

White Skin, Red Masks: “Playing Indian” in Queer Images from *Physique Pictorial*, 1957-67

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Introduction: Race and an Epistemology of “Coming Out”

Some of the most important theoretical work on queer representation today has been deeply influenced by the work of the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who is widely recognized across academic fields as a pioneer of queer studies. In *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), her oft-cited study that interrogates the gay, Western subject of desire as a condensation of latent and manifest scripts of sexual identity, Sedgwick writes that “The gay closet is not only a feature of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence” (68). Sedgwick continues to argue that “coming out of the closet,” as understood in the Western identity formation of gayness, is a lifelong process since queer subjects are constantly disclosing and/or hiding their sexual desires in a variety of social contexts, thus positioned in a circulatory process of subject formations exponentially generated, versus ultimately allayed, by the utterance of gay disclosure (81).

Meditating on Sedgwick’s claims about the multiplicity of queer identities generated by the closet metaphor, I open with a general, historical question: What

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dominant formations in the US have shaped racialized, gay desire into a national, erotic imaginary? In attempting to answer this, Christopher Nealon offers what he calls a “foundling” experience. According to him, the “foundling” experience entails a simultaneous exile from sanctioned, normative social experiences (usually through participation in a nuclear family), and a reunion with “some ‘people’ or sodality who redeem this exile and surpass the painful limitations of the original ‘home’” (Nealon 2). Attempting to construct a model that bridges a continuum between exile and collective experience, and the sexual inversion (“man trapped in a woman’s body”) and ethnic (“we are all one kind of people”) models of gayness, Nealon’s concept has the vital task of historicizing gay American experiences while avoiding what he views to be essentialist models. He writes, “Through the lens of a foundling imagination, in other words, we can see homosexuality in twentieth-century US literature and culture, not as an early stage in the formation of an autonomous sexual-political ‘identity’ that has liberated itself over the past seventy years, but as a historiographical struggle” (13).

Despite this call to view emergent gay rights as a historiographical struggle, Nealon’s notion is problematic at best and amnesiac at worst. While his foundling concept risks outright dismissal of family life across sexual borders at the cost of a “reunion” whose lowest common denominator is gayness, Nealon’s non-treatment of race issues within the paradigm of foundling experience is especially alarming given its willful exclusion of non-white queer texts and issues and his comparatively fractional discussion of the representational politics of the exclusions themselves. It is curious that Nealon claims his attention has been directed towards the “racial politics of foundling imaginations,” yet admits, “all of the primary texts in this book are by white writers and artists” (11). Wanting to reconcile this exclusion, Nealon writes that “foundling” texts need not be written only by white writers—though he does not explore or name such non-white texts—and that the “foundling” texts written by white Westerners “tend to participate in an unpolitical and sometimes racist set of beliefs about the simplicity of racial analogies” (11). Ironically, Nealon’s choice of texts and readings potentially supports, through exclusion, the very “racist set of beliefs” he expresses concerns over.

While Sedgwick encourages us to read beyond absolute polarities of identification and instead survey the shuttling movements between the inner and outer realms of the closet, Nealon invokes what we can think of as *the white closet*, a historical point of origin of queer desire whose “foundling” experience entails shuttling between the inner and outer realms of a closet whose origin for sexual expression, desirability, and representation is whiteness. The “white closet” consolidates white skin’s privilege as an epidermal marker of manifest male homosexuality by emanating its own cultural capital as the original point of origin for what is sexually desirable. The axiomatic persistence of the white closet throughout Nealon’s historiographical readings is symptomatic of a racial project that interprets and represents knowledge along particular racial lines (Omi & Winant 56). This is evident in his chapter on physique magazines, where the bulging masculinity of white cartoon queers

minoritizes, even erase, any representation of men of color. The net effect is that Nealon in some ways affirms, rather than rebuts, Tracy D. Morgan's assertion in "Pages of Whiteness: Race, Physique Magazines, and the Emergence of Public Gay Culture" that mainstream media and other socio-political factions clearly extol that "to be gay is to be white" (280).

Thomas Waugh has similarly noted that though some black and Hispanic models appeared (as bodybuilders versus "boy-next-door" types) in some physique magazines, "the racial representation of the magazines reflected only a slight improvement on the white supremacist ideology of other American media of the 1950s" (233). Such an implicit origin of gayness in whiteness also dominates scholarship. From Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality: Volume I* to John Boswell's *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, from Kenneth R. Dutton's *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* to Linda Williams' *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* extensive examination of white Western discourses of sex and/or feminist responses to it foreclose on comparable attentions to queer of color representations while failing to be self-reflective on this phenomenon. Even in feminist studies that read gender roles as social performances, the repetition of a specific iteration of identity has been popularized and compared to drag by Judith Butler (315). But as Gayatri Gopinath observes, developments in queer studies presuppose and center the queer, white citizen in the public arena (120). Here, another question surfaces: How then do we engage in an alternative historical study of gay desire and American racial politics that produce the absence of queer of color representations in the very texts Nealon cites?

My intent hereon is to explore white, gay images printed between 1957 and 1967 in *Physique Pictorial* magazine, an American "physique" magazine owned and operated by photographer Bob Mizer that served as a public articulation of gay identification and desire that omits models of color but, curiously, acts out racialized identities of natives indigenous to the US. These images, I argue, carry a fraught and contradictory mission of conveying race and nation that is symptomatic of the historical context in which they appeared in print. Given that physique magazines were the softcore forerunners to what evolved into hardcore porn, I shall first theoretically contextualize the images, and then place them into the historical context of the Cold War. I will then examine *Physique Pictorial* images in which models are "playing Indian," to use Phillip Deloria's terminology in describing white Americans, primarily males, who dress as Native Americans. I will in particular historicize three *Physique Pictorial* images that reflect David Halperin's contention that "sexuality is a cultural production: it represents the appropriation of the human body and of its erogenous zones by an ideological discourse" (25). Pushing this notion into the arena of historical power relations in the US, I will read these images by way of a prescriptive methodology offered by Amy Kaplan: "To understand the multiple ways in which empire becomes a way of life means to focus on those areas of culture traditionally ignored as long as imperialism was treated as a matter of foreign policy..." (14). From Kaplan's cue, finally, I will elaborate on how these image are veritable traces of the

social anxieties of the period around gayness, masculinity, racial otherness, and political affiliations.

Birth of a (Gay) Nation

The work of Michel Foucault and Benedict Anderson, though problematic for divergent reasons that I cannot here expand on, are helpful tools for exploring the gay, white model as national icon in *Physique Pictorial* images—a subject whose excessive representation catalyzes an overdetermination of gay desire within the erotics of the national imaginary. That is not to say that other sexual desires for a multitude of other subjects do not exist. As Foucault has famously suggested in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, the repression of sexuality proliferates other desires, even at sites of taboo, within a network of power presided by disciplinary agents like psychiatry and censorship of pornography (48-9). Indeed, by the end of that study, Foucault argues that government deploys biopower—the efficient application of disciplinary technologies onto human populations—as a means of control (140). This idea allows us to conceptualize how and why a racialized concept of Eurocentric homoeroticism influenced the gay population in the US during the Cold War era. The proliferation of queer images of white youth suggests that homosocial/sexual desire was articulated in the public sphere at the time through a particular lens of race and age. In the context of print media, I would argue, these images testify to a double-edged national imagining: on the one hand, it portrayed the homosexual as a young, muscular Narcissus, an ejaculation of male beauty, while on the other hand it identified the dually-threatening subject of both national and sexual transgression.

In exploring how an abstract entity like the nation comes to imagine itself, Anderson recognizes print capitalism as key. He writes, “The second source of imagined linkage lies in the relationship between the newspaper, as a form of book, and the market. . . . In this perspective, the newspaper is merely an ‘extreme form’ of the book, a book sold on a colossal scale, but of ephemeral popularity” (34). Anderson’s notion is a strong lens from which we can observe the interface between print media and gay identity after World War II. As John D’Emilio notes about homosexuality and American society, “The interlocking processes of urbanization and industrialization created a social context in which an autonomous personal life could develop. . . . In this setting, men and women who felt a strong erotic attraction to their own sex could begin to fashion from their feeling a personal identity and a way of life” (11). Similarly, Andrew Ross has observed that “changes in print and visual technology” not only transformed pornography’s field of representation, but also opened up this field to a new mass public (177-8). Likewise, the increase in sales and availability of porn on newsstands into the 1970s demonstrates that pornography reflected major cultural and economic changes (Bronski 164).

Thus, the physique culture magazines created and catered to a private public, or what Michael Warner calls a “counterpublic.” Though it has the characteristics of a public, a counterpublic is additionally “a scene in which a dominated group aspires to

re-create itself as a public and, in doing so, finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group, but also with the norms that constitute dominant culture as public” (Warner 80). Within this realm of counterpublic, there is no doubt that early gay pornography, aside from being read as a consolidation of gay, white, American identity, can also be viewed as a site to register political dissent and/or a safe space from which sexual aberrations and transgressions can be fantasized at limits which could constitute law violations in real life. Yet, as Warner notes, counterpublics are also publics (81), and thus run the risk of buttressing or re-establishing the very hegemonic discourses they are protesting against within the alternative public. Thus the irony of the printing and circulation of early gay porn: on the one hand it offered representation to a counterpublic by offering a masturbatory venue that affirmed both a gay identity and same-sex object choice while on the other hand those same representations limited that field of representations to a racial type (white) with a certain body type (“Grecian”/athletic).

As such, we might consider how early American gay print culture contributed to a blueprint of gay American identity that was partly mobilized and achieved “through the agency of a consumer capitalism which stood to profit from the exploitation of markets formed around these identities” (Ross 189). Thus, in the heyday of censorship laws, gay white identity not only monopolized queer representation, but also financially and culturally capitalized from it. Issues of the magazine early in the 1960s cost 35 cents, while black and white 5X7 prints fetched a price of 5 cents and 8X10 prints a hefty 24 cents (Lewis 1). Although one can argue that the exclusion of racial minorities from early print porn was instrumental for giving all gays visibility in the financial and cultural market of the US at the time, the exclusion suggests a colonization of desire through limited representation (like the violent imposition of the colonial languages on native peoples). American homosexuality, like nationalized heterosexuality, “privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy” (Berlant and Warner 554). Lisa Duggan offers her notion of “the new homonormativity” as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (50).

American popular attitudes towards gays and lesbians from the 1950s into the 1970s remained fairly negative or stereotypical if not shunned by the likes of media including Hollywood portrayals (Greenberg 457). John D’Emilio observes in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* that “homosexuality became associated with ‘mannishness’ in women and effeminacy in men as descriptions of both physical appearance and personality” (D’Emilio 17). In a climate of gender anxiety, the 1962 US Supreme Court case of *Manual Enterprises v. Day* transformed some of these perceptions of the feminine homosexual by allowing print images of nude, muscular men that contradicted the “swish” stereotype. Thus the very notion that gay men can be identified by effeminate identity performances was disoriented by images of muscular, taut men (Bronski, “From Victorian Parlor to *Physique Pictorial*, 153). While the justices

of this landmark case acquiesced that photo magazines of male nudes pandered to gay men and were “dismally unpleasant, uncouth, and tawdry,” the material lacked “patent offensiveness” and could therefore not be considered obscene (D’Emilio 133). Along with this ruling, the nascent gay movement drew on the momentum catalyzed by “black militancy, and both members and tactics from the white fraction of the New Left, a social movement of reformers and revolutionaries opposed to racism, capitalism, imperialism, militarism, and large-scale bureaucratic forms of social organization” (Greenberg 458-9). Ways of containing the homosexual other thus followed a familiar history of using the same legal and medical discourses that had disciplined people of color in previous decades.

These constitutive dynamics of US history meant that caricatures of the homosexual as a “swish” were countered by images of men, like those in *Physique Pictorial*, as ultra-masculine and white—in both cases, whiteness nonetheless is the established staple of masculine homosexuality. This process of “re-making manhood” far preceded the *MANual Enterprises v. Day* ruling and is part of a long history that demonstrates anxieties about masculinity and the nation-state. In the early 1900s, notes Gail Bederman, heterosexual masculinity in the US embodied “The power of manhood, as the middle class understood it, encompassed the power to wield civic authority, to control strife and unrest, and to shape the future of the nation” (Bederman 14). Indeed, this period early in the 20th century was fraught with much concern over masculinity and national identity, notably with westward expansion and Theodore Roosevelt’s turn-of-the-century espousal that “some stronger, manlier power” will have to do the work of making the nation great if American men prove to be weaklings (Roosevelt 3). Such displays of masculinity that assert civic authority, influence young boys, and/or conflate the American male body with the nation were often modeled on ideals of masculine heterosexuality. These articulations of manliness guarded against foreignness while further pushing heteronormative citizenship in the limelight of popular jingoism aimed at policing bodies inside by stoking hysteria about those outside national borders.

This leads us to a key reason for the widespread hyper-masculinization of American men at this time. Just beyond the devastation and global instability wracked by World War II and in the throes of the hemispheric paranoia between the US and the Soviet Union, emerging gay identities in the postwar and Cold War years became sacrificial pawns used by federal officials to further political agendas. Roderick Ferguson notes that a kind of “cold war hysteria” was catalyzed and deployed by US officials who asserted that gays were susceptible to blackmail and manipulation by Soviet spies given their moral turpitude and legal vulnerability as sexual transgressives (236-239). The rhetoric of the homosexual menace went to great lengths to qualify itself as a patriotic project with the nation’s best intentions in mind, conducting a witch-hunt for queers who it equated with communists. In “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” John D’Emilio describes in detail how and why McCarthyist witchhunts forcefully conflated communists with homosexuals:

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Since communists bore no identifying physical characteristics, they were able to infiltrate the government and commit treason against their country. Bereft of integrity, they exhibited loyalty only to an alien ideology that inspired fanatical passion. Homosexuals, too, could escape detection and thus insinuate themselves into every branch of the government. The slaves of their sexual passions, they would stop at nothing to gratify their desires until the satisfaction of animal needs finally destroyed their moral sense. Communists taught their children to betray their parents; “mannish” women mocked the ideals of marriage and motherhood...The congruence between the stereotypes of Communists and homosexuals made the scapegoating of gay men and women a simple matter (64).

Washington’s fear of the communist bloc, and its desire to protect capitalism, overdetermined “national security,” disciplining citizens with notions of transgressive race and sexuality policed by the nation-state. The “national security threat” of the homosexual menace during the Cold War suggests why *Physique Pictorial* might have codified its queer white models with ethnic signifiers. D’ Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman note that “Pornography was becoming more visible in the postwar era, at the same time that Cold War politics encouraged a heightened preoccupation with family stability. Worries about internal subversion took on moral coloration as anticommunist ideologues searched for signs of decaying values, or the corruption of youth” (D’Emilio and Freedman, 282). The threat of being caught with queer pornography at this historical moment militated a heteronormative nationalism that trumpeted capitalist values. Paralleling communism to homosexuality, the federal government’s discernability of “sexual deviance” demonstrates that threats to masculinity were coded as threats to national security, domestic order, and capitalist consumerism.

The hysteria around “national security” notoriously pervaded multiple levels of the federal government. Some cases are most evident in the US Postal Service, which began to surveil subscribers of physique magazines and other gay male erotica under obscenity statutes (D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace,” 62). A *New Republic* article from August 1965 reported that Post Office officials were even meeting with employers of suspected homosexuals (*The New Republic* August 21, 1965). David K. Johnson writes, “In 1950, many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists” (Johnson 2). An executive order issued by President Eisenhower stated that homosexuality was sufficient and necessary grounds for disbarment from the federal government (D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace,” 60). These accounts clearly demonstrate that the rhetoric of national security reified the notion that nonheteronormative sexual practices were treasonous as they cast whiteness as a veritable marker of gayness.

Erotic Politics and “Playing Indian” in *Physique Pictorial*

The anxieties over both the socio-political threat of communism and the sexual/reproductive threat of homosexuality condense in a third perceived threat through the Cold War and into the Civil Rights Movement: race. A glance at the titles of many

physique magazines suggest the dominance of the white closet in representing “American gayness”: *Adonis*, *Grecian Guild Pictorial*, *American Apollo*, *Olympians*, *Demi Gods*, *Triumph*, *Champ*, *Little Caesar*, *Mars*, and *Young Adonis*. Such titles suggest that the supposedly liberatory publication of homoerotic images consolidate whiteness as the racial standard of a sexual ideal while geographically placing the origin of American male beauty in Western Europe. Indeed, advertisements in the magazines often purported to “foster the ‘Grecian’ ideals of morality, honesty, and physical beauty,” and thus attempted to cover the traces of gay desire (“Vintage”). In evoking an Eurocentric ethos in validating queerness, the underground gay culture of physique magazines, ironically, mobilized a queer public sphere from coast to coast. Reading these photos as deeply emblematic loci of American identity politics of the period, I would argue that they are troubled representations given the historical contexts that they depict and are a product of. Indeed, some of the images are symptomatic of a concerted effort to champion queer desire in and through the emulation of native peoples and the omission of black people, racialized others within American borders who represented differing ideas of what the country in those years “looked” like.

In sifting through the three volume complete reprint of *Physique Pictorial* (1951-1990), I examined hundreds of images. In this essay, I consider three images of subjects dressed in native garb that appeared between 1957 and 1967. The first picture (fig. 1) appeared on the back cover of the Spring 1957 issue of *Physique Pictorial*. In it, Kurt Freeman looks head-on at the camera, the camera framing his muscular torso. His full body on display for the homospectorial gaze, two prominent props mark his body as Native American: A large and flowing headdress sporting black and white feathers crowns his head, falling the length of his torso to his buttocks while a “loincloth” with an ostensibly indigenous design covers his genitals. Despite the partially visible tattoo on his left forearm, the visual linkage of the Native American garb with his chiseled body analogizes hyper-masculinity with hyper-Americanness.

Freeman’s torso and the props seem to compete for viewers’ attention. Indeed, the headdress and loincloth both visually dominate the frame, falling to vertically suggestive lengths that seem to measure masculine prowess. Published just a few years after the infamous Army vs. McCarthy trials, Freeman appears to be an authentic American, the antithesis of the targets of xenophobia or the “pinko fag” in which J. Edgar Hoover, Roy Cohn, and other high-ranking government officials instilled nationalist hysteria (Hoven, 70). While the props simultaneously produce Freeman’s body as both sexual fetish and signifier of “true” masculinity/Americanness, we should also note that this image is the closest thing we have to an erotized, non-white subject in the periodical’s public sphere—not one page of this issue contains an image of a model of color. Thus the bittersweet reality of the publication of these images: while enabling a queer counterpublic that was able to resist the conflation of queer with communist, the omission of subjects of color in the run up to the Civil Rights era suggests that the “freedom” to be gay was perceived as a white struggle.

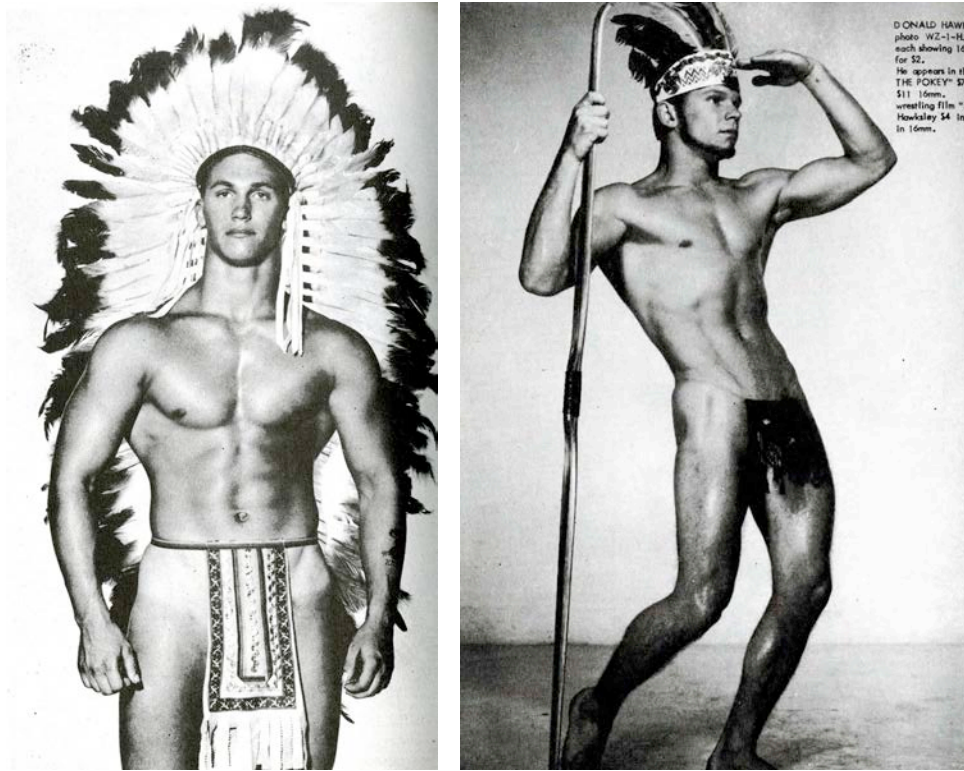


fig.1 (left): Kurt Freeman, *Physique Pictorial*, Spring 1957; fig 2 (right): Donald Hawksley, *Physique Pictorial*, January 1963

Published in January 1963, the second image (fig. 2) depicts Donald Hawksley in a full body shot posing as a scantily clad Indian scout gazing forward with his left palm raised to shade the sun. A bit of cloth covers his genital area while the straps that hold it around his waist are barely visible, exposing the maximum area around his upper thighs. The positions of his raised hands, one holding a staff and the other surveying the distance ahead, enable viewers to clearly enjoy the definition of his form. The headdress, which features erect feathers affixed to a wide, white band, is ornamented with what is, again, presumably an indigenous pattern. Here too, vertical planes accentuate Hawksley's posture, such to the extent that the staff and feathers exceed the top of the frame while the staff and his feet exceed its lower boundary.

With his torso angled backwards, the muscle contours of his chest and legs compliment the others from top to bottom, allowing viewers' eyes to pleasurably travel uninterrupted from the curve of the feathers through his face and the slope of his nose, down the curves of his torso, legs, and feet. Unlike the 1957 image of Freeman, Hawksley's body is the visual centerpiece of the photograph with the Native

American garb accentuating it rather than competing with it. The information note in the upper right-hand corner tells us that Hawksley also stars in the film that corresponds to the image, titled *The Pokey*. Given the homoerotic title of the film, the intended purpose and audience are thinly disguised for subscribers and investigators alike. But the coding of the gay white body through cultural signifiers mediates against the “swish” and other stereotypes of gay men as women “trapped” in the bodies of men. In other words, racial re-codification served as the representational surrogate for gay desire. This process of shuttling meanings by re-coding the exposed body was perhaps an unconscious response to the national hysteria produced by McCarthy, but even its manifestation at the local level with blacklists in Hollywood ensured that many talented actors, writers, and directors were unable to find work or creative and intellectual output. Produced at the AMG (Athletic Model Guild) Studios in Los Angeles, the witchhunt for “commies and homos” lay only miles away in Hollywood. If it was the subversive nature of “commies and homos” that McCarthyism sought to identify and punish, the images presented the antithesis. They performed a quixotic patriotism in contrast to anti-Americanism by hybridizing white skin, the signifier of European beauty and civility, with the Indian—as American as earth and air.

Yet, in and against the persistence of images that at once wanted to capitalize on the “true American” significations of the native people but disseminated notions of white superiority within gay representation, traces of America’s fraught past persist. Shari M. Huhndorf expands on the phenomena of what she calls “going native” as an identificatory process that involved:

the more widespread conviction that adopting some vision of Native life in a more permanent way is necessary to regenerate and to maintain European-American racial and national identities. ... Yet the significance of going native extends well beyond the relations between European Americans and Native Americans. Often, these representations and events not only articulate and attempt to resolve anxieties about history and modernity, they reflect upon other power relations within the broader society, including the advent of overseas imperialism, changing gender ideals, and the devastating histories of African Americans in the United States (8-9).

In this forceful passage, Huhndorf acknowledges the complicated vectors of history and meaning in which the images of my study are produced and from. I would in particular like to draw attention to the later part of the passage in which she cites intersecting power relations mired in a network of US imperialism, gender roles, and the Jim Crow laws that followed the horrors of slavery. While portraying a glorification of Western expansion through representations that invoke the racial colonization of indigenous bodies, the lack of models of color, particularly black ones, are particularly telling in the year of this issue’s publication. As it would be, the infamous “Stand in the Schoolhouse” at the University of Alabama in June and the historical March on Washington at which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech soon after in August would make 1963 an especially significant year. Indeed, the biggest news on race relations published in

print media in the US did not reflect the subjects that *Physique Pictorial*, and other magazines, centered as models of male beauty.

But perhaps this was also a function, intentional or not, of the disorienting codifications of such images in the publication. While the usual function of a periodical is to serve as a marker of the times, a journal of the historical present, these magazines, with the omission of black models, seem to stand outside of the year in which they were published. This aspect of the issue's publication date is curiously parallel to the way that the "Indian" subjects stand outside of history precisely that is the popular stereotype of native peoples in the US and other European-settler colonies. This strategy of European conquest is particularly well known due to Western constructions of a "timeless Orient" that are rigorously critiqued by Edward Said (Jhally). Similarly, the tendency to stereotype native tribes of North America as primitive yet noble subjects is a familiar technique for managing the internal threat of dispossessed natives who reside within the borders of the US. As David Spurr has argued, primitivism can be "the dream of its own opposite that lives at the very heart of the capitalist imagination" while being bound up in an idealization that "always takes places in relation to Western culture itself" (128). In other words, the image detached from both the historical moment in which it is published, and also the historical moment it represents, perhaps best speaks to the magazine's marketability of fetishism (in both the senses understood by Karl Marx and Alfred Binet).

The third image (fig. 3) was published in the April 1967 issue of *Physique Pictorial* as a still from the short film *Inquisitive Indian*, and features the models John Virgin, Johnny Porter, and Bobby Joe Kiser. As the "inquisitive Indian," Kiser has tied up the other two models, and wears the same markers of Indianness sported by Hawksley. Kiser too wears a skimpy loincloth, albeit one that sports what looks like a white baron's cross on it. While pouting, he holds up an object that is presumably a knife to the neck of John Porter. While Kiser's physical features are highlighted by his near nakedness, the other two models are dressed as cowboys. Here the colonial fantasy, as articulated for and by white men who sexually desire white men, is reversed: the "inquisitive Indian" has seductively captured both cowboys, and even seems to hold their lives in his hands. Yet the models' expressions do not suggest terror or fear, but instead a sensual arousal.

Indeed, a bemused sensuality pervades Porter's expression while one of intrigue guide's Virgin's gaze back toward the other two models; the "inquisitiveness" of the film's title seems shared by all three models, and that which inspires their curiosity seems all too apparent. Unlike the other two images, this still portrays three models rather than one and, in that scenario, seems to reverse the story of colonial domination of North America. This flipped depiction of historical domination frames danger as a surrogate for sexual arousal. For this reason it is worth noting that Virgin and Porter, though fully dressed, wear the markers of Wild West masculinity (cowboy hats and boots) that have traditionally signified American manliness since Roosevelt's time. Yet while these cultural signifiers of "going native" were meant to encode masculinity through the virtual erasure of men of color, Bob Mizer began publishing

symbols what were looked like “chicken-scratch primitive symbols” that disclosed personal facts about each model that include sexual orientation, favorite positions, and if the model was available to be “rented out”—subscribers could request a “key” through the mail (Fritscher 224). Thus, encrypted notations that spread and consolidated a fan base of homoerotic images produced by the white closet complemented the “primitive symbols” marking the models’ bodies.

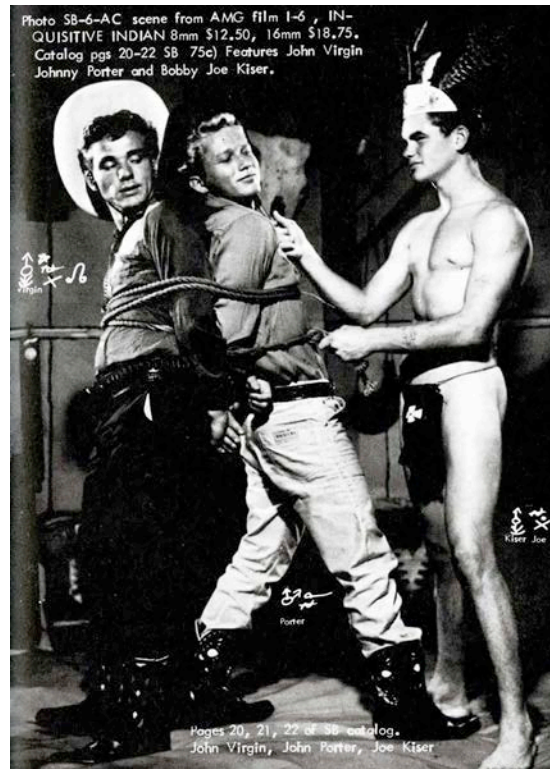


fig. 3: John Virgin, Johnny Porter, and Bobby Joe Kiser, *Physique Pictorial*, April 1967

How might we read all three images in relation to one another? Phillip Deloria’s compelling study *Playing Indian*, though silent on homosexuality, tracks performances of “playing Indian” from The Boston Tea Party in 1773 to a Grateful Dead concert in the early 1990s. Deloria observes a panorama of instances throughout American history where white, heterosexual Americans engaged in such identity swapping for myriad of often contradictory reasons. Deloria writes, “By the twentieth century, the last shift in perception of and policy toward real Indian people helped invert the

definition of Indian Others. Revolutionary era constructions of the interior Indian Other had almost completely emphasized positive qualities—Americanness, a claim of landscape, and individual liberty. Even savagery, coded as martial prowess, could be a positive value when attached to an American Self” (104). Such “ethnic masquerade,” to use Werner Sollors’ term, began during revolutionary times when settlers wanted to define themselves as “non-British” and distinctly “American”—a term originally used exclusively to designate Native Americans (102-133).

The queer stakes of “playing Indian” come into sharp focus in light of my earlier delineation of Cold War politics. At no other time was the need to display a masculine American self as important as in this era of McCarthyism, which was heavily monitored by the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). As Denis Altman notes, “It was not by accident that in the fifties McCarthyism linked homosexuality with communism as a threat to ‘the American way’” (ix). Even before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s infamous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in February of 1950, national anxieties of the homosexual American plagued public morale (Johnson 4). The Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movements, arriving on the heels of the rise of McCarthyism, no doubt catalyzed multiply-layered anxieties. These historical, multiply-layered anxieties seem to substantiate Deloria’s recognition that the sixties and early seventies was a period during which many Americans felt tensions over Vietnam and race relations that succeeded the modernist anxieties exacerbated by rapid industrialization and world war. “Playing Indian” during this time period facilitated Americans’ need to simultaneously inhabit two positions—the liberal subject and the user of Indianness.

The models in these images represent a definitive, even stereotypical “Americanness” that, despite Jeffrey Escoffier’s observation that “effeminacy, camp humor, and drag were prominent aspects of gay life in the 1950s and early 1960s,” defy the stereotype of the effeminate, politically-subversive homosexual (252). In this way, the models playing Indian in *Physique Pictorial* affirmed an indigenous, masculine Americanness while delineating it as predominantly white. Homosexual identity was coded as savage masculinity, eluding McCarthyist fanaticism by playing Indian—a most “American” signifier of nativist sensibility. In this way, these images can be read as strategic identity performances countering accusations of anti-Americanism. Nealon, with whom I began this essay, notes that “muscle magazines used analogies to race, or tribal affiliation, at once to mask homosexuality and to give their readership a sense of historical heft” (129). He goes on to write that “queer people in the United States still figure themselves as a ‘tribe,’” and this may reflect parody and play through the use of the similar headdresses worn by models. This certainly reflects Deloria’s observation that playing Indian allowed straight males to imagine themselves as part of an American fraternity that was necessarily white. Deloria writes, “Americans had a long history of imagining and claiming an Indianness that was about being indigenous, free, white, and male...Indianness was the province of whites” (Deloria 146).

Thus even the “tribalism” of emergent gay identities was complicit with race projects, affirming itself as hyper-American at the cost of non-white representations of gay erotics that shaped the contours of gay male desire into the Stonewall riots of 1969. Reading the images in chronological order, it is evident that the scenarios became more risqué, as did the props and names of the various models. They moreover suggested that white, gay men were acting out their “primal instincts” through racialized performances that sutured them to fetishistic desire for man and nation at the same moment. The addition of codes that corresponded to an already codified public text is perhaps the most telling sign of how gay eroticism produced meaning in a closeted society during the Second Red Scare. But perhaps of most significance here is the complicated and fraught position that such depictions of the love that dare not speak its name simultaneously inhabit: they at once offer and erase agency; they at once suggest yet disavow historical context. In the context of US empire studies, however, they suggest that the racially latent content comes to life through representations that contribute to a repertoire of otherness that is etched from the Manichean aesthetics that have justified slavery and colonialism for centuries. We might also note that “physique” itself, or the “fitness” of one’s body, is also, as for centuries before in terms of mental faculty, racially codified.

Coda

In briefly concluding, I want to acknowledge that the title of this essay invokes a scholar who, though writing in 1952 about French colonialism half the world away in Martinique, informs the concerns herein about empire, representation, and the decolonial movements throughout the 1950s. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon describes a moment where racists verbally assaulted him (109-112). Fanon writes of the traumatic experience, “An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (110-113). What comes into sharp focus in Fanon’s account is what he calls a “racial epidermal schema,” which is intended to describe the human body as other through the mark of black skin. My title alludes to Fanon and the paper ends with him so I can highlight that the “racial epidermal schema” is doubly reinforced in the exclusion of queers of color *Physique Pictorial*. The white closet produced by these images, and Bob Mizer’s entire oeuvre, go on to buttress the ways in which racialized gayness would assimilate to U.S. capitalism, or homonormativity. Activism by queers of color must continue to transform the absence of representation by forging agency with stakes in queer communities of color, most urgently, even, when the white closet forecloses on imagined communities that more accurately reflect queer demographics in the US.

This semiotic project is crucial lest we lapse into what Chandan Reddy calls a reinstallation of “a singular historical and cultural formation and subject in the very process of advocating for an alternative and radical ethical critique of political life” (176). I would thus conclude that invisibility, as well as stereotypical representations,

point, like a socio-historical compass, to the *vox populi* of how we see ourselves and “other” Americans. While we must here acknowledge, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak advises, that although coming into representation can undermine a claim of subaltern status, it is nonetheless necessary in society for ethical and political work (Spivak 91). For in this difficult task, elusive strategies of colonization of the mind can be combated, from white, Western imperialism to the cultural imperialism of white gayness, and the ways in which both have informed racial and sexual identities during and since the Cold War era in the United States. So how can we jump start into a process that offers a solid alternative to the eurocentrism of Nealon’s paradigm?

To start, Jose Esteban Muñoz offers the process of “disidentification” as a way for queers of color to as a means of working performance from the inside out. He writes, “Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). This is one of many identifiatory processes of re-appropriating the hegemony of Eurocentrism in queer representations that will, I am confident, get us away from undermining the pioneering work of Sedgwick by conflating origins of race and desire with the moral “physique” of representations of minorities in the US. It will prevent us from installing what I have called “the white closet” as the origination of gay and lesbian homoeroticism. Finally, it will compell us from producing narratives that obscure histories of decimation, imperialism, and the continuation of Jim Crow as queer studies evolves in the larger-than-life, digital realm of the 21st-century.

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