

## 6. Performance, gestures and poses in postcards of Ho-Chunk in Wisconsin Dells

*Sarah Anne Stolte*

Social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes that ‘persons and things are not radically distinct categories, and the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations’. Things, he states, ‘make the journey from commodity to singularity and back’ (2006, p. 1). Postcards – hand-scripted, illustrated, and addressed to and from named individuals – poignantly express these functions. As Appadurai suggests, social relations are performative acts. Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes note that images are ‘essentially labile and fluid artefacts, at once “at home” in any context, while at the same time in transit’ (2010, p. 339). Each printing, publication, display or resurfacing of picture postcards is akin to the performance of an intangible art object, such as a dance, moving fluidly through time and with human lives as its partner, ‘becom[ing] animated’, to use the words of Judith Hamera, ‘through consumption’ (2006, p. 62).

Multiplicities of performances are folded into any single photographic postcard. This chapter draws attention to mid-20th-century postcard images of the Ho-Chunk Nation taken in the tourist area of Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, USA, in which the individuals depicted appear conscious of being photographed. Through dramatic posing, costuming and uses of setting, the Ho-Chunk harnessed the postcard as a performative space for assertions of presence and thriving existence within a transforming, colonised world. Since the 1990s, the sense has grown in academic circles that images can be read in ways moving beyond or behind the photographers’ intentions to provide instead access to historical traces of the peoples depicted (Banks and Vokes, 2010, p. 337). The methodology employed in this chapter follows Banks and Vokes’s postulation that recent scholarship on photographic archives attempts to ‘unpick those [anthropological] stitches and reconnect the subjects with their personal and collective biographies’ (ibid., p. 338). No matter how staged or seemingly artificial, the postcard images selected here for discussion point to individual and collective historical narratives reconnected with their points of origin.

Discovered in anthropological, photographic archives, many of the postcards described here provided documentary images of Native American people and

celebrate ethnographic enterprises. My examination of the setting, poses and composition of the photographs themselves, and my conversations with individuals depicted in postcards from a later era, reveal that many were staged and distributed by Ho-Chunk 'actors' posing as theatrical caricatures explicitly for the postcard format. Formal analysis reveals an increase in dramatisation from the early to late 20th century, made manifest in exaggerated poses and gestures and performative settings (such as ceremonials) and accentuated by captioning. With the rising popularity of film, theatricality replaced a documentary-style postcard image, evidencing a sensitivity towards Ho-Chunk involved in composing images concerning what Paul Chaat Smith cites as non-Native photographers' 'endless fascination' with capturing still and moving images of indigenous peoples (1995, p. 7).

Changes in postcard imagery as a result of the rising popularity of film are noted in this study, not only because both media are mass-produced and widely distributed but also because both contain written and oral information that is valuable in interpreting the uses and meanings of American Indian images as viewed by the public.<sup>1</sup> Since the medium first began Native Americans have been intriguing subjects for photographers, a fascination that has continued into the world of filmmaking (Chaat Smith, 1995). Deloria deconstructs the ways in which Native American bodies are fetishised and romanticised by white filmmakers, creating an idealised fantasy 'Indian' as an expression of national, modern and personal identities (1998). Through still and cinematic images, non-Natives learned stereotypical visual signifiers of Native identity, racialised clues that indigenous peoples subvert, reject and employ increasingly on their own terms. The work of Choctaw artist Marcus Amerman serves as an example.

Layered with social commentary, some of Amerman's works, such as 'Postcard' (2001), explicitly engage with the postcard form. The phrase, 'Greetings from the Indian Country of the Great Southwest', is beaded in bold block letters across the picture plane and filled with 'Indian' stereotypes: stoic chiefs and dancing braves. Juxtaposed with these iconic images are depictions of an exploding atomic bomb, fighter jets and the moon landing (see Igloliorte, 2011, pp. 78–9). With this work, Amerman is deconstructing conventional symbols as signifiers of Native American identity while reclaiming and repatriating Indian imagery – postcards in this particular case – for a contemporary Native American audience.

The dissemination of visual stereotypes of Native American identity begins with key events that occurred during the 19th century in the United States, including the rise of commercial photography, the emergence of mass

1 For a discussion of the social saliency of postcards see Albers and James (1985). The topic of American Indian peoples in film is examined in Rollins and O'Connor (2010) and Diamond (2010).

tourism and the final colonisation of Native American lands. Successive federal governments' genocidal policies hastened the threat to indigenous lifeways. A statement in 1867 by merchant and entrepreneur George Francis Train emphasises the aggressive colonisation that Native Americans faced: '[E]xtermination is the frontier cry. Well, if commerce demands, then wipe them out' (1867). Consumerism, nationalism and aspirations of prosperity took precedence over the lives and humanitarian rights of indigenous peoples. Yet, the presumption of their imminent extinction manifested a romanticisation of Native Americans as part of a 'vanishing race' that was close to nature. This notion of an idyllic, fantasy 'Indian' constructed in the imaginations of Euro-Americans persists to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Disregarding nuances of cultural difference between various Indian groups, non-Natives identified 'Indianness' through a handful of symbolic icons: feathered bonnets, tipis and totem poles. Most of the symbols are part of the material culture of Plains Indian groups, a non-coincidental correlation. The final battles of the American Indian Wars primarily occurred west of the Mississippi river at the end of the 19th century, the period when photography was first utilised as a tool of visual documentation. As the first subjects of the newly emerging photographic medium, Plains Indian groups became signifiers of a homogenised Native American race (Albers and James, 1983, pp. 123–48). Although early postcard images tended towards documentary accuracy (generally depicting men, women and families as seen through the lenses of predominantly male, Euro-American photographers), by the mid-1900s, a large proportion of those destined for public consumption via postcard circulation were intentionally staged to dramatise an 'Indianness' that visibly romanticised Native American people. The aim was to appeal to the sensibilities of the rising numbers of Euro-American tourist consumers seduced by nostalgic images of 'noble Chiefs' and 'Indian Princesses' (Mihesuah, 1996).

The postcard images introduced here are attributed to the H.H. Bennett Studio in Wisconsin Dells. Famed landscape photographer Henry Hamilton Bennett (1843–1908) is often credited with making the Wisconsin Dells area the tourist destination it is today; from very early on his exquisite landscape photographs enticed tourists to the area. The studio he opened in 1875, believed to be the oldest operating studio in the United States, was still functioning in 1998, when the family donated the property to the Wisconsin State Historical Society (Alton, 2007, p. 7; see also Rath, 1979 and Hoelscher, 2008). The unique sandstone pillars of The Dells, a five-mile long gorge along the Wisconsin River in southern Wisconsin, were formed during the last ice age. They awed Bennett, who captured and distributed inspiring scenic images

2 Berkhofer (1979) offers a detailed account of how Euro-American images of the American Indian developed over time.

during the 1860s and 1870s, encouraging travellers to visit the area. Bennett was well aware of the marketability of images of local Native American peoples and intentionally contrived photographs that deliberately blended the scenic landscape with the 'exotic' Indian to encourage sales. Through this romantic performance of place, he built a successful commercial photography business that relied on tourism. Staged within the early commercial successes of his images of Ho-Chunk individuals is a dance between the photographer as adventurer, capturing images of Native people, and those who agreed to pose in this way. In this dance, the Ho-Chunk assert their presence while adjusting to a changing economy that remains sustainable today.

After the photographer's death, his daughters, Miriam Bennett (1891–1971) and Ruth Bennett Dyer (1895–1982), continued to operate the commercial studio, taking photographs and printing from, as well as conserving, his original glass plates. Eventually Ruth's daughter Jean and her husband Oliver Reese took over the business until the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Indulging her interest in film, Miriam shot over 46 amateur documentary and fiction pieces between approximately 1930 and 1965.<sup>4</sup> She took 'Winnebago Indian Camp Dells of the Wisconsin River', the first of the postcard images included in this chapter.

### **The postcard image/object as stage**

Elizabeth Edwards suggests paying careful attention not only to the material practices of photography as an interpretive strategy but also to the potential uses that photographers envisaged for their images:

[T]he material practices of photography were not only performances by the photographers with their particular aspirations regarding the past, but the subjects of these photographs were themselves physical or material traces of the historical past. Understanding the saliency of these entwined practices for those involved is a way of exploring the potential of photographs as historical evidence, and is also a means of investigating the forms through which historical imagination might be made possible and be experienced (2009, p. 131).

Postcard images/objects are particularly salient in these terms due to their social context. The H.H. Bennett Studio was distributing images to promote tourism and its own commercial enterprise. Multiple copies of a single image were produced relatively inexpensively and were circulated across the region in the hope of attracting new audiences and consumers to the area. Additionally,

3 Wisconsin State Historical Society (WSHS), 'About H.H. Bennett', available at: [www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/hhbennett/about.asp](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/hhbennett/about.asp) (accessed 3 Sep. 2013).

4 Conversation with Jennifer A. Graham, archivist, WSHS, 10 Jan. 2013. The Society has recently digitised many of Miriam Bennett's film reels.

the postcards functioned as bearers of short messages, evidence of the sender's travel to exciting new regions at a time before photography was ubiquitous and digital.

Henry Hamilton Bennett began printing his photographs as 'stereocards', three-dimensional images that brought the Wisconsin Dells River and the local Native American people to life in particular ways. Victorian-era non-Natives would view stereocards, tokens of travel in the time before rapid transportation of mail became the norm, while visiting each other in highly performative domestic spaces known as parlour rooms.<sup>5</sup> The popularity of these three-dimensional objects corresponds to the rise of Wild West shows and emphasises the popularity of sensationalism and live performances at that time.

Although more closely akin to live performances because of their realistic quality, the use of stereocards declined as postcards became prolific in America at the beginning of the 20th century. The United States Postal Service had held a monopoly in postcard circulation since 1873, when it began issuing pre-stamped cards. In 1898, President McKinley signed into law the Private Mailing Card Act, allowing private publishers to enter this market but regulating their postcards with specific requirements relating to size, colour and printing technique. These restrictions proved challenging for private postcard publishers as pre-printed stocks had to be reformatted, making the adjustment phase expensive (Friedman, 2003, p. 302). Some postal historians suggest that the government intentionally created strict formatting guidelines because they were competing for sales. Regardless, the Act was amended in 1901, following an outcry from businesses, putting an end to its restrictive clauses. The term 'post card' could be used by the private sector and the ensuing decade saw rapid growth in the creation, distribution and use of this particular commodity.

Anthropologists Patricia Albers and William James, in their study of postcard images of Minnesota's Ojibwe, note the decline in postcard use during the 1920s as photographic practices became ubiquitous among the general public. According to Albers and James, other media, newspapers and magazines were replacing the postcard as a major repository for documentary, local-interest images (1985, p. 235). Images of Native Americans in film also became commonplace at this time. By the middle of the decade, 50 million people a week went to the movies – the equivalent of half the nation's population (Mintz, 2010). Acting for a camera, both still and cinematic, became increasingly common among many Native American people. Cheyenne/Arapaho film director Chris Eyre commented in a 2004 interview that 'Indian people have been the longest-running subject of films out of anyone' (Abourezk, 2004). Simultaneously, postcards lost their ethnographic documentary style during

5 For more information on performance and the Victorian-era parlour room see Logan (2001).



Figure 6.1. H.H. Bennett. 'Winnebago Indian Camp Dells of the Wisconsin'. Postcard c. 1940. Wisconsin State Historical Society Collection.

the early and middle decades of the 20th century. No longer necessary for their ability to reflect reality, postcards became quintessential, dramatically composed, consumable markers of the tourist experience.

### Subjects/actors

'Winnebago Indian Camp Dells of the Wisconsin' exemplifies the early, documentary style (figure 6.1). This image of a woman sitting near a fire was probably taken around 1930. Heavy metal pots and stacks of fried bread surround her as she momentarily pauses from the mundane activity of cooking to have her photo taken. Her smile is, perhaps, for a photographer with whom she has a rapport, or perhaps it is a cordial response to a stranger. Taken as a scene from her everyday life, the photograph will multiply, eventually finding its way across the region in postcard form, to be retrieved from an archival folder at the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison, and later found in an archival collection at the National Museum of the American Indian.<sup>6</sup> The woman's activity, her clothing and the image's setting follow the documentary style that Albers and James found typical of postcards of the Great Lakes region from the early 20th century (1985). In general, early cards depicted Native American men, women and children wearing everyday attire appropriate to

6 There are copies of this image in postcard form at the WSHS in Madison and in the National Museum of the American Indian archives (NMAI). The museum also has it on display on the wall of its cafeteria.

the time and performing unspectacular tasks. As on this postcard, captions are useful to verify the image and often to note accurately the setting or activity, yet may generalise concerning the subjects, frequently omitting proper names.

The 'Indian camp' indicated by this card's caption was a seasonal village set up outside the town of Wisconsin Dells during the early to mid-20th century.<sup>7</sup> On the site, Ho-Chunk families would construct traditional dwelling structures, make communal meals and provide a living display of indigenous culture. In his work on tourism and photography in Wisconsin Dells, Steven Hoelscher notes, following Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998), that people in the village performed ordinary aspects of their everyday lives, such as cooking, tending a fire, washing and weaving. The participants benefited from the crucial economic as well as cultural role played by the camp (2008, pp. 29–30). Women would weave black ash baskets and intricate beadwork specifically for sale. Friends and relatives would meet, talk and enjoy summer festivities. The temporary camp occupants were aware of themselves as being on display and it is likely that this woman, given its setting and composition, knew her photograph would be offered for sale at the H.H. Bennett Studio.

Today, tourists continue to flock to the town of Wisconsin Dells, enticed by the river. Although the Indian Camp no longer exists, tourism there continues to be complexly interwoven with the lives of the Ho-Chunk. After years of transformations and changes engendered by colonisation, individuals and communities developed ways, such as the Indian Camp, of practising their traditions while adjusting to the new tourist economy. Like the staging of the Indian Camp, the distribution of images serviced performances of identity. Ho-Chunk members dressed in regalia would pose for photographs. Allowing distribution of these portraits as postcards asserted their presence to a global audience as rightful occupants of the area of Wisconsin Dells. Donning stereotypical attire, such as buckskin leggings and war bonnets, and posing in dramatically staged positions with anachronistic accoutrements, such as wooden bows and arrows, 20th-century Ho-Chunk were utilising performance and commoditisation as a means of economic sustainability that fitted into the tourist market.

It is not assumed here that all Ho-Chunk enjoy or even desire having their picture taken. As Devon A. Mihesuah points out, photography is a contentious issue for many Native American people who, since the inception of the

7 The camp is referred to as 'Indian Hill' in an editorial in *La Crosse Tribune*, 15 June 1930 and as 'Winnebago Indian Village' in Hoelscher (2008, p. 29). It was located on Highway 12 and specifically occupied by Ho-Chunk travelling from the area around Tomah, Wisconsin. Other 'Indian Camps' existed in the Dells area and were equally designed as tourist displays while remaining actual, temporary living sites. The degree of this separation varied between sites. See also the 'Modern Tourism' section of The School for Advanced Research 'Indians 4 Sale' website.



medium, have had to suffer the intrusion of having their pictures taken without their permission. The exceptions she notes in *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities* (1996) often centre on tourist-driven areas, such as Wisconsin Dells, where some indigenous people have found it advantageous to pose as 'real Indians' for naïve visitors. From the 1920s, performances of Native traditions targeting a tourist audience regularly occurred at the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial, an outdoor arena where Ho-Chunk and other Native American people performed a programme of dances and short skits in traditional regalia for a live audience. Within this space, photographing these peoples was not just acceptable, it was expected. Numerous postcard images of the performers at Stand Rock continue to circulate. Through their performances, Ho-Chunk played a part in the 20th-century trends that commoditised Indian identity for public consumption in America. These shows may be seen as exploitative insofar as they drew from the performance modalities of 19th-century ethnographic spectacles; however, because Ho-Chunk members were able to design the skits and choose the dance sequences, they were exercising agency in how they were presented. Additionally, they gained some financial independence and eventually owned and operated the arena.

The Stand Rock Ceremonial became one of the most popular attractions in Wisconsin Dells during its 78-year run from 1919–97. On the 'Indians 4 Sale: using culture as a commodity' web page, Kendall Tallmadge (Ho-Chunk) discusses the Ceremonial's history from its origins as a contact site between the Ho-Chunk Nation and tourists as early as 1916, when two Ho-Chunk men, Sanborn and Winslow White Eagle, used to dance on the beach as the evening steamer passed by and tourists would throw coins into a hat in payment. Captain Glen Parsons, a pilot and general manager for the Dells Boat Company, recognised it as a business opportunity. With the help of local entrepreneur and environmental activist, George Crandall, and a Ho-Chunk group headed by Russell Decorah, Parsons organised the first 'official' ceremonial performance at Stand Rock in 1919. By the late 1970s, the show was being run by a Ho-Chunk group, who eventually took control of Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial management until it closed in the late 1990s (Tallmadge, 2010). Many Ho-Chunk individuals participated in these performative ceremonies in the Wisconsin Dells area and were photographed by the H.H. Bennett Studio for use as postcards and other tourist ephemera.

'War Dance of the Winnebago' (c. early 1980s) exemplifies postcard images generated from the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial (figure 6.2). Shot from an angle above the dancers' main arena, this photograph depicts a group of men in regalia at the Stand Rock dance grounds, a picturesque natural stage featuring pillar-like rock formations and views of the river. Many wear full feather bonnets, which are not traditional Ho-Chunk dress but rather objects





Figure 6.2. H.H. Bennett, 'War Dance of the Winnebago'. Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial, Wisconsin Dells. Postcard c. 1975. Sarah Anne Stolte's collection.

that have come to symbolise 'Indian' to a non-Native audience. Two tipis are depicted in the background to the right and left; a man, sitting in a seat reserved for the Chief, oversees the ceremonial from an elevated position.

Although staged and often using stereotypical tropes, postcard images of Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin Dells simultaneously record points in individual and collective lives, as Banks and Vokes suggest. When Marlon White Eagle (Ho-Chunk), editor of the *Hocak Worak*, viewed 'War Dance of the Winnebago', a smile of recognition slowly appeared. He recalled a time when he and his family members participated in the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial. The postcard image of nameless dancers transforms into a memory, brought back to life through our conversation in a small-town café. White Eagle later recalled an experience when he and his family met with a group of Norwegian tourists at the Tallmadge Indian Museum and allowed them to take and print photographs, which he signed like a movie star. This experience was both objectifying and honourable; White Eagle was on display to satiate the desires of the foreign travellers, yet he was proud to share his culture.<sup>8</sup>

Over time and in daily interactive micronarratives, Native and non-Native people shared their cultures and traditions although the general public accepted only limited and stereotypical generalisations of 'Nativity' in their understandings of what it meant to be Native American (Berkhofer, 1979). Postcard purchases continued to decline during the years between 1930 and

8 Conversation with Marlon White Eagle, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, 10 Jan. 2013.

1940, seemingly replaced by the consumption of movies as a visual experience of the exotic 'Indian' and faraway places (Albers and James, 1984, p. 76). During this time, Native American characters in film were rarely given spoken lines. Frequently projected as unintelligent 'others', when they did speak, the script often gave them a 'mock' Indian language, as evident in Tonto's use of *kim-o-sabe* in *The Lone Ranger* series (Bataille and Silet, 1980, p. 117). Without verbal language, Indian characters utilised gestures to communicate but even these were limited, often to pointing while gazing off into the distance or standing with arms akimbo. Additionally, 85 per cent of the tribal identities represented in films until 1967 were of Plains equestrian societies (*ibid.*, p. 87).

With the popularity of film growing through the 1930s, a new style of postcard emerged. For example, the colour-printed 'Winnebago Brave of the Wisconsin River' (c. 1929–30) exhibits caricature-like posing and colouration that distinguishes the photograph from the documentary style and instead aligns it with the narrow interpretive ranges characterising cinematic portrayals of Indians created by non-Natives (figure 6.3). Donning Plains Indians attire rather than traditional Winnebago dress, this 'Brave' stands austere in profile in front of a tipi, pipe under his arm, full feather bonnet on his head. He does not confront the viewer but looks away to casually scan an unseen horizon. The image's one-dimensionality is highlighted by a caption on the reverse reading: 'One of the Winnebago tribe, which still inhabits this region'. Such packaging denies the diversity of tribes in the Midwest and additionally erases the presence of indigenous women. This particular postcard also reveals how meanings became 'overwritten' through the use of captioning to produce a recognisable semiotics of colonial representation and power. A duplicate black-and-white print of this image is held in the National Anthropological Archives in Washington, DC, part of a group of photographs organised for a publication on Winnebago music. Written in cursive letters across the back of the postcard are the words, 'Henry Thunder Winnebago'.<sup>9</sup> Transformed into 'Winnebago Brave of the Wisconsin River', Thunder becomes a caricature that plays to the expectations and tastes of tourist consumers.

Staged and dressed like Plains Indian movie characters and depicted on objects that were reproduced in multiples and distributed across a broad geographical area, Ho-Chunk featured in postcards from Wisconsin Dells during this time are metaphorically severed from their unique traditions and self-ascribed identities. The understandings of Native American identities that this commerce generated among Euro-Americans were often at odds with the actual, daily lives of individuals and communities. A sample of images taken by one of America's first Kiowa photographers, Horace Poolaw, serves

9 Author notes from research conducted at the National Anthropological Archives while on a visiting scholars fellowship with the NMAI, 12 Nov.–14 Dec. 2012.

to illustrate this point. Hadely Jerman has framed Poolaw's work within film studies, arguing that his subjects were 'acting for the camera'. She relates images of Poolaw's family members to two early motion pictures filmed on the Southern Plains, *The Daughter of Dawn* (1920) and *Old Texas* (1916). Jerman finds that although Poolaw's portraits reference and subtly challenge existing filmic modes of depicting indigenous characters, other photographs in his collection suggest the aspiring photographer found the imagery of the film set aesthetically compelling (2011, pp. 105–23). As an artist, Poolaw was always influenced by movie production, engaging with performance and film as integral to his work. His brother and sister-in-law, celebrated in a *Mountain View Times* article of 1928 as destined for the silver screen, were vaudeville stars who played in leading East Coast theatres. Bruce Poolaw and his wife Lucy 'Watawasso' Nicola are significant, not only because Horace Poolaw documented part of their lives but also because their careers profoundly affected his work. Linda Poolaw, Horace's daughter, credits their self-conscious poses in her father's portraits to his meeting with Watawasso in the mid-1920s; this influence continued throughout his photographic career (*ibid.*, p. 107).

Poolaw also printed some of his photographs on postcard stock to sell at local fairs in the early to mid-20th century. Laura Smith argues that he composed his images and selected subject matter that fitted with conventional visual assumptions and expectations of Indian identity so that the postcards would appeal to the greatest number of consumers. She also contends that Poolaw was politically engaged in contemporaneous regional and national indigenous efforts to preserve their cultural histories and to correct inaccuracies and negative views (2011, pp. 125–46). Furthermore, he may have been negotiating the social salience of postcards through the performances of making and distributing the cards to a broader mass network. In control of the contrivance and distribution of his own photographs and their subjects, Poolaw is effectively honouring his people, disseminating images of them looking directly at the viewer with peace medallions displayed around their necks, blankets across their laps and feather fans in their hands.

Similar honorific images were in circulation in Wisconsin Dells after the 1940s as a postcard of John Bearskin (Ho-Chunk) demonstrates. Not caricaturised as a Plains Indian, Bearskin poses while seated for a distinguished, three-quarter-view portrait wearing a roach (a traditional Ho-Chunk headdress) and traditional-style beadwork, with a feather fan in his hand. Further research might reveal what Bearskin felt about how his portrait was disseminated. The Bennett studio made the image, but Curt Teich & Company – a printing business in operation from 1898–1978, famous for its bold style and vividly lettered 'Greetings From' postcards – printed the card.

No longer documentary in appearance, postcards of Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin Dells, created between 1955–85, were visually spectacular and theatrical. The subjects evoked Plains Indian characters in Hollywood films in bearing, accoutrements and costumes.<sup>10</sup> Posed looking away from the photographer and image viewer, the individuals' movements suggest an event, or an action, causing the viewer to wonder what is happening. The postcard 'Brave on the War Path' (c. 1950s) depicts Roger Little Eagle Tallmadge (Sioux), who, according to Hoelscher, is role-playing a staged image of his own design.<sup>11</sup> He is not named on the card; rather, he gives himself the title, 'Brave'. He is depicted in profile, wearing a full feather bonnet with ermine trailers, beaded necklaces, fringe leggings, silver arm cuffs and beaded moccasins. Shirtless, he rests his left elbow on his bent left knee, with the right leg extended behind him, as if about to start a race. Two large rings are displayed on his left hand, which is tilted toward the viewer. In his right hand, he holds a shield and spear. Paint on his face draws the viewer's attention to his eyes, which pierce a distant horizon. In this example, Tallmadge's image is overtly dramatised by accessories and captioning: 'On the War Path'. His wife, Bernadine Miner (Ho-Chunk), recalled that he used to joke about 'playing the part of postcard Indians' (Hoelscher, 2008, p. 69). Through such dramatically engaging postcards, Ho-Chunk actively marketed performative images that would appeal to the sensibilities of tourists. Hence, there is little doubt that those photographed exercised agency in choosing how they would adapt to a cash economy, strategically and often humorously producing images of themselves as viable economic commodities.

Capitalising on mainstream society's romantic fascination with the idea of 'primitive tribes', the Ho-Chunk Nation responded to 19th- and 20th-century socio-economic challenges. In Wisconsin Dells, there continued to be a ready audience for individuals willing to act out clichéd versions of tribal traditions. Riverboat guides, in particular, made money in this way. At the height of the 'American Indian as tour guide' phenomenon, which occurred

- 10 Although outside the scope of this chapter, the gendering of the images should be noted. Albers and James (1985) note a dramatic increase in the use of the Plains Indian warbonnet in the Great Lakes region in postcard images of Ojibwe men during the 1940s. A dramatic change in depictions of Indian females from this region also occurred, generally conforming with popular images of Native women in kitsch art and Hollywood movies. In general, I have noted a decline over the years of such images. When women appear, it is often with one man and/or children, reinforcing a persistent heteronormative ideology for a tourist audience. For further discussion of trends in representations of Native women in American culture up to the 1970s see Green (1975).
- 11 Roger Little Eagle Tallmadge, who was born into a Minnesota Sioux family, married a Ho-Chunk woman, Bernadine Miner. Over the years, he became a spokesman for Ho-Chunk concerns. Their children remained active in the tourist industry in Wisconsin Dells. See Hoelscher (2008, pp. 68–9).





Figure 6.3. 'A Winnebago Brave, Dells of the Wisconsin River'. Postcard c. 1929–30. Wisconsin State Historical Society Collection.

during the 1970s in the lower Dells region, many postcards were made of each guide wearing traditional regalia or ribbon shirts, which were sold to tourists for profit (Tallmadge, 2010). Set apart from their non-Indian counterparts, Ho-Chunk tour guides, often in traditional garb, were required to inform passengers of their Native heritage. The demand for Ho-Chunk tour guides has since faded and today tourists are unlikely to be able to tell the difference between a Native and a non-Native guide.

Tourists tipped well in exchange for a staged picture postcard of subjects such as Randy Little Eagle (Ho-Chunk) posing on the bow of the 'Chippewa', an all-steel riverboat vessel with the capacity to hold 150 passengers. Made in the 1970s, the postcard depicts the young boat guide dressed in a ribbon shirt as an assertion and performance of his identity. He utilised the image, autographed across the reverse with his name and a line drawing of an eagle, to distribute to tourists who may have prized this souvenir because it recorded their encounter with a 'real Indian'. The postcard, evidence of their experience, remains a desirable object because it contains the memory. Judith Hamera's discussion of Navajo folk art illuminates the performative nature of the commodity here. She states that the acquirement of objects in commodity situations is suffused with performance (2006, pp. 58–9). The object/image, the postcard of Randy Little Eagle, is synonymous with a story, relatable to an action and event situated within a specific moment in time.

## Conclusion

Although touristic schemes marketing Native American material culture still persist in the Dells, postcard images of Ho-Chunk dancers and performers are now increasingly rare, replaced by scenic photographs of the river and cartoon drawings of cows and cheese. The Indian Camp and the Stand Rock Indian Ceremonial are no longer active. The Ho-Chunk continue to assert their presence in the area, but individuals no longer rely on spectacular displays of dance or dramatically composed images for financial support. Ho-Chunk gaming opened in Wisconsin Dells in the 1990s and continues as a successful tourist-targeted business, freeing Ho-Chunk from exhibiting themselves as curiosities. Their presence as rightful occupants of the area is evident in the architectural features and placement of the large casino and hotel. Designed to be attractive to tourists and to the local community, the building is surrounded by sculpted rock formations that mirror the local landscape and the interior is decorated with Ho-Chunk traditional designs and material culture.

Successful tourist economies rely heavily on the creation and dissemination of fantasy. While photographs are often understood as visually indicating truths, these truths are layered within performances of identity that can

confuse a viewer's understanding of a people's everyday experiences. A large proportion of the photographic postcards created for public consumption in Wisconsin Dells do not portray Native American lives as they were lived when the pictures were made. Instead, photographs were intentionally staged in order to project images constructed to satiate romantic, nostalgic desires held in the imaginations of visitors to the area. Performance is central to the postcard commodity from the initial staging of the image, through its distribution from a sender/consumer to a recipient, and in its various exposures to viewers over its lifetime. Each of the images discussed here has circulated in and out of archival collections of various kinds, from commodity to singularity and back. This movement encompasses layers of meaning that shift the object from a quintessential photographic image of the 'other' to a marker of individual and collective memories.

Marketing for the tourist industry encouraged new dimensions in gesture and pose in the depictions of Native American people on postcards; with the rising popularity of film, more dynamic poses and dramatic scenarios replaced static documentary images. Taking ownership of their own images through reappropriation of cinematic stereotypes for use as commodities brought Native Americans financial benefits through tourism. The postcard Indian indexed a stage on which performative aesthetics found in other forms of indigenous art could be adjusted to the changing economic environments engendered by colonialism. Wisconsin Dells postcards of Ho-Chunk performances evidence these adjustments and continuities.

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### **Filmography**

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