).

complicate this analysis. On the one hand, they could facsimile the objectification of Indigenous Peoples as possessing peak physical abilities. However, this is usually and traditionally attributed to Indigenous men, whilst women were more often overly feminine and subdued (Callison and Rifkind 152). On the other hand, then, the enormity of her muscles could function to challenge other stereotypes and attitudes. Such impressive (and typically unrealistic) muscles are something too rarely attributed to women superheroes: the men are always overly-muscular whilst the women remain slender and feminine-looking in both comics and their film adaptations. Thus, her

muscles could function to challenge this ‘misogynistic’ disparity (J. A. Brown 27) and the sexualisation of them could challenge society’s repulsion of muscular women (J. A. Brown 27).

The cover art for *New Mutants* #3 also risks sexualising the character (figure 82). The array of straps and weapons draped across Dani’s body are reminiscent of Hayton’s writing on bondage and the dominatrix trope of female comics characters in the 90s, which combine ‘ultra-feminine seductiveness with masculine toughness’ (Hayton 30). However, although the idea of bondage can certainly be seen here, there is no discernible ‘ultra-feminine seductiveness’ in this illustration of Dani, nor in the rest of the comic: she is not drawn with exaggerated

proportions, skimpy outfits, nor is she sexualised at any point within the text. Dani is certainly portrayed as dangerous: she is covered head-to-toe in guns, grenades, and all kinds of weapons, one of which she is aiming towards the viewer. In addition, she is drawn without pupils or irises, resembling a zombie or some other undead creature (which are, of course, usually antagonists), and the shading in the panel is very dark, casting a large, looming shadow of her weapons behind her and making it appear as though she is emerging from the darkness. The panel is also set in an alleyway, which are typically associated with crime and danger. These factors do make this depiction of Dani odd considering that she is a protagonist and whilst they

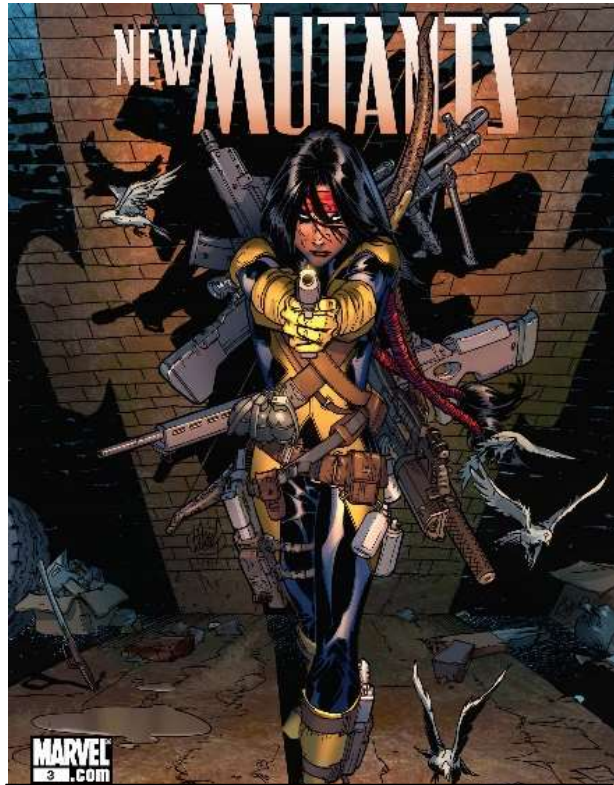


Figure 82: Cover page featuring Dani aiming a gun with a large array of weapons (NM#3).

could contribute to the dominatrix trope, they could also function to reject other stereotypes regarding Indigenous helplessness. As discussed in Chapter One, throughout this first volume, Dani's teammates, especially Sam, continually leave her out of their activities and refuse to let her fight, claiming that she is merely a civilian and it is too dangerous: essentially, implying that she is too weak and powerless to be a real New Mutant. Contextually, this cover image occurs in the volume just after Legion appears in the jail where Dani is being held. More broadly, Legion has escaped and has begun wreaking havoc upon the New Mutants, and Sam and Roberto fly off to find Shan and Dani. Whilst Dani's situation seems to present her as a damsel in distress, this cover image foreshadows the turn of events in the following issue. That is, Dani saves the rest of the team and stops Legion herself. Therefore, this image disputes the

assumption that Dani is helpless by presenting her as dangerous and powerful, hinting to the reader that she is capable of saving not only herself, but others. The potential dominatrix trope, then, seems less problematic when the context of the panel and the lack of any other instance of fetishisation are taken into consideration.

Redefining, Challenging, and Rejecting the Category

Dani Moonstar

Thankfully, the above tropes are complete anomalies in the examined comics. In terms of the “Ecological Indian”, the main *New Mutants* series continues on from the M-Day storyline that saw Dani, among many other characters, lose her mutant powers, thus her problematic link to Wolfbane’s animal form is removed. Instead, Dani is simply an exceptionally skilled fighter, tactician, team leader, and Valkyrie, meaning her character concept consistently rejects stereotypes surrounding Indigenous animality, ecology, and shamanism. The extent of Dani’s communication with the animal world is presented through her connection to Brightwind, her Valkyrie horse, and her interaction with Hela’s crow. Dani’s connection to Brightwind stems from her position as a Valkyrie rather than her Cheyenne identity and her interactions with her never go beyond a regular human-animal relationship. Whilst Dani is often depicted talking to Brightwind (‘Whoa, Brightwind! Can you feel that? [...] I thought things were bad at home. What’s happening here?’ (*FI:NM* 91)), these communications are in-keeping with the way that people interact with their animals in a real-world setting. Indeed, Brightwind does not reply to Dani, nor does she appear to understand her any more than a regular horse understands their handler.

Dani’s interactions with Hela’s crow are similarly ordinary and even function to depict Dani’s compassionate yet humorous nature. When Dani is first awoken by the crow cawing at

her, Dani asks, ‘Is your wing broken?’ and seeks to help the animal without displaying any inherent or shamanistic connection to it (*FI:NM* 81). Later on, when Dani asks the crow what she should call her and the crow simply caws back at her, Dani says, ‘Okay, “Kaw!!” You dragged me to Hel because Hela sent for me, right? [...] Have you any idea how much danger my world is facing right n- / Kak! / Yes, I get that part’ (*FI:NM* 91). Here, Dani takes the crow’s cawing literally and humorously calls her “Kaw!!” after the noise she makes, reflecting the same lack of understanding shared by Dani and Brightwind. In addition, her response to the crow’s interruption provides a humorous moment as Dani attempts to interact with the bird and pretends to “understand” what she is talking about, just as many humans jokingly respond to their animals’ noises.

In another scene, the crow interrupts Dani as she speaks to Hela’s lifeless body, to which Dani responds, ‘I wasn’t talking to you, I was talking to her!’, an exceptionally ordinary response to being interrupted by an animal. Then, when the crow approaches Hela’s face, Dani tells her, ‘Eww! Don’t eat her! She’s not roadkill’ (*FI:NM* 137). Their interactions in this scene are familiar to anyone with animals, grounding the character within the supernatural and bizarre setting, and allowing readers to relate to her. Furthermore, Dani’s ordinary relationship with the animal world is evidenced in her inability to guess that the crow is actually Hela herself, subtly rejecting White expectations of Indigenous characters who are in tune with nature as well as the spiritual world. Indeed, her interactions with the animals in the comics are humorous and very human, demonstrating her kindness towards animals without exaggerating the trope to a problematic extent like the earlier depictions of her.

The writing of Dani further rejects the shamanism trope through her reactions to supernatural and spiritual events. For example, when she asks some Asgardian warriors what the creatures attacking them are and they reply that ‘They must not be named, else it tempts their coming’, Dani replies that ‘They’re here. It’s too late to be superstitious. Spill...’ (*NM* 2

145). Dani's rejection of superstition here modernises her in comparison to the Asgardians and grounds her in logic and pragmatism rather than mystery and the supernatural. Furthermore, her unfamiliarity with the creatures is appropriate considering their ancient Asgardian origin and the writers do not attempt to present her as possessing the innate and inexplicable 'ancient wisdom and spiritual knowledge' that Indigenous characters so often have (Bird, 'Savage' 75; see also Brand). Indeed, Dani is never presented as a shaman throughout the series; she is not endowed with visions or any mysterious knowledge or connections, nor is the word "shaman" ever used. Overall, Dani is consistently represented as an ordinary, albeit exceptionally skilled and intelligent, person.

Another character in the *New Mutants* comics also rejects these stereotypes: Gus Grim. Gus is a no-nonsense, to-the-point psychologist from Dani's home in Colorado, whose attitude continually challenges the wise, 'chic-mystical' shaman stereotype (Bird, 'Savage' 76). In Volume 2, Gus tells Sam,

I've got one day here. Lots to cover. I don't have time to waste chatting [...] It's tough to untangle PTSD from feelings of guilt. That's a basic fact. There's trauma, and there's a reluctance to expose yourself to that trauma [...] You placed yourself in a secure ward, and requested psychiatric observation. Well, here it is. This is what you asked for. So shut up and listen. (NM2 90-91).

Gus's short, simple sentences accompany the bluntness of his words, and his matter-of-fact speech rejects stereotypes of Indigenous shamans who talk in riddles and metaphors. Gus is not presented as particularly spiritual and his quick and accurate analyses of the team demonstrate his deep understanding of psychology. His knowledge is practically based in scientific study, detailed analysis, and factual evidence, rather than an inherent or mystical knowledge; a refreshing change from the propagandistic stereotypes found elsewhere.



Figure 83: Dani talks to Cyclops in his office (NM4 29).

In regards to the fetishisation of Indigenous characters, the illustrations of Dani in the *New Mutants* series frequently reject the objectification and sexualisation of Indigenous women. Throughout the series, Dani is never illustrated in revealing clothes or sexualised poses; on the contrary, her outfits are exceedingly normal (more on this in Chapter Four) and even her “superhero” outfit is practical and sensible. As can be seen in figures 83 & 84, Dani’s suit features a polo neck with no cut-out for her cleavage as is so often the case with superhero women, full-length sleeves,

gloves, and full-length trousers. Indeed, her outfit is exactly the same as the women and even the men who fight alongside her. Furthermore, Dani is not drawn with exaggerated proportions: her waist is a more realistic size than is often found in comics, she does not have an extreme hourglass figure, and her breasts and bottom are not particularly large. Overall, she looks fairly close to a real person, which is a significant divergence from not only the sexualisation of Indigenous women, but the sexualisation of all women in comics.



Figure 84: Dani in her New Mutant outfit (NM4 25).

Her regular outfits follow a similarly progressive pattern: in Volume 6, for example, Doug wakes screaming from a nightmare and the team burst into his room in their pyjamas. Whilst Amara is wearing a crop top and very small shorts (although even this image is not particularly



Figure 85: The team gather around Doug as Dani checks his bedroom for intruders (NM6 7).

sexualised in comparison to most comic book depictions), Dani is wearing baggy pyjama trousers and a casual, loose-fitting vest. Not only is Dani illustrated wearing exceedingly normal pyjamas, she is also presented as the

most pragmatic of the group as she holds a baseball bat and checks the window for any sign of danger, ensuring that they are all safe before comforting Doug (figure 85).

Dani's everyday clothes also reject the sexualisation of Indigenous women. In Volume 5 for example (figure 86), Dani is illustrated wearing a polo-neck jumper, shirt-jacket, blue jeans, and calf-length boots. Her outfits are exceedingly normal (often in contrast to the frequently-shirtless Nate in the background) and the reader is never encouraged to gaze upon or objectify her.

Moreover, the creators of the series manage to reject the fetishisation of the character without denying her sexuality. On the contrary, Dani is presented as a grown woman in touch with her own sexuality. For example, in Volume 3, Dani



Figure 86: Dani stands in the street with the keys to their house (NM5 3)

instigates a flirtatious interaction with Sam, which leads to them kissing: when Sam claims his ex-girlfriend was a bad kisser, Dani remarks, ‘Are you sure she was the problem?’ and tells him, ‘You need an impartial judge’, to which Sam replies, ‘Dani, I have punched you in the face. Don’t think for a second I won’t kiss you where you stand’ and finally, Dani says, ‘Bring it’ (NM3 52). This flirtation is relatable, humorous, and refuses to depict Dani as simply the object of affection: indeed, she is the one who instigated the flirtation and suggested that the two of them kiss. Her agency in this situation is further presented through the illustration: her right hand is placed firmly on the side and back of Sam’s head and her left arm is wrapped around his shoulders, suggesting that she is holding him close to her. Indeed, Dani is never passive in any romantic relationship or situation; she is consistently in touch with her own feelings and is never objectified by the other characters in the series.

Dani’s relationship with Nate Grey also allocates her agency over her own sexuality in a similar manner. When the New Mutants are having a party, Dani seeks out Nate, who is sitting



Figure 87: Dani drags Nate up to dance with her (NM6 83).

alone in a side room, and proceeds to tease him for using the term, “disco”, before dragging him up to dance with her (NM6 83). Figure 87 depicts the latter moment, showing Dani holding Nate’s hands firmly in hers and pulling him towards her. Nate’s surprised facial expression is also contrasted to Dani’s, who is grinning and blushing (indicated by the lines across her cheeks and nose), both of which imply that this is a deliberate attempt to get close to Nate and facilitate their first kiss, depicted on the following page (NM6 84). Once again, Dani holds the control and agency in the situation and instigates the relationship

between them, showing her confidence and comfort with her own sexuality. The creators thus simultaneously reject the “innocent maiden” and overtly sexualised “Pocahottie” stereotypes,

providing a successful demonstration of how to overcome these colonial narratives regarding Indigenous Peoples.

Equinox

The creators of Equinox do risk perpetuating this category through the very concept of the character. However, these risks are all successfully mitigated throughout the comics. Miiyahbin's superhero name, Equinox, immediately connects her to the environment, as do her elemental powers that change with the seasons of her homeland (*JLUI* 139-144; *JLU2* 24, 51). The character's entire superhero identity is based around her affiliation with her land; as she states in the comics, 'I bring a bit of my land with me wherever I go' (*JLU2* 24) and her powers themselves come 'from the land' (*JLUI* 144). This very concept clearly encourages the view of Indigenous Peoples as inherently and innately connected to the natural world. However, the character has also gained much praise as 'the best Indigenous character' who provides an 'accurate representation' of Cree culture (Gaines). As Smith explains, her 'powers are represented as both located and dynamic' and are simultaneously 'rooted in human tradition', dispelling 'the notion that Equinox is a flawless vessel of the landscape' (W. Smith). Indeed, this particular character was created from research, experience, and conversations with the Cree community of Moose Factory (Leask, 'Shaman'). Despite Lemire's non-Indigenous identity, many Indigenous comics fans, such as Leask, recognise his dedication to creating an accurate and respectful character and 'truly believe he understands the importance of this kind of representation' (Leask, 'Shaman'). Such a positive reception of the character by Indigenous readers certainly complicates the binary of acceptable representation. However, the key difference with this character is, I believe, in her creator's commitment, cultural specificity, and cultural sensitivity. Miiyahbin's powers do not feel like a mere continuation of a stereotype due to the detailed and culturally accurate exploration of them within the comic itself, in which

Lemire succeeds in justifying the approach to the character through what is clearly a well-researched discussion between the character and her grandmother (which will be explored in depth in the next chapter). In short, the character's powers do not feel like a random decision based on a well-known stereotype; Equinox is not granted these powers because she is Indigenous, but because she, specifically, is part of a long family line of Midayos. Thus it is not her homogenised Indigeneity that connects her to the earth, but her specific heritage. Indeed, environmentalism is an important aspect of many Indigenous cultures (Mihsuah, *So You* 21), and Equinox's complex embodiment of it is testament that this aspect of culture can be included, represented, and honoured in a respectful and accurate way. Furthermore, the depiction of her powers manages to reject the animalisation that often accompanies such depictions. Firstly, Miiyahbin is initially presented as a normal teenager with no overt connection to nature and no connection whatsoever to animals; she is not inherently concerned with the natural world. Secondly, when she does discover her powers in the comics, they come as a surprise to her and do not trigger any sudden changes in her relationship to nature; the environmental basis of her powers is somewhat understated throughout the comics. Lastly, the creators reject the animalisation of Miiyahbin: they do not connect her to any animals in any way, nor do they present her as exceptionally knowledgeable or well-adapted to the environment. Lemire's depiction of this character demonstrates how writers can successfully honour Indigenous ecologies without stereotyping or dehumanising them.

Similarly, Indigenous spirituality is represented in a way that rejects stereotypes. Whilst Miiyahbin and her grandmother's powers can be seen to be somewhat spiritual in nature, the word shaman is never used; Lemire refers to their roles as Midayos, reminiscent of the Cree/Ojibwe word Manitous, referring to a spiritual being. Once again, this spirituality is not something ascribed to all Indigenous characters in the series and is never presented as being an inherent ability of all Cree people. Miiyahbin is singled out as the sole possessor of these

abilities and connections, and thus her role as a Midayo avoids feeding into generalised assumptions about all Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, Miiyahbin spends the comics slowly learning about her powers and how to use them; she is not magically adept at using them, suggesting that this spirituality and these superpowers are not a natural or inherent part of her Indigenous identity, rejecting the “Instant Shaman” trope through her confusion and inexperience with supernatural matters.

The writers of *Equinox* also go some way to reject the stereotype of the wise old Native man through *Equinox*’s grandmother. As Stuller explains,, ‘there are few examples of women mentoring superhero women’ (Stuller 22), so Miiyahbin’s ‘reliance on Nohkom insists not simply on women as a source of knowledge for other women, but also on the importance of Native knowledge’ (W. Smith). The depiction of Nohkom not only disrupts White projections of patriarchal structures onto Indigenous communities, it functions to reclaim traditional knowledges and acknowledge the role of women in many Indigenous cultures. Indeed, the Native Women’s Association of Canada explain that ‘Aboriginal women represent and maintain cultures rich in knowledge, history, skills, and environmental stewardship’; ‘Aboriginal women are entrusted with knowledge to care for the environment and their families and communities, but their responsibilities for the knowledge are often neglected or forgotten.’ (NWAC). Thus, the inclusion of Nohkom as a source of learning for Miiyahbin ‘is actively rewriting comic book depictions of sovereignty and power relations’ (W. Smith). Furthermore, Nohkom’s knowledge is never presented as mysterious wisdom; she fully explains her understanding in relation to her experience and her culture. In volume 1, Nohkom states that Miiyahbin ‘learned about [the seven pillars of Cree life] in school, all of our children do’ (*JLUI* 139), rooting her knowledge firstly in a central teaching within their community. Her knowledge also stems from personal experience, as Nohkom herself is a Midayo and thus does not teach from an abstract knowledge base. The presentation of Nohkom rejects colonial

erasure and reclaims women's role in Cree culture as possessors and purveyors of Indigenous knowledge, from both cultural traditions and personal experience.

The creators of *Equinox* also reject the fetishisation and sexualisation of Indigenous women. Miiyahbin's outfit is practical and appropriate for the cold climate of her hometown of Moosonee and does not reveal her cleavage or indeed any skin other than her hands and face. Whilst the suit is reasonably tight-fitting, Mii is not drawn with overly



Figure 88: Cover page featuring Miiyahbin set against the outline of the Whitago (*JLUI* 129).

sexualised and unrealistic proportions: she is toned and muscular but is in no way sexualised in terms of her body. Her poses, too, reject the tendency for illustrators to draw Indigenous women (and indeed women in general) in overtly promiscuous positions. For example, the cover image in figure 88 shows Mii's appropriate and practical superhero outfit and illustrates her in a fighting position with her head tilted down slightly in concentration and her arms and hands raised up beside her face, either in defence of herself or ready to use her powers. She is also illustrated from a standard angle that does not amplify or exaggerate her features. Furthermore, the character is never sexualised by other characters in the comics and never finds herself in sexually-charged situations like many female characters do, such as Dawnstar. In this panel and within the comic more broadly, then, Miiyahbin is depicted in a respectful manner that rejects colonial propaganda regarding the animalisation, fetishisation, and shamanisation of Indigenous Peoples.

Bishop

The writers of Bishop also reject the shamanism and ecological tropes through the general presentation of the character. Firstly, Bishop's powers do not come from a spiritual or environmental source: he is a mutant just like his fellow X-Men. His powers themselves also reject the typical elemental powers of many Indigenous superheroes: Bishop can absorb, convert, and redistribute energy (Saunders et al 255). He is described in *Gambit & Bishop* as 'a living energy cell' (*G&B*#5 22), which feels far more modern and urban than the elemental powers usually ascribed to Indigenous characters. Bishop himself is also rarely presented in a rural setting and on the rare occasion he is (such as in the *Last X-Man* series when he finds himself in an unfamiliar, future world), he is not the most knowledgeable character about the land and interacts with the strange world in an unsurprising way; that is, with a lack of knowledge and confusion, thus rejecting expectations of shamanic connections and inexplicable environmental knowledge. Indeed, Bishop's origins show him growing up in a concentration camp before escaping and fending for himself in a large city (*T&L*#1-3), before finding and joining the X-Men (*T&L*#3). The only glimpse the reader gets of a reservation is in the first pages of Issue #1, which depicts Bishop's parents fleeing their home. The lack of any reservations or few rural settings is a stark contrast to most characters and challenges the usual omission of "Urban Indians" (National Urban Indian Family Coalition).

Conclusion

Many contemporary comics continue to appeal to 'a public that still sees Indians mainly through the mythic veil of mingled racism and romance' (Bordewich 11), encouraging and enforcing the romanticisation, fetishisation, and sexualisation of Indigenous Peoples that we have seen is so harmful to communities and contributes towards high rates of domestic and sexual violence against Indigenous Peoples. In contrast, the depiction of Dani throughout the

New Mutants series consistently rejects and dismantles stereotypes regarding Indigenous animality, ecology, shamanism, and romanticisation. Dani is a normal, modern Indigenous woman that readers can relate to. There has been some movement towards reclaiming Indigenous ecologies and simultaneously rejecting the stereotypes surrounding it by Lemire through his creation of *Equinox*, and the writing of Bishop, but very few creators appear to address, criticise, or actively challenge the stereotype, likely due to it being seen as a “positive stereotype” (which is a paradox). The romanticisation, shamanisation, and animalisation of Indigenous characters must be recognised for the damage it does to communities, and creators must make the effort to learn from these misrepresentations as *Moonstar* and *Equinox*’s writers consciously do.

Chapter Four: The Homogenous Relict

Chapter Four focuses on the category of the Homogenous Relict, discussed by Sheyahshe, Pewewardy (*Studies; American*), Pearce, Stedman, M.K. Green, R. Green ('Indian'; 'Pochahontas'), Leask ('Totems'; 'Not'; 'Slurs'; 'Shaman'), Bird, Steele, and Lent. Indigenous characters are continually presented as primitive, living in nature and far removed from cities or any urban centres, as confused by the modern world, as rejecting technology, as dressing in breeches, loincloths, fringed buckskin, feathers, and warpaint, as assimilated into the dominant white culture, and/or as living solely in the past as historical figures and symbols (it is far too rare to find stories of Native peoples that are set in the present). It also examines the homogenisation of Indigenous characters and cultures in order to present the image of "The Indian", ignoring and obscuring the vastly differing cultures to which the characters belong. This category is problematic due to the implication that Indigenous Peoples belong in the past, and furthermore, that the only way for them to exist in the present is to abandon their culture and live as White people.

The Category

The first component of the Homogenised Relict is the portrayal of Indigenous Peoples as primitive; that is, old-fashioned, out-of-place, and/or extinct in the modern world. Too often Indigenous characters seem to 'belong only in the pages of history or the dioramas of museums' and their stories are almost always set in the past (Stedman 247). This representation not only 'feeds colonial nostalgia (Callison et al 141), but also causes people to forget that between 370-500 million Indigenous Peoples are living varied lives in over 90 countries all over the world today (Amnesty International; Stedman 247). Despite many colonists' best efforts, Indigenous

Peoples and cultures are far from extinct, and yet Native characters remain ‘entrenched in the past’ in far too much media (Pewewardy, *Studies* 19).

The basis for this presentation can be traced back to the colonial era, where it was claimed that Indigenous Peoples were destined to ‘disappear’: ‘before the new tide of human life now rolling from the East, and with the buffalo, will have vanished the red man of America’ (Debow’s Review 85). Through murder, slavery, forced sterilisation, abduction, and forced assimilation, settler colonialism did everything it could to eliminate the Indigenous Peoples of the world, and these ‘material exterminations of first-wave genocide’ cannot be separated from the ongoing ‘intellectual and cultural extermination of second-wave genocide’ (Driskill 79). Indeed, Indigenous peoples have been ‘excluded systemically from the writing of the history of our own lands’ (L. T. Smith 34), and any mentions of the original inhabitants of settler colonial countries is ‘slender’, usually ‘eclipsed by dumb, racist drivel’ (Hirschfelder & Molin; see also Dorris vii-viii). This ‘dying race’ ideology can be seen through the complete exclusion of Native peoples in so much media and their rare presence where they are almost always depicted in a Wild West setting, or on a reservation far away from urban or modern life (S. Wilkinson 27; Steele 46). As Bird states, ‘opportunities to see contemporary Indians playing mainstream roles are few and far between’ (‘Intro’ 4) and this is equally true in comics: as Red Wolf’s writer, Walker himself claims, whilst there are ‘many groups who are underrepresented in comic books [...] Native Americans are at the top of that list’ (Walker in Arrant). Indeed, most Indigenous comics character before the 21st century appeared ‘trapped in a time warp’, ‘represented as historical figures only, with no hope of their continuing presence into modern times’ (Sheyahshe 94). Examples of such characters include those in the 1999 comic, *The Adventures of Browser & Sequoia*, and in films such as *The Revenant* (2015 – set in 1823), *Hostiles* (2017 – set in 1892), *Last of the Mohicans* (1992 – set in 1757), and many more. This erasure of them entirely or of their contemporary existence is part of settler colonial propaganda

intended to legitimise the existence of countries such as the USA and Australia by simply denying the existence of the original inhabitants. ‘Native people are erased from an understanding of racial formations, Native histories are ignored, Native people are thought of as historical rather than contemporary, and our homelands aren’t seen as occupied by colonial powers’ (Driskill 78). Thus, the central way to reject this narrative is to portray Indigenous Peoples as simply existing in contemporary and urban spaces. As Sheyashe says, ‘The message should always be: “we are still here and we will remain.”’ (Sheyahshe 106).

One of the ways in which settler colonial propaganda presents Indigenous Peoples as primitive and asserts their actions as justified is through the depiction of language. Historically, Indigenous Peoples were assumed to lack the ‘capacity to express individualism, a shared moral sense, and the legal system’ (Harvey 525), and this assumption was used to justify the oppression and genocide of their communities (Goff et al 293; see also Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Despite the obvious falsity of this assumption, many Indigenous characters in media have continued to speak only ‘stoic broken-English dialects’ (Pewewardy, *Studies* 23) and are shown to have ‘minimal linguistic skills’ and ‘only the rudiments of language’ (M. K. Green 327; see also Hanson and Rouse). Such language has been dubbed “Tonto Talk” and is named after the insulting depiction of an Indigenous man in the *Lone Ranger* comics, although many if not most Indigenous characters, particularly from this time period, speak in equally insulting ways. Tonto Talk is the ‘fictional, substandard version of English’ that features ‘formulaic grammar, including the use of “um” (“speak-um”) and “me” instead of “I” (“me speak-um”)’ (Hirschfelder & Molin). This speech has become ‘entrenched, endlessly repeated across time and place [to portray] Indians as silent and wordless or incapable of speaking proper English or other “civilised” languages’ (Hirschfelder & Molin). There are numerous examples in contemporary media, including the 2010 episode of *Modern Family*, ‘Unplugged’, and in the aforementioned 2015 film, *Ridiculous 6*. Indeed, from adverts for ski resorts and television

programmes (Stedman 242-243), to comics characters such as Tonto and Tomahawk (Sheyahshe 18), “ughs” and “ums” are continuously present in the speech of Native characters in order ‘to make the Indian look stupid and to make [Indigenous languages] seem inferior’ (Hirschfelder et al 214). Thankfully, none of the Indigenous characters in this study use such ‘infantile mumblings’ (Stedman 242), but some characters do facsimile the colonial narratives that claimed ‘Native languages lacked the descriptive power of English and had to rely on the almost continual use of metaphor to describe abstract ideas’ (P. J. Deloria 33). Indeed, the ‘metaphorical sensibility associated with Indian talk’ is still prevalent today (P. J. Deloria 33) and Indigenous characters seem doomed to either talk in broken English plagued with ughs and ums, or speak without any use of contractions, elisions, or ellipsis whilst being ‘overburdened with metaphors and similes’ (Sheyahshe 15-16). Whilst the former intends to present the simplicity of Indigenous Peoples, the latter functions to relegate them to the past with overly formal, old-fashioned speech, and to enforce the concept of the “shaman” with their long, complex riddles. In obvious contrast to these representations, LaRocque explains that we know ‘Aboriginal peoples were peoples of words. Many words. Amazing words. Cultivated words. They were neither wordless nor illiterate in the context of their linguistic and cultural roots’ (LaRocque xv). Thus the allocation of unnatural or limited language to Indigenous characters functions to deny their individuality and delegitimise their languages, and by extension their cultures.

Another component of the Homogenous Relict is homogenisation or cultural inaccuracy. This is often demonstrated through the appearance and attire of Indigenous characters; what Stedman refers to as the Alphabet Indian, who is ‘rarely drawn without their feather bonnets and weapons’ (248). The visual representation of Indigenous characters with feathers, tomahawks, and braids, surrounded by buffalo and tipis, amongst other stereotypical attributes, functions similarly to the primitivity component by visually indicating that the character

belongs in a different (pre-modern) era and has no part in the modern world. However, it also fails to draw any distinctions between different cultures and communities and presents the fictional image of “The Indian”. Whilst some of these stereotyped features did hold special significance in some cultures, they should not be used as mere signifiers of Indigeneity. As Mihesuah reminds her reader, ‘most tribes did not wear headdresses or braids’ (*So You* 22). Whilst popular media would have audiences believe that Indigenous Peoples exclusively dress(ed) in the same simplistic rags, in reality, of course, ‘aboriginal people wear [and wore] a wide variety of clothes’ (Leask, ‘Not’). This homogenisation leads to shocking inaccuracies when media attempts to portray Native characters, for example in 1992 Marvel Comics portrayed a group of “Hopi” characters ‘in the clothing of their traditional enemies, the Navajo (Dine)’, insulting both nations and causing a huge backlash (Sheyahshe 3; see also *Native Nevadan*). Similarly, whilst colonial narratives would have people believe that Indigenous communities all live in tipis and wear buckskin, this is simply not the case: whilst some did indeed live in tipis for at least part of the year or during certain ceremonies (Mihesuah, *So You* 22), most Indigenous communities lived in wooden homes with shingle and chimneys, wickiups, plank houses, pueblos, earth lodges, and thatched dwellings (Mihesuah, *So You* 22; Sheyahshe 15).

Non-Indigenous creators seem to have a hard time recognising that ‘there were literally thousands of distinct Native societies, each with its own unique history, its own systems of ethics and aesthetics, and its own cosmology, each speaking a language that, as often as not, was completely incomprehensible to groups that lived just a few miles away’ (Bordewich 33).

As Stedman explains, ‘mass media have long fostered the idea that Indians have one ethnic, national, and linguistic identity, that, aside, perhaps, from minor differences in dress or mode of transportation, all Indians look, think, and talk alike’ (Stedman 243), and Mihesuah concurs that a ‘look at any ten fiction books featuring Natives will probably show that the Native

characters are all alike' (*So You* 22). This homogenisation (and the resulting inaccuracies) have plagued a multitude of comics (Sheyahshe 107) and this tendency is a continuation of colonists' unwillingness to draw distinctions between the thousands of communities they encountered (Kilpatrick 1). Such homogenous images of what Stedman calls the 'feather-bonnet tribe' (243) and Sheyahshe refers to as the 'pan-Indian tribe' (6), present Indigenous Peoples as a faceless, 'anonymous "they" [who are] far more vulnerable to suspicion or prejudicial treatment than are groups recognised as being composed of individuals' (Stedman 251). This tendency, as well as creating severe inaccuracies, is also harmful to Indigenous communities who, historically and contemporarily, 'have not regarded themselves as one monolithic racial society' (Yellow Bird 2), thus each community 'must be viewed as a dynamic entity that has its own history that has been shaped by internal processes of invention, interaction with other tribes, natural events and contact with the world' (Tighe 6). Indeed, just as it would be impossible and inaccurate to present a "European" character, it is impossible to present an "Indigenous" character.

By ignoring their existence, presenting them as relicts of the past, and ignoring the sheer number of nations that exist, the media continues to perpetuate the notion of Terra Nullius (empty land vacant for the White settlers to take), diminish the number of nations and peoples they murdered by pretending that there were not many to begin with, and ignore the role these settler countries continue to play in oppressing and damaging Indigenous communities.

Red Wolf

The Red Wolf comics examined do, unfortunately, reinforce some of this category in relation to language. Thankfully, there is no "Tonto Talk" in any of the comics, however there are instances of language discrepancy between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters.

Red Wolf speaks very eloquently and never uses contractions, such as his statement that ‘Something is amiss upon the reservation’ (*OAI* 28). The word “amiss” in particular is a middle-English word whose usage peaked in the 1800s before falling drastically into the 21st century (OED), and indeed Red Wolf’s backstory could explain his extremely “proper” speech, as he is actually from the 1800s (*RW* 3). However, his speech is often ridiculed by other characters: for example, Barton states that ‘you speak like you graduated from Dr. Chumley’s School of Proper Diction and Grammar’ (*OAI* 18), demonstrating that Indigenous Peoples are ridiculed for speaking English well, as well as for speaking it “badly”. The name, Chumley, also has several possible implications, as Dr Chumley is a character from Mary Chase’s play, *Harvey*. Chumley is the director of a sanitarium who himself becomes convinced of the existence of an invisible six-foot rabbit called Harvey by his patient Elwood. This reference could suggest that Barton is implying that Red Wolf has some form of mental instability that causes him to speak so properly. Whilst Barton certainly does appear to be mocking Red Wolf’s speech, it would seem out of character for him to be this insulting. Alternatively, Chumley was a character on the animated series, *Tennessee Tuxedo and His Tales*. Tennessee was the name of the protagonist, a penguin, and Chumley was his sidekick, a young walrus, who was naïve, idiotic, and spoke broken English that was punctuated by gulping sounds. This portrayal is similar to the stereotyping of Native characters, and thus appears the most likely connection. If we assume that Barton is referencing this walrus, then his statement seems to reflect that the idiotic sidekick has now become a Dr who has not only learnt to speak properly himself, but now runs a school teaching others to speak properly. This implication is also reflective of the progress comics have made in terms of the representation of Native Americans: as we have seen in Chapter Two, Native characters are traditionally presented as naïve and simple, and their speech is far from eloquent, but in the Red Wolf comics and the *Occupy Avengers* storylines, Red Wolf’s speech is the most eloquent of all the characters.

Thus, Barton's apparent mocking could also be seen as a means to draw attention to the attempted deconstruction of this stereotype. Such speech patterns certainly reject the perception of Indigenous Peoples not being able to speak English well, but it does simultaneously fall into another problematic perception: that someone must speak English well in order to be considered intelligent, no matter their nationality or first language (Bari; Robson; Thatiah). Red Wolf's speech, then, both challenges the idea that Indigenous Peoples don't speak English well, and reiterates the idea that they should speak English well through his exaggerated speech style. However, there are also instances where Red Wolf refers to himself in the third person, for example: 'You crossed your own people to save Red Wolf?' (*M1872* 13), which does mimic an element of Tonto Talk and hints at inferior cognitive capacities for self identification. Therefore, the mere existence of these discrepancies in language and the ridicule that Red Wolf endures risks reinforces colonial propaganda surrounding Indigenous languages as well as presenting the character as being old-fashioned and therefore out of place in a modern world.

Red Wolf's appearance and attire has also been criticised for enforcing this stereotype, not least of all in Marvel's promotional image for their "All New, All Different" reboot (figure 89), or, as Leask dubs it, 'Not So New, Not So Different':

Red Wolf is dressed like the most problematic stereotype you have ever seen of an aboriginal person. He's holding a bow and arrow. He's wearing buckskin breeches. He's wearing a loincloth on top of the buckskin breeches. He has a bone necklace and warpaint. He's not wearing a shirt. The only thing missing from the Injun Stereotype Bingo Card is a feather in his hair. It's hard to make this more suspect-looking. (Leask, 'Not')



Figure 89: Red Wolf wields a bow and arrow, wearing body paint, a loincloth, beige fringed trousers, and old-fashioned boots (Marvel).

Indeed, this depiction of the character falls into nearly every stereotype within this category and somehow becomes even more shocking when the image is placed in context amongst the other rebooted characters (figure 90). Red Wolf stands out starkly from the other characters in the launch as a caricature from the 1800s despite the actual release date being as recent as 2015. Even taking into account that the character is indeed from 1872, this depiction is wildly inaccurate, insulting, and, according to Leask, dangerous in its insistence that Indigenous Peoples in the 19th century

‘only dressed in breeches, loincloths, and a startling lack of upper body wear’ (Leask, ‘Not’), feeding into settler colonial propaganda surrounding the “uncivilised savage”.

Unfortunately, Leask and many other people’s concern over Red Wolf’s attire was not acknowledged for the

first issues of 1872 and the character appears in the comics wearing the same insulting outfit. As Leask points out, when Red Wolf appears in this comic



Figure 90: Promotional art featuring all characters in the All New, All Different reboot (Marvel).

alongside the non-Indigenous characters dressed in suits with relatively little period detail, the creators 'send one key message: he's "savage"' (Leask, 'Not'), the dangers of which have been clearly demonstrated in Chapter One. Red Wolf finally gets some real clothes in Issue #3, but the fringe and warpaint remain, as does the damage already done by this depiction.

The comics continue to reinforce this category through the depiction of Red Wolf as being old-fashioned and out of place. In *Man out of Time*, the plot revolves around Red Wolf being teleported from his life in 1872 into the 21st century, leaving him confused and scared by contemporary things such as cars and phones (*RW* 26). Whilst this is contextually appropriate considering that the character is from the past, the prevalence of this trope in narratives where it is unjustified still makes this depiction at risk of further enforcing stereotypes and harming Indigenous communities. Even Red Wolf himself claims to be 'A man out of place and time, trying to find his way. Lost' (*OAI* 24), once again facsimileing the colonial narrative that Indigenous Peoples do not belong in the new or urban world. This attitude is also embodied by characters within the comics who refer to Indigenous Peoples as 'Old-world savages' (*RW* 15) and 'Neanderthals' with 'unevolved minds' (*RW* 19, 110), both of which imply that Indigenous Peoples are not fully human and do not belong in the modern world. Furthermore, Issue #1 of Red Wolf alone features ten anti-Indigenous slurs. Whilst the characters who display such racism are intended as antagonists, this is simply not good enough justification to include this language. As Leask explains, 'Seeing a native person called a redskin or an injun doesn't just tell me the villains are bad guys: it tells me I'm not particularly valued or welcome' (Leask, 'Slurs'). Indigenous comics readers should not have to endure this language in the pages of a comic about an Indigenous superhero; a comic that should be written with them in mind.

Unfortunately, this racism continues throughout the comics as more and more characters demonstrate their ignorance. One character says to Red Wolf, 'You people like carving canoes, right?' (*M1872* 64), referring to some North Western communities' aptitude for sea

travel. However, the Southern Cheyenne are not a part of this demographic and thus this is inaccurate and homogenising. Another example of this homogenisation is when a townspeople states that a murder must have been committed by ‘some of your savages’, to which Red Wolf explains that the tracks lead off ‘to the Malpais. **Not** from my tribe’ (*RW* 9). The assumption that the murderer is Indigenous is clearly racist, and the use of the possessive pronoun “your” indicates the man’s belief that all Native Americans are the same; that is, the ‘pan-Indigenous tribe’ Sheyahshe criticises (6). This attitude is displayed by another character who accuses the Apache more specifically, before Red Wolf explains that ‘There are no Apache within a state’s distance’ (*RW* 9), reflecting Mihesuah’s comment that people tend to ‘pick out a tribe based on what they’ve [heard about or] seen in the movies, usually Apache, Comanche, or one of the Sioux peoples [...]’ (*So You* 9) without any consideration for context or accuracy. Even the 21st century police officers display this attitude when they refer to Red Wolf as ‘Apache Joe’ (*RW* 51). Their use of this insulting address term shows not only their ignorance and racism through this homogenisation and disrespect for Red Wolf’s identity, it could also function as a commentary on the inherent racism within the criminal justice system and the prevalence of racial profiling (Tighe 12). However, despite this potentially progressive commentary, the inclusion of insulting address terms is unnecessary and unacceptable in any media, especially when such commentary is so subtle and the narrative avoids any wider discussions of racism and Anti-Indianism.

Dawnstar

Whilst Dawnstar should defy many of the tropes in this category (being from the future rather than from the past is a great contrast to the usual stereotype), she is still portrayed as being out of place. Upon first arriving in the 21st century, Dawnstar struggles to adjust to the time period, claiming that ‘accessing the sensory patterns of this time period [...] is like trying

to see, hear and talk while inside a pool of mud' (*LL1* 19). Her difficulties in adjusting are not shared by her teammates, who, whilst a little disoriented, get straight to work figuring out where and when they are. Dawnstar is thus singled out as being the most affected in their collective displacement, feeding into stereotypical notions of Indigenous Peoples being "out of place".

More worryingly, throughout the *Legion Lost* series, the people of the 21st century are referred to as 'aboriginals' (*LL2* 101), which is hugely problematic and reflects some White Americans' appropriation of the term, Native American, to refer to themselves (Yellow Bird 6). This usage, then, is an insulting example of appropriation that trivialises the identity of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, its presence in a comic that features a prominent Indigenous hero demonstrates the ignorance of many creators to Indigenous conversations and scholarship, and the utter lack of input by Indigenous creators. Moreover, Dawnstar herself uses an anti-Indigenous slur to refer to the people of the 21st century, calling them 'Barbarians' and referring to their science as 'ancient rituals and outdated potions' (*LL2* 85), both adjectives suggesting the irrelevance, ineffectiveness, and primitiveness of their science. This attitude facsimiles that of settler colonialism and even uses the very same language that was used against Indigenous Peoples. This inversion and the use of this language by the Indigenous character is, quite frankly, deplorable, and further demonstrates the writers' ignorance regarding American history, the experiences of Indigenous communities, and the danger of trivialising and negating the generational trauma suffered by so many communities around the world.

The language attributed to Dawnstar presents further problems. Like the depiction of Red Wolf, Dawnstar thankfully never uses "Tonto Talk"; she does, however, embody the mystical, old-fashioned, and overly formal way of speaking that Red Wolf is also a victim of. One example of this is when her teammate, Tyroc, asks Tellus, 'You okay, big fella?' and Dawnstar immediately follows with, 'What causes such pain, Tellus?' (*LL2* 141). Another example is

when Dawnstar asks, ‘If our quests travel together, have your rigs the power to make the crossing?’ (*LoS3* 230-232). The use of this old-fashioned grammar, lack of contractions or slang, and generally obscure way of speaking makes her speech seem unnatural. Like the broken speech of Tonto, this type of speaking implies that English is not her first language; she has learnt it very well and speaks eloquently, but far too eloquently and rigidly than a first-language English speaker. It also functions to make her seem old-fashioned and out of place in a modern world despite her being from the 30th century.

The writing of Dawnstar also presents issues regarding appearance. Whilst her outfit in figure 66 is a big improvement on previous depictions where she wore a leotard that revealed more skin than it covered, the continued presence of fringe on her trousers, sleeves, and bodice acts as a lazy and outdated signpost of her Indigeneity. Thankfully, this is the only stereotypical element of her outfit and there are no feathers or bows and arrows in sight.

Black Condor

Similarly to the Red Wolf comics, the *Freedom Fighters* series is plagued with racist language and anti-Indigenous slurs. Indigenous characters throughout the series are called names such as ‘injun’, ‘Pochahontas’, ‘mongrels’, ‘unwanted animals’, ‘filthy savages’, and are consistently referred to as ‘Indians’ (e.g. *USI* 123; *FF#1* 1; *FF#3* 17). Most of these slurs are spoken by antagonistic characters, including a group of neo-Nazis who are illustrated waving confederate flags, sporting Christian tattoos, and wearing Nazi bands. On the one hand, their depictions provide an interesting commentary on the link between Nazism, the confederation, and Christian extremism, and most of these characters are certainly reprimanded for their views (the neo-Nazis are easily defeated by Condor himself). However, the mere inclusion of these terms creates a hostile environment for any Indigenous readers and clearly indicates the lack of Indigenous input into the creation of these comics. Moreover, other

characters' reactions to such attitudes is sometimes underwhelming: when one character tells John that he must have grown 'up on a crappy little rez somewhere with a drunk dad and a hooker for a mom', Uncle Sam refers to him as a 'misguided young man' (*USI* 123). Sam's understatement in the face of this blatant racist downplays the harmful and even dangerous effects of such racism on Indigenous Peoples both psychologically and physically in regards to how stereotypes affect job and housing opportunities and increase rates of violence against them. Thus, having a character who is intended to represent justice dismiss racists as merely "misguided" sends a dangerous message on the severity of racism.

Uncle Sam also proves problematic on many more occasions. Firstly and most obviously, the character is intended to represent the "true spirit of America" but is notably a White man. This depiction functions to erase the existence of the country and its people prior to colonisation. It could even suggest that the country was "meant" to be colonised as its true spirit is a White man, thus diminishing the horrors of colonialism and erasing the completely unnecessary genocide that was committed. The character is also problematic in relation to his comments regarding the "founding" of the USA. Uncle Sam frequently talks about how the country was built 'on the sweat and blood of hard-workin' people' who 'shared common interests in creating a more perfect union' (*FF*#2 21; *FF*#8 3). This account is both ignorant and insulting, committing epistemic violence against the Indigenous Peoples who were murdered and enslaved in order for the settler colonists to "build" the country. This complete erasure of the genocide and slave trade from which the colony was actually created is both a dangerous narrative and a clear example of the continual presence of colonial propaganda in comics. Similarly, Sam also claims that the colonists were 'immigrants' who 'desperately wanted ta be free from oppression' (*USI* 132). Once again, this is a clearly biased account of America's history, positioning the settlers as only victims of oppression, rather than the perpetrators. Furthermore, settler colonists were not "immigrants" and to label them as such is

dangerous and insulting in many ways. Firstly, it once again erases the genocide against the Native American nations by avoiding the word “colonists” or even “settlers”. As Dunbar-Ortiz explains, ‘making everyone an immigrant, serves to preserve the "official story" of a mostly benign and benevolent USA’; it intends to rid the country of any memory or guilt surrounding its existence. Secondly, it is also insulting to real immigrants, who seek safety in countries by joining the existing communities and creating multi-cultural societies, so referring to colonists as immigrants could even place a violent and dangerous narrative on the people who genuinely seek safety.

There are also questionable, inaccurate, and stereotypical representations regarding the Indigenous characters’ appearances within the comics. When John first appears, he is climbing up a cliff wearing nothing other than a pair of jeans with his long hair flowing behind him (*USI* 69), which immediately feeds into Leask’s criticism of the tendency for illustrators to depict Indigenous characters with very little clothing (‘Not’). Upon reaching the top of the cliff, John is transformed into the Black Condor and reappears with war paint and his hair cut into what Western cultures refer to as a “Mohawk” (figure 91; *USI* 71). Firstly, the sudden presence of war paint is both stereotypical and unnecessary: not only is it not generally worn in everyday



Figure 91: Black Condor with warpaint and new hairstyle (*USI* 71).

situations, it cannot even be justified as part of a “disguise” as John makes no attempt to lead a normal life or to hide his real identity. Secondly, the haircut, whilst it certainly seems to modernise him in a typical sense, is actually an incredibly inaccurate and questionable choice. The hairstyle in question was named after the Mohawk people who often did and do

don such a style. However, the Mohawk people are based in Canada and the most north-easterly regions of America; they have absolutely no relation to the Navajo of south-western America. In contrast, it is traditional for Navajo people to keep their hair long (Keeler), thus this choice of hair cut for Black Condor is inexplicable in its inaccuracy and homogenises Indigenous communities by thoughtlessly substituting a north-easterly nation with the unrelated south-western nation to which John belongs.

The comics unfortunately become even more stereotypical and insulting when they attempt to depict a variety of Indigenous cultures in one panel (figure 92). In this image, we are presented with a great number of people supposedly from one hundred different tribes (*FF#1* 31), however most of them are wearing loincloths, feathers, tooth necklaces, fringed ponchos, headdresses, warpaint, and clothes made from either feathers or animal furs, and many are bare-chested. Rather than depicting an accurate variety of tribal attire, the illustrators have instead managed to mix and match every stereotypical depiction of Indigenous clothing in one panel.



Figure 92: Panel depicting the “shamans” of “100” different communities, most wearing loincloths, fringe, feathers, fur, and warpaint (*FF#3* 31).

Lastly, the allocation of the name “Condor” to the Navajo hero seems somewhat ill-fitting, as even the comic itself explains that condors ‘fed on the dead’ during the Long Walk (*USI* 67). The comic not only fails to explain why the saviour of their people took on the name of the creatures who had stalked them and eaten their dead, but also fails to recognise that the

‘Jeshóó’ (vulture/ condor/ buzzard) are known as ‘the vermin of the desert’ and are ‘shunned and despised’ in the Diné Bahane/ Navajo Creation Story (Zolbrod 245). Thus, the choice of a condor to represent the Navajo hero seems ill-fitting considering the nation’s associations in regard to the animal and demonstrates a severe cultural ignorance on the part of the creators.

Warpath

Once again there are problems with the language used in the Warpath comics. On more than one occasion, James is referred to as ‘the Apache’ (*XF*#10 10; *XF*#23 8) and as ‘little Indian’ (*XF*#23 22). This language is insulting, reductive, and unnecessary through the implication that his Apache identity is his sole identity and the consequent removal of his individualism, which also functions to homogenise all Apache peoples. The use of the definite article when referring to James as ‘the Apache’ also implies that he is the only one, feeding into the sole survivor stereotype and the implication that Indigenous communities no longer exist in the modern world. Moreover, one of the characters who refers to James in this way is actually a protagonist: after Ghost Rider appears and rescues James from the demon bear, he asks him: ‘Are you ready, Apache?’ (*XF*#10 10). This sort of address term is unacceptable coming from antagonists, so to have a protagonist use it actually normalises its use and makes it seem an acceptable way to refer to an Indigenous person, especially as James seems content with being referred to in this way, simply replying that he is indeed ready, rather than addressing the simplistic and insulting erasure of his name and therefore his identity as an individual.

There are two more instances in the comics that reinforce this category of propaganda, the first being James’ cry of ‘Hokahey!’ (*XF*#25 20). This exclamation is a reasonably well-known saying, however, it is a Lakota phrase and is therefore inaccurate and homogenous, demonstrating the writers’ ignorance of both Apache and Lakota cultures and their

unwillingness to learn about the specific community they are supposed to be representing. This once again indicates a complete lack of Indigenous input into these comics.

The last example of inaccurate and inappropriate representation in these comics is their attempt to rewrite the role the colonists played in the genocide of the Indigenous inhabitants of the USA. In Issue #11, James “learns” and then informs his teammates that many Native American communities were actually murdered by Selene and Eli Bard but their deaths were blamed on the colonists (*XF*#11 29). This narrative is incredibly insulting for its erasure of colonialism’s guilt and the implication that Indigenous communities do not know their own history; it seems a clear and uncomfortable attempt to absolve the settlers of any blame for the genocide of Native Americans. This treatment of America’s horrific history and the resulting generational trauma, ongoing poverty, and oppression is callous, inappropriate, and shocking in a comic as recent as 2008-2010.

Dani Moonstar

Throughout the *New Mutants* series, Dani’s appearance has remained fairly consistent in both the good and the bad details (with one glaring exception, explored below). To start with, her New Mutant outfit has been the topic of a fair number of articles and blog posts, some



Figure 93: Dani wearing fringes boots and firing an arrow (*NM4* 12).

criticising stereotypical elements such as the occasional inclusion of fringe on her boots, the fringed quiver, and hair feathers (figures 93 and 94). These elements are indeed too familiar, but thankfully they only appear in a few scenes and most of the time her boots and quiver are perfectly ordinary.

A more problematic element yet to be dissolved is Dani's use of a bow and arrow. Whilst her skill with said weapon is seriously impressive and gains the admiration of other characters and readers alike, she is the only character who uses old-fashioned weaponry and thus risks enforcing stereotypes regarding primitivity. Thankfully, she does not use the bow exclusively: she is often shown with modern guns to match her teammates and usually prevails through hand-to-hand combat.

There is also an anomaly in the illustration of Dani that occurs in *Back to School*, where the character is suddenly and inexplicably

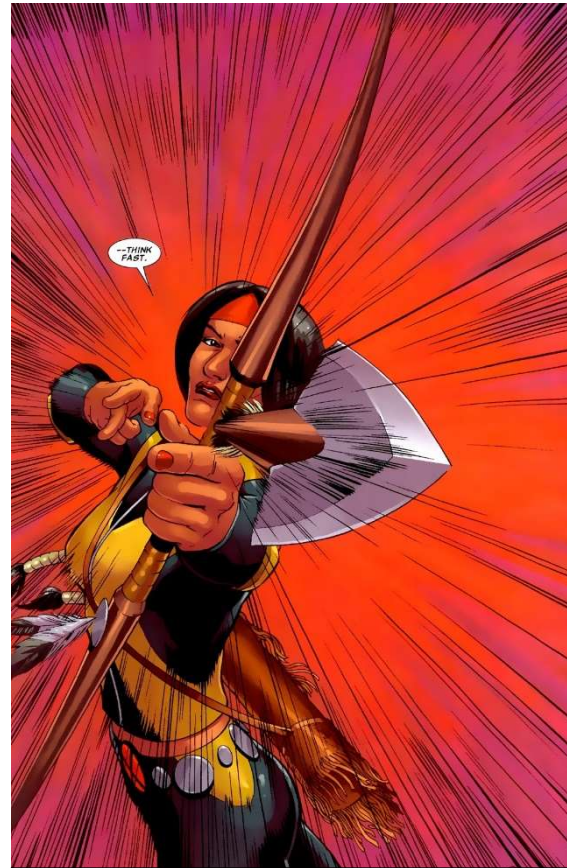


Figure 94: Dani aims an arrow whilst wearing feathers in her hair, a large belt, and wielding a fringed quiver (NM5 13).

unrecognisable (BTS 7; figure 95). Depictions of Dani have accurately portrayed her as a member of the Cheyenne nation since the character's creation, but this issue depicts her in a way that is more reminiscent of the Indigenous Peoples of Northern Canada. By comparing this illustration (figure 95) to other modern depictions (figures 96 and 97), the difference is evident. The complete change in her complexion and facial features here is not merely a matter of artistic variance that always occurs between comics with different artists; it appears a deliberate and inexplicable decision to lighten her complexion and remove the culturally-appropriate aspects of her appearance. Thankfully this depiction is quickly rectified, but the apparent interchangeability between completely different cultures still demonstrates an offensive homogenisation of all Indigenous Peoples



Figure 95: A close-up of Dani in *Back to School* (7).



Figure 97: Dani in *New Mutants Volume 5* (17).



Figure 96: Dani in *Fear Itself: New Mutants* (126).

Redefining, Challenging, and Rejecting the Category

Dani Moonstar

Aside from these issues, the presentation of Dani is generally very successful in rejecting these tropes. Significantly, there is no inclusion of feathers in the series and Dani is, for the most part, illustrated as a regular, modern teenager: her *New Mutants* outfit is very similar to the rest of the team, she wears long, checked pyjama bottoms and a plain top to sleep in, generic work-out clothes for physical exercise, and a variety of standard outfits, including plain jeans, tops, jumpers, jackets, and (non-fringed) boots (figure 98). In short, Dani's culture is not presented as a costume and she looks as modern and appropriately-dressed as her teammates. However, Dani's culture is also not ignored: her Northern Cheyenne identity is displayed

through her hair and the character wears her braids as a proud nod to her culture throughout the series. Whilst braided hair can often be stereotypical, Dani's style in this case is culturally



Figure 98: Three panels depicting a variety of Dani's regular outfits (NM5 29; NM6 7; NM5 3).

accurate to Cheyenne traditions. Sheyahshe praises the way 'Dani successfully integrates contemporary American culture with her adherence to traditional Cheyenne ways' (18) and Leask agrees that her costume 'hits the exact right balance' ('Totems'). Indeed, her hair can be seen as 'a contemporary expression of identity and a sacred continuation of history' (Blais-Billie), which, according to Cook, 'brings strength and healing, and hope'.

Another element of Dani's identity has occasioned much discussion by Indigenous comics fans, specifically the appropriateness of Dani being a Valkyrie. James Leask claims that her position 'feels like a loss' since she 'got tangled up in another culture's mythology' (Leask, 'Shaman'). However, he also admits that her dual identity 'presents a common internal debate many aboriginal people have, particularly when they are of mixed heritage' and that, in some comics, her position as a Valkyrie is 'balanced with her Aboriginal heritage' (Leask, 'Totems'). One of the problems Leask cites with her Valkyrie role is the subsequent lack of her Cheyenne culture in both her outfits and her narratives. However, the core elements of Dani's outfit do still remain in many panels throughout the comics even within her Valkyrie armour. In figure



Figure 99: Dani in her Valkyrie armour with her hair in its usual braids, necklace and headband still on, and Valkyrie sword in hand (*FI:NM* 124).

99, Dani has arrived in Hel and donned her Valkyrie suit, but her headband, signature hairstyle, and necklace remain, presenting more of a merging of cultures and identities than an erasure of one in favour of the other. Indeed, other fans regard her dual identity as ‘badass’ (Weekes) and Indigenous comics creator, Darci Little Badger, claims that combining Dani’s Cheyenne heritage with her Valkyrie status ‘is like combining peanut butter with jelly’ (Little Badger qtd in Hassan). Little Badger elaborates that this combination is ‘a very compelling element of her character’ and

praises the way that the comics themselves deal with this complexity regarding these two elements of her identity co-existing (Little Badger qtd in Hassan). She also states that ‘One part of her identity does not necessarily diminish the other parts’ (Little Badger qtd in Hassan); ‘Like all Native folks, she’s many things simultaneously. Dani’s character is not made to minimize or compromise her indigeneity in pursuit of individuality or complexity’ (Little Badger qtd in Hassan). Whilst feelings of cultural erasure will always be valid, the *New Mutants* series on which this study focuses certainly appears to strive towards the balanced and nuanced depiction of Dani’s identity as a representation of real-life discussions on identity and multi-culturalism.

In regard to the presentation of Indigenous characters as relicts, Dani's writers certainly reject the stereotype. As Sheyahshe states, 'The important element that Indigenous Peoples are alive in the world today is present. Dani exists in current (modern) times' (Sheyahshe 169). Indeed, Dani is a contemporary and reasonably ordinary teenager (aside from the superpowers). As already seen in her clothing, she presents herself in a modern way and is never (nowadays) shown wearing traditional sacred or ceremonial attire in everyday life.

Dani is also shown to be knowledgeable about the modern world (as one would expect a modern teenager to be). In Volume 6 and *Fear Itself* respectively, Dani is shown to be proficient with technology as she navigates her way through a computer system and manages to find information on the strange virus they are facing (*NM6* 34), and she pilots the Blackbird jet solo (*FI:NM* 74). Whilst even being averagely proficient at technology would be a step forward for Indigenous representation, Dani's mastery of computers (and the complex technology at their core) alongside small moments such as her impressive ability as a pilot, is a potent rejection of the stereotypical Indigenous character who 'exists to tell us how strange the modern world is' (Schmidt).

Another element of Dani's modernity is her language. Whilst Sheyahshe praises the character for never having 'spoken like Tonto' and always being 'articulate' (Sheyahshe 169), the writers also successfully reject the over-articulate, metaphor-laden speech often associated with old-fashioned or shamanistic stereotypes. In Volume 3, for example, Dani tells a story to her teammates and friends:

So I think Shan's been shot, right? But then I turn and see this smiley in front of me, calmly taking off his armor. And he's like, "Dani, it's me! Put this on!" Then Shan must have jumped, because he's just sitting there staring at me, like, "what's going on?" So I just level him in the face with a roundhouse (*NM3* 19).

The use of discourse markers, fillers, cooperative signals, slang, and informally reported speech ('like') are all natural elements of speech; they function to make her sound entirely ordinary by successfully mimicking everyday speech. Dani's writers consistently demonstrate

her intelligence and capability throughout the comics (Chapter Two), so to see her relaxed and speaking casually with friends is a refreshing reminder that she is also a teenager; a young person who is not consistently and unwaveringly formal as so many Indigenous characters are made to be.

Dani also consistently rejects flowery, metaphorical language, such as when she meets the warriors in Hel who tell her an elaborate story about the creatures she is facing, which she summarises as ‘evil dead gods that everyone has forgotten about’, to which one such warrior replies, ‘She wouldn’t make a great spinner of sagas’ (*FI:NM* 99). The stereotypical roles are reversed in this scene, as the non-Indigenous characters tell their grand tales and our Indigenous hero is the one to translate and simplify the story into the basic and necessary information. Other examples include her calling her monstrous opponents ‘big fat ugly jerks’ (*FI:NM* 106), nicknaming a skull ‘chuckles’ (*FI:NM* 121), and exclaiming, ‘man this sucks’ when trapped in a monster’s stomach (*FI:NM* 124). The childish insults, inappropriate nickname, and contemporary language reject the tendency to present Indigenous characters as overly-formal and old-fashioned, and provide humour through the juxtaposition of her circumstances and reactions.

Throughout the series, Dani consistently speaks like a normal, intelligent, yet modern person: she uses contractions and slang, she swears and curses, she makes jokes and makes fun of her friends, she is witty and quick-thinking, and generally entirely relatable to her audience. Dani challenges the propaganda that would have people believe that Indigenous Peoples are an ‘irrelevant minority’ (Pewewardy, *Studies* 16), ‘entrenched in the past’ (Pewewardy, *Studies* 19), and a ‘race of human beings that is entirely extinct’ (Sheyahshe 26). On the contrary, Dani’s character fulfils not only the need for ‘Indigenous central characters’ set in ‘modern times and locations’ (Sheyahshe 35), but also for modern, interesting, and relatable Indigenous

characters whose presence embodies the message that Sheyahshe claims is crucial to Indigenous narratives: ‘we are still here and we will remain’ (Sheyahshe 106).

Red Wolf

Whilst Silas and Frank reinforce many stereotypes throughout the comics, the writers also appear, once again, to have responded to criticism. As discussed in Chapter Two, the cousins’ speech at the beginning of the series presents them as lacking intelligence, but by the end of the series, this is rectified and they are presented as far more capable and intelligent regarding the content of their speech. Their speech itself, however, remains very much the same: the cousins use slang and informal expressions, calling a Hydra soldier ‘dude’ and shouting ‘suckers’ at them (*OA2* 95). Their language, like Dani’s, reflects their characters as modern teenagers; they certainly don’t speak like Tonto, nor do they speak formally or metaphorically, but simply as ordinary teenagers. Their modernity is also demonstrated through their frequent pop culture references throughout the comics, such as *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (*OAI* 26), Billy Jack (*OAI* 26), and *Thunderheart* (*OAI* 30). Such references reflect contemporary culture and remind us that the characters are ordinary people who like to watch films and indeed, use such media as a mode of comparison for their own lives.

It is worth noting here that all of the films they mention feature White men playing Indigenous characters: something which is also addressed by the cousins within the comic as they point out that the actors are not ‘real’ Indigenous Peoples (*OAI* 30). This acknowledgement could function as a deliberate albeit subtle attempt to point towards the lack of real Indigenous representation in mainstream media, thus criticising the erasure of Indigenous narratives. Thus, the comic appears not only to challenge this category through the cousins’ modernity and youth, but also to actively criticise it.

Red Wolf's displacement in the modern world also softens throughout the series as he adjusts to the new world he finds himself in, learning to use a smart phone and various other pieces of technology. The phone, especially, is an established attempt by Walker to rectify the previous depiction of Red Wolf being confused and scared by things such as cars and phones (*RW* 25-27). By *Occupy Avengers Volume 2*, Red Wolf is 'constantly learning about [...] the world around him' and 'looking up information' on his smart phone (Walker in Arrant). Walker's inclusion of this technology is an attempt to grant the character agency and independence; rather than having to rely on other characters to explain things about the modern world, Red Wolf is able to gain the knowledge and understanding himself, and even goes on to operate technology such as a tracking radar by the end of the series (*OA2* 103).

Warpath

Whilst there are numerous issues with language choices in the *X-Force* comics, Warpath's speech at least challenges this stereotype. James consistently speaks like a real person; there is no Tonto Talk, nor is there any formality or metaphors in his dialogue. In issue #8, James calls the Demon Bear a 'son of a \$%&#' (*XF*#8 29) and a 'mangy... piece of... crap' in issue #9 (*XF*#9 18-19). Whilst swearing does not appear too ground-breaking, the casual and informal language does break down stereotypes regarding nobility and overly-eloquent speech patterns, presenting James as an ordinary and relatable character to some extent at least. His interactions with his teammates also prove him to be witty, quick-thinking, and down-to-earth, much of which has been discussed in regards to humour in Chapter Two. Another example of this is the following interaction with Archangel, who exclaims, 'What the hell happened to my house?!' and James replies, 'Pretty sure it wasn't the wind', before calling him a 'jackass' and mocking his concern about the cost of rebuilding his mansion (*XF*#20 12). James' use of incomplete sentences and contractions imitates normal speech, and his sarcasm and mockery of Archangel

make him relatable to a modern reader, defying both the depiction of Indigenous Peoples as not being able to speak English well and that of them speaking unnecessarily formally, always using complete sentences, and speaking in complex, wisdom-filled riddles.

There are also occasional elements of cultural specificity and accuracy, such as when James enters Missoula in Montana, reminds the reader that he is ‘Apache’, and explains that ‘These are Blackfoot lands’ (XF#3 8). Not only is this correct, but the present tense reminds the reader that the Blackfoot people are still here; they still exist in this world and these lands still rightfully belong to them, fulfilling the need to present Indigenous communities as present, living communities.

Bishop

Whilst Bishop is technically from a different time period to the ones in which he usually finds himself in and therefore could risk facsimileing the displacement trope, a significant detail is that Bishop is actually from the future instead of the past. Bishop was born in an alternate future before being transported into the past where he joins the X-Men, then subsequently finds himself in yet another future world before returning to the X-Men’s time period. Bishop is a time traveller and therefore does find himself surrounded by unfamiliar cultures and time periods rather often, but instead of feeling lost and confused by advancements in technology, he quickly adjusts to his new settings. One example of this is in *The Last X-Man* where Bishop is transported to a strange and dystopian future but quickly befriends and leads a group of rebels, before taking on his arch nemesis and leading a country-wide revolution in the process. Unlike Red Wolf who relies on other characters for guidance in the new world (prior to acquiring a phone at least), Bishop is the one who guides others and becomes a mentor to those he encounters. Wherever Bishop finds himself, he certainly never ends up lost or out of place, quickly making himself at home and becoming a leader of other lost souls.

Indeed, Bishop is a consistently wise and intelligent mentor throughout *The Last X-Man* series (as discussed in Chapter Two), although he does occasionally use metaphors and similes in the narration of his own story. However, these metaphors do not appear within his speech, are only occasional, and are always related to descriptions. One example is when he narrates how the old sentinels ‘bob in the water like ghost shipwrecks’ (*LXM*#8 27), which is appropriate considering that they are literally wrecked, floating on the water, and are an out of place reminder of Bishop’s past. His narration is eloquent and testament to him being a good storyteller, whilst also avoiding falling into stereotypes. Indeed, Bishop even criticises the Witness for speaking ‘in riddles’ (*LXM*#2 4) and his speech is once again eloquent but not overendowed with flowery language or metaphors. In series such as *The Times & Life of Lucas Bishop*, the character also swears and speaks bluntly even in his narration: ‘you didn’t know #\$\$%& then, and you don’t know #\$\$%& now’ (*T&L*#2 11). Bishop’s speech is a long way away from Tonto-talk and whilst he does occasionally speak rather formally and with descriptive language, the writers successfully present him as eloquent and a good narrator without forcing the character into the stereotype of being unwaveringly and unnecessarily formal.

In regards to his appearance, Bishop’s outfit in *The Last X-Man* series varies very little as he consistently wears his X-Men armour alongside his red cape and wields guns when necessary but usually relies on his powers (on the odd occasion his diplomacy fails). There are no feathers, loincloths, inaccurate patterns, fringe, spears, bows and arrows, or anything else stereotypical to be seen; he simply dresses like an X-Man and uses appropriate weaponry. His



Figure 100: Bishop with his locked hair down (*LXM*#13).



Figure 101: Bishop's locked hair in a top-knot style (*LXM#1*).

hair, however, does indicate his heritage without the use of ridiculous feathers or headdresses. In the series, Bishop wears his hair in locs (figure 100), which start off short but gradually become longer over the course of the series. This style is appropriate not only for his African American heritage, but especially for his Anangu heritage. The Anangu people traditionally lived in Central to North Western Australia (Parks Australia) and several books describe many of the communities in this area wearing their hair in what we now call locs

(Spencer & Gillen; Withnell). Indeed, some communities are also described cutting their locs short and tying them back in top-knots (Spencer & Gillen 643; 38; 312). This style is donned by Bishop throughout the Last X-Man series (figure 101), subtly paying tribute to Bishop's Aboriginal heritage.

Raven

Whilst there are some aspects of the *Teen Titans* comics that do risk perpetuating this stereotype, they also work to reject it. Firstly, Raven's outfit isn't entirely modern and does include some elements that are typically "Indigenous" (for example, the large ornamental belt, necklace, earrings, and bracelets). However, she does manage to avoid looking like a stereotype. The black catsuit and blue poncho



Figure 102: Raven's outfit, featuring a black catsuit and blue cape (*TT1* 81).



Figure 103: Raven's grandfather wearing a bandana and shirt (*TTI* 13)

(figure 102) are certainly interesting choices for the character, but the unusual dress of most of the characters in the series means that her style actually fits in rather neatly in the world that is Earth One, and her outfit is certainly more modern than the 19th century. Her Grandpa also has typically long hair and a bandana around his head (figure 103), but both his and Raven's long hair are appropriate in relation to traditional Navajo hair styles (Keeler). Furthermore, her Grandpa wears a rather modern combination of

a t-shirt and a shirt, potentially indicating that Raven's choice of accessories stems more from personal taste than as a marker of her Indigeneity. In addition, their home is presented as modern and practical: Raven's room in particular is simple, sporting a desk with a plate, books, and a cactus, and side table with a leftover mug, bowl, and spoons (figure 104). There is nothing particularly noticeable, old-fashioned, or unusual about her suite.



Figure 104: Raven's bedroom (*TTI* 11).

The creators also reject stereotypes surrounding language, as Raven and her Grandpa avoid both the overly-formal and the Tonto Talk stereotypes. Both characters consistently use contractions and non-standard English, such as 'don't really matter' and 'you ain't crazy' (*TTI* 58), and they do not talk in riddles or metaphors.



Figure 105: A bird's eye view of the Navajo reservation (TT1 12).

Teen Titans is the only comic in this selection that visually depicts a reservation (figure 105). In the comic, the readers are first shown a birds-eye view of Raven's home with houses scattered around alongside some fences, cars, telephone masts, and lights, with the desert in

the background. The reservation is certainly simple, but it's also relatively neat, tidy, and modern. Indeed, the area also has internet connection, as we see in figure 106 showing Raven and Starfire on her laptop, reading an article about Star Labs. The presence of phone masts, technology, and decent houses rejects notions of primitivity, whilst the simplistic facilities and remote location remind the reader that reservations were not built with luxury in mind. The illustrators do a careful and considerate job in their depiction of Raven's home by



Figure 106: Raven and Starfire sit outside whilst Raven is in her laptop (TT2 136).

shunning the stereotype of modern reservations being dirty, poverty-stricken places, but also avoiding romanticising the place and the conditions many Indigenous Peoples are forced to live in.

Equinox

The creators of Equinox continually and successfully reject this stereotype through their presentation of her as a modern teenager in the 21st century, as a Cree woman, and as a Midayo. Firstly, the creators present Mii as a modern and regular teenager (in spite of the superpowers that she discovers later), firstly through her speech and general appearance. Miiyahbin bears no “signifiers of Indigeneity”: she dresses simply in jeans and multiple layers as appropriate for the cold climate of Moose Factory. Her clothes have no elaborate patterns that could signify her Cree heritage, nor does she wear any jewellery, headwear, or hairstyle that stereotypically signifies Indigeneity. On the contrary, her hair is tied up out of her face, there are no braids in sight, and her coat is a simple pink accompanied by a beige hoodie and blue jeans. Mii and Heather’s speech also reflects the speech of any modern teenagers. For example, when Heather tells Mii that she is ‘like a zombie or something, girl. Barely said a word all day’, then tells her she is ‘always a bit weird’, to which Mii replies, ‘Ha ha - ever funny’ (*JLUI* 18). The ellipsis, pop culture references, sarcasm, and teasing depict them as typical teenagers. In addition, Mii never speaks in riddles or metaphors and continually talks in a relatable way to the reader.



Figure 107: Cover page featuring Miiyahbin set against the outline of the Whitago (*JLUI* 129).

Furthermore, her Cree language is interwoven naturally and flawlessly into her speech, as she calls out for her ‘Nohkom’ (*JLUI* 18), which is Cree for Grandmother. This functions as a subtle and very natural way to incorporate her Cree identity without waving a metaphorical flag in the reader’s face. In fact, the interwoven language used in relation to Mii and her family is a very common occurrence for bi- and multi-linguists, thus her culture and language is

included without being put on display as a costume or flag.

Another way in which the creators reject the homogenisation of Indigenous Peoples is through Miiyahbin's superhero costume, which was inspired by Shannen Koostachin's dress (figure 108), as featured in the documentary, *Hi-Ho Mistahey*. Shannen was a young, Indigenous activist who 'advocated for equal education funding across Canada, essentially fighting for Native rights to education' (W. Smith). She was also a member of the Attawapiskat First Nation, who are part of the Cree residing in Northern Ontario (where this story is set). According to Smith, and as is evident on comparison, the 'colours and tailoring of Equinox's costume also resemble Shannen's traditional dress, mimicking the flowing cape and



Figure 108: Obomsawin.

dress regalia' (W. Smith). Lemire's inspiration is thus not only appropriate but demonstrates a dedicated engagement 'with specific First Nations identity' (W. Smith), revealing his commitment to portraying a culturally specific and accurate Indigenous hero. Moreover, Lemire's decision pays tribute to the incredible activist Shannen was and honours her fight for education funding for all Indigenous children.

The presentation of Miiyahbin's Nokhom is also appropriate and holds more cultural significance than a non-Indigenous reader might think. Nokhom's knowledge-sharing does more than simply reify the lack of 'women mentoring superhero women' that Stuller points out (22), but also acts as an ode to the significant role of women in many Indigenous cultures (as discussed briefly in Chapter Three). Whilst the settler colonists did their best to convert many Indigenous societies into patriarchal ones, many nations practised gender equality and some

were actually matriarchal, with women as the ‘clan mothers’ who ‘made all the major decisions’ (Otway). Thus this character acts as both a tribute to the role of Indigenous women in society and to the role of Indigenous knowledges more generally, as the grandmother figure is the one who passes on the knowledge to our Indigenous superhero, who then passes this on to the Justice League themselves. Furthermore, this knowledge base is not simply taken by the Justice League and acted upon; it is Miiyahbin herself who defeats the Whitago through her knowledge of her own culture and her Nohkom’s teachings, thus ‘rewriting comic book depictions of sovereignty and power relations’ (W. Smith).

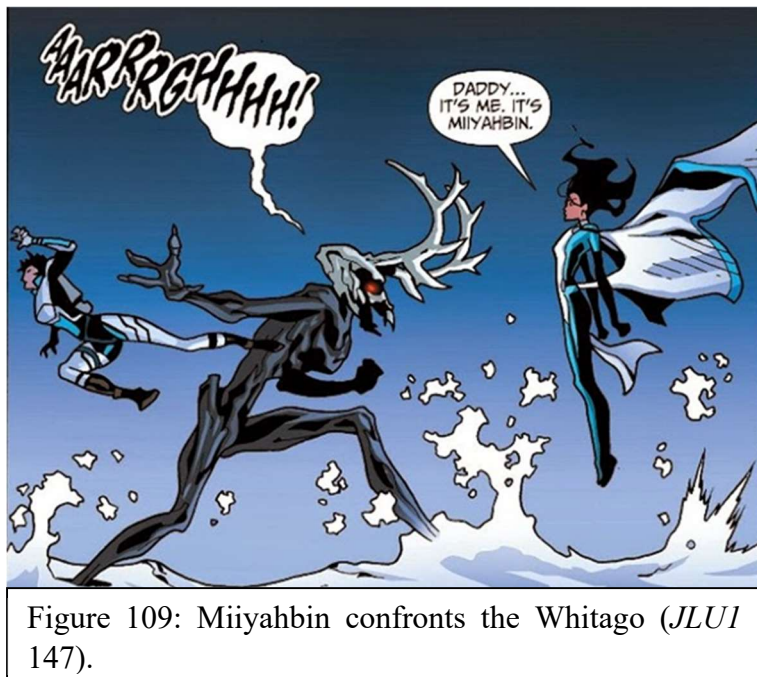


Figure 109: Miiyahbin confronts the Whitago (*JLUI* 147).

This inclusion of the Whitago further demonstrates Lemire’s attention to cultural specificity and his refusal to homogenise Indigenous cultures. The Whitago in Cree myth has ‘distinctive red eyes’ that ‘roll in blood’, its feet are very long with ‘long, pointed heels’ and its hands ‘are hideous with claw-

like fingers and fingernails’ (Teicher quoted in Harring 76; see also W. Smith), all of which are clearly illustrated in figure 109. The inclusion of this beast is culturally relevant and an exceptional exploration of Cree culture within the Justice League comics. Indeed, as Smith states,

Working at a variety of levels, the narrative, interwoven with a story of a nascent incarnation of the Justice League forming in Northern Ontario, avoids the “homogenizing discourse on Aboriginal worldviews” that might be risked by such an endeavour by entering into particularity (Eigenbrod 445). Depicting the Moose Cree First Nation through the particular geography of snow-covered streets, using

the Delores D Echum Composite School in Moose Factory as the visual for the local school, and the iconic Cold War architecture of an abandoned NATO Radar base, gestures to the broader mass of Northern Native communities with ex-military facilities nearby who share similar experiences. Accommodating a complex cross-national fantastic within this grounded setting seems to resist the homogenising discourses of popular culture oft-associated with superhero comic books. (W. Smith)

The whole grounding, setting, narrative, and visuals of the volume demonstrate perfectly how even a non-Indigenous creator can successfully depict Indigenous characters in comics; it simply requires them to do their research and consult people from the community they are depicting.

Conclusion

Many American comics still perpetuate several myths of settler colonial propaganda, noticeably the homogenisation of Indigenous Peoples and the presentation of them as relicts, thus settler countries' refusal to acknowledge their violent pasts is still evident in much of this media. By examining these comics' interactions with this stereotype, it can be seen that some comics creators are beginning to make a conscious effort to distinguish between Indigenous nations, to actively challenge the homogenisation of communities, and to depict modern, relatable Indigenous characters in contemporary settings. Finding a balance between the erasure of culture and the modernisation of characters is clearly something many creators have struggled with. However, successful attempts can be clearly seen in several examples, proving that it is not necessarily a daunting task, just one that requires more cultural awareness. This task would, once again, benefit hugely from the input of Indigenous consultants at the very least, and prove an effortless one with input from Indigenous comics creators themselves.

Conclusion: A Glimpse into the Future

This conclusion provides a glimpse into the future of Indigenous representation by examining the effects of having Indigenous creators work on comics featuring Indigenous characters. This section thus starts by looking closely at Marvel's recent and ground-breaking publication: *Indigenous Voices*, featuring the work of Jeffrey Veregge (Coast Salish), Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva), Darcie Little Badger (Lipan Apache), Kyle Charles (Whitefish Lake First Nation), Rebecca Roanhorse, David Cutler (Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation), and Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet Nation).

Echo/ Maya Lopez.

Rebecca Roanhorse, Weshoyot Alvitre (Tongva), and Lee Loughridge come together for the first story in this issue, focusing on the deaf, Cheyenne-Latina hero of Hell's Kitchen, Maya Lopez. In this miniscule, ten-page story, the creators not only avoid all stereotyping of their Indigenous hero, but manage to actively break down all four categories in this study. Firstly, the Bloodthirsty Savage category is deconstructed throughout the tale. Maya is shown to be a caring and empathetic person who is willing to stand up against bullies and tyrants, yet shows no uncontrollable anger or murderous inclinations. When Captain Marvel (who is actually Loki in disguise) approaches her and requests her help to save a Badoon settlement and fight off the swamp god terrorising them, Maya casually agrees, 'Sure. I'm in.' (*IV* 6). Maya's apparent willingness to help, demonstrated through the brevity of their conversation and the casualness of her agreement, in addition to the lack of any personal benefit from taking the mission, demonstrates her kind and helpful nature. Moreover, when she arrives at the settlement and an anxious Badoon attacks her, Maya calmly and effortlessly disarms the soldier without hurting them, before lowering her weapon upon realising that they were simply confused and scared

(IV 8). Her ability to disarm a soldier without causing injury demonstrates not only her high level of skill, but also her commitment to morality. Indeed, the ease with which she completes this action suggests that she is well-practised in disarming as opposed to simply fighting back. This level of consideration for those who attack her indicates her empathy and kindness as a character, as opposed to the cold, murderous, and overtly violent stereotype constructed by settler colonial propaganda.

Her commitment to avoiding unnecessary violence and murder is further demonstrated when she confronts the swamp god at the settlement: calling him a ‘bully’, Maya states that ‘it’s time you take on someone who doesn’t *mind* a little violence’ (IV 11). Although this statement does indicate that violence does not bother her, the specific phrasing still goes some way to deconstructing the Bloodthirsty Savage stereotype. The graphology in the form of the italics on ‘*mind*’ emphasises that she does not profess a liking for violence, but merely an indifference to it and a recognition of the unfortunate necessity of it. The inclusion of the modifier, ‘little’, is also significant here, as it reduces the scope of violence to which she is indifferent and in doing so implies her dislike of extreme or excessive violence. After defeating the god, Maya also states that she should ‘kill’ him for the ‘torment’ he put the Badoon through, but refuses to do so, claiming that he has ‘already taught these peaceful people enough about violence’. (IV 12). The mercy she shows here for the sake of the Badoon further demonstrates her empathy and consideration, and rejects the propagandic image of “savages” uncontrollable violence and eagerness for murder. Furthermore, Maya’s Cheyenne culture is implied to be ‘warm and welcoming’, as the receipt of this warm welcome from the Badoon ‘stirs up old memories’ of her home and their attitudes towards visitors (IV 9). Thus, the stereotype of the Bloodthirsty Savage is successfully dismantled.

The Naïve Sidekick stereotype is also dismantled effectively throughout, simply through the presentation of Maya’s skill in battle, and her sheer independence and capability. Firstly, her

fight against the swamp god, Saarl, lasts exactly 5 panels; within one page, she has defeated him and handed him over to the Badoon to deal with (*IV* 11-12). The exceptional skill demonstrated here is proof of her capability and her skills certainly exceed the abilities of any sidekick. Secondly, Maya rescues the Badoon from the god single-handedly, requires no help, and certainly does not need saving at any point during this story; on the contrary, she is the hero and saviour (*IV* 5, 12).

The Homogenised Relict stereotype is also deconstructed through Maya's story, including her excursion on Captain Marvel/ Loki's space ship. Indeed, this space travel is not even acknowledged within the comic, suggesting the ordinariness of such high and futuristic technologies in Maya's life. Her contemporariness is also demonstrated on the very first panel of Maya's story. The reader's first view of the character is a full-page spread of her in an alleyway, scrolling through the messages on her phone with her weapons tucked in her elbow (figure 110; *IV* 4). The immediate presence of



Figure 110: Maya looks at her phone whilst standing in an alleyway (*IV* 4).

what appears to be a smart phone (indicated through the general design and the form of the messages we are shown) tells the reader immediately that we are located in the modern day and reinforces the message, 'we are still here' that is so crucial to Indigenous narratives in the 21st century (Sheyahshe 106). Maya's casual pose also makes her immediately relatable to the reader and suggests her comfort in the modern world, through the way she casually holds her weapons with the inside of her elbow. This means of holding your other belongings in order to

text would be completely familiar to her reader and again places her in the context of the everyday, modern world. The setting also rejects the stereotype of Indigenous Peoples only existing in rural spaces. Indeed, Maya is known for her work with Daredevil and her position in Hell's Kitchen, a particularly urban and built-up area, thus rejecting the notion of exclusively rural Indigeneity and of old-fashioned characters.

The comic further rejects the relict trope through Maya's language: 'That's your troublesome god, right? Sounds charming.' (*IV* 9). The use of contractions, ellipsis, sarcasm, and the casual cooperative signal, 'right', all place her speech in the modern day and present her to be reasonably well-spoken without erring into the speech of the overly-formal caricature or the mysterious and metaphor-riddled shaman. Indeed, her speech successfully dismantles the Romantic Ecologist and Homogenised Relict categories through the contemporariness and informality of it.

The story also rejects and challenges the Romantic Ecologist through Maya's comfort in her urban environment in addition to the creators' refusal to sexualise her. In the first panel of the story, Maya is illustrated surrounded by messages from the men in her life, some professing interest in her in a sexual manner (e.g. 'Hey sexy' [*IV* 4]). Whilst this could be seen as an instance of this comic reinforcing the sexualisation, it seems more likely to function as a criticism of it. Indeed, Maya is shown to be annoyed at their messages, sighing, 'Men', and questioning why they can't 'just let me be' (*IV* 5). Maya's frustration at their comments and the smashing of the screen in the fight shows the frustration such attitudes cause; the creators could be attempting to highlight the annoyance of this ongoing sexualisation of Indigenous women, and the literal smashing of the phone within the comic could imply the need for the metaphorical smashing of this attitude. Such a reading is encouraged by the illustrators' depictions of Maya and her costume; she is never drawn in sexualised poses, only relatable and practical ones, and her outfit is a functional and sensible fighting suit that refuses to show any

cleavage or unnecessary skin. Thus, the creators' refusal to objectify the character suggests that the objectification of her by the other characters in the story is indeed intended as a criticism of the attitude. Furthermore, these men never actually appear in her story; they are completely irrelevant and defined only by their frustrating messages to Maya, thus reducing them to their poor attitudes and exploring Maya's character exclusively. Indeed, they are merely background props used to send a message to the reader and to advance and enhance Maya's story, an unusual inversion of the sidekick trope from the second category.

In addition to these successful deconstructions of the categories, the creators also include references to Indigenous issues, such as generational trauma, the ongoing impact of settler colonialism, lost cultures, and diaspora. One of the first things Maya says in the comics is that she feels 'so weighed down by my past that I fear it's suffocating any chance I have for a future' (*IV* 4). Whilst to a non-Indigenous reader, this could appear as simply an interesting and insightful line, to the Indigenous reader this statement could hold far more meaning. The notion of past events and traumas continuing to impact Indigenous Peoples today is a huge talking point amongst Indigenous scholars and communities. Indeed, the very fact that reservations exist and that many are mired by poverty is evidence of this ongoing effect of settler colonialism. The high rates of mental health issues, suicide, unemployment, and incarceration, also all prove the accuracy of this notion. It could even refer to the notion of generational trauma; that is, that the current generations are continuing to feel not only the physical but also the mental health effects of traumatic events such as residential schools. Similar references appear in Maya and Dara's conversation, where Maya explains that the people on 'The Rez' 'were my family. But that's all gone now', and Dara sympathises that 'it's hard to live with what has been lost' (*IV* 9). This exchange more directly references issues of cultural alienation and diaspora; Maya's family and her home are implied to have been destroyed, which speaks to the lack of access many Indigenous Peoples have to their cultures, histories, and roots, and

the impact this lost identity can have. References such as these speak directly to Indigenous readers of this comic, showing that it has been written with these readers in mind. The significance of this intended readership lies not in the exclusion of non-Indigenous readers, as these stories are exceedingly enjoyable to any readership, but in the attention and care given to ensure that Indigenous readers feel seen, acknowledged, and welcome within this medium.

Mirage/ Dani Moonstar

Whilst Dani has remained a reasonably consistent example of how to write an interesting, stereotype-breaking Indigenous character, seeing her finally written and illustrated by Indigenous comics creators is an incredible step (and one that has taken far too long). Whilst she remains the same strong, confident, smart, and lovable character from the *New Mutants* series, her Indigeneity now plays a bigger part in her story, which also introduces a new character, Julian. This mini story successfully rejects all four stereotypes in its few pages, further demonstrating the incredibly positive impact of having Indigenous creators telling Indigenous stories.

Firstly, the comic works hard to break down the Bloodthirsty Savage stereotype by reversing the narrative and showing the everyday oppression and violence faced by Indigenous communities. In the first pages, we are presented with a White teenager complaining that Julian's family are not 'from here' but 'off the rez' and that their inclusion in the fete 'just ain't right' (IV 14). The declaration that the people on the reservation are not part of the overall town speaks to wider issues of exclusion and alienation in regards to Indigenous communities in White-dominated spaces, as well as issues of belonging and nationality. The notion that Indigenous Peoples can only exist on reservations and cannot partake in wider society is a huge problem that leads to a lack of access to education, work, and housing, leaving the people

feeling trapped and isolated, which, as has already been discussed, leads to high levels of poverty and mental health problems in said communities. The comic manages to highlight this



Figure 111: The sheriff's son stands over Julian's family (*IV* 15).

issue through this brief moment in the opening scene of Dani and Julian's story, yet it makes a big impact regarding the wider issues of exclusion and microaggressions. These subjects are addressed again when the White boy, who is in fact the Sheriff's son, robs the grandmother and breaks Lucas' nose when Lucas tries to stop him, leading to the grandmother begging the boy to 'Please leave us alone!' (*IV* 15). This violence enacted on the family simply for daring to exist outside of the reservation and partake in the wider community again implicates the everyday violence Indigenous Peoples are

subjected to in non-Indigenous spaces. It also presents the normality of it and the deep sadness of this through the grandmother, whose plea lacks surprise and simply attempts to prevent any further violence. Moreover, the angle of the panel and positioning of the characters furthers this presentation of Indigenous communities as victims of White aggression. The panel is drawn with the grandmother in the foreground cradling her injured grandson whilst the Sheriff's son stands over them with his fist clenched around her purse (figure 111). This positionality places the reader on the grandmother's side through our literal closeness to her in the panel. In addition, the reader is also made to look up at the looming attacker from the grandmother's perspective, showing the boy's power in the situation and presenting him as a looming and dangerous figure. Thus, the narrative of the hostile, violent Indigenous character is flipped and these traits are placed on the White antagonist as the reader is encouraged to sympathise with the grandmother and young boy.

However, even though this portrayal is flipped and sympathy for the Indigenous characters created, the comic also avoids presenting them as helpless victims and thus perpetuating the Naïve Sidekick stereotype. Indeed, Julian stands up for his family and stops the boy attacking them any further, shouting, ‘Don’t hurt my family’ before manifesting his mutant powers and saving the three of them (*IV* 16). In doing so, the writers overtly reject the White Saviour Complex and position their Indigenous character as the hero. Furthermore, when Julian is shown to have disappeared after the incident, the writers do not bring in a White superhero to help him. On the contrary, Dani Moonstar is the one tasked with finding Julian. As the comic itself states, this mission is ‘personal’ for Dani as ‘Julian’s tribal government reached out and tasked me with his protection’ (*IV* 16). Not only does this further reject the White Saviour trope, it also comments on the American justice system and its failings towards Indigenous communities. Dani declares that they ‘need to reach Julian before the police do’ (*IV* 16), which, alongside the use of the verb ‘protection’, references the racial bias and police brutality inherent in the system, thus portraying Dani as a hero and protector and the White police officers as the violent and unjust enemies. Whilst this narrative is likely to be in reference to the anti-Mutant attitudes prevalent within the X-Men comics, the ‘personal’ nature of the mission to Dani and the fact Julian’s community reached out to her rather than to the (non-Indigenous) Mutant marauders, whose case this should have been (*IV* 16), suggests that it is Julian’s Indigeneity in particular that puts him at such great risk.

After Dani and Rahne find and offer support to Julian, the police appear and threaten the three of them (*IV* 21). However, despite the hostility and subtle racism demonstrated by the police, Dani remains polite and even demonstrates a kindness towards the Sheriff, reassuring him that the situation was merely a ‘misunderstanding’ and that ‘Everything will be all right’ (*IV* 22). Whilst this kindness is far more than the Sheriff seems to deserve, it functions to challenge and critique the presentation of Indigenous characters as bloodthirsty and violent.

Dani and Rahne win the fight easily, but do so with grace and mercy, enforcing a truce rather than claiming victory. Not only does Dani's diplomacy save Julian and stop the police from hunting him, it also instigates a 'friendly diplomatic' alliance between the X-Men and Julian's community. Thus, Dani is shown as a powerful and influential character through her understanding, kindness, and cleverness, thus creating a safe space for mutants and Indigenous communities alike. Indeed, Dani even contemplates the knock-on effect this alliance could have, wondering 'how many other Native nations will follow suit', further demonstrating the large impact her actions may cause.

The comic further rejects the Naïve Sidekick stereotype through the creators' presentation of humour, authority, and cleverness. Early on in the story, Julian jokes that his grandmother could 'make a pie for the Hulk' with her prize-winning pumpkin (*IV* 15), demonstrating his good sense of humour and thus rejecting the stereotypical stoic, humourless character. Dani, too, rejects the category both via her intelligence and her body language. Upon their entrance, Dani is the first to speak, asking 'What's the verdict?' (*IV* 16). The claim over the opening lines of the scenes along with the use of an interrogative immediately indicate that Dani is in charge in the scene; she is the leader and authority in the situation, thus overtly rejecting the sidekick trope. Furthermore,



Figure 112: Dani & Rahne inspect the crime scene (*IV* 16).

112). Dani is drawn with her hands on her hips, surveying her surroundings, and the panel is drawn from a low angle, forcing the reader to look up at Dani. Moreover, whilst Dani is standing over the scene, Rahne is kneeling down. Through this positioning of the characters,

Dani's importance and authority is firmly presented, her literal height and position in the panel reflecting her confidence and metaphorical position as leader.

The rejection of the category is further demonstrated through Dani's interactions with young Julian, during which she demonstrates her kindness, empathy, and intelligence. Firstly, rather than being afraid or repulsed by the demonic dog Julian conjured for protection, Dani reassures the creature, 'Don't be afraid, little one. We won't hurt you' (*IV* 17). Her patience and sympathy in the face of an aggressive and subjectively frightening creature shows the extent of her empathy, as does the address term, 'little one', which seems to juxtapose the nature of the creature she is talking to. However, her kindness proves successful and she calms the demon dog. In addition to reassuring the creature, Dani also reassures Julian that he doesn't 'have to struggle' and that there is 'a community to support you' (*IV* 19). More significantly, Julian does not even have to voice any concerns for Dani to know exactly what to say; she instinctively knows how to support Julian and make him feel better, demonstrating her high levels of empathy. Moreover, when Julian protests that he has 'a community already', Dani explains that he can be 'both', just as she is Krakoan and Cheyenne, and 'a sometimes-Valkyrie, a teacher, and a connoisseur of black coffee' (*IV* 20), explaining that 'we can be many things, Julian – and have many families' (*IV* 20). Dani's reassurance that Krakoa is not 'about assimilation' and that she would 'raise hell before that happened' speaks to discussions surrounding assimilation in today's world and demonstrates the writers' awareness and engagement with Indigenous issues. Having Dani state so explicitly the importance of retaining one's culture whilst simultaneously accepting her other identities speaks to far more than just the Mutant conversations within the comic. Indeed, it reassures its Indigenous readers that they do not have to sacrifice one part of their identity for another; that Indigenous Peoples, like anyone else, can have multifaceted identities. It is a simple claim and one that should not be worthy of praise, but when so many Indigenous characters' identities are wholly built out of

their Indigeneity and they are refused any other elements of personality, it is in fact a ground-breaking moment for the comic to not only imply such ideas, but to outwardly state them as fact. The writers manage to use Dani's entire story and, perhaps, even respond to the previously mentioned criticism on the character being made a Valkyrie (see Chapter Four). Indeed, the mention of Dani's Valkyrie status within this explicit discussion of identity seems to suggest the writers' awareness of this controversy and their belief in the importance of complex, three-dimensional Indigenous characters, as well as their belief in the freedom to create their own identities that include their Indigeneity without performing or patronising it, and that is a much-needed message.

The creators also reject the categories of the Romantic Ecologist and the Homogenous Relict. Julian's powers are an excellent example of this, as although he conjures creatures, his creations certainly aren't natural or sublime as the Romantic Ecologist stereotype would



Figure 113: Julian with his eyes blacked out and hands glowing black, surrounded by demon bats and tentacles (*IV* 16).

expect. On the contrary, his powers seem to reflect his love for Halloween, as he creates horror-style creatures with tentacles and demonic versions of bats, dogs,

giant spiders, and others (figure 113). Julian's connection with this kind of theme is incredibly refreshing in comparison to the stereotypical Indigenous character, who loves "natural nature", is stoic, serious, and old-fashioned, and who detests anything unnatural, man-made, or demonic. Julian's interests are not explicitly tied to his Indigeneity; it does not define his personality in this sense, further supporting the above rejection of singular-identities, and

presenting him as a normal teenager who enjoys alternative culture. His outfit provides another example of this depiction, as Julian is illustrated wearing a grey hoodie, fishnet sleeves, ripped skinny jeans, a beanie hat, and what could be converse on his feet (figure 113). Such items of clothing are culturally tied to the gothic and alternative subcultures. Julian's outfit thus matches well with his stated interest in Halloween and the gothic nature of his mutant powers. This interest and involvement in itself rejects stereotypes of the Romantic Ecologist and the homogenisation of Indigenous Peoples' dress and interests. Indeed, there is once again a refreshing lack of anything stereotypically thought of as simply and reductively "Native", whilst still acknowledging and honouring his Indigeneity. In other words, Julian is allowed to be both Indigenous and an individual, instead of being forced to wear his Indigeneity as a costume.

Overall, the Julian-Dani story in this comic breaks down many categories both subtly and explicitly, refers to and seems to react to potent discussions in Indigenous circles, and provides a narrative of joy, hope, and reassurance to its Indigenous readers. Simply put, the comic appears to be written not only **by** Indigenous creators, but **for** Indigenous readers, whilst successfully proving an enjoyable and exciting story to all audiences.

Silver Fox and Trigo

The third and final story within this issue is that of two lesser-known characters. Silver Fox first appeared in 1989 as Wolverine's love interest who was promptly "murdered" by Sabretooth (it is revealed later that she was not really murdered and instead a member of the co-ops team, Team X, before joining Hydra, and finally joining the X-Men to take down Ferro, by whom she is killed). Trigo's first appearance came a year later in 1990, but very little is known of the character due to his miniscule and somewhat insignificant appearances. However,

Stephen Graham Jones, David Cutler, Roberto Poggi, and Cris Peter rectify this oversight, and create a captivating narrative that pairs these oft-overlooked characters and succeeds in challenging and rejecting several stereotypes to which the original version of the characters succumbed.

The comic successfully rejects and criticises the Bloodthirsty Savage, Naïve Sidekick, and Homogenous Relict categories through their presentation of Silver Fox, Trigo, and the White settler colonists. Set in the colonial period (date unspecified), the comic opens with an explanation that ‘Twenty-two years ago, the trappers came through, brought their pestilence to the Siksikaitsitapi. And then came their soldiers, with their Gatling guns. With more disease’ (*IV* 24). This opening immediately rejects the homogenisation of Indigenous communities, using the Blackfoot nation’s proper name alongside an asterix clarifying the name for the benefit of the non-Indigenous readers. The use of the correct name, Siksikaitsitapi, in the main and initial introduction, though, implies that the comic is written more prominently for those who would understand and appreciate the proper name, as well as to normalise the use of it and educate the reader. Indeed, the English name, Blackfoot, is positioned here as a second thought and thus is implied to be of secondary importance, demonstrating culturally-specific knowledge and respect for the Peoples of that nation.

This opening also references the genocide committed by settler colonists, both indirectly via the new ‘disease’ and ‘pestilence’ they brought to the continent that killed thousands of Indigenous Peoples, and via murder through their mention of ‘soldiers’ and ‘guns’ (*IV* 24). The reader is given simple yet effective and emotive background for the story, as well as being immediately shown the racism of the settlers, calling the Blackfoot people ‘dirty savages’ and claiming that they must have killed the group of settlers by catching them ‘out here all alone’ (*IV* 24). Firstly, the use of the anti-Indigenous slur, whilst unfortunate, is historically accurate here, and is used only the once in order to present the racism faced by the main characters.

Such slurs are not over-used, nor do they consistently plague the comic (as they do in *Red Wolf*); it is a simple and quick way to identify and establish these characters as the enemy. The specification that the settlers were caught ‘all alone’ also implies that the Indigenous Peoples only succeeded in defeating them because they were isolated and vulnerable, and that they would have been otherwise incapable of winning the fight. This implication reflects settler colonial narratives of the “dying race” (Wilkinson 27), that attempted to “justify” colonial genocide by claiming that Indigenous Peoples were incompetent and would have died out anyway (Wilkinson 27). The writers also draw attention to the insatiable nature of colonialism, as Silver Fox explains that ‘it’s never enough. They always have to have more, until they have it all’ (*IV* 28). By including this explanation, the writers further justify Silver Fox and Trigo’s actions, through the implication that the settler colonists would never stop their violence; that if they did not do something, their entire community would be displaced and murdered. Therefore, by presenting the violence and racism of the settler colonists first, the reader is instructed to view Silver Fox and Trigo’s actions as reactions; as a defence against the violence already committed. This therefore challenges the narrative of Indigenous Peoples being the perpetrators of violence, and instead positions them as defenders of their lives, challenges the conspiracy of silence that continually covered up colonial atrocities and presented Indigenous Nations’ defensive reactions as unprovoked attacks (Mihehuah, *So You* 19; *LA Times* Aug 1885, 2; Allam and Evershed).

The comic further rejects the Bloodthirsty Savage category while also rejecting the Naïve Sidekick through the pair’s clever tactics. Whilst Silver Fox and Trigo infiltrate the settlement, they do not do so in order to kill the settlers. Instead, the narration explains that by adjusting some things, the fort will not ‘survive the winter’, and as it will appear to fail ‘due to the weather, the remoteness, the character of the people – there will be no reprisals’ (*IV* 26). The

characters know that if they kill the settlers, their own people will face even further vilification and the settlers would respond with more violence. Instead, the illustrators cleverly show how their actions will succeed via Trigo's future-sight. Following a panel showing Silver Fox emptying a bag of flour, Silver Fox has a vision of one settler killing another after finding the



Figure 114: Trigo surrounded by three visions of the settlement's future (*IV* 27).

empty sacks (figure 114; *IV* 27). Similarly, after they throw a dead animal into the settlement's well, Trigo sees a violent and bloody scene of the settlers killing and hanging each other (figure 115). The writers confirm their success as Trigo explains that the settlers 'eat each other in the end. But they get no sustenance from it... only more hunger' (*IV* 30), showing that they succeed in turning the settlers against each other by ensuring there is a scarcity of resources; by using



Figure 115: Trigo envisions the settlers killing each other (*IV* 29).

their intelligence instead of resorting to mass murder.

Unfortunately, they do not manage to do so without killing anyone: when a settler woman appears, Silver Fox tries to stop her from shouting, reassuring her that they are leaving, but the woman screams for help and Silver Fox is forced to break her neck (figure 116; *IV* 31). Although Silver Fox does kill the woman, her attempt to avoid it challenges

the stereotype of the Bloodthirsty Indigenous character, as does her proceeding lament that, ‘She... she was just going for water’ (*IV* 32). The false start in her utterance alongside the modifier ‘just’ and her bowed head in the panel imply Silver Fox’s upset and trauma at having killed the lady, showing her not as a hardened killer, but an empathetic person acting out of desperation and in defence of her people’s lives.



Figure 116: Silver Fox walks hand-in-hand with Trigo, bowing her head and looking at the ground (*IV* 32).

Her empathy is further demonstrated when she finds a wolf cub, whose fate was to be cooked and eaten by the settlers. Silver Fox cradles the cub and wraps him in a blanket, claiming, ‘They don’t get to hurt you too’ (*IV* 32). Silver Fox calls the cub ‘Sweet little one’, before naming him ‘Ootskwiimi’, which is translated in a side note to mean ‘Blue’ (*IV* 34). The epithet and the care that Silver Fox takes of the helpless cub further prove that she is not a heartless killer, and is instead simply doing what she must to survive, thus rejecting both the Bloodthirsty Savage and Naïve Sidekick categories.

In terms of the Homogenous Relict, this story does not reject these stereotypes as overtly as the previous narratives in the comic. Firstly, this story is set in the past, which could risk facsimileing the Relict trope, and secondly, the characters do wear some fringe and animal furs. However, in regards to the former, the setting makes sense as an effort by the writers to create a backstory for the little-explored characters. In addition, the past setting functions as a means to criticise colonialism, educate the reader, pay homage to the longevity of the characters, and to reject colonial propaganda within its original context. Thus, the setting can be viewed as a practical opportunity for these endeavours, rather than a thoughtless result of the characters’ Indigeneity. In regards to the fringe and furs, such attire is in this case appropriate to the time

period, place, season, and Peoples depicted; Silver Fox and Trigo have not been randomly allocated “Indigenous regalia”; their clothing is accurate to their setting and their identities.

Lastly, the Romantic Ecologist trope could be upheld by this comic in relation to shamanism: Trigo’s power of future-sight risks facsimileing typical shamanistic powers. However, once again the creators manage to negate this potential issue, as his powers are not nature-based, nor do they derive from any environmental or spiritual factor, nor is the character himself mystical, wise, and mysterious. On the contrary, Trigo’s powers have no known relation to the environment, were not a gift from any “deity”, nor does he seem particularly spiritual. Moreover, his powers, instead of being fanciful and idealistic, seem to cause him pain and suffering (see his facial expression in figures 114 and 115). In addition, Silver Fox does not appear to have any superpowers, nor any connection to the environment other than her name. Thus, Trigo’s power is presented as something specific to him rather than a result of his Indigeneity.

Whilst some elements of this story risk perpetuating tropes of colonial propaganda, the creators have instead managed to reclaim and legitimise these elements, using them in a way that accurately and respectfully depicts the characters and their Siksikaitsitapi identity.

As Marvel’s *Indigenous Voices* demonstrates, there is hope for the future of representation; the excellence of this comic and its refusal to perpetuate colonial propaganda proves a strong argument for comics publishers to hire Indigenous creators. The possible future opened up in *Indigenous Voices* therefore means that the concerns addressed in this thesis will continue to be a pressing topic of discussion. Even now, there is far more to explore in terms of Indigenous representation in comics than just one study can manage; indeed, even limiting this research to Marvel and DC comics was not enough to include everything necessary for a fully

comprehensive study. There are many more characters, many more comics (New Mutants series are plentiful in particular, but characters such as Dani and Dawnstar appear in many cross-over comics, too), and indeed many more publishing companies that deserve a thorough examination. The aim of this study, however, was not and could not be to look at the history and present of Indigenous representation in comics in its entirety. It was, instead, to provide a detailed look at a selection of the most influential representations of this century, and to act as an introduction to the examination of this issue that I hope will promote more studies on the topic. An entire study could be dedicated to Dani Moonstar alone, or to Bishop, Red Wolf, and many others. Alternatively, characters such as Maya Lopez, Forge, and Thunder Bird should be dealt with in the same manner, as should comics from companies such as Image and Black Horse and numerous independent publishers. There is plenty more work to be done holding creators accountable for their depictions of Native characters, and more opportunity for further analysis of the role of these categories in popular comics. In the future, the hope is for this work to inspire comics creators to re-evaluate their relationships with Indigenous characters and for comics publishers to re-evaluate their relationships with Indigenous creators.

Whilst there are an increasing number of studies dedicated to Indigenous representation, and some even focused on comics (such as the recently published *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*) these studies fail to examine the more modern and prominent characters and comics in context with Indigenous stereotyping in the way this study does. Examining the less palpable racism in comics is just as important as the more palpable stereotyping, as oftentimes non-Indigenous writers remain unaware of the harmful stereotypes they perpetuate and the racism demonstrated stems from a lack of knowledge and understanding, rather than any intended bigotry. However, this type of racism is just as dangerous in comics, as it is presented as appropriate and sometimes even as “progressive” (e.g. the “positive” stereotyping of Indigenous characters as being wise, spiritual, and

protective of nature). Without studies that explore the link between this kind of “positive” racism and the history of the stereotype it links to, creators would remain unaware of the damage they are doing to Indigenous communities and such stereotyping would continue.

Indeed, by examining the comics in relation to these categories, it becomes clearer exactly where and how contemporary depictions of Indigenous characters continue to contribute to and reinforce out-of-date stereotypes. This methodology made recognising the presence and rejection of these categories much clearer and aided my analysis by creating a clear framework grounded in existing scholarship with which to work. The inconsistencies in the lengths of Chapters is also an indication of the prevalence of these stereotypes. The Bloodthirsty Savage and Naïve Sidekick chapters, for example, are longer than the others and this in itself reveals the continuing prevalence of these stereotypes; despite them being the oldest and most pernicious of the categories, these elements remain so ingrained in contemporary Indigenous representation that there was far too much material to fit into even the longer chapter lengths. The Homogenous Relict and Romantic Ecologist, however, are newer and less obviously racist categories, and the aspects are correlatively less consistent throughout the comics examined.

Character	Comics	Stereotype Present				Stereotype Rejected			
		BS	NS	RE	HR	BS	NS	RE	HR
Bishop	Times & Life						x	x	x
	Last X-Man		x	x		x	x	x	x
	Gambit & Bishop		x	x			x	x	
	Messiah Complex	x					x		
Dawnstar	Legion Lost 1		x	x	x				
	Legion Lost 2		x	x	x				
	Legion of SH 1			x					
	Legion of SH 2			x					
	Legion of SH 3			x	x				
Black Condor	Uncle Sam 1	x		x	x		x		
	Uncle Sam #1-8	x		x			x		
	Freedom #1-9	x		x	x	x	x		
Red Wolf	Marvel 1872		x	x	x	x			

	Man out of Time	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
	Occupy 1	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
	Occupy 2	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
Warpath	X-Force #1-28	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
	X-Force 1	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>						
	X-Force 2	<i>x</i>							
	Messiah Complex								
Dani Moonstar	New Mutants 1	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 2	<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 3				<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 4	<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 5				<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 6				<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	New Mutants 7				<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	Back to School			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		
	Fear Itself				<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Raven	<i>TT1</i>			<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
	<i>TT2</i>					<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>
Equinox	<i>JLU1</i>			<i>x</i>			<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
	<i>JLU2</i>		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>				<i>x</i>	
Dani, Maya, Fox, & Trigo	Indigenous Voices					<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>

From a statistical perspective, this table shows in simple terms which comics present and reject the settler colonial propagandic stereotypes. Whilst *Occupy Avengers Volume 1* is the only comic examined that presents all four categories, there are 19 comics that present as many or more stereotypes than they reject, including all comics featuring Black Condor and Dawnstar, and all but one comic featuring Red Wolf and Warpath. On the other hand, 13 comics successfully reject more categories than they present, including all but one of the *New Mutants* comics. However, there is only one comic that succeeds in rejecting all categories whilst refusing to present any stereotypes at all, and that is Marvel's *Indigenous Voices*. Whilst every other comic examined, even the generally well-praised *New Mutants* series, does feature some form of settler colonial propaganda, Veregge, Little Badger, Roanhorse, Jones, and all who worked on *Indigenous Voices* have proved absolutely the necessity of having Indigenous creators tell Indigenous stories. Even the best representation by non-Indigenous creators falls

a long way off of that demonstrated by the Indigenous writers and illustrators who worked on *Indigenous Voices*.

The answer to the questions this study posed, then, is that contemporary comics do continue to play a role in the presence of settler colonial propaganda and, whilst Dani Moonstar certainly redefines and challenges the stereotypes in multiple ways, even her creators fail to avoid this stereotyping completely. There are certainly promising moments in most comics examined, but the ongoing presence of stereotypical components cannot be ignored in favour of these moments. Furthermore, in order to truly understand both the successes and failures of these comics, creators and readers alike must turn to Indigenous-created comics such as *Indigenous Voices*, where the presentation of Dani, Julian, Maya, Silver Fox, and Trigo is unrivalled by any other mainstream publication.

Although mainstream representation has improved a great deal over the years, there is still a lot of progress yet to be made and a lot of propaganda still to be fully rejected; that is, comics still have a lot of work to do for better representation of Indigenous communities. This study also, I believe, provides the answer on how to achieve this. Indeed, the answer to better representation for Indigenous communities appears clear: whilst Indigenous creators are prevented from telling their own stories and non-Indigenous creators remain the predominant storytellers in their place, comics will continue to perpetuate harmful stereotypes regarding Indigenous Peoples, regardless of whether or not this stereotyping is intentional. In conclusion, I leave my reader with the following quote from Thiong'o, which summarises this necessity for better representation behind the scenes: 'Until the lions have their storytellers, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o).

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