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“JOURNEY’S END”: NATIVE AMERICANS AND RELOCATION IN “STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION”

ABSTRACT

The main objective of the research is to use “Journey’s End”, the 1994 *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode as an example of the 1990s American text that addresses the issue of Native Americans, their problems, history and needs. The quoted episode tries to address those questions in a respectful way; however, it tends to exchange one stereotype of Native American for another, doing very little justice to North American Indians. Additionally, “Journey’s End” will be compared to other contemporary texts that focused on similar themes, with a discussion on the influence of these texts on modern American society and its approach to its own history and to Native Americans in general.

Key words

The United States of America, American history, American culture, North American Indians, relocation, Star Trek

Introduction

Star Trek: The Next Generation was launched in 1987 by Paramount in response to the great success of the *Star Trek: The Original Series*. 1960s' TV show with such lovable characters as Spock, Cpt. Kirk, "Bones" McCoy and others was still on air as reruns on cable television, and had been successfully "beamed up" into cinemas as four movies. Paramount executives believed that *Star Trek* was the studio's crown jewel and that another show would be a hit in syndication just like the original was (Nemecek, 2003, pp. 13–15). Even with some backlash at the start of its run, *The Next Generation*, or *TNG* for short, proved to be even more successful than its 1966 counterpart as it ran for 7 seasons, spawning two spin-off series, four further movies and numerous video games, books, comics, as well as an immense volume of fan-created media (Nemecek, 2003, p. 61).

Set in the second half of the 24th century, *TNG* is a story of the USS starship NCC 1701-D, the *Enterprise*, and its diverse crew of humans, aliens and androids. The primary mission of Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) is to explore the outer space in search of new planets and space anomalies as well as to establish contact with new civilizations. Yet, because of Picard's diplomatic talent and the *Enterprise*'s strategic importance, the crew often finds itself in scenarios of political concern. Most of such missions involve border conflicts with the Federation's enemies Romulans, rare contacts with a mysterious hive-mind known simply as the Borg, or helping the Federation's allies, such as the cult-classic Klingons.

A science fiction series that became a massive hit, *TNG* tended to touch from time to time upon more serious themes and talk about social, political or environmental issues. For instance Season 5 episode "The Outcast" is a story about relation between gender and individual's role in society (Block, Erdmann & Moore, 2012) while "I, Borg" from the same year explores the notion of identity in a totalitarian regime (Block, Erdmann & Moore, 2012). Season 6's "Relics" on the other hand is an episode about aging and human desire to feel relevant and useful despite one's age (Block, Erdmann & Moore, 2012). This paper focuses on one of those episodes, "Journey's End" (1994), episode 20 of the seventh and last season of the show (Block Erdmann & Moore, 2012). In "Journey's End" the main cast encounters a colony of Native Americans that decided to leave Earth and settle in space. Unfortunately, according to the peace treaty between

the Federation that Earth is part of, and the Cardassian Union, the Natives' planet will be given to Cardassians and its colonizers have to be resettled – a dark parallel to the United States' politics toward Natives (Nemecek, 2003).

The main research problem of this paper are questions how "Journey's End" portrays Native Americans and what this portrayal says about the creators' attitude towards them. Even if *TNG* producers' desire to address the question as controversial and difficult for Americans as their grim past of killing and resettling Native Americans is admirable, it has to be said that "Journey's End's" delivery is very awkward, and may feel tactless and wrong. The stereotype of a Native as a dangerous savage was rejected at the cost of embracing different tropes such as the perception of Native Americans as "noble savages", "wise shamans" and people focusing on the spiritual side of life and honor while eschewing other aspects of existence. What is more, "Journey's End" attempts to shift the blame for crimes against American autochthonic peoples to nations other than Americans, mostly Spaniards and French. An additional aspect of this research is a comparison of this *TNG* episode to other contemporary media representing Native Americans and an attempt to analyze the relation between those sources and modern American attitude toward indigenous peoples.

To facilitate the research, a set of detailed questions was developed. The questions that have to be answered are: What is the plot of "Journey's End"? What is the episode's portrayal of the main cast? What is the portrayal of Native Americans in the episode? What does it say about White Man's relations with Native Americans? What kind of tropes typical for texts about Native Americans does "Journey's End" use? How do other 1990s American texts present indigenous peoples? How has it shaped modern America? To find answers to these questions, an analysis of "Journey's End" and some additional texts will be made. The first section of this paper will be a summary of the episode's plot. Section two will point out the troubling contents of the plot and focus on the analysis of themes of "Journey's End", while section three will set the episode in the context of other 1990s texts focusing on the Native Americans. Section four will provide a conclusion of the research as well as some thoughts on the impact of the analyzed texts on today's approach to indigenous peoples in the United States.

"Journey's End": the plot

The episode starts with the return of Wesley Crusher, played by Wil Weaton, to the board of USS Enterprise. He is a Starfleet Academy Cadet and a son of Chief Medical Officer Beverly Crusher. His presence in this episode can be considered

a side story, yet later his story becomes relevant for the main plot. Wes is supposed to enjoy his vacation among family and friends, but his mother notices that there is something off about the teenager and initially suspects some trouble at school.

After that, the story shifts to Captain Picard. He is supposed to meet with his superior, Admiral Nechayev, and receive a new mission. The mission briefing serves as an exposition: after a long conflict, the Federation and the Cardassian Union are going to sign a peace treaty and delineate a new border between their spaces. The problem is that the new division will result in an exchange of some territories between the two powers and the relocation of local settlements will be necessary. Picard is aware that those people can be unwilling to move out. His mission is to evacuate the colony on the planet Dorvan V, the home of a group of Pueblo people, Native Americans that left South-Western North America two centuries earlier. Stewart's character is perfectly aware of historical and moral connotations of this situation (and so is Nechayev), yet still he has to convince or force the Natives to resettle. Resettlement takes the shape of a necessary evil. Soon Picard meets with the colony leader Anthwara and its council.

The talks are carried in two sessions. The first, on Dorvan V, does not go well. Picard offers Puebloans alternatives to their planet – several habitable worlds located nearby on the Federation's side of the border. Anthwara refuses, citing spiritual reasons. He and his fellow councilmen believe that Dorvan V is their home and do not want to "spend another 200 years on looking for something they already have". Phase two of talks takes place on board of the *Enterprise*, where both sides meet at the banquet. Picard is sure that relocation should be done for the sake of greater good, i.e. the peace with Cardassians. Anthwara's argument at this time is that his people have sacrificed too much, as they had been slain by White Man and had left the Earth. Still, both leaders are respectful and friendly to each other.

Wesley appears at the party as well. He is nervous and rude to other crewmen, due to his grades deteriorating; he also feels that he does not fit the Starfleet. He is approached by a man named Lakanta, presumably the Dorvan colony's shaman or priest. Lakanta claims that thanks to his visions, he has been aware of Wesley's problem for two years. The young man comes to the surface of Dorvan V to learn from the shaman and experience his own visions. He has a vision of his father, a deceased Starfleet Officer, who tells him to find his own way outside the Starfleet if he is not happy within it.

In the meantime, Picard and Anthwara are unable to reach an agreement. Though unwilling to do it, the captain warns the Puebloans that his orders are

to remove people by force if they will not agree to resettlement. The old leader reveals then what he found out about Picard's ancestor named Javier Maribona-Picard, a Spanish conquistador from the late 1600s who took part in mass killing of Native Americans who were defending themselves against European aggressors. Anthwara believes that Picard came to Dorvan V to wash off the blood staining his family's hands. This information shakes Picard deeply. His situation is complicated further by a Cardassian takeover force appearing on the planet as the aliens threaten the safety of Native Americans and make solving the situation more urgent (Bergman & Roddenberry, 1987–1994).

The episode then focuses on Picard's dilemma and his personal feelings about the case. He tries to reason with the Starfleet Headquarters, but even with support from Nechayev, he can do nothing. He is supposed to use force against the colonists. Also, even if he claims to not believe in his responsibility for his ancestor's sins, Picard's behavior seems to be shaped by them. He somehow feels responsible and does not want to repeat the actions of the Spanish Picard. Nevertheless, Picard sends his men to Dorvan V to start relocation.

Soon, Wesley finds out about that. His friendship with Lakanta has changed him and he warns Puebloans, jeopardizing the *Enterprise*'s mission. During a talk with Picard he reveals that he is resigning from the Academy. What is more, the teenager decides to leave the ship and stay with the Natives on the planet. He goes there with his mother's blessing just to discover that tensions between the Pueblo people, Picard's crew and the Cardassians have escalated into open violence. Two Cardassian officers have been taken hostage by Native Americans. Picard advises the Cardassian commander just to teleport the hostages to his ship, but the aggressive alien wants to send down some troops to ultimately reclaim the planet. In response, Picard threatens him and moves in to protect the Puebloans. While the commanders argue, shooting starts on Dorvan V, only to be stopped by Wesley himself, who appears to have the ability to control time. In the best *deus ex machina* tradition, it is revealed that Lakanta is in fact the Traveler, a recurring character possessing similar powers to control time and space. Long ago he had chosen Wesley as his apprentice and now he came in a shaman's disguise to take the boy for training. In the meantime, the Cardassians decide to peacefully retreat, avoiding the war over the planet.

At the end of the episode, the conflict over resettlement is also resolved. Anthwara decides that he and his people will stay on Dorvan V, becoming Cardassian citizens. It turns out that the Cardassians accept that kind of agreement and the *Enterprise* is ready to leave the star system. Picard manages to avoid repeating

his ancestor's mistakes, and Wesley starts his new life among the Puebloans on a remote planet (Bergman & Roddenberry, 1987–1994).

Themes and reception

“Journey’s End” is considered one of the worst *TNG* episodes in its seven-year-long run. Most of the criticism, such as Screen Rant’s ranking of best and worst *TNG* episodes, focuses on the deliverance of Wesley’s plot and its ending on the scale of the whole series. *Star Trek* fans all around the Internet also note the heavy-handed moral lesson on colonialism and lack of awareness in the portrayal of Native Americans (Walter, 2019).

This criticism is understandable. As some of fans on Reddit point out, using in the episode the word “Indian” feels wrong because it is the pre-2000s way of addressing Native Americans (*TNG Journey’s End*, 2021). In fact, according to Larry Nemecek’s *The Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion*, the creators originally wanted to use the Hopi tribe’s name, history and culture, but when approached, the Hopi refused, afraid of misrepresentation (Nemecek, 2003). The effect is the word “Indians” being dropped all around. The more respectful terms “Puebloans” or “Pueblo people” are used in discussions on the episode but do not appear in “Journey’s End” (Pueblo people, n.d.). As a result, the indigenous people in the episode do not represent any specific culture and have no specific name. The tribe is generic, rather a sad testimony to the creators’ lack of imagination.

This lack of fleshing out and grounding of Puebloans leads to creating and presenting a rather unreal image of Native American in general. As stated above, “Journey’s End” completely rejects the image of Native Americans as rivals to White Men, an obstacle, or even a force of nature, which was codified by Frederick Jackson Turner in his influential 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”. Turner wrote that one can trade with the Natives, the Natives occupy land, yet they are savage and inhuman (Czepil & Turner, 2014). “The Next Generation” rejects that idea, but makes Puebloans inhuman in a different way. As Keith R.A. DeCandido points out in his review of the episode, both Lakanta (besides being an actual alien in disguise) and Anthwara represent the tropes of “Wise Natives” or “Magical Native Americans” (DeCandido, 2019). A “Magical Native” is simply a person who possesses some kind of magical or paranormal abilities because of their ethnicity. In the case of Native Americans, the sources of their power are great spirits, or a bond with nature that White Man has lost or never had.

As Jessica Mehta explains in her paper "White 'Alliah': The Creation & Perpetuation of the 'Wise Indian' Trope", the "Wise Native American" figure is "an under-appreciated yet somehow enlightened 'brown person' with the sole purpose of helping the white messiah on their journey." (Mehta, 2020). One can assume that the idea of helping a white messiah can be stretched onto the "Magical Native". If so, the assumption that Anthwara and Lakanta are supposed to be guides for "White Saviors", Jean-Luc Picard and Wesley Crusher respectively, is correct. But are they "White Saviors"? Picard's actions in the final act of the episode, taking Puebloans under the *Enterprise*'s protection and fighting with ancestral guilt make him that kind of character. Yet what is more suitable is a name that Mehda also uses, the "White Alliah", a blend of "White Messiah" and "ally", someone who guides and saves, but is more aware of his and Natives' place in the world. However, Jean-Luc Picard lacks the darker side of this concept, – demanding gratitude for actions, which is related to white supremacy (Mehta, 2020). On the other hand, the *TV Tropes* website describes the trope of "Mighty Whitey"; a white person who lives among Natives for some time and eventually bests them in any field. To some degree Wesley befriending Lakanta, experiencing visions and becoming a time-controlling demigod fits into this concept.

It is clear that no one working on "Journey's End" desired this kind of effect. On the contrary, the show wanted to present Native Americans as victims of colonial politics of great powers and as good and valuable people. Yet by focusing on the concepts of "native wisdom" and "native magic", without making the Pueblo people of the episode a representation of any specific tribe, they created a very distant, fairylike, almost unearthly image of Native Americans, who seem to be made up fantasy characters, not flesh and blood people. Let us look at Anthwara's argumentation. In almost all of his scenes, the old chief claims that his people are spiritually bonded to Dorvan V, and Picard is bound by his ancestor's sins – a kind of argumentation that would hardly be successful in political negotiations. What is more, it has very little to do with real-life political views and actions of the indigenous peoples of North America, who believe in the bond between nature and a human being, but for them it is just a path to environmental activism. For instance, the Canadian "Idle No More" movement is a form of protest against the actions of the government and businesses that can harm the natural environment and may cut indigenous people's rights (Idle No More, 2019). In fact, the rejected idea for "Journey's End" to make Natives' protesting against weather-control technology would be more accurate (Nemecek, 2003). In that scenario Anthwara would be a leader who believes that nature should not be controlled by anyone and that technology may be harmful to planets.

Another questionable element of “Journey’s End” is at the issue of the perpetrators of genocides on Native Americans. The character who fights with this grim aspect of both Americas’ history is Jean-Luc Picard. Even though Patrick Stewart is British, it has been established multiple times in the course of the show that Picard is French. Most famously, in Season 4 Episode 2, Picard visits his brother’s family living in an existing village La Barre in Eastern France (Family, n.d.). In “Journey’s End” he states that he is able to track down his ancestors to the time of Charles the Great. It seems unlikely that he would have overlooked Javier Maribona-Picard in his lineage; if so, this would mean that the Picard family distant Spanish relations, not direct ancestors – considering the Spanish naming pattern, “Maribona” would be paternal surname, passed down to the descendants, and “Picard” the mother’s maiden name (Javier Maribona-Picard, n.d.). Both France and Spain have a history of exploitation, slave trade and genocide acts against indigenous peoples, but “Journey’s End” does not point out that so do the United States. It is hard to examine whether it was intentional or not, but the aspect of guilt for crimes against Native Americans and the burden of regret for colonialism is left to Picard solely. It is more interesting in the context of the fact that Picard’s First Officer, Commander William Riker, who appears in the episode, was not only born in Alaska, but he also is a descendant of an American Civil War Union Soldier. Even if not stated in any episode of *TNG* or any other *Star Trek*-related media, Riker’s forebears may have taken part in resettlement of Natives or even in some genocide acts during the Wild West era (William T. Riker, n.d.). However, “Journey’s End” does not attempt to deal with America’s darker past, even if putting Riker in Picard’s place would make a more emotional and better episode. Probably, this option was never considered at the point of script writing, and even if so, it would have been rejected as too uncomfortable for viewers and creators.

American indigenous peoples in the context of the 1990s culture and today

The last decade of the 20th century can be seen as attempting a sort of revision of the image of Native American in American culture in general. The negative portrayal of a violent savage was rejected in favor of the idea of “Noble savage” or “Magical native” in revisionist westerns or anti-westerns (Newman, 1990) – movies that were critical of the frontier myth and rejected a clear division between good and evil, or between civilization and nature. The marking of that trend is the 1990 blockbuster *Dances with Wolves*, starring and directed by Kevin

Costner. It is a story of a Union Army officer John Dunbar sent to the American frontier after the American Civil War. The movie plot focuses on Dunbar's relations with the Lakota tribe living near his settlement (Castillo, 1991).

Costner's character comes to the West because he believes when white men settle in, it will be lost forever. Sent by his superior to the deserted fort on Colorado plains, Dunbar tries to restock it and repair as much as he can, waiting for reinforcements. When he encounters the Lakotas, he decides to open a dialog instead of starting a lone war against a whole native village. He succeeds befriending Lakotas with the help of Stands with a Fist, a white woman raised among Natives who is their translator. The officer grows fond of her and the Lakota culture. He learns their language, takes part in buffalo hunting and even defends the village from an attack by their enemies, the Pawnee tribe. The crucial moment of the film is Dunbar getting a new name, Dances with Wolves, and permission from the tribesmen to marry Stands with a Fist. Yet, one day Dunbar arrives at his camp and discovers numerous Union Soldiers in it. The reinforcement has come, and the soldiers capture him as a traitor in Lakota's clothes. Charged with desertion, Dunbar is carried away by his own men. The convoy is attacked and defeated by Lakota warriors, who free Dunbar and take him with them. However, he and Stands with a Fist decide to leave the natives not to endanger them. It is suggested that American soldiers will not be able to find neither the Lakota tribe nor Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist. The movie ends with a note that in the following years Natives and their culture was eventually destroyed (Wilson & Costner, 1990).

Dances with Wolves is not the first of cynical and realistic westerns. It is not a perfect depiction of Natives and Americans either. Kevin Costner plays a typical White savior, and his Lakota allies seem to be "Noble savages" and "Wise Indians". Also, as Edward Castillo pointed out in his 1991 review of the movie, Pawnees are depicted as stereotypical "Bad Indians" (Castillo, 1991). Still, *Dances with Wolves* was a huge box office hit, and can be considered as a film that influenced the portrayal of Native Americans in general. Though it was not perfectly historically accurate (e.g. the Lakotas were a more aggressive tribe than the Pawnees), it was praised for realism and ethnically appropriate casting. To some degree, Costner's movie is similar to "Journey's End". Both try to portrait Native Americans as real people, heroes of their own stories. Both seem to fail, yet *Dances with Wolves* had a more favorable reception as a good movie, while "Journey's End" is a poor episode of a good TV Show.

Still, *Dances with Wolves* has not received a fraction of criticism directed against Disney's *Pocahontas*. Walt Disney Studios' productions have a very long

history of racist depictions of specific nationalities and minorities. For instance, during World War II Donald Duck fought grotesque Japanese and was bullied by fat and ugly Nazi Germans in “Commando Duck” and “Der Fuhrer’s Face” respectively (Donald, 2017). Also, 1953 *Peter Pan* is criticized for racist depictions of Native Americans (Laskow, 2014). This is why 1995 *Pocahontas* was supposed to be a film that would put a stop to associating Disney with that kind of portrayals of indigenous peoples.

The film heavily modifies the actual events related to the establishing Jamestown in Virginia and the relations of this English colony with the Powhatan Federation. Instead of being a story of a fort on the brink of death of famine, *Pocahontas* is mostly a romance between the eponymous character and one of the colonists, John Smith. Together, the lovers intend to use the “power of great spirits” to make peace between the Powhatan people and the English settlers. The latter are obsessed with finding gold that made Spaniards rich in South America and intend to kill the Powhatans in order to acquire it. When this leads to the killing of one of Powhatan warriors by a white man, John Smith takes the blame. John is supposed to be executed by Natives, while the English prepare to attack. The situation is saved by Pocahontas, who convinces both sides to talk. The colonists’ leader Ratcliffe decides to shoot the Powhatan chief, yet it is John Smith who takes the bullet. He survives, but has to leave for England to heal, while Ratcliffe is arrested by the colonists and also taken to homeland to be judged. Pocahontas decides to stay with her people as their princess (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995).

Back in time, *Pocahontas* was considered “the sexiest Disney princess”. Making her character more attractive, with thin waist, full lips, and significantly realistic proportions was the animators’ goal as they felt that the character based on the historical figure of Matoaka Pocahontas would need to be more realistic, so they aimed to make her more physically attractive than previous Disney princesses (Bradley, 1995). In the context of the paper, this means introducing yet another archetype of Native Americans into American culture. “Sexy Pocahontas” or “Pocahottie” is an echo of an old stereotype dated to the 19th Century that Native American women are more dissolute and sexually-accessible than any other women. The grim side of this concept is the fact that, as journalist Lindsey Gilpin points out, Native women are more likely to be sexually assaulted than White women. According to a 2016 US Department of Justice’s report, over 56 percent of Native American women have experienced some kind of sexual or physical violence and psychological aggression (Gilpin, 2016). It is not *Pocahontas*’ fault, but the Disney character became a face of the problem, along with

Halloween costume manufacturers who sell stereotypical Native American costumes labeled as "Sexy Pocahontas" or "Indian Princess" (Martinez, 2018).

Along this dark notion, *Pocahontas* extensively draws upon the stereotype of a "Magical and wise Native", who Pocahontas represents with her ability to talk to a willow tree and her special, spiritual bond with other plants and animals. Just like "Journey's End", the film can be considered a poorly executed attempt at dealing with grim parts of America's history, using the 1600s' Englishmen instead of the 1800s' Americans.

Conclusions

What *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Dances with Wolves* and *Pocahontas* have in common is good intentions motivating the creators of all three texts. *Star Trek* wanted to comment on an actual problem, Costner's movie tried to revise and reshape the figure of a Native American in culture, and Disney's animated picture was supposed to clearly distance the company from its past disrespectful portrayals of minorities. What all three have also in common is that they lack self-awareness and to some degree show ignorance in presenting indigenous peoples; in order to reject stereotypes of the past, they embrace new ones that still dehumanize indigenous characters in the story. They are merely changed from wild savages into magic demigods with nature oriented superpowers. In case of "Pocahontas", it also unintentionally introduces one of the most harmful stereotypes in general.

Also, in the case of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, blaming Europeans has to be highlighted. Naturally, as both "Journey's End" and *Pocahontas* show, the English, the Spanish, the French and many other nations pursued colonial politics, but *Star Trek* decides not to use its science-fiction perspective to discuss the United States' role in Native Americans' genocide. Instead, no mention is made of the relation of one of the show's main characters with American history, and the blame is put solely on the Frenchman Picard and his Spanish ancestor.

Yet, even if harmful or wrong, these texts after more or less 30 years from their premiere may lead their viewers to some kind of reflection. After all, the majority of criticism that "Journey's End" or *Dances with Wolves* have received, comes from 21st-century opinions and reviews by people who are aware of the importance of realistic depictions of Natives in culture. The same people are willing to work towards changing inaccurate or hurtful stereotypes. Today, we observe how people's self-awareness leads to rejecting those kinds of representation. "Sexy Pocahontas" costumes are openly branded as racist (Martinez, 2018). Land

O Lakes Butter that used a stereotypical Native American girl on its packaging has dropped that label (Hauser, 2020). Washington Redskins American football team name was renamed Washington Commanders in 2022 (Shook, 2022).

There is also a significant shift in culture in general. Though *Star Trek* continued portraying Natives as highly spiritual people such as *Star Trek: Voyager*'s Commander Chakotay, Disney seemed to become more aware of cultural and racial notions in their 2002 movie *Lilo and Stitch*, focusing on the natives of the Hawaii Islands. And today's television seems to be aware of what the 1990s TV and cinema failed to notice. The 2021 Peacock series *Rutherford Falls* handles the notion of relations between Native Americans and White Men back at the time of frontier conquest and today (Kang, 2021). *Reservation Dogs*, a 2021 TV series produced by Natives tells the story of young people growing up in an Oklahoma reservation.

The ways in which contemporary culture is aware of harm that was done to Indigenous Peoples all over the world can be a subject of many extensive research projects. Yet one can also ask, whether all these changes really matter if the United States has not changed significantly over the last 30 years in how it treats Native Americans. One can even discuss whether there have been any real changes in the situation of African Americans, who despite growing cultural representation still have to deal with racism inbuilt in the political system. An interesting comparison would also be that of American and Canadian culture; the latter is more favorable towards the First Nations' artists and creators. Still, much more needs to be done to present Native Americans in the way they really are, not in the way some others imagine them.

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