



# Analysis American Native Discrimination in The Movie Geronimo: An American Legend

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## ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze how discrimination against Native Americans is portrayed in the film "Geronimo: An American Legend" (1993) using a qualitative descriptive method and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory. Spivak's postcolonial theory, especially the concept of the "subaltern," is applied to understand how Geronimo and the Apache tribe are depicted as marginalized groups that lack a voice in the dominant narrative. The film portrays the conflict between Native Americans and the U.S. government, but it tends to present the colonial side's perspective. The struggles of Native Americans are often reduced to stereotypical depictions, portraying them as a threat to the "civilization" and progress of America. The findings of this study show that the film implicitly reinforces negative stereotypes about Native Americans, portraying them as violent and uncivilized. The narrative mainly supports the colonial perspective, where the U.S. expansion into the western territories is depicted as a justified and necessary action for progress. Meanwhile, the Native Americans' struggle to defend their land and culture is only briefly addressed and not given significant attention. Spivak's approach helps identify that Native Americans in this film are positioned as passive subjects, denied the opportunity to authentically tell their own story. In conclusion, "Geronimo: An American Legend" tends to reinforce the colonial narrative that justifies discriminatory actions against Native Americans. The film fails to provide enough space to depict the complexities of their struggle and instead strengthens the viewpoint that justifies their oppression. Thus, it is crucial for the representation of Native Americans in mainstream media to be more balanced and fair, so that stereotypes and discrimination are not perpetuated. This research contributes to the study of marginalized group representation in media and opens up discussions on how the authentic voices of oppressed communities can be better heard in historical narratives.

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## 1. Introduction

The United States, often seen as a global superpower, is known for its influence in politics, economics, and culture. However, it also faces significant social issues, such as economic inequality, gun violence, and ongoing racial discrimination. Historically, the country has struggled with systemic racism and oppression, particularly against Native Americans, who experienced forced expulsions, massacres, and land theft during colonization. Despite the principles of freedom and equality upon which America was founded, its history is marked by racial injustice, as seen in the centuries of slavery and the racial segregation of the Jim Crow era.

In contemporary times, racial discrimination continues to affect minority groups, including African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Disparities are evident in areas such as education,



housing, healthcare, and the criminal justice system. Reports indicate that minorities face higher rates of police violence, harsher sentencing, and less access to quality services compared to the white majority (Ghassemi, 2020; Anderson, 2019). These inequalities perpetuate the marginalization of minority communities, showing that the struggle for racial equality is far from over.

In response to this discrimination, Native American movements in the 19th and 20th centuries fought for the recognition and restoration of their rights, striving to preserve their culture, language, and traditions (Smith & Logan, 2019). Despite ongoing challenges, Native Americans continue to seek equality and justice in the face of structural discrimination. The film "Geronimo: An American Legend" (1993) reflects these historical struggles but has faced criticism for its portrayal of Native Americans. Critics argue that the film reinforces negative stereotypes and justifies the discrimination against the Apache tribe by depicting them as barbarians (Thorner, 2021). This portrayal perpetuates harmful colonial narratives, underscoring the need for more accurate and respectful representations of Native communities in media.

Using Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory, this research examines how the film "Geronimo" contributes to the silencing of Native American voices. Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" refers to marginalized groups who are unable to represent themselves within dominant cultural frameworks (Spivak, 1988). In "Geronimo", the Apache people are portrayed from a colonialist perspective, stripping them of their agency and reinforcing their subaltern status. Spivak's theory emphasizes the importance of giving voice to the oppressed, critiquing how indigenous narratives are often co-opted or misrepresented by dominant Western discourses (Loomba, 2020).

By applying this theoretical lens, the research aims to explore how Native Americans are depicted in the film and to propose solutions for more inclusive and accurate representations in media. Addressing these portrayals is crucial to challenging ongoing stereotypes and promoting a broader understanding of Native American experiences and struggles in both historical and modern contexts.

## 2. Method

In this study, the method used is a descriptive qualitative research method based on Lexy J. Moleong's guidelines. This method aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study by describing and analyzing the data qualitatively (Moleong, 2017). This research also integrates Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory, specifically the concept of "subaltern," which refers to marginalized groups whose voices are often not heard in dominant narratives (Spivak, 1988). By adopting this approach, this study focuses on analyzing the representation of indigenous people in the film *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993), where the researcher will explore how the movie depicts indigenous characters and how their views are ignored in the context of colonial narratives. Through a rich content analysis of the film, we will identify themes of discrimination, stereotyping and marginalization seen in the characters and dialogue, and relate them to Spivak's concept of the subaltern to show how indigenous voices are often suppressed in media representations. As such, this research not only describes but also critiques existing narratives, which will hopefully contribute to a better understanding of the representation of indigenous people in film and media in general (Byrne, 2021).

According to the research method described earlier, the analysis in this study will be conducted with systematic steps. First, researchers will collect primary and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained through screening and observing the movie *Geronimo: An American Legend*, focusing on scenes and dialogues featuring Native American characters (Byrne, 2021). Researchers will also take note of the stereotypical portrayals and power dynamics that emerge in the film's narrative. Secondary data will be obtained from relevant academic literature, including articles, books, and media reviews that discuss the representation of indigenous people in films, as well as discussions on postcolonial theory. After data collection, the next step is content analysis, where the researcher will use a descriptive qualitative approach to organize and categorize the data that has been collected (Moleong, 2017). In this process, the researcher will highlight emerging patterns and themes, especially those related to discrimination and marginalization. Using the lens of Spivak's theory, we will analyze how the voices and experiences of Native American characters are not only ignored, but also often interpreted and presented from a colonial perspective (Spivak, 1988).

### 3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis of the film *Geronimo: An American Legend* by identifying and exploring the representation of indigenous people in the film as well as the patterns of discrimination that emerge: *An American legend* (1993) can interpret that there is a portrayal of discrimination received by the Indian tribe. the following picture and analysis of this research:



#### Primery Data (Images analysis):

**Colonial Domination:** The soldiers riding behind the indigenous people represent the dominant colonial power, which uses violence and surveillance to control indigenous movements. It shows how colonialism physically and symbolically suppressed indigenous peoples' freedom and identity. **Compulsion and Displacement:** This movement of escape by indigenous groups implies coercion, where they have no control over their own destiny. This affirms their "subaltern" position, in accordance with Gayatri Spivak's theory, which states that oppressed groups are often deprived of agency or voice in dominant narratives. **Stereotypical Visualization:** From a postcolonial perspective, this image can also be interpreted as a stereotypical example of the plight of indigenous peoples being repeated in visual representations, where indigenous peoples are often positioned as victims without showing resistance or complex humanity.

#### Secondary Data (Historical context):

**Gayatri Spivak's Theory and the Concept of "Subaltern":** a subaltern is a group of people who are in a marginalized and dominated position, where their voices are not heard in the narrative of power. In this context, the indigenous people in the picture are seen losing agency, forced to flee from colonial militarization, which shows that they do not have the power to control their own destiny. **Colonial Representation in Film:** This image can be analyzed as part of a broader stereotypical representation, where indigenous people are often portrayed as victims of colonial violence, but without any depth in the depiction of their resistance or cultural identity. **Dominant Narratives and Structural Violence:** The violence inflicted on indigenous peoples is often normalized and unquestioned in dominant narratives. In this image, the dominance of the military behind indigenous people can be seen as a representation of structural violence legitimized by colonial power.



#### Primery Data (Images analysis):

**Judgmental Stereotypes:** These derogatory remarks are a manifestation of negative stereotypes against marginalized groups, particularly indigenous peoples. In colonial representations, indigenous

peoples are often portrayed as “barbarians”, “rebels”, or “murderers” who must be dealt with by “civilized” white people. **The Construction of Colonial Power:** The cowboy figure in the image can be considered a symbol of Western civilization feeling superior. This expression shows how the colonial gaze works, where culturally different societies are looked down upon and judged only through the colonizer's point of view. **Subaltern Position:** According to Gayatri Spivak's theory, subaltern groups, in this case possibly indigenous people or minority characters, are often denied a voice and are forced to be seen through a colonial perspective. In this image, the judged figure is given no space to defend themselves, showing how their voices are ignored.

#### Secondary Data (Historical context):

**Spivak's Theory of the Subaltern:** In the context of this image, the so-called “murderous bastard” likely represents a marginalized group (such as Native Americans) who cannot defend themselves from the insults and stereotypes given by the white characters representing colonial domination. **Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Western Films:** The harsh remarks directed at the characters in this image are an example of how colonial narratives discredit indigenous peoples, positioning them as “enemies” who need to be subdued. **Colonial Narratives and Superiority:** In this image, demeaning statements represent a colonial strategy to create a social hierarchy in which white people play the role of judges and guardians of morality.



#### Primery Data (Images analysis):

**Military Domination and Colonialism:** In this image, we see a group of people on horseback, looking like white people, wearing typical warrior or cowboy clothing. They are using the horse as a symbol of power, while there is a human figure who appears to be below or down on the ground. This could represent a social hierarchy where the natives are tied up and beaten by the colonials. **Symbolization of Conquest:** A figure on the ground that seems to be captured or surrounded by people on horses suggests unequal power relations. This could be a representation of colonial subjugation, where the colonial ruler captures or controls the local population by force or violence. **Physical Representation of Violence:** The act of tying or capturing with ropes can show aspects of oppression and physical violence prevalent in colonial practices. This image can be interpreted as a form of colonial control imposed on local people through intimidation or physical force.

#### Secondary Data (Historical context):

**History of Colonialism in the American West:** This image seems to have influences from the time of Western colonialism in the Americas, especially the relationship between European colonizers and Native Americans. **Postcolonial Theory in Media and Film:** These images may come from films or media works that represent periods of colonialism, where often the colonial power is portrayed as physically and morally superior to the colonized people. **Studies on Indigenous Resistance:** Secondary data can also be obtained from studies on indigenous resistance to colonial colonizers. This can include physical, cultural and political resistance by indigenous people in the face of colonial violence and domination.





#### Primery Data (Images analysis):

**Native Subject:** This image features a stern-looking native-looking figure, surrounded by other people in the background. Their serious faces and the dialog implies that the group is on the defensive or in a threatened position, even though they assert that they are not “bothering” anyone. This shows how colonized groups often feel pressured and positioned as a threat by colonial powers, even if they themselves do not commit aggression. **Contexts of Power and Resistance:** The words “We don't bother anyone” imply that they feel attacked or blamed for no apparent reason. In postcolonial theory, this can refer to power dynamics where indigenous people are often constructed as the “other” or “threat” by colonizers, even though they are simply defending their rights to their own land and culture. **Clothing and Identity Symbols:** The characters in the image are wearing traditional clothing and head coverings, which can be seen as representations of the indigenous cultural identities they maintain amidst threats. Colonization often involves attempts to erase or assimilate local cultural identities, so maintaining traditional clothing and customs can be a form of cultural resistance to colonial powers.

#### Secondary Data (Historical context):

**Postcolonial Theory of Indigenous Resistance:** In this case, literature discussing indigenous resistance to colonization could be relevant secondary data. **Historical Studies of Colonialism in North America:** If this image refers to Native American societies, then historical studies on colonialism in North America can be an important context. **Cultural Studies on Identity and Land Rights:** Colonization often involved the appropriation of land and resources from indigenous peoples. This can also be seen in the context of the statement that they “bothered no one,” perhaps referring to their right to defend their own lands and resources. The study of indigenous land rights, including modern struggles by indigenous groups around the world, such as the native rights movement in the Americas can be a strong secondary context.

#### 4. Conclusion

The movie *Geronimo: An American Legend* reflects the complexity of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the context of colonial history. Through postcolonial analysis, it can be concluded that although the film attempts to give voice to Geronimo, its perspective remains dominated by white narratives, which often distort the reality of indigenous struggles. In addition, the film's narrative shows how subaltern voices are transformed into symbols of struggle, while colonial power continues to control the representation of their identities and experiences. Geronimo's struggle also remains relevant in a modern context, reflecting the challenges that indigenous peoples face today and emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing their voices in the broader discourse. Overall, the film invites viewers to be critical of the narratives presented and understand the importance of fair representation in history.

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