


Reading Homework

The American Indian

The classic American Western is a product of Hollywood and Hollywood, more than any other institution in America is the creator of the American mythology. Hollywood films shape how Americans see themselves and the world. But Hollywood films have never told the complete truth about American history and they have often completely distorted that history. It must be said Hollywood improved somewhat in the last four decades of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century, but it should be noted that this almost exactly corresponds to the end of the age of the Classic American Western.

THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD 1899

Buffalo  **Bill**

The last of the great Indian fighters, Colonel Wm. F. Cody and Lieutenant General Nelson A. Miles (retired) of the United States Army, are the leading players in this most realistic film of the age.

This picture, which has been APPROVED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT and made under the DIRECTION OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT, has attracted the attention of the entire world.

“THE INDIAN WARS”

As a Money-Maker this film is without an equal. The Advertising Possibilities of the picture are unlimited. It is a **FIVE-REEL THRILLER THAT WILL LIVE FOREVER.**

1000 INDIANS, many of whom were leaders in the original battles: **12th U. S. CAVALRY**, and **MANY OFFICERS** now retired, again took their places in the re-enacted scenes.



Historically Correct and all scenes **TAKEN ON THE EXACT LOCATION** of the original battles.

State Rights Now Ready **Get Busy!**

THE POSTERS will STOP THE CROWDS and get you the business—6 one-sheets, 3 three-sheets, 1 six-sheet, 2 eight-sheets, 2 sixteen-sheets.

EXHIBITORS—Write or wire us at once and if your state has not been sold, we will book you direct.

THE COL. WM. F. CODY (BUFFALO BILL) HISTORICAL PICTURE CO.
521 First National Bank Bldg.
CHICAGO ILL.

General Nelson A. Miles (U. S. A., Retired) An American Aborigine

Coincidence? Not really. Westerns distorted American history more than any other type of film Hollywood made. Recall what the newspaper editor in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* said about legends: “When the legend becomes truth, print the legend”. This simply means telling people what they want to hear rather than telling them the truth. This is exactly what Hollywood did Hollywood told stories about the West and many of them were not even close to the truth. Among the most

dishonest films Hollywood made were films about the conflict between Whites and The American Indian.

One way in which Hollywood was dishonest about The American Indian was in failing to acknowledge the incredible diversity of the people the Whites collectively referred to as “Indians”. Even the word “Indian” is misleading and based on a misunderstanding. The discoverer, Christopher Columbus, sailed from Spain in 1492 looking for a way to the great



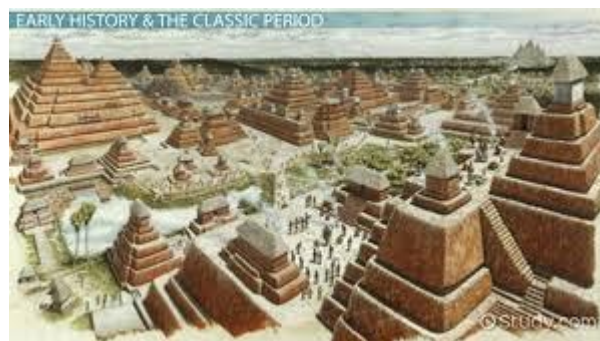
subcontinent of India where he hoped to trade for spices. Instead he accidentally “discovered” the North American continent but never realized his mistake. So he called the inhabitants he encountered “Indians”. The name has been used by Whites ever since, but it is not what the native people of the Americas called themselves. Before European contact beginning with Columbus in 1492, scholars estimate that the total population of the Americas was as high as 112,000,000 people consisting of *hundreds* of different cultures each with its own distinct traditions, religions, and languages. They ranged from people living in small family bands with almost no technology to those living in huge and sophisticated cities. For example, it was always known that the Mayans of southern

Mexico and Central America were a great empire but very recent discoveries using LIDAR (Lasers that scan the earth and bounce back images from beneath the jungle canopy) have been made and suggest the Mayan Empire was truly one of the greatest of the ancient world, a rival to ancient Egypt or China. Your professor (me) spent the winter of 2020 in Mexico studying this culture. It was awe inspiring.



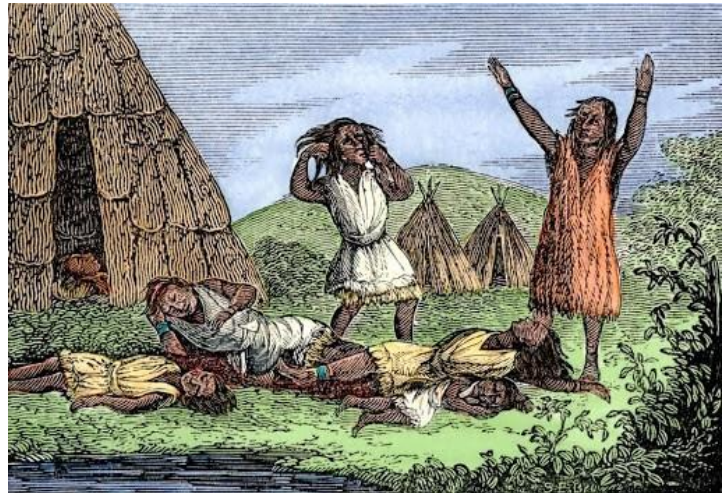
Your professor at the ruins of Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico

White-European contact with these peoples of North and South America was simply catastrophic. There were two main



reasons for the catastrophe. The first was biological. The Europeans brought diseases with them to which the Indians had no natural immunity. As I write this essay, we are all currently experiencing the Covid-19 pandemic, which has, as of the count I checked as I wrote this, infected over 60,000,000 people and killed more than one million. That means that Covid kills about 1% of the people it infects. Smallpox, one of the

diseases the Europeans brought to the Americas killed approximately 90% of the Indians it infected. So did influenza and many other European diseases. Overall, it is estimated that 90% of the native population of the Americas was wiped out by European diseases. Remember, this was at a time when nobody understood these diseases or how to cure them.



But even those who survived the diseases faced Europeans who were determined to conquer them, enslave them, convert them to Christianity or simply exterminate them. Given that the White Europeans had steel weapons and gunpowder it is remarkable that so many native



cultures resisted for so long. Among the last to be conquered were the Indians of the Western region of what would become the United States. These were tribes like the Apache and the Comanche, the

Cheyenne and the Lakota Sioux. Fascinating as the cultures of South and Central America are, our movies are (mostly) about these Indians of the great plains and the American West. Because they are the tribes the Americans had to conquer to

take control of the West, they are by far the most frequently depicted groups in Hollywood films. They are also the most misrepresented.

