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“Two Times ‘Geronimo’”: Changes in the Representation of Native American History in Film

Abstract: This paper investigates how far historical developments and the New Indian History influenced Hollywood movies. As a case study it looks at *Geronimo* (1962) and *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993). The movie *Geronimo*, the first more sympathetic treatment of the Apache leader, is barely interested in historical events, puts most of the blame for Geronimo's 1885 breakout on corrupt whites, and, in a happy ending, portrays Geronimo as slowly converting to white ways. *Geronimo: An American Legend*, filmed after twenty years of Native American struggle for their rights, uses American Indian actors, has them speak in Apache, and is historically more accurate; yet, it does not focus on Geronimo but portrays instead his chase by white Americans as well as their (and the audience's) efforts to come to grips with their guilt. The Apaches are presented as noble, heroic Indians vanishing in an inevitable clash of cultures. Although progress has been made in portraying Native Americans and their culture in film, the Hollywood view is still deficient.

1. Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and the Red Power Movement, historical writing about Native Americans has changed. Instead of presenting American Indians as passive victims or objects, the New Indian History or Ethnohistory states that Indian-Anglo relations can only be understood as multicultural interaction; ethnohistorians portray American Indians as communities acting independently, adopting white practices only selectively, and influencing white society in return (Richter 1993, 379-93; Edmunds 1995, 717-40). At about the same time, in the late 1980s, American Indians started to achieve a more prominent status in Hollywood films, including the use of Native American actors. Most well-known among these recent movies are *Powwow Highway* (1989), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Thunderheart* (1992), *Last of the Mohicans* (1993), *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993), and *Pocahontas* (1995) (Kilpatrick 1999, 124).

The question therefore arises if movies have changed in their portrayal of American Indians as much as most history books have. Has the Red Power Movement not only had an impact on professional historians but also on filmmakers? How “sympathetic” to American Indians (Kilpatrick 1999, 101) were movies of the 1990s? What can we learn from these feature films about the prevalent cultural preconceptions, myths, and social tensions (O'Connor 1990; Quart and

Auster 1984, 140)? To explore these issues, the following article will compare a film from the 1960s with a film from the 1990s, *Geronimo* (1962) and *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993).

Born in the late 1820s (Debo 1976, 7), Geronimo was a Bedonkohe Apache and rose to prominence in the 1870s as a war leader of a band of Chiricahua Apaches and as a medicine man with power visions. Geronimo became infamous in the context of the so-called Apache wars that began in the 1850s when the various Apache bands or tribes, the categorization of which remains controversial, were slowly pushed off their home territories in present-day Arizona and New Mexico; between 1876 and 1886, Geronimo fled five times from the reservations to which his Apache band had been confined (Debo 1976).

Both movies discussed in this article, however, only deal with the last years of Geronimo's fight against the whites. They start with Geronimo's second but last surrender in 1884 and mainly portray his last flight in 1885 up to the point when he finally turned himself and his band in to the whites in 1886.

2. The Myth of Geronimo

Geronimo was already a myth in the 1880s. At the time, he was portrayed as a vicious, inhuman murderer. Already during his captivity, however, Americans in the East began to see him as a victim of circumstances, a valiant man who had, with thirty-some men, women, and children, opposed a combined army of 5,000 U.S. soldiers and 3,000 Mexicans. His fight against great odds turned him into the archetypal, individualistic, manly American hero. At the same time, it became safe to admire Geronimo since with his surrender and the massacre of Wounded Knee four years later, the Indian wars were over and American Indians appeared to be a "vanishing race." Thus, Indian reformers in the East began to lobby for the release of Geronimo and his band and for their return to Arizona. The first novels portraying Geronimo as a positive figure appeared at the turn of the century. In the 1960s and 1970s, positive literary treatments of Geronimo became the norm. A flood of novels criticized villainous white Americans and praised family-loving, peaceful, freedom-minded, victimized Apaches. Geronimo had turned into the symbol for a valiant fight against all odds (Sonnichsen 1986, 5-34).

In the movies, a positive image of Geronimo took slightly longer to develop. In western movies, Apaches ranked second in popularity as representatives of attacking Indians (Price 1973, 166; Lutz 2002, 54).¹ In the 1950s, during the height of the Cold War, some revisionist Westerns began to individualize American Indians, depicting noble chieftains instead of showing only massive, anonymous, threatening tribes. In some movies, an understanding between individual Indians and individual whites appeared possible. The reasons for the bloodshed were explained and no longer attributed to the violent nature of Indians (Price 1973, 159-63; Lutz 2002, 51-7).

¹ For a list of films dealing with Apaches cf. Dopheide 2004, 237-9. The list has to be treated carefully, though, since Dopheide mistakenly dates *Geronimo* as 1961.

Geronimo appeared in several of these films. In nearly all of them, he acts as the villainous counterpart to peaceful Cochise, as in *Broken Arrow* (1950), *Battle at Apache Pass* (1951), and *Taza, Son of Cochise* (1954) (Hilger 2002, 98-105). In *Geronimo* (1939) and in *I Killed Geronimo* (1950) he is a violent, hostile Apache, murdering women and children, though sometimes helped by white villains; in the latter film, he even has to die. A notable exception is *Apache* (1954) where a member of Geronimo's band, who flees during the train ride to captivity in Florida, goes unpunished because his deeds are considered part of a legitimate war (Hilger 2002, 115). The first more sympathetic portrayal of Geronimo occurred in *Geronimo* (1962) (Price 1973, 166).

3. *Geronimo* (1962)

By the early 1960s, the Red Power movement was slowly starting and the African-American civil rights struggle was in full swing. American Indians fought against the program to terminate the special relationship between Native Americans and the U.S. government. In 1961, the National Indian Youth Council was founded, which demanded self-determination for American Indians and an improvement in their living conditions. The heyday of the movement, though, had not yet occurred, with the foundation of the American Indian Movement in 1968, the occupations of Alcatraz in 1964 and in 1969, the Trail of Broken Treaties of 1972, and the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 (Smith and Warrior 1996; Olson and Wilson 1984, 157-78). Nevertheless, enough change had occurred to portray Geronimo no longer as a cruel fiend but as a militant leader of an ethnic minority with just complaints.

Geronimo (1962), based on a screenplay by Pat Fielder, begins with his surrender in 1884 and his arrival at the reservation. There, Geronimo has trouble getting used to the new life and to the arrogance of the whites. While some Apaches have adjusted, especially Mangus, a friend of Geronimo's, and Teela, a young teacher with whom Geronimo falls in love, Geronimo refuses to give up his identity as an Apache. The army captain, the storekeeper, and the Indian agent at the reservation conspire in a scheme to defraud the Indians by giving part of the land they have cleared to white ranchers. When Geronimo discovers this plan, he, Mangus, and Natchez (or Naiche) confront the Indian agent and leave with the warriors of their band and their wives. In the second part of the film, Geronimo and his people take up their old life and raid whites to get supplies. By declaring war on the United States they hope to obtain a new treaty recognizing their human dignity. Geronimo persuades Teela to join them, and Mangus is killed. Teela gives birth to Geronimo's son parallel to the Apaches' final battle against the U.S. Army. Just in time, an order arrives from Washington to negotiate a new settlement with a greater understanding on both sides, and Geronimo and his band join white society again.

Geronimo is barely interested in historical events. The film starts with the written prologue: "History has created heroes out of legend and out of fact. This story combines both legend and fact." But, like many western movies, the film

contains more myth than fact, as the West had attained mythical status in the United States (Daly and Persky 1990, 12-3). Some of the few historically accurate events mentioned in the movie are the fact that Geronimo officially surrendered in 1883, became unhappy with the conditions at San Carlos, and left in 1885 with Naiche and the more peaceful Mangus. Mangus, however, immediately split off from the other two (Debo 1976, 222, 241 and 249). In addition, there is no historical counterpart to the evil army captain William Maynard and Indian agent Reverend Jeremiah Burns.²

The love story of Geronimo with Teela is also unhistorical. It serves to show that Indians can convert to white ways and that a compromise between preserving one's identity and adapting is possible. Teela, a woman mainly raised on the reservation, is the counterpart to Geronimo. She works as a teacher and tries to learn as much as possible about white ways. While Teela wishes to "improve herself" so that the whites will "respect" her, Geronimo demands to be respected for what he is, not for what whites want him to be; he unsettles Teela when he wants to know whether she is ashamed of what she is. This is a 1960s conversation about identity politics. When Geronimo leaves the reservation, he asks Teela to join him and offers to teach her the old ways. Teela, however, accuses Geronimo of living like an animal and points to the hopelessness of his flight. Because Geronimo longs for a son, he braves all danger and returns to the reservation where he more or less forces Teela to come with him although she does not believe in him and his life-style. In the end, despite her complaints, Teela demonstrates that even "civilized" Apaches are still capable of enduring the hardships of traditional Apache life and being hunted by the U.S. Army. While Teela is changed by Geronimo he equally experiences some change. During an attack on a wagon train he recovers a book and proudly presents it to his new wife, who, in turn, feigns delight over getting a copy of the army regulations. When he learns that she is pregnant and has gained some knowledge about the growth of their child through books, he suggests that his son will be a good warrior but, maybe, should also learn to read.

Mangus serves as another foil to Geronimo. Mangus has already been living on the reservation for a year when Geronimo arrives, though historically he returned only three months earlier (Debo 1976, 196). He is proud of his agricultural achievements, which he presents as the only way to survive and coexist peacefully with the whites, who will never understand the Indians. Geronimo questions whether Mangus, a former chief, is actually still alive. Geronimo wants Apache boys to continue to be proud to be Apaches and learn to be warriors; he promises them that he will not allow whites to change them. In the end, Mangus joins the breakout, because he is cheated out of the fruits of his fieldwork by the whites. In fact, Mangus fled because his wife Huera was no longer allowed to brew tizwin and because he was led to believe that the Apache leaders were about

² The San Carlos Reservation was slowly diminished, however, by land grants to settlers, miners, and ranchers, and some agents did not pursue ranchers grazing their cattle on Indian land (Debo 1976, 172).

to be killed; he also survives (Debo 1976, 228, 234 and 240). In the movie, though, his death and his motive for fleeing turn Mangus into the symbol of an ethnic minority which learns to fight and make sacrifices for its rights and identity – when the Indian agent's wife screams "Savages, animals" Mangus responds proudly: "Apaches" – but still stays within the framework of mainstream society.

The movie centers on Geronimo although there were several important Apache band or group leaders and although he always submitted to the hereditary chief Naiche (Debo 1976, 39, 99 and 102). The prologue calls Geronimo one of the heroes of history who strove for "freedom and dignity against impossible odds." The movie's taglines read: "The Most Defiant Warrior of Them All!" Geronimo towers over all his warriors in physical and intellectual height, even though the real Geronimo was rather small (Kraft 2000, 73 and 77). He draws off a Mexican border patrol from his band single-handedly. He continuously gives the other Indians orders, prevents the hereditary chief Natchez from attacking a white woman who confronted him, and is shown as a loving family man. He is the one to decide on the time of surrender. Geronimo is portrayed as the only Apache who knows how to play the whites; he devises a strategy of resistance against all odds to force the white public to inquire why the Apaches resist so desperately; that way, he wants to force the U.S. government to offer the Indians a settlement preserving their honor and dignity. Accordingly, Senator Conrad arrives with a committee from Washington to investigate, at the behest of the American people, why the Chiricahuas are still holding out. Just as Geronimo and his band are about to be annihilated by malicious Captain Maynard, Senator Conrad comes to their hideout with a presidential order offering the Apaches a settlement that gives them respect and dignity as their "rightful heritage." Thus, the Indians are accepted into mainstream America but can retain part of their identity as a "proud" and "strong" people.

In its gender roles, the movie is a typical product of the late 1950s/early 1960s. When Mangus tries to earn money because his wife wants him to do so, he is recalled to his "manly" duties by Geronimo. Teela's independence makes her so offensive that nobody wants to marry her. When Geronimo comes to fetch her she submits to him in a taming-of-the-shrew-like scene. To her complaint that she does not want only to cook his food but also wishes to be loved as a person, Geronimo replies: "I am not asking you I am telling you [to come with me]." Slowly, Teela begins to fulfill the role model of a caring wife.

After decades of portrayals of Geronimo as a bloodthirsty savage, *Geronimo* places all the blame for the war on corrupt whites. The Indian agent, the Reverend Jeremiah Burns, is a hypocrite pretending to care about the material and spiritual welfare of his charges but selling his "moral obligation" to the Indians, whom he sees as children of the devil, for 100,000 dollars. Captain William Maynard and the storekeeper despise Apaches as subhuman and as a pack of "dirty, wild animals," who belong in a cage and have to be "broken;" they openly work for their own financial benefits. The Captain has a constant arrogant sneer on his face and regrets not having killed Geronimo on the reservation. At the end, he tortures

the Indians by deliberately firing his cannon first too short and then too long before adjusting the cannon to kill them. Lieutenant John Delahay, his foil, attempts several times to advocate for the Apaches and to point out their human dignity. He is willing to face a court martial by disobeying his Captain's orders to fire the cannon on Geronimo's band without giving them first the option to surrender. General Crook is represented in a neutral way as an army man fulfilling his duties without asking many questions, while Senator Conrad is the humanitarian sent at the behest of the U.S. people. In the end, the good side wins as Maynard is blown up with his exploding cannon and Crook, Conrad, and Delahay invite Geronimo down from his hiding place.

By juxtaposing two white positions, the movie manages to exonerate the U.S. government. With the bloodshed only caused by two bad individuals, whites in general seem understanding of the Indian point of view, and Delahay becomes the audience's representative as the blond, likeable, American boy.

Typical of films of the mid-1950s to early 1960s (Lutz 2002, 56), the path in the end is open for a slow adaptation of the remaining American Indians to white culture. The Apaches will be respected and will retain their dignity, but they will no longer be able to live as warriors. The symbols for such a merging into the American mainstream, which was still thought possible in the early 1960s, are Teela, their son, and to a certain extent Geronimo himself. The film – true to Hollywood tradition – offers a happy ending with Geronimo and his people marching down from their mountain stronghold to triumphant music. The ending does not even mention that the Chiricahua Apaches were held as prisoners of war until 1913. A positive feature of the movie, though, is the fact that almost the whole story is told from Geronimo's perspective.

In contrast to movies of the 1990s, *Geronimo* is a film with American Indian characters but without Native American actors, though Geronimo in earlier films had been played by Indians like Yakima Daniel Simmons a.k.a. Chief Yowlachie in *Son of Geronimo* (1952) and Victor Daniels a.k.a. Chief Thundercloud in *I Killed Geronimo* (1950). In the 1962 movie, the cast includes Irish-American Chuck Connors as Geronimo, India-born Kamala Devi as Teela, Mexican-American Armando Silvestre as Natchez, and Polish-American Ross Martin as Mangus (Price 1973, 165-6).

4. *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993)

By the 1990s, after thirty years of struggle for their rights, American Indians had achieved some success. The termination program of 1953 had been officially canceled, more money was funneled into development and education funds, some Indian lands had been returned, Native Americans had achieved more religious freedom, and Native Americans had a greater say in the administration of all matters pertaining to them. Although some whites were incensed about the supposedly unfair privileges granted to a minority group, many were embarrassed about the fate of American Indians or yearned for the spirituality of a "lost culture" (Nichols 2003, 194-228; Kilpatrick 1999, 120).

Accordingly, Hollywood tried to turn out movies more sympathetic to the fate of American Indians. After films in the 1970s had used American Indians as a symbol for the American experience in Vietnam and movies in the 1980s had for the first time dealt with modern Indians, the cue word for the 1990s became multiculturalism, with attention being directed toward the Indian perspective, though often still fractured through a white lens (Lutz 2002, 57-9; Hilger 2002, 178; Kilpatrick 1999, 66, 102-20 and 124; Dopheide 2004, 43-7).

Geronimo: An American Legend was produced in 1993 by a team of action movie specialists, Walter Hill and John Milius.³ The white lead characters are played by Jason Patric as First Lieutenant Charles B. Gatewood, Matt Damon as Second Lieutenant Britton Davis, Gene Hackman as Brigadier General George Crook, and Robert Duvall as Chief of Scouts Al Sieber. The Indian roles were assigned to Cherokee Wes Studi as Geronimo, Omaha Rodney Grant as Mangus, Blackfoot Steve Reevies as Chato, and Ute Rino Thunder as Nana. Conversations among the Indians are consistently in Apache with subtitles, but conversations between Apaches and Americans are nearly always in English with a few sentences exchanged in Apache between Gatewood and Geronimo as well as Chato to show the former's command of the Apache language. The historic Apaches including Geronimo mostly only knew a smattering of Spanish and hardly any English (Debo 1976, 8).

The movie begins with Geronimo's voluntary surrender and assignment to the Turkey Creek area of San Carlos Reservation. Here, the Apaches are unhappy with their new way of life, with the crowded conditions, with the dry land, and with the prohibition of alcohol. When they hear of a medicine man who predicts that the dead Indian chiefs will rise and that the whites must leave, Geronimo visits the prophet. The prophet gets killed, and as soldiers attempt to arrest Geronimo, he flees with his followers, including the older leader Nana and Mangas. Pursued by the U.S. Army, Nana urges negotiations with General Crook, which result in his elderly band's surrender. Geronimo, and in his wake Mangas, however, continue the war. This leads to the resignation of Crook and the arrival of General Nelson A. Miles. After a long manhunt and many casualties on both sides, Miles asks Lieutenant Gatewood to catch Geronimo. Gatewood chooses three men, Davis, white scout Sieber, and Apache scout Chato and persuades Geronimo to give up. The film ends with both the renegades and the Apache scouts being shipped off to imprisonment in Florida.

Regarding its portrayal of Native Americans, the film utilizes several stereotypes. Right at the beginning, an Apache medicine man predicts the arrival of Geronimo on a white horse to underline the supposedly quintessential American Indian spirituality. The first voiceover description calls the Chiricahuas the last Indians to resist removal, and Gatewood informs Davis that they are special even among the Apaches.

³ One critic charged that Milius was still trying to deal with Vietnam in *Geronimo: An American Legend*, and the film referred to relocation, religious freedom, and pacification; he dubbed the film "Apocalypse Then" (Harrington 1993).

With these romantic concepts in place, the Apaches are portrayed almost throughout as innocent victims, as when Geronimo asks: "With all this land, why is there no room for the Apaches?" Although Geronimo left the reservation in 1885 because the Army had prohibited the brewing of the Apache alcohol *tizwin*, the movie transfers the reason for his flight in 1881 to 1885 (Thompson 1994, 208; Utley 1973, 371-4; Debo 1976, 129-30). By using the shooting of the prophet and contriving a subsequent violent flight, the filmmakers are able to present the Apaches as an innocent people defending their mystic religion and can allude to the Ghost Dance and the massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890.

There are only a few isolated instances when the Apaches are presented in a more negative light. Sieber warns Davis ominously never to let himself be taken alive by Apaches. The movie also shows three bloody corpses in a stagecoach attacked by Geronimo, and Davis laments that the Indians did not need to kill the whites in order to steal the horses.⁴ While some viewers and critics therefore complain that the film does not allow viewers an easy identification with either the whites or the Indians (Antulov 1999; Emmert 1996, 80), the majority complain that the Apaches, in a desperate effort at political correctness, have evolved into a noble, heroic, innocent people (Nichols 1989, 1009-10; Hicks 1993).⁵

Just like its predecessor, *Geronimo: An American Legend* is very much centered on Geronimo. It suggests that Geronimo was the only chief leading the breakout and that he subdivided "his" bands, which, however, were led by different chiefs like Nana and Mangus. The hereditary chief Naiche never appears in the film (Thompson 1994, 209). By not including a love story, by not even showing an individualized Indian woman character, and by having Geronimo appear suddenly out of nowhere at the beginning, flanked by two silent Indians on darker horses, Geronimo is transformed into a mythical, tragic, lonely hero. Thus he can become a worthy adversary of the U.S. Army and part of America's national heritage.

In addition, like many Hollywood movies and in accordance with the popular image of the noble Indian savage, *Geronimo: An American Legend* presents American Indians as a "vanishing race," and pleads for pity instead of understanding. The film ends with Geronimo's being sent off to Florida to the strains of a mournful hymn. Only the last voiceover states that he lived for another 22 years. Davis, the narrator, quotes Geronimo's words of surrender to Miles as: "Once I moved about like the wind and now I surrender, and that is all." Davis ends his story of the Geronimo campaign by saying that he is haunted by memories of the days of bravery and cruelty, heroism and deceit – the positive words connoting the Indians, the negative ones the whites. He sadly remarks that a way of life of a thou-

⁴ Nana would explain years later that they had to kill all people who had seen them to protect themselves. This held especially true for Mexicans, whom most Apaches hated since they had attacked Indian camps several times (Debo 1976, 37 and 270), though mostly in retaliation for Indian raids.

⁵ One film critic reports that he asked scriptwriter Milius what his opinion of the finished film was; Milius had not seen it but asked if the scene where the Apaches hung children on meat-hooks was still in the film, thus revealing that originally there were far more episodes portraying Indians as less than angelic (Black 1993).

sand years is gone and that the land will never be the same.⁶ In the last scene Geronimo says to his fellow Apaches in the train: "Now my time is over. Now, maybe, the time of our people is over" (Deloria 1995, 1197; Kilpatrick 1999, 148). By placing Indians in the past, they can become part of American nation-building (Klopotek 2001, 253).

The greatest flaw of the movie is that it focuses more on whites than American Indians, as was also criticized by quite a few critics (Ebert 1993; Harrington 1993; Hicks 1993). The story is doubly mirrored by white narrators, with 27-year-old Lieutenant Britton Davis on his first assignment to the West telling the story but getting his information on the Apaches from experienced Indian fighter Lieutenant Gatewood and long-time Indian scout Sieber. Whites assume center stage as the Apaches' life style and culture are explained by Gatewood and Sieber, who is characterized as the only white able to keep up with Apaches. During the pursuit of Geronimo it is he and not the Apache scout who does the tracking.

Apache culture is shown first-hand only four times when Nana, Mangas, and Geronimo discuss the prophet and his teachings and when they debate surrender. In a third scene, the sickly, starving state of Geronimo's small remaining band is shown for a few minutes with Geronimo "looking into his power," i.e., having a vision – just as before his visit to the prophet. The fourth scene shows the scouts and Geronimo's warriors being shipped off to Florida. For the most part, the movie follows the army hunting the Apaches and actor Wes Studi as Geronimo only receives fourth billing (Kilpatrick 1999, 144).

It would have been easy to have Davis or Gatewood alternate with Geronimo in telling the story since all of them left autobiographies (Minor and Vrzalik 1999; Gatewood 1929; Davis 1976; cf. Deloria 1995, 1197) and thus to establish a multidimensional story (White 1988, 1194-9; Davis 1988, 280-2).⁷ A similar strategy was adopted by the TV movie *Son of the Morning Star* (1991), where the battle of Little Bighorn is narrated by the widow of George Custer and a Cheyenne Woman. Two contemporaneous TV movies/documentaries about Geronimo also used an Indian voice. In the Turner Productions film, *Geronimo* (1993), the old Geronimo talks to a young Indian school boy, concentrating on his life before captivity and bemoaning the loss of the old Apache ways (Calloway 1995, 1200-1).⁸ The PBS documentary *Geronimo and the Apache Resistance* (1988) uses interviews with descendants of the Apache refugees and spans Geronimo's entire life.⁹ *Geronimo: An American Legend* does, however, manage to establish several In-

⁶ This is turned into a positive by Scott Emmert (1996, 80-1) who praises the film for its social commentary.

⁷ There are equally stories by other white participants, like Nelson A. Miles (1896) or Leonard B. Wood (1970).

⁸ Turner Productions also produced the three-part documentary *The Native Americans* (1994) with an accompanying illustrated book and the TV films *The Broken Chain* (1993, about the Iroquois), *Tecumseh, the Last Warrior* (1995), and *Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee* (1994, about the Siege at Wounded Knee 1873).

⁹ Historians have, however, criticized that the documentary portrays Indians as the victims of a clash of cultures and leaves out the concentration of the Apache economy on raiding and theft (Nichols 1989, 1009-10).

dian voices. On the one hand, Geronimo is challenged by Nana who advocates a return to the reservation where at least they will survive. On the other hand, the film shows the contempt and hatred between the Apache scouts recruited by the U.S. Army and Geronimo's group. When both are reunited in the train to Florida, Chato tells Geronimo that the latter was right to fight the duplicitous whites. When Mangas responds that he will forever hate former scout Chato for his betrayal, Geronimo offers a final reconciliatory statement by saying that there are so few Apaches left that they should not hate one another.

In contrast to the 1962 movie, in the 1993 version there is only one bad white individual: General Miles who orders Gatewood to offer Geronimo two years of imprisonment in Florida, a return to a reservation in Arizona, and forty acres of land, although he knows full well that the government will not keep this promise. He is portrayed as an amoral devil (Kilpatrick 1999, 147; Thompson 1994, 210).¹⁰ When Davis at the end confronts him with his lie, Miles calls the Indians savages and – in contrast to Crook – sees his duty only towards U.S. citizens, for whom he opened the West to farming. Slightly negatively portrayed are the anonymous settlers, prospectors, and land speculators mentioned by Crook as subconsciously wanting to hang Geronimo. They are offset, however, by a courageous miner confronting the Apaches, who serves to stress the inevitability of progress, a view to which most audience members would have subscribed. Two other negative groups are an amorphous lynching posse and nameless scalp hunters from Texas – who, in typical Hollywood manner, also include a bad Indian from the Comanche tribe.

The other whites are good, though. General Crook respects the Chiricahuas for their valor and sees himself and the U.S. Army as their protectors and true friends. Sieber originally has an ambivalent attitude towards Apaches, admiring them but also hating them. Although he is wounded by Geronimo, he later admits that, were he an Apache, he would be out with Geronimo. Near the end of the movie, he dies rescuing Chato from the scalp hunters.

Gatewood and Davis take on almost mythical proportions. The audience first meets them as they wait for Geronimo's surrender, although it was Davis alone who met him (Debo 1976, 196-7). Gatewood can be interpreted as a white who has turned partially Indian, like Lieutenant John Dunbar in *Dances With Wolves* (1990), to which there are a number of other parallels (Kilpatrick 1999, 145). Gatewood is depicted as experienced, courageous, honest, respected, and a perfect Southern gentleman. He knows some Apache, appears as taciturn as the Apaches, and even has adopted some of the Indians' fighting methods (Thompson 1994, 210).¹¹ When he kills an Apache he demonstrates his gallantry and sympathy for

¹⁰ Miles actually moved Geronimo to Florida against the express order of the President who was thinking of turning him over to Arizona authorities to prosecute him. Miles also lobbied against a separation of the prisoners from their families and for a more humane Indian policy (Debo 1976, 297-301 and 359; Wooster 1993).

¹¹ He accepts the challenge of a single Apache warrior wanting to brave him and pulls his horse down suddenly shooting the Indian. Kilpatrick points out rightfully that this act of daring would have been unnecessary for a warrior braving the whole U.S. Army. The Indian is also shown bellowing like a savage to Gatewood and firing five times without hitting Gatewood

Indians by asking Chato to perform the correct death ceremony. He also serves to initiate Davis and the audience into the intricacies of the Apache mind and soul.

Gatewood is depicted as feeling close to the Apaches as a former Confederate who knows "what it's like to hate the blue coat." Gatewood twice defends Apaches against whites. In a fight against a lynch posse, Gatewood stays in the rear with Geronimo and the two become fighting comrades. Geronimo in a bet wins Gatewood's binoculars and offers him a blue stone considered valuable among the Apache to make the trade fair. The incident never occurred (Thompson 1994, 208), and it was Davis who once helped Geronimo escape a U.S. marshal by letting the Chiricahuas slip away towards the reservation (Debo 1976, 198-202). All in all, the "friendship" between Geronimo and Gatewood was vastly augmented for the movie, since Geronimo in his autobiography never mentioned Gatewood, and the lieutenant did not like Apaches that much (Debo 1976, 280). In the movie, however, Gatewood and Geronimo are such good friends that the Lieutenant can persuade the Apache to surrender. When both point to their gods as gods of peace and Gatewood reciprocates Geronimo's gift of the blue stone with his crucifix, the audience is led to believe that different ethnic groups can easily get along with one another. In the film, Gatewood, as the remnant of the mythical, "good," old West, rides off alone into the distance and obscurity.¹²

Davis earns the viewers' sympathies as he becomes their inexperienced, outsider eyes on the events. For him, the Geronimo campaign turns into his coming of age, even though the historic Davis was quite knowledgeable on Apaches himself (Debo 1976, 280). When Geronimo – fictionally (Debo 1976, 211) – chooses him to supervise his band in the reservation he symbolizes the possibility of harmonious relations between Indians and whites in building the new West, i.e. the America of the 1990s. Davis, as the audience's representative, remains innocent throughout the whole movie because he does not kill a single Apache. Although Davis did not experience the end of the Apache Wars since he had left the army by 1886 and bought a farm (Utley 1973, 388), he is shown as one of the four men advancing to Geronimo's mountain stronghold. Before Gatewood and Chato climb to Geronimo's camp, the First Lieutenant tells Davis, whom for the first time he calls by his first name, to remain behind so that he can tell the truth. He gives him the advice to stay noble, and to try and build a country in the West. Thus, after the removal of the Indians, manifest destiny is indirectly invoked. In the end, Davis resigns after having accused Miles of breaking the army's word to the Indians. In that way, he disassociates himself from the shame of conquest (Prats 1996, 15-29) and can become the innocent ancestor of present-day Americans; those, in turn, can relieve their guilt by watching a movie about the heroic

once whereas one shot by Gatewood kills him (Kilpatrick 1999, 145). In addition, with the army trying to find the Apaches they would not have calmly let them ride parallel to them and run away after the death of their band member.

¹² Gatewood's part in Geronimo's surrender was belittled by Miles and the Fourth Cavalry but he did continue to serve as an officer to Miles in Arizona and New Mexico before being sent to Wyoming until his health failed him and he died in 1896 (Kraft 2000, 195-218).

but doomed resistance of Native Americans to the inevitable conquest of North America by whites (Klopotek 2001, 253).

6. Conclusion

Both *Geronimo* (1962) and *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993) are about whites and their visions of the past and future of the United States more than they are histories about Geronimo and Native Americans. While the 1960s film at least focuses on the tribulations of Geronimo and his people, the 1993 film is concerned with white guilt. In both films, American Indian issues and African-American concerns are mixed. In the 1962 version, the portrayal of Geronimo as a militant leader reflects more the African-American movement than contemporary Native American concerns (Dopheide 2004, 93), which was even admitted by one of the directors (Lapr evotte 1989, 66). In the 1993 film, politically correct filmmakers remind viewers that minorities were victimized, by having General Miles promise the Apaches forty acres and a mule, a plan to compensate former slaves. The only members of an ethnic group presented negatively in both movies are the Mexicans, who are depicted as cowards, alcoholics, brutal scalp-hunters, or as of no importance.¹³ Thus, neither *Geronimo* nor *Geronimo: An American Legend* are true to a genuine multicultural perspective.

Geronimo (1962) still has a happy Hollywood ending proclaiming that all American Indians and all other minorities are ready to assimilate into mainstream America under the preconditions that they be treated with dignity and respect. This reflects the optimistic outlook of the early 1960s. *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993) will leave most viewers with the regret that Native American culture has vanished, as have Native Americans themselves. In both movies, white posterity is exonerated by a "whitewash" via Delahay and Davis respectively as the quintessential, young, innocent, blond, American boys (Howe 1993).¹⁴ As the political climate of the 1990s precluded an assimilationist message, *Geronimo: An American Legend* concentrates on the ways whites deal with their guilt. By going through the agonies Gatewood and Davis went through, the audience can experience a cathartic cleansing; Americans are equally reassured that there were many decent white men who at the time worked hard to help Native Americans in the inevitable clash of cultures. Therefore, all seemed well in 1990s America, and any threats of disunity in the United States, as predicted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., (Schlesinger 1991) were held at bay.

It is obvious that the New Indian History has not yet reached Hollywood. In fact, it is the 1962 movie, filmed during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, that depicts the Apaches as making some flexible adaptations and influencing

¹³ This is in accordance with most Hollywood western movies, where Mexicans were portrayed as treacherous, cowardly, and violent (Hoffman 1997, 52).

¹⁴ Scriptwriter Milius is a self-avowed right-wing conservative and supposedly wanted to distance himself from the destruction of Indian society while avoiding criticizing European conquest of the land (Thompson n.d.).

white policies. The 1993 version, though historically more accurate,¹⁵ converts Geronimo and his people again into more or less passive victims. This is rather dangerous, since internet user comments demonstrate that the revisionist Western *Geronimo: An American Legend* is perceived as an accurate depiction of Apache history (cf. www.imdb.com 1993). Yet, comparing both movies to earlier portrayals of Geronimo, there has been some progress. Geronimo is no longer the cold-blooded fiendish murderer, but a person with legitimate complaints and human feelings.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done to render a better portrait of Native American history in film. This is essential at a time when history plays an ever larger role in public collective memory and films increasingly discover the significance of memory and history for the present (Williams 1993, 9-21; Rabinowitz 1993, 119-37). So far, the best films dealing with American Indians have been about contemporary Native America (especially *Powwow Highway*, 1989, based on the novel by Huron author David Seals). This is also the topic preferred by American Indians themselves (Leuthold 1995). Many charge that Native Americans should be involved more in the production of Hollywood movies (e.g. Appleford 1995, 116). American Indian filmmakers up till now have mostly been confined to low-budget films or documentaries and for the most part have not managed to reach a large audience. The challenge therefore remains to produce a good movie about Native Americans and their history that is able to reach millions of viewers despite the commercial, political, and dramatic considerations which stack the odds against such a film (O'Connor 1993, 21-6).

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¹⁵ One of the film's advisors was the Chiricahua Apaches' tribal historian (*Indian Country Today* quoted in Dopheide 2004, 106).

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