

## The Old West, Part II

Nor are Indians always the bad guys. Quite a few silent films were sympathetic to them, e.g., *An Indian Wife's Devotion*, *A Squaw's Love*, *Red-Wing's Gratitude*, *Ramona*, *Heart of an Indian*, *The Squaw Man*, *In the Days of Buffalo Bill*, *The Vanishing American*, *Redskin*. *Broken Arrow* was the first after the silents to be so, but Pro-Indian movies have persisted. As examples, see *Devil's Doorway*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Savage*, *Arrowhead*, *The Big Sky*, *Apache*, *Taza—Son of Cochise*, *Chief Crazy Horse*, *Sitting Bull*, *White Feather*, *Navajo*, *Hiawatha*, *The Outsider*, *Jim Thorpe—All American*, *Flaming Star*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*, *A Man Called Horse*, *Flap*, *Little Big Man*, *The Stalking Moon*. On television, *Hawk* was about an Indian cop in New York, and *F Troop* had comic Indians. Most of us know *Kaw-Liga*, the cigar-store wooden Indian in the Hank Williams song. Enos Edward (“Yakima”) Canutt was a famous half-Indian stunt man of Westerns for 50 years and provided second unit direction for sixties epics. Elvis Presley played an Indian in *Stay Away Joe* and *Flaming Arrow*. But we also had *Little Beaver*, played, among others, by Robert (“Bobby”) Blake, of “You betchum, Red Ryder” fame, and *Papoose*, his horse. Cherokee Iron-Eyes Cody’s “one tear” ecology spot on television will never be forgotten.

African-Americans? Washington (“Wash”) Jefferson Lincoln Lee was Tom Mix’s Black



cook on the radio. The thirties provided a series of Westerns with all-Black casts (e.g., *Harlem on the Prairie*). *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) had a Black as the central character.

The Depp Lone Ranger movie offers a young boy fascinated by the Old West as seen through the eyes of Tonto. Imagine in the day of political correctness daring to have a White play an Indian, but the Indians, so far as I am aware, did not explode in anger and, indeed, were able to offer, through this movie, humorous comments on Whites. Indians have apparently always respected those mentally touched, as Tonto is in the movie.

Westerns have generally relegated their humor to the sidekick, e.g., George Gabby Hayes (1885-1969), who rode alongside Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy (as Windy Halliday), Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Bill Elliott, and Randolph Scott; Pat Aloysius Brady and his jeep Nellybelle in the TV series *Roy Rogers*; Smiley Burnette, Gene Autry’s sidekick, as was Pat Buttram; Al (“Fuzzy”) St. John, pard of Lash LaRue; and Andy Devine as Jingles,

who provided comic relief for Wild Bill Hickok. I prefer such animal companions as *Bullet*, *Roy Rogers’ wonder dog*, and the wonderful horses, e.g., Dale Evans’ *Buttermilk*; Roy Rogers’ *Trigger*; Gene Autry’s “World’s Wonder Horse” *Champion*, who starred in *The Adventures of Champion* on television; *Red Ryder’s Thunder*; and Tom Mix’s *Tony*, “The Wonder Horse.”

Tom Mix, like his horse *Tony*, was a wonder—a US Marshal who turned actor and appeared in over 400 low-budget Westerns. Another “can’t resist” is *Murania*, the underground scientific city visited by Gene Autry in the movie serial *The Phantom Empire* (called, as a feature picture, *Men with Steel Faces*). It was ruled by *Queen Tika*, and its *Thunder Riders* were evil residents who sometimes came above ground. Wonder what would happen if the *Thunder Riders* faced off against the *Ghost Riders in the Sky*?

I continue to learn (and revel in learning) the lore. At a lunch with two other couples, I brought up the Depp opus and my take on it, and the conversation “triggered” memories. One woman at the table, *Mary Sawyer*, a former Army nurse, suddenly burst forth with “*Scratch gravel, White Wind!*” Not even I recognized that, and she didn’t remember who used it. Google later gave me “*Golden Arrow*,” whom I remember, though not his general background and horse, and reminded me of my love of comic books, *Whiz* included.

I remain a bit leery of plump cowboys (e.g., *Whip Wilson*) and the “*Singing Cowboys*” (e.g., *Gene Autry*; *Roy Rogers*; *Dale Evans*, and the “*Sons of the Pioneers*”; *Tex Ritter*, though he did sing the theme song of *High Noon*; and *Jimmy Wakely*). “*Happy Trails*” was a good theme song for *Roy Rogers* and *Dale Evans*, but I liked *Gene Autry*, who made Westerns 1934-1954, better singing “*Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*.” *Patsy Montana* became his acting partner and wrote Western songs, including “*I Want To Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart*.” *Audie Murphy*, the most decorated World War II hero and a star of many Westerns, wrote “*Shutters and Boards*.” *Ken Maynard* began as the star of silent movies but is credited with introducing song into Westerns. *Sheb Wooley* was in *Rawhide* on TV but is best known for singing “*The Purple People Eater*.”

The names are legion and include *William S. Hart*; *Johnny Mack Brown* (a former football star); *Canadian Rod Cameron* (*Nathan Cox*); “*Wild Bill*” *Elliott* and *Wild Bill Hickok* (*James Butler Hickok*); *Buffalo Bill* (*William*

*Frederick Cody*), who killed 4,280 buffaloes and had a *Wild West Show* that included real Indians and starred *Annie Oakley*; *Calamity Jane* (*Martha Jane Canary Burke*, married twelve times with eight movies made about her), *Belle Starr* (*Myra Belle Shirley*), the West’s most notorious female outlaw; *Doc Holliday*; *Tim Holt*; *Bat Masterson* (*William Barclay Masterson*), a U.S. marshal and later a sports writer; *Australian Chips Rafferty* (*John Goffage*); *Randolph Scott* (*Randolph Crane*), who started on the stage; *Charles Starrett*, known as the *Durango Kid* and another professional football player; and *Bob Steele* (*Robert Bradbury*), who began acting at age 2 and was in over 400 second features. On the radio, the series about *Bobby Benson* included cowboy *Windy Wales*, played by *Don Knotts*. One of the hosts of television’s *Death Valley Days* was *Ronald Reagan*.

When I spoke on this topic to my Rotary Club, the Assistant District Governor, *Dr. Mark Zeringue*, happened to be visiting. He came up afterwards to ask if I knew anything about *Milo Holt*. “*Tim*,” I responded, “but not *Milo*.” Then, before he could reply, I remembered that he was from Chatham County and that *Siler City*, his home, hosted the “*Milo Holt Western Film Festival*.” I had heard of it, never attended. I later found the newspaper clipping I had saved—to my chagrin, I had missed its opportunity to see the “son of Tonto,” *Chief Steve Silverheels*. My husband and I did so later when we helped with the event for two years, and I cooked for the performers.

Of course, I loved *The Unforgiven* (1960); *Dances With Wolves* (1990); the *Sergio Leone Spaghetti Westerns*, which helped *Clint Eastwood* get to *Unforgiven* (1992) and practically all those on the way to 2017’s wonderful *Hostiles*. But they have to wait for another article (columns). For now, I simply point out that *Great Spirits* have been among us. These two quotations sum up, for me, the Old West:

a voice-over at the end of *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*—“The dog-faced soldiers . . . the regulars . . . the fifty-cents-a-day professionals, riding the outposts of a nation . . . Wherever they rode, and whatever they fought for, that place became the United States.”

*William S. Hart*, farewell/prologue to the audience, 1939 reissue of *Tumbleweeds*—“The rush of the wind that cuts your face . . . the pounding hooves of the pursuing posse. Out there in front, a fallen tree trunk that spawns a yawning chasm, with a noble animal under you that takes it in the same low, ground-eating gallop . . . Oh, the thrill of it all!”

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