Settler Colonialism in U.S. Popular Media as Influencing Perceptions of Material Culture and Museum Ethics

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ABSTRACT

The everyday person living in the United States does not first encounter ethics of material culture and collecting solely by visiting a museum. This MA Thesis seeks to look at how action-adventure "treasure-hunting" media introduces people to fields such as archaeology, anthropology, and museum studies through entertainment media. Frameworks of settler colonialism are used to understand the intentionality behind and subsequent impact of these films in a US-based context. Media effects theories of cultivation, framing, and agenda setting are also applied to understand how messages are facilitated through media such as the *Indiana Jones (1981-2024)*, *National Treasure (2004-2023)*, and "Outer Banks" (2020-) franchises. The core aim for future thought and research is to understand how museums and filmmakers alike may more ethically and equitably represent people and material culture.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In the United States, the allure of museums is supported by action-adventure "treasure-hunting" media, like the *Indiana Jones (1981-2024), National Treasure (2004-2023),* and "Outer Banks" (2020-) franchises. Settler colonial ideologies, which seek to legitimize white settlers' relationship to the land in the United States, are present in the production and consumption of this media. Communication-based media effects theories, which explain how media messages influence an audience's point of view, support that there is a relationship between action-adventure "treasure-hunting" media and museums on audience outlook.

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INTRODUCTION

I have enjoyed quite a few *Indiana Jones* movies (although some more than others) and other similar films and TV shows over the years. No part of this discussion is to imply that popular media which take us on adventures and quests for treasure are inherently bad, and no one should watch them. My first encounter with such media was going through my dad's DVD drawer in the basement of our West Virginia home as a kid. I found the quest for knowledge featured exciting and entertaining. Films like *Indiana Jones, National Treasure, Night at the Museum*, and more have always been options for me to select and consume. I must admit that my drive towards studying museums and material culture in the first place probably originates in such media. I also spent my late childhood and teenage years growing up in Northern Virginia, a relative stone's throw away from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. My grandmother was a children's book editor for National Geographic, so I had many sources to choose from when I had questions about people, places, or things. What I have realized though, reflecting back, was that I was much more preoccupied with the *what* than the *how.* I rarely wondered *how* the Hope Diamond became the star of my field trip to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History; I just wanted to know *what* it was. I do not mean to discount studying the *what*, but instead imply that the conversation can and should be broader, even for "everyday" folks visiting museum institutions around the world.

In the United States, film and television have become a large part of the broader cultural landscape. Mass entertainment media is both reflective and shaping. Filmmakers, television executives, etc. create media that is reflective of the current cultural context while also shaping it through the representations of society and life they include. Popular media also provides a sense

of commonality and collectivity. Fandoms, cosplay, conventions, and trending social media topics are evidence.

The impact of action-adventure treasure-hunting media on the U.S. public's perceptions of museums deserves more consideration. The allure of the traditional, colonial museum in the United States is supported by tales of plundering, looting, and grave robbing. The penchant for these narratives lies in the colonial past of the United States. As a settler colonial nation, U.S. media often implements narratives which legitimize sovereignty. A key subgenre of this work happens in action-adventure treasure-hunting films which often feature an explorer who hails from a settler colonial nation who then quests for an object of material culture either at home or abroad to establish cultural heritage in U.S. museums.

While these films and television shows are for entertainment purposes, they impact how museumgoers interact with material culture and museum ethics. Cultivation theory, a popular media effects theory, "predicts and explains the long-term formation and shaping of perceptions, understandings, and beliefs about the world as a result of consumption of media messages."[1] If material culture is depicted as rightfully gained through variable degrees of theft in treasure hunting films, museum attendees may be less likely to interrogate the ethics of museum spaces. It is made to seem natural and likely that items from around the world are at home and protected in U.S. museums.

Such media franchises like *Indiana Jones, National Treasure,* and *Outer Banks* serve as examples of such treasure hunting media. In commonality, they share key characteristics of legitimizing United States nationhood, engaging in fetishization through material culture, featuring a morally unsound antagonist, starring an "American" hero, and incorporating a strong

[1] Richard West and Lynn Turner, *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2018), 405.

troupe of secondary characters. The "American" hero, in this case American because of his United States citizenship, follows an epic hero archetype and embodies qualities integral to the "American dream."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Settler colonialism, settler colonialism and media, and media affects theories are essential to understanding the following analysis of treasure hunting media and public perceptions of museum ethics.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism provides a lens with which to view the implications and ramifications present in films about "exploration" and "treasure" hunting. Most literature characterizes settler colonialism not as “past” or “finished.” While postmodernism and postcolonialism seem to be ever circulating, settler colonialism is a lasting structure.

The colonial period typically references European invasions and conquests happening all over the world beginning in the 1600s. Nations sought to expand their reach and power by taking control of other nations by force. For many, British colonization in India, Australia, and the eastern United States will first come to mind. Nancy Shoemaker identifies specific forms of colonialism including: settler, planter, extractive, trade, transport, imperial power, not-in-my-backyard, legal, rogue, missionary, romantic, and postcolonial.[2] Colonialism's long-standing effects increase its complexity and forms. Certain forms of colonialism continue to persist, even if there is no longer a foreign government governing and controlling most facets of life.

Patrick Wolfe’s 2006 “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” is often cited for its assertion, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.” [3]

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[2] Nancy Shoemaker, “A Typology of Colonialism,” *Perspectives on History*. October 1, 2015, https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/october-2015/a-typology-of-colonialism.

[3] Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006), 388.

Settler colonialism is therefore not an encounter or contact. As a structure, it persists and influences many aspects of life. Wolfe orients his understanding of settler colonialism around an "elimination of the native." By this, he argues that the logic of settler colonialism relies on not totally erasing but dominating Indigenous presence. The drive is to "destroy to replace."[4] The land is a commodity which can be used by the settler colonists once dispossessed. In settler colonial societies, "the logic of elimination marks a return whereby the native repressed continues to structure settler-colonial society."[5] These societies operate on a partially negative definition of what they are not. They use the land in a different way and a different capacity. Their settlement is a structure because it permeates most aspects of life. Later in Wolfe's argument, he states that settler colonialism is an indicator of genocide because of its logic of elimination. The logic of elimination, not genocide, is the defining characteristic of settler colonialism as a formation.[6]

> In a more recent 2022 publication by Sai Englert, settler colonialism is not defined as a
>
> "self-contained structure of domination, but one that interacts with—and is co-constituent of – key processes of domination that continue to define the present moment, both in and beyond settler colonial regimes. Capitalism, racism, and dispossession, as well as different forms of state violence and gender oppression, emerged within, through and/or in relation to settler colonialism expansion and domination."[7]

Settler colonialism therefore exists beyond borders. Just as it does not end in time, it does not end in space either. Land continues to be the easiest point of entry into understanding settler

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[4] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388.
[5] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 390.
[6] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native."
[7] Sai Englert, *Settler Colonialism: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2022), 4.

colonialism. Settler colonialism occurs in spaces where land has been forcibly dispossessed of Indigenous communities and then repossessed by settlers. Unlike trade, planter, or extractive colonialism, which exerts control over people and place from outside it, settler colonialism involves a transfer of sovereignty over land which creates a new way of life and society there permanently.

In taking the now United States as an example, the British colonization of the Eastern seaboard exhibited franchise colonialism. After the Revolutionary War, the former British colonists, now "Americans" imposed a settler colonial society upon innumerable Indigenous nations and their ancestral lands. There is a permanency involved in settler colonialism; "settlers settle."[8] Another defining characteristic is ongoing conflict with the dispossessed Indigenous people. Settler colonists enforce their command and suppose "legitimacy" over the land through means such as oppression and violence.

Through imperialism, sovereignty and legitimacy was enacted through "massacres, disease, removals, abrogated treaties, religious intolerance, theft of land, the kidnapping and forced education of children;" and the legacies of this violence persist through "social crises of poverty, poor health, and political marginalization."[9] This is how violence of colonialism persists through settler colonialism. Genocide and elimination are likewise often made unknown in the settler colonial present by decreasing visibility and decentering the involvement of colonial figures.[10] Violence persists through lack of acknowledgement as well. Ignorance becomes more

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[8] Englert, *Settler Colonialism*, 5.
[9] Yve Chavez and Nancy Marie Mithlo, "Introduction: The Unknowable Known Past," in *Visualizing Genocide*, ed. Yve Chavez and Nancy Marie Mithlo (University of Arizona Press, 2022), 3–16, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv3006zsc.5.
[10] Yve Chavez and Nancy Marie Mithlo, "Introduction."

favorable than reconciliation or remediation because it allows settler colonial authority and domination to persist.

By putting Wolfe and Englert's works in conversation with one another, a single definition of settler colonialism does not emerge, but key characteristics do. The danger in specifically defining settler colonialism is that some examples may inevitably be left out. However, key characteristics include domination/oppression, relative permanence, ongoing conflict, dispossession, and a new societal establishment perpetrated by colonists and successors of colonists who now live a settler colonial legacy. Settler colonialism persists structurally, not as a remembered event or imagined past. Similarly, Weaver-Hightower and Lahti define settler colonialism as "something that involves conquest and capture of land, long-range migration, permanent settlement (or at least intent of such), the elimination of Natives and/or native sovereignty, and the reproduction of one's own society on what used to be other people's lands."[11] The settler colonists are centered rather than the voices, histories, and traditions of Indigenous people. This is intentional. Indigenous people are robbed not only of land, but also of rights to self-determination, societal organization, etc.

The far-reaching effects of settler colonialism have found their place in media studies too. Scholars are carving out a field of research around settler colonialism media studies. When looking at settler colonialism broadly, Lorenzo Veracini thinks along similar lines to Wolfe and Englert. Displacement and negative definition are essential to the settler colonial understanding. Because he agrees that settler colonialism is not an event, he asserts "1) that settler colonialism is not colonialism; 2) that settlers are not migrants; 3) that settler colonialism is not somewhere

[11] Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Janne Lahti, "Introduction: Reel Settler Colonialism: Gazing, Reception, and Production of Global Settler Cinemas," in *Cinematic Settlers* (Routledge, 2020), 3.

else; 4) and that settler colonialism is not finished."[12] From this foundational understanding of settler colonialism, Veracini argues in a later publication, "Cinema, the Settler" that settler colonialism is deeply embedded in cinema and film as modes of domination.[13]

From production to consumption, settler colonialism is everywhere in media. The way movie scenes are framed and edited displays a settler colonialism which goes beyond just "tropes and representations" present, but the way films are produced is "like settler colonialism... a mode of domination that programmatically erases the conditions of its operation."[14] There is a kind of "glossing over" involved in filmmaking that mimics the conditions of displacement, dispossession, and a rewriting of history present in settler colonial contexts. The movie-going experience is also a settler colonial one. The immersive nature of seeing a film in a movie theater offers a settler colonialist experience by placing viewers comfortably stagnant observing another world they are transported to, yet almost feel a kind of authority ownership over. As Veracini puts it, "a settler colonist who has travelled to the settler colony is also someone who is in a location but not of it... cinema makes one travel without moving."[15]

Ultimately, "classic" cinema is a settler colonial medium because the representations and formatting are "tools of settler colonial domination."[16] While negative representations of People of Color, non-US cultures, and biased accounts of history are often present and display an entanglement of settler colonial narratives, the experience of film is likewise aligned with settler colonialism's habits and traditions.

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[12] Lorenzo Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 6.
[13] Lorenzo Veracini, "Cinema, the Settler," *Humanities* 12 no. 3: 40 (March 2023).
[14] Veracini, "Cinema, the Settler," 2.
[15] Veracini, "Cinema, the Settler," 2.
[16] Veracini, "Cinema, the Settler," 1.

In another article, Veracini looks at settler colonial narratives in *Interstellar* and *Cowboys and Aliens*, including the end of the world and crisis as common themes. Both displacement and indigenizing take place, making the once settler colonists "native" to the land. To this end, *Cowboys and Aliens* in particular seeks to cement the white settler's home when met with a foreign foe (aliens) who become the new settler colonists.[17] Relationship to place is important to the settler colonial identity and a leveraging of home justifies protection of sovereignty against outsiders, emphasizing once again settler colonial logic's reliance on a binary opposition.

In these films he identifies certain settler colonial fantasies which are present: Indigenous gratitude, “secret” Indigenous knowledge, a “Pocahontas” character, settler colonial humanity, etc.[18] Indigenous gratitude is not dissimilar to elements white saviorism where thanks and appreciation is earned in response to a rescuing or saving of Indigenous people by settlers. Acquiring "secret" Indigenous knowledge also serves to carry out indigenization, making settlers at home in their new environment.[19] This trope usually involves settlers receiving some element of divine of sacred information which was meant only for those native to the land. By acquiring this knowledge, settlers become "native" to the land as well. A "Pocahontas" character's role is to enable settlers and save them.[20] She is the bridge, granting permission to settlers to act as they see best for their survival. Settler colonial humanity involves a journey of self-determination which excludes Indigenous voices. Veracini emphasizes that "in the process of claiming a future elsewhere, this [settler colonial] humanity has already redeemed itself—this is what settlers

[17] Lorenzo Veracini, “Settler Evasions in Interstellar and Cowboys and Aliens: Thinking the End of the World Is Still Easier Than Thinking the End of Settler Colonialism,” in *Cinematic Settlers,* ed. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Janne Lahti (Routledge, 2020).
[18] Veracini, “Settler Evasions."
[19] Veracini, "Settler Evasions."
[20] Veracini, "Settler Evasions"

typically do."[21] The journey redeems the settlers in the end, reinforcing the innate need of the settler to belong and be at home in their new location.

Weaver-Hightower and Lahti also point to "shared language" of settler colonialism in media which includes "the stories of empty lands, settler civilizations and righteousness, and of othering and elimination" and "stories of ambiguity, settler vulnerability, and native resistance and agency."[22] The shared language of settler colonialism in media decenters the violence of settler perpetrators towards Indigenous communities. The histories retold which praise settlers and preach their triumph regularly erase Indigenous voices. This tradition reoccurs in settler colonial media. Tales of encounters are favored rather than invasions. Narratives which focus on exploration rather than theft are privileged too. The settler is made more innocent. The realities of settler violence and the long-standing ramifications of such discrimination become hidden under the weight of a settler colonial fantasy of rightful or perhaps inevitable possession and success.

The effects of film are not just bound to its running time, but films and cinema are also often popular culture moments and phenomena which get discussed by members of society. Films provide a means for both critical engagement and in other spaces purely entertainment. In all, settler colonial film studies seek to "show how films offer layered, diffused, contested, and dynamic settler colonial narratives that advance not merely settler hegemonic readings, but also nuanced representations, resistances, multiple voices, and continuous reinterpretations of historical processes and present-day realities."[23] Greater representation and multiplicity of voices is increasing in media. While there are still great lengths to go, "in recent years Indigenous

[21] Veracini, "Settler Evasions," 208.
[22] Weaver-Hightower and Lahti, “Introduction," 4.
[23] Weaver-Hightower and Lahti, “Introduction,” 9.

cinema witnessed a veritable resurgence. Moving beyond relatively niche productions and markets, Indigenous filmmakers have been telling mainstream stories and directing mainstream movies."[24]

Media Effects Theories

Media effects theory is a subgenre of communication theory which suggests that there is a relationship between the media humans consume and the way they perceive reality. Three of the most popular are cultivation theory, framing theory, and agenda setting theory.

George Gerbner's cultivation theory synthesizes that "mass media (particularly television) shapes (cultivates) people's view of social reality. Secondhand experience through media content can distort what people think of the world."[25] For example, in Gerbner's study, he found that viewers who saw more violence often on TV were more fearful of the world. Cultivation theory helps demonstrate how mass media affects how people with high media consumption see the world, even on a subconscious level. Mass media may distort, amplify, or perhaps accurately represent reality depending on how it is executed. The representations provided by mass media then influence a media consumer's understanding of their presence in the world. Cultivation theory links viewpoint to environment.

Gerbner focuses mostly on television because it "is a centralized system of storytelling... Television cultivates from the outset the very predispositions that affect future cultural selections and uses."[26] Television serves as the most commonly used media in conjunction with cultivation

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[24] Veracini, "Cinema, the Settler," 5.
[25] Douglas Cannon, "Understanding communication theories, models and the history of the profession," in *APR Study Guide.* (Universal Accreditation Board, 2021), 116.
[26] George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorelli, "Charting the Mainstream: Television's Contributions to Political Orientations," *Journal of Communication,* (Spring 1982): 102.

theory because of its accessibility. However, films have also become more accessible due to streaming services, movies being shown on television channels, and on-demand. A DVD or tape is no longer required to view a movie from home. The audiovisual components of this media elevate it beyond print media in terms of impact and accessibility. Its accessibility is because it requires no literacy, no mobility, and is ageless (people of all ages can use it).[27]

Cultivation theory "predicts and explains the long-term formation and shaping of perceptions, understandings, and beliefs about the world as a result of consumption of media messages."[28] Television does not cause a certain action, but instead provides a certain viewpoint which influences culture. Cultivation theory is more concerned with television's effect on culture rather than culture's effect on television. When people frequently consume such media it "blurs the traditional distinctions of people's views of their world, blends people's realities into television's cultural mainstream, and bends that mainstream to the institutional interests of television and its sponsors."[29] The constructed reality of television and the reality of people's everyday lives become conflated. For instance, while regularly watching shows like *Criminal Minds (2005-2020)* will not cause a media consumer to become more violent, it may cause them to believe there is a higher prevalence of violence in the world around them.

There are two types of cultivation effects that may occur. First-order cultivation is the "perceptions regarding the prevalence of the phenomenon in question" and second-order cultivation is "the beliefs that are nurtured in relation to the phenomenon."[30] Continuing with the *Criminal Minds* example, a first-order cultivation may be that the U.S. has a very high number of

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[27] West and Turner, *Communication* Theory, 407.
[28] West and Turner, *Communication* Theory, 405.
[29] West and Turner, *Communication* Theory, 414.
[30] Catherine Luther, Carolyn Ringer Lepre, and Naeemah Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 18.

active serial killers each year and a second-order cultivation may be that the United States has a severe and unsolvable serial killer problem.

Framing theory is a popular media effects theory in which there is a "transfer of attributes (or frames) describing a person, issue or topic from media to audience."[31] Framing can be viewed as a process where "a perceived reality is organized in such a way that certain aspects of the reality are stressed, while others are de-emphasized, leading to a particular definition or understanding of the social world."[32] As such, this theory is often applied to news media, where scholars theorize that the media can have a transfer affect when it comes to portrayals. If a public figure is covered positively in the media with emphasis to their charitable donations and public service, audiences will ascribe traits like generosity and selflessness to that person, regardless of accuracy. However, framing goes beyond just news media and by leveraging framing, storytellers can prompt certain interpretations by the choices they make in portraying a topic. Priming is a related phenomenon where "what the media present temporarily, at least, influences what people think about afterwards in processing additional information."[33] While framing influences how a viewer will interpret the media in the moment based on strategic choices made by storytellers, priming considers the effects after being exposed to a certain message.

Agenda setting theory is one of the most prevalent and popular news media theories. According to scholarship on agenda setting theory, the news media does not tell audiences what to think, but instead what to think about. There is no hypodermic needle where news media

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[31] Cannon, "Understanding communication theories," 116.
[32] Luther, Lepre, and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*, 12.
[33] West and Turner, *Communication Theory*, 361.

messages are immediately transmitted to the viewer.[34] Instead, a person undergoes their own discovery process based on what the news tells them is trending. Through agenda setting, mass media distinguishes between what stories are important and therefore sets the public's agenda. When the media's agenda and the public's agenda become aligned, they then influence the agenda of policymakers.[35] For example, if the local news runs a multitude of stories about food insecurity in high schools, viewers will take that to be an important issue. As viewers become more active in their consideration of food insecurity, they will call on their policymakers to respond to their concerns. Youth food insecurity then becomes a more salient issue in the community.

[34] The Hypodermic Needle theory is another communication theory where messages flow in a straight line from transmitter to recipient. The message is not mediated in between and there is no feedback loop, see Cannon, "Understanding communication theories," 116.
[35] West and Turner, *Communication Theory*, 359.

CASE STUDY: THE POPULARITY OF *INDIANA JONES*

Fans first met Indiana Jones in their local movie theaters on June 12, 1981.[36] George Lucas conceived the idea for an adventurous, supernatural artifact-hunting archaeologist in tandem with an idea about a space adventure movie which would later become Star Wars in 1971 after finishing his directorial debut THX 1138.[37] In the prime era for the summer blockbuster, it is no surprise that the *Indiana Jones* franchise has reached the height it has today—five films and numerous other Intellectual Property (IP) projects.[38]

Despite the success of the franchise and the hours of content related to the character, the Dr. Jones who lives in collective consciousness the most is the one encountered in the first portion of the first film. Key to understanding the impact of such a small sequence in proportion to the franchise is understanding the context in which the film was released.

Lucas and Harrison Ford had already teamed up for the first two *Star Wars* films. Steven Spielberg had made the summer of 1975 his own and changed perceptions of sharks forever with *Jaws*.[39] In the United States in the early 1980s, the movie theater was *the* place for films, and they were seen in community.[40] Despite bringing something different to the table, *Indiana Jones* was poised for success. If Lucas and Spielberg were not enough, Ford became a fan favorite in *Star Wars*, delivering iconic lines like "I've got a bad feeling about this."[41] The film also

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[36] "Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark | Lucasfilm.com." Lucasfilm. Accessed September 8, 2023. https://www.lucasfilm.com/productions/raiders-of-the-lost-ark/.

[37] American Film Institute, "George Lucas on Creating RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK," YouTube, May 3, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2y6VRRlsIc.

[38] Other examples of IP projects include LEGO video games and sets, theme park rides, comics, books, games, etc.

[39] "The Jaws Effect" is what scientists deem the socially enforced fear of sharks, galeophobia, see Carter Evans, "What Makes People so Afraid of Sharks? 'Jaws,' Some Scientists Say," *CBS* News, July 15, 2022, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-makes-people-so-afraid-of-sharks-jaws-scientists/.

[40] The first Blockbuster video rental chain did not open until 1985 in Dallas, TX. The movie rental franchise expanded to 800 stores in 1988, allowing increased access to viewing movies at home with VHS tapes, see Frank Olito and Alex Botter, "Blockbuster: The Rise and Fall of the Movie Rental Store, and What Happened to the Brand," *Business Insider*, accessed March 21, 2024, https://www.businessinsider.com/rise-and-fall-of-blockbuster.

[41] Although Mark Hamill's Luke Skywalker is the first to utter this line. It is one of Ford's most memorable lines as Han Solo in the *Star Wars* franchise. The line foreshadows a near-deadly run-in with a trash compactor.

featured a soundtrack composed by John Williams, famous for creating iconic and sweeping scores which make the viewer feel closer to the film.[42]

The intent of this discussion is to demonstrate how people, especially people living in the United States, are not initially exposed to the debates of material culture and museum ethics through textbooks, scholarly articles, and think pieces. Instead, they discover the world of archaeology, "treasure," and the "neutral" site of museums oftentimes through entertainment media, particularly in an adventure, "treasure" hunting context. The entertainment media at hand is steeped in settler colonialism ideologies that naturalize the authority and power of white settlers in the United States, North America, and elsewhere. Cis, straight, white men are particularly privileged in these narratives which reinforce such identity markers as congruent with sovereignty and control.

The Opening Sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*

The first sequence of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* is the most famous scene of the franchise. However, it stands apart from the themes of the rest of the film: the Ark of the Covenant is not there, the Nazis are missing, and there is only one snake. Something about the huge boulder whooshing after the hero has engrained itself into US popular consciousness. Today, the scene is recreated live at the "Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular!" at Walt Disney World and reimagined with a desktop globe and Buzz Lightyear in Disney's *Toy Story*, to name a few ways it has permeated pop culture.

[42] John Williams is also responsible for the iconic music of *Star Wars, Harry Potter, Schindler's List, Jurassic Park,* and *Jaws,* see "John Williams | Films," JohnWilliams.org, accessed March 21, 2024, https://www.johnwilliams.org/compositions/film.."

Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark begins with the Paramount Pictures logo fading into a mountain top. The mountain is rocky, not covered by snow or any other distinguishable feature, bordered on both sides by lush foliage. John Williams's track, "In the Jungle" plays in the background mixed with overlapping bug and bird sounds.[43] The silhouette of a traveler gazing up at the mountain strides onto the screen, adorned with cargo pants, a bag, a leather jacket, and an unusual fedora. When the title of the film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* appears, he is joined by others who are dressed differently from him, weighed down with more baggage and wearing disheveled clothes. All this information builds an idea that the setting is exotic, out of the time and place of the viewer. While the original moviegoers encountered the film in the heat of summer with buckets of popcorn, the subjects of the film are travelers in a faraway place.

The first man in the scene is distinct. While his traveling companions lumber along as if it is just another day of work, he charges along studying the landscape. He leads the traveling party and exerts an air of authority. All of this occurs, and the time stamp only shows thirty seconds have elapsed. The audience has been gifted a wealth of information and the stage is set.

Moving forward, the audience has yet to see the face of the titular character and there is "a man chattering in foreign language," as Disney+ indistinctly describes in the closed captioning of today. The party continues, laden with equipment, dragging a mule along, and pushing aside foliage. The leading fedora-wearer is still only silhouetted as a means of intriguing the audience, but the other members of the party have their faces revealed. As the credits continue to roll across the lower third of the screen, one of the travelers uncovers a large stone carved into a rocky cliff of a face with large eyes and sharp teeth. The sculpture's iconography

[43] John Williams, "Into the Jungle," track 1 on *Raiders of the Lost Ark (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, Lucasfilm Ltd. 1981.

alludes to ancient Mesoamerican origins. However, it is noticeably a prop- too clean and well-positioned. The carving frightens the seemingly local man who uncovers it, and he runs away screaming. The fedora-wearing leader, the not-yet-revealed Dr. Indiana Jones, walks bravely up to it, nonchalantly taking in the carvings which are meant to stereotypically fit the mold for Mexica empire aesthetics.[44] He exerts a greater expertise over the area than the people who are his traveling partners and guides. He holds less fear and more knowledge than them, even though the audience is led to believe that the traveling party lives close by due to their familiarity with the terrain.

Satipo, played by Alfred Molina, and a companion find a poisonous dart in a nearby tree. Molina, who is British, speaks in clipped, rapid-fire, English with an ambiguous accent here saying "the Hovitos are near" in a frightened manner. The accent implies he is a non-native English speaker. There is no record of a Hovitos community existing anywhere in Abya Yala, thus, they are a fictional community created for the film.[45] This aspect of the plot represents an attempt to identify an Indigenous community with a name of Spanish origin, considering the –itos ending, meaning a plural small or little in the Spanish language.

"South America, 1936" appears on the screen. The caption is the first piece of concrete information offered as to where and when the events are taking place. By just including "South America" and no city, state, or country. South America is presented as a monolith. Flattening

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[44] Mexica is the name people residing in or around Tenochtitlan used to describe themselves. The term "Aztec," which is more popular in mainstream language, was first used by German explorer Alexander von Humboldt in the early 1800s, see Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank, "Introduction to the Aztecs (Mexica)," SmartHistory, accessed May 21, 2024, https://smarthistory.org/introduction-mexica/.

[45] Abya Yala is a decolonial term used to describe the American continent. Abya Yala was used before colonial invasion by the Kuna people to describe what is now known as the Americas. The use of this term combats Eurocentric naming imposed by colonial rule. For more on how decolonial practices like Abya Yala usage seek to center Indigenous perspectives, particularly through art, see Fabia, Prates, "What Do Abya Yala and Pindorama Mean?," C& AMÉRICA LATINA, last modified April 12, 2023, https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/editorial/what-do-abya-yala-and-pindorama-mean/.

occurs in implying every place within the continent has similar people, culture, and environment. The audience can assume that a specific jungle or even country does not actually matter; they should be able to understand enough just from a general label. This is problematic because it represents an entire continent as somewhat wild and full of terrifying emblems to potentially ignorant audience members who likely have not visited. However, South America's diverse landscape of coastal areas, basins, highland regions, and the Andes Mountains spans about 6,878,000 square miles (about twice the area of Canada).[46] Despite the label of general South America, the filmmakers had Peru in mind, as evidenced by the mountainous terrain and the fourth musical track titled "Flight from Peru."[47] The opening montage was actually shot in Kauaʻi, Hawaiʻi.[48]

The first whip crack of the film happens just before Indiana Jones, played by Ford, shows his face on screen. The auditory cracking of the whip breaks the audience out of the comfortable traveling montage they have settled into, cementing that Jones *is* the main character, and this *is* his journey. The whip is his defense against one of the remaining members of the traveling party who wields a gun. He effortlessly and fearlessly dumps the gun into a stream and watches as the perpetrator flees. The audience is now left with only the attractive and mysterious Jones and the disheveled and awestruck Satipo. It is unclear what happened to the rest of the traveling party and the baggage they carried. Assumingly, they were too afraid and turned back or got lost.

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[46] C.W. Minkel, Victor Ramos, and Jean Dorst, "South America | Facts, Land, People, & Economy | Britannica," Brittanica, last updated March 18, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/place/South-America

[47] John Williams, "Flight From Peru," track 4 on *Raiders of the Lost Ark (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack),* Lucasfilm Ltd. 1981.

[48] "Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) - Filming & Production," IMDb, accessed May 24, 2024, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0082971/locations/.

The duo makes their way up a steep incline to a temple entrance shrouded by vines and foliage. Despite the long journey, Jones appears to have just broken a sweat, while Satipo is exhausted and covered in dirt. Satipo then delivers his plea in a mix of English and Spanish, stating, “Señor, no one’s come out of there alive. Please...” as Jones fills a bag with sand. The duo creep into the forbidden temple through a cobwebbed tunnel with mysterious chasms and huge tarantulas lining the way. Although a set, the temple is intentionally decorated to seem old and untouched, playing into the idea that only a few have dared to travel this far before. Lit by a single torch, the temple is cavernous around them. Stalagmites surround the path forward. While the temple appears manufactured with intricate carvings, it is also built into the mountainous range the audience was treated with in the first few seconds. Jones intentionally triggers the first booby trap, rusted spears that shoot out of the walls. An old competitor of Jones’s corpse springs out. Satipo struggles with the violence and scare tactics of the temple. The booby traps present send an unwelcome message, but Indiana Jones disarms them.

At the end of the temple’s main thoroughfare, a gold figurine sits atop an altar. It is surrounded by more seemingly Mexica iconography, despite the Mexica empire formerly being in present-day Mexico City, Mexico, and not Peru where this sequence takes place. The figurine is modeled on a figure in the Dumbarton Oaks collection in Washington D.C. The museum describes it as a “birthing figure” from the nineteenth century, being “Aztec style, late Postclassic,” once again displaying the film’s choices which flatten and make similar all cultures south of the US border. Dumbarton Oaks also says the object, “has been esteemed as an icon of fertility, and even played a featured role in one of the most popular films of all time when it was the object of Indiana Jones’s attentions in the opening scenes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.”[49] The

[49] Dumbarton Oaks, “Birthing Figure,” accessed May 24, 2024, https://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/23088.

statue on display at the D.C. museum is not gold, but instead aplite. It has recently been contested that the object is a nineteenth century art piece, rather than a precolonial Mexica figurine as previously thought.[50] The whole first sequence of the franchise then, does not even rest on retrieving a statue of great historical value, but instead a fake made in the Mexica style. The filmmakers did not know of the object's history when they chose to center the introduction to Jones upon it, but it is interesting that the figure's value is now enhanced by its position as a popular culture icon.

The most memorable popular culture moment of the film happens when Jones leaves the temple. After attempting to switch the figure with a bag of sand, implying that Jones cannot just outsmart his local guides, but also the builders of the temple, Jones triggers another series of booby traps. What plays out next is an excellent adventure sequence full of close misses and the iconic boulder chase. Amid the chaos, Satipo attempts to take the figurine as his own. He betrays Jones, saying "adiós, señor" and leaving him to die. However, as has been emphasized throughout the sequence so far, Jones is the hero who is smarter and better equipped for the plundering adventure. He defies all odds. Meanwhile, Satipo meets a depressing and brutal end by spear thanks to one of the booby traps.

After narrowly missing the huge boulder chasing him, Indiana Jones lands on his stomach back into the jungle. He is met by a rival archaeologist, who is also white, who takes the birthing figure for himself. He is assisted by the fictional Hovitos foreshadowed earlier, who presumably live in the Andes Mountains. The Indigenous warriors appear with face paint, wielding poison darts and spears, and are scantily clad. They only wear necklaces of bone and jade and

[50] Dumbarton Oaks, "Birthing Figure," https://museum.doaks.org/objects-1/info/23088

loincloths.[51] The rival archaeologist, dressed similarly to Jones, claims the idol for himself. He presents himself as their leader, speaking the Hovitos language and using them to steal the figurine from Jones. He lifts the figurine in the air and the Hovitos bow. He makes a throat slitting motion with his pointer finger and the Hovitos warriors, armed to the teeth, chase Jones.

Viewers can breathe a sigh of relief when Jones eventually takes a biplane to safety, even if it is without the figurine. They have been treated to thirteen minutes of suspenseful and action-packed adventure. And, unwittingly, been exposed to harmful representations of people and places. The opening sequence creates a comparison and value judgment between who Indiana Jones, as a white university-educated archaeologist from the United States, and people who live in the entirety of South America. South America has long been portrayed as "brutal," "unforgiving," and "uncivilized" since the sixteenth century when Europeans first invaded and wrote their biased narratives. *Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)* further enforces these depictions through its aesthetic and action choices. The brutal, unforgiving, and uncivilized portrayals are rooted in racism and a belief in white, Western superiority. They are indicative of settler colonialism which thrives on a binary opposition between white settlers and black, indigenous, and other people of color to bolster the status of one at the expense of the other. These depictions are far from reality. Instead, it could be said that plunderers like Jones are brutal, unforgiving, and uncivilized.

When Indiana Jones returns to his (fictional) university, Marshall College, it has its own location caption overlaid on the scene. The Andes Mountains were labeled vaguely as "South

[51] Jade is a valuable resource associated with Mesoamerican peoples, see Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, "Jade in Mesoamerica," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2001, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jade2/hd_jade2.htm.

America," but the same treatment by the filmmakers was not given to a Western higher education institution and museum.

THE ACTION-ADVENTURE "TREASURE-HUNTING" GENRE

Treasure-hunting narratives may fall under the larger umbrella of the adventure media genre but are defined by the characters' quest for a particular object of great importance which promises riches, prestige, or perhaps the triumph of good over evil. Examples of treasure-hunting narratives in US film and television include the *Indiana Jones* franchise (1981-2023), *Romancing the Stone* (1984), *The Goonies* (1985), *The Mummy* franchise (1999-2008), *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001-2018), the *National Treasure* franchise (2004-2023), *Outer Banks* series (2020-), and *Uncharted* (2022). These examples demonstrate a distinct media genre and show a continuation of a similar theme over time.[52]

Euro-American treasure-hunting narratives rely on some common elements to engage moviegoers. There are often fluctuations of time, place, etc., but some common elements are reproduced across eras of filmmaking and television versus film versus direct-to-streaming contexts. By using *Indiana Jones*, *National Treasure,* and *Outer Banks* as sample franchises to view how these narratives legitimize US nationhood, racially other non-US cultures through material culture, unite the audience against an evil enemy, and generate an epic "American" hero protagonist the core audience may identify with, the following discussion examines how popular treasure-hunting narratives become successful or prolific. In turn, the proliferation of these settler colonial narratives can aid understanding of how people conceptualize material culture and museum ethics.

[52] Most of the films mentioned have been turned into franchises, showing their popularity over time and through generations. Their reboots demonstrate a certain nostalgic quality they carry as well, causing viewers to want to revisit the characters and storylines over time.

The US media reconciles the country's relatively young nationhood with connection to Western conceptualizations of history, regardless of how recent. The US is legitimized through significant historical, legendary, or mythic roots. Settler colonialism impacts US perspectives of material culture by making settler people, objects, etc. seem as though they belong within a colonial nation and have a natural place there. Because settler colonialism is a structure, not an event, it permeates. Settler colonialism works to legitimize the settler's relationship with land in part due to eliminating Indigenous claims to it.[53] In terms of objects and material culture, settlers also work to dispossess objects of "value" (i.e., artifacts) and transfer their ownership away from Indigenous communities and to the settlers.

The *National Treasure* franchise is an example of centralizing narratives of white, European roots and wealth as integral to the success of the nation in US history. The antics in these films, from stealing the Declaration of Independence to kidnapping the US President at Mount Vernon, are so astounding that the two-part franchise almost seems satirical to other treasure hunting films like *Indiana Jones.* However believable, these films celebrate United States history from the time the colonists invaded and thereby promote assumptions of what is "American" and "American greatness." *National Treasure (2004)* and *National Treasure Book of Secrets (2007)* are permeated by the white protagonists of the film celebrating the greatness of the famous white figures in American history, crediting them with building and maintaining the greatness of the United States. Indigenous communities and other People of Color are mostly absent in the narrative and vision of US history the films weave, with little acknowledgement to how they have contributed to the foundations and growth of the United States.

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[53] Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present.*

Trend 1: Legitimizing United States Nationhood

The main quest of the first *National Treasure* film is to find the lost "Templar Treasure." The object history of the treasure is mapped through pharaohs and warlords but is ultimately coined after the Knights Templar, crediting the riches to white Christian knights of the Crusades (1095-1571).[54] The Knights Templar then evolves into the Freemasons, nobly protecting the treasure and smuggling it into the United States during the colonial period just before the Revolutionary War. Major eighteenth-century colonists and Independence heroes like George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Paul Revere are framed as freemasons who outsmarted the British with clues and maps to protect the hidden treasure. The film then ties "American" history to originating not just with the time of the colonists (1607-1776) but also to deeper European legacies. The film's narrative portrays the history of the US beginning in the colonies is then portrayed as a natural progression of independence, centering the nation as a superpower, despite "humble" origins. Throughout this narrative, the smarter, more democratic, and better equipped US leaders better deliver freedom economically and socially than their European or Indigenous counterparts, depicting a thriving United States which was born from the colonial and Revolutionary War eras. This narrow brand of history sold to the audience ignores the contributions of individuals who lie outside of the dominant narrative.

The terms colonial and colonization were not even widely used linguistically until revolutions in the Americas; "the condition of 'being colonial' was not inherent to life in the American colonies."[55] The language of colonialism is therefore born out of conflict between the

[54] Marshall Baldwin, Gary Dickson, and Thomas Madden. "Crusades | Definition, History, Map, Significance, & Legacy," Brittanica, last updated May 6, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/event/Crusades.
[55] Byron Hamann, "The monsters of reason," in *The Invention of the Colonial Americas*. (Getty Publications, 2022), 228.

English in Europe and their descendants in the colonies of Turtle Island. While both the film and United States history, seem hyper focused on the triumph which came from the humble beginnings of "being colonial," that is a lens put on the past. The people living these realities did not understand themselves in the same way society interprets them now.

The tension expressed in the film between European (primarily English) and post-Revolutionary War independence roots represent at the same time a broader tension within US history to link the nation to the West while distinguishing it as its own unique manifestation of democracy. Through narratives of history, the US attempts to link itself with Europe, while distinguishing itself as uniquely superior. Alicia Cox defines settler colonialism as "an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous people and cultures… [settler colonialism] normalizes the continuous settler occupation, exploiting lands and resources to which indigenous peoples have genealogical relationships."[56] Thus, settler colonialism serves as a framework to begin to understand how white people of European descent's claim to the land in the United States is made "natural," or even "revolutionary." The settler colonial tradition operates on a logic of elimination, as posited by Wolfe.[57] Indigenous communities' relationship to the land is erased or eliminated so that it may be repossessed by the white settlers.

The settlers continue to exert power over both the land and the manufactured narratives by continuing to displace and mistreat Indigenous communities. They are leveraged as the foil to

[56] Alicia Cox, "Introduction," in Settler Colonialism. (Oxford Bibliographies, 2017). https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0029.xml
[57] The logic of elimination is perhaps the most used element of Wolfe's work, see Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native."

settler colonial narratives of conquest and Manifest Destiny.[58] The often celebrated "American might" has its roots in invasion and theft. United States history reconciles its beginnings in the 1700s by engaging in the erasure of Indigenous perspectives through connection to Europe, answering the question of "where did we come from?" by establishing the "we" as white settlers. Important to note is the lack of race as a framework, which linguistically did not evolve until the late 1700s; the roots of settler colonialism lie in "European xenophobic traditions," rather than race as a social construct.[59] *National Treasure* as a franchise demonstrates how this settler colonial perspective is reproduced over time, by starting "American" history in Europe. In this way, the United States as a nation appears older due to its connection to England which is subsequently linked to a broader history of Christianity vis-a-vis the Crusades. The United States is posited as the culmination of improved society and a righteous triumph of "good" over "evil" throughout time.

Trend 2: Fetishization via Material Culture

William Pietz engages in a complex discussion of the history and usage of the word "fetish" to describe objects. The idea of the fetish has both colonial and Christian roots which seek to paint a picture of non-Western societies and continue "the traditional Christian discourse concerning idolatry."[60] The figure featured in the opening sequence of Indiana Jones and The Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981) is positioned to push it into the status of idol within the film's context. As heavily guarded by booby traps and hidden away, the figure is found on a pedestal

[58] Manifest Destiny refers to the notion that settlers in the early United States had a moral and divine right to go west and expand. It is one of the greatest contributing causes of the age westward expansion.
[59] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387–409, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.
[60] William Pietz et al., *The Problem of the Fetish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 6.

surrounded by carvings and seats. The object is at once valuable and significant by its esteemed placement and its gold composition when everything else is stone.

Pietz identifies fundamental categories of the fetish as "historicization, territorialization, reification, and personalization."[61] The Dumbarton Oaks replica figure as a fetish object in the opening sequence is historicized by its affixation to the past based on its "lost" nature and the overgrowth of cobwebs and greenery the temple. The figure is territorialized due to the tropical setting and South American location assertion. It is then reified by being one-of-a-kind, gold, and treasure. Finally, the object is also personalized because of a displayed passionate personal response both from the explorers who seek to find it, the Indigenous community who seeks to protect it, and the museum curators who seek to immortalize it within the vitrine.

Material culture as fetish objects extends across the genre. The fetishization of historical objects then also extends to permeate perceptions of the cultures they originate from. The pastness and idolatry imposed upon the objects is then transferred to the people within a particular (usually non-Western, as Pietz indicates) culture. [62]

Trend 3: The "Big Bad" Antagonist

Often in treasure-hunting narratives, the enemy of the hero (the antagonist) is irreconcilably in the wrong according to the standards of contemporary morality. While these antagonists may have sinister intentions, they demonstrate a considerable desire to capture the topical treasure, not dissimilar to the protagonist. The organizing logic of both parties is that the ends justify the means-- excusing theft, car chases in busy cities, falsifying identities, etc. It is

[61] Pietz et al., *The Problem of the Fetish,* 12.
[62] Pietz et al., *The Problem of the Fetish*.

then up to the audience to agree that wrong intentions for pursuing treasure are what separate the protagonists and the antagonists.

The opposition to material culture "falling into the wrong hands" is common across narratives in the films I analyze in this chapter/thesis. However, the evil nature of specific antagonists differs in their direct relationship to objects of material culture. While connection to a broader recognized regimes like the Third Reich or the Confederate States of America can be seen as bad by US audiences due to their alignment with the history recorded and commonly taught across the United States, sometimes there are other mechanisms that turn the audience against the antagonist.

Settler colonialism legitimizes the settler relationship to the land and power status through negative definitions of what they are not. Similarly, negative definitions also work in this media to show differences in intentionality between the protagonists and antagonists. The relative "goodness" of the protagonist is often reinforced by their difference from the antagonist.

In the hit Netflix TV show, *Outer Banks* for example, one of the antagonist groups is the family of Sarah Cameron, the protagonist John B.'s significant other. Cameron's father and brother are hunting the treasure for the money, the same as the team of protagonists.[63] However, her brother slips down a slope of irreconcilable wrong by melting down the artifact at hand, the Cross of Santo Domingo, into gold bars to make it easier to sell on the illegal market and avoid the attention of museums.

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[63] The team of protagonists also have the more noble motive to claim the treasure. Pope, a member of the team and the "nerdy" one of the bunch, discovers that the Cross was left to his family by his ancestor Denmark Tanny, a formerly enslaved man who went on to buy and run a cotton plantation in the early 1800s. Although Denmark Tanny is fictional for the sake of the show, he was inspired by the story of Denmark Vessey, see "Who's Denmark Tanny on 'Outer Banks'?," Netflix Tudum, accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.netflix.com/tudum/articles/outer-banks-who-is-denmark-tanny.

The practice of melting down gold material culture into bars as a form of extraction was present in Spanish colonial encounters with Mexica in the 1500s. Cortés and his military entourage violently took sacred objects from Mexica civilization on *Noche Triste (*June 30-July 1, 1520) by melting them down and fleeing with as much as they could carry.[64] Looted gold bars estimated to be from this conflict were even on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the J. Paul Getty Museum as recently as 2018, in a traveling exhibition titled "Golden Kingdoms: Luxury and Legacy in the Ancient Americas."[65] While this practice may not have been questioned in the past, more contemporary and holistic understandings of the violence inherent in destruction of culture make it unacceptable. Settler colonial tendencies of dispossession and a subsequent transfer of ownership of material culture is more acceptable in the United States today than an altogether destruction.

The destruction of an important historical artifact, the fictional Cross of Santo Domingo, which was said to have once contained the burial shroud of Jesus Christ in *Outer Banks*, alludes to the Western value of protecting and preserving culture, a value that allows museum institutions to thrive. There is a need born out of the Enlightenment to categorize and determine, a desire to know an object's past, present, and future. Making material culture "last" is vital to the museum project.[66] The show portrays the antagonist and different from the protagonist once again through their intentions. While making money and achieving upward mobility is not

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[64] Smithsonian Magazine and Theresa Machemer, "Spanish Conquistadors Stole This Gold Bar From Aztec Emperor Moctezuma's Trove," Smithsonian Magazine, accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/gold-bar-once-belonged-aztec-emperor-moctezuma-180973959/.
[65] "Bullion | Aztec and Spanish," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed April 8, 2024, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/722248.
[66] One such is example is Montezuma's crown or El Penacho, which is encased in glass in Austria. Repatriation requests by Mexico have been declined in part due to the fragility of the crown. Austrian scholars and restorationists fear that the crown would collapse in transit, a fear that Mexico does not echo. For Mexico, the symbolism of repatriating the crown is more important than maintaining its structural integrity, see Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *The Contested Crown: Repatriation Politics Between Europe and Mexico* (Chicago, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press, 2022), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vt/detail.action?docID=6827951.

necessarily considered evil in a capitalist context, the destruction of an artifact to meet those ends is unequivocally wrong. While in many colonial contexts, material culture was destroyed as a means of domination and erasure, modern sensibilities lean towards the protection of items which made it out of that period. The human anxiety of forgetting and being untethered to history spurs people to protect the past. By appealing to Western values of material culture as stagnate, the antagonist is positioned in the wrong.

The antagonist is essential to treasure-hunting narratives because they legitimize the quest for treasure. The usage of a competition against a foe to get to the treasure provides a purpose for the hunt, subsequently distracting the viewer from questions of whether these "treasures" should be searched for, found, and put in a museum in the first place. There is a sense of time urgency which keeps the viewer in the unfolding action. Because cinema is a settler colonial practice due to its passive nature of exploring another world from the comfortability of a living room or theater, the viewer is often in the action with the characters, rather than mediating on ethical issues.[67]

Trend 4: The Hero a US Audience Desires

The protagonist of each treasure hunting story has key features that characterize him as distinctly "American" in combination with long-standing features of the epic hero. This supposed Americanism is combined with classic long-standing features of the epic hero, as set out by Aristotle: a "noble" hero who possesses a fatal flaw which seems antithetical to his character.[68] His heroism is epic rather than tragic because he serves as a model rather than a

[67] Veracini, Cinema, the Settler.
[68] Dean Miller, "The hero from on high," in *Epic Hero.* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 8.

problem and moves the audience to feel pity and awe in the face of his crisis.[69] The usage of he/him pronouns here is strategic. The protagonist of these American epic treasure-hunting protagonists is typically cis, straight, white and male, suggesting this is also the target audience of the specific piece of entertainment media. While films are products of culture and reflective of norms and values, they also speak to that culture, either reinforcing or subverting the cultural context within which it was created.[70]

"American" is written with quotation marks because the qualities presented are reminiscent of the "American dream" in a US-based context. The longstanding fable of the American dream weaves a narrative that anyone can achieve prosperity and success within the borders of the United States. Americans can build themselves up and work their way up society's ranks through hard work and good spirits.[71] While what is now called the Americas is composed of North, Central, and South America, the "American" nature of the protagonists are distinctly US. They fit into the US popular narratives of heroism, justice, liberty, etc. The US-centric approach to character development supersedes any references to other countries in treasure-hunting narratives.

All the protagonists of the examples covered here were raised in the United States, studying fields like archaeology and history which hold biases of settler colonialism. This is shown in their exploration and treasure hunting. They operate from a specific stance of privilege and entitlement. Indiana Jones, for instance, can travel to another location and plunder (as seen in

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[69] Dean Miller, "The hero from on high," in *Epic Hero.* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 7.
[70] Terri Murray, "Feminist Film Theory: An Introduction," in *Studying Feminist Film Theory*. (Liverpool University Press, 2019.
[71] The idea of the American dream first came to prominence in the 1930s with the publication of James Truslow Adam's *The Epic of America*, which attempts to capture the essence of the United States by looking into its past, see James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New York: Routledge, 2017), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351304122. The book was published at a time of great turmoil in the United States with the period known as Great Depression starting in 1929.

the case study featured earlier) because of the authority afforded to him by his upbringing and affiliation with a U.S. university/museum which upholds a settler colonial tradition. Benjamin Gates and John B. Routledge do most of their treasure hunting within the settler colonial nation of the United States. They all hunt for valuable material culture to contribute to the broader U.S. historical narrative.

The United States-centric "Americanism" is immediately apparent because of generational "American" naming and its ties to settler colonialism. For example, Indiana Jones's first name is a gesture to the United States of America's midwestern state, Indiana. The origins of the state's nomenclature are thought to originate from the land's historic relationship to various American Indian nations before they were forced from the land beginning in the nineteenth century.[72] The ACLU of Indiana's land acknowledgement cites the state as the homeland of many Indigenous nations, "including the Miami, Potawatomi, Piankeshaw, Wea, Kickapoo, and Shawnee peoples. The state name "Indiana," means the land of Indians, and derives from the "Indiana Land Company," which held land ceased from Indigenous peoples in Virginia."[73]

In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), the entrance of Jones's father (played by Sean Connery) as a supporting character reveals that the protagonist's real name is Henry Jones Jr., after his father, a medievalist scholar, who is also involved in the treasure-hunting world in a search for the Holy Grail. Jones is the fifth and fourth most popular last name according to the

[72] Cyrus Wilburn Hodgin, *Naming of Indiana* (Nicholson Print, 1903).
[73] "Land Acknowledgment | ACLU of Indiana," October 6, 2022. https://www.aclu-in.org/en/news/land-acknowledgment.

US Census from 1990-2010, further contributing to a protagonist with whom viewers can identify.

Similarly, the protagonist of *National Treasure*, Benjamin Franklin Gates's name ties back not only to the famous founding father and inventor Benjamin Franklin, but most recently to his own father, Patrick Henry Gates. In *Outer Banks*, John Routledge also shares a name with his father who, like Gates, is disgraced by academic and local communities for chasing pseudohistory to unearth long forgotten or lost treasures.

The generational, "American" naming and treasure-hunting aspirations frame adventure and exploration as an inherited legacy, nodding to the colonial history of the United States, especially the role of white men with privilege within it. Invasion and theft as justifying exploration and conquest in history is indicative of the generational quest for treasure. There is a white legacy of a right to explore and gain; this legacy subsequently makes the profession of these heroes seem feasible. The tradition of accumulation, both of land and material culture, is a settler colonial one. The logic of elimination present in settler colonialism justifies dispossession and displacement to appease the white identity of being non-native to their home. The drive to explore, gain, and dispossess points to a quest to "make a place" in the world that belongs to them.[74]

Regardless of their connections to their father, all three protagonists are estranged from them, due to aspirational differences or forced separation, while also following in their footsteps.

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[74] Chip Colwell suggests that humans have made three big leaps when it comes to hoarding items: making tools, investing tools with meaning, and creating patterns of abundance as prompted by the Industrial Revolution, see Chip Colwell, *So Much Stuff: How Humans Discovered Tools, Invented Meaning, and Made More of Everything* (University of Chicago Press, 2023).

Despite trying to separate themselves from their fathers, as Indiana Jones does by going by Indiana, they are still haunted by their father's legacies while searching for treasure.[75]

Playing directly into the epic hero archetype, a character in this genre will have a fatal flaw which is somewhat surprising and humanizes the protagonist for the audience. It is usually at this moment that the main character is not as invincible as he once seemed. For Indiana Jones, it is his overwhelming fear of snakes. One of the most notable quotes of the franchise is "snakes… why did it have to be snakes?" Despite his ability to always succeed it is not without first encountering a snake or two that sets him back. For John B. of *Outer Banks*, it is the prioritization of the safety of his friends over all else. The teen drama has featured at least four treasure hunts so far and only one success because his Achilles heel is his loyalty to others.

Trend 5: The Supporting Secondary Characters

Another common element to these media is the presence of a team that supports the protagonists. Members of the team have essential knowledge that complements the main character's obsession with treasure and a niche interest in academia or history that relates specifically to the task at hand. Being that most protagonists are straight, white, cis men, they are usually accompanied by a beautiful woman who is also essential to the plot in some way.

Although these films claim to mirror the world in which we live, they ultimately are a fabricated version of the world through the eyes of filmmakers. In terms of representation, including more diversity in casting is not always enough. The act of having a woman in every film does not represent the female experience, but rather one (fictional) woman's experience in

[75] In the film, Indiana is revealed to be his childhood dog's name.

this fabricated world. Films serve as a medium in which "relationships of power are maintained, reinforced, exposed, subverted, or re-negotiated."[76]

The woman will ultimately fall for the hero. She may also be in peril and need rescue at some point. She enters the plot because she has knowledge essential to the treasure hunt. In *Outer Banks* season one, Sarah Cameron is the rich girl who lives on the property where the protagonist, John B., believes the treasure is hidden. He thereby exploits her to access plot maps and documents found on the property at time of purchase. The two then embark on a Romeo and Juliet-esque love story and she joins the protagonist's quest for the treasure. In the first *National Treasure* film, Dr. Abigail Chase enters the hunt because she works at the National Archives and refuses to leave the Declaration of Independence's side after it is stolen by protagonist, Ben Gates, due to a map hidden on the back.

A sidekick of some kind always tends to be present as well. While the sidekick does not have the same brains, bravery, or brawn as the main protagonist, he is still necessary to the success of the treasure hunt. In *National Treasure*, this character archetype is best exemplified by Riley Poole, who is talented with computers and can hack into security systems and decrypt code. In *Outer Banks*, John B.'s best friend JJ is skilled in deceit and theft.

Recent Developments in the Genre

There may be diversity among specific material culture, time periods, locations, etc. of treasure-hunting adventure films, but the broader common elements among them ensure their continued success and proliferation over time. New films of the genre still adhere to previous plotlines and character profiles. Despite changing social landscapes and politics, at their heart

[76] Terri Murray, "Feminist Film Theory," 12.

they are still settler colonial, privileging white perspectives of travel, exploration, history, and material culture. It may not be able to be confidently claimed that this is purposeful, but it can be claimed that these trends are indicative of engrained social values within the US-based entertainment and film industry. Similarly, it also brings emphasis to the expectations of a general audience for these films.

It is worth noting the 2023 box office flop of the most recent Indiana Jones installment, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny.* The movie's cost, excluding marketing, was $295 million and the domestic debut earned just $60 million during its opening weekend. The demographics of moviegoers are reported as older males: 58% were male, 42% were forty-five to fifty-four years old.[77] In contrast, Netflix's *Outer Banks* season 3 was a resounding success for the streaming platform, with the fourth season being greenlit before the third had even aired. Within the first four days, the third season entered the number one spot on the streaming platform and logged over 154 million hours viewed.[78] The show has built on its success each season after premiering during the quarantine period of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US while people were at home and seeking out (relatively) family-friendly media to watch. The most recent installment of the *National Treasure* franchise, a television show titled, *National Treasure: Edge of History*, debuted late 2022 and was not renewed for a second season. *Edge of History* scored low with critics and audience members were unhappy with it too, citing wokeness, a lack of treasure hunting, and incongruence with the preceding films.[79] The show, which streamed on

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[77] Pamela McClintock, "Box Office: 'Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny' Cursed With $60M Domestic Opening," *The Hollywood Reporter* (blog), July 2, 2023, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/indiana-jones-dial-of-destiny-box-office-opening-1235527936/

[78] Briana Bell. "'Outer Banks' Season 3 Sails to No. 1 With Over 154 Million Hours," accessed October 31, 2023, https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/outer-banks-season-3-154-million-hours-viewed-first-four-days-1235538681/.

[79] Paul Tassi, "Disney Plus's New 'National Treasure' TV Show Is Getting Roasted In Reviews," Forbes, accessed May 22, 2024, https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultassi/2022/12/19/disney-pluss-new-national-treasure-tv-show-is-getting-roasted-in-reviews/.

Disney+ did not reach the record-breaking levels of success as *Outer Banks,* despite having a similar target audience.

RAMIFICATIONS

Just as Veracini demonstrates that attending the cinema is a settler colonial practice, so is attending a museum. Despite new pioneering efforts of visitor engagement, visiting a museum is still very much a passive practice. Spectators, which I use here to emphasize the passive nature of the average museum visitor, are immersed in a different time or place. They discover new horizons from the relative comfortability of well-kept rooms with lit vitrines and painstakingly organized exhibits. The discovery aspect is laid out for them. These spectators also bring their own backgrounds, biases, and unique global experiences into the museum space. These unique positionalities impact how these spectators understand and conceptualize the space, especially in designated "ethnic" or "cultural" museums.

Television and film consistently inform human understanding of broader culture. There is a correlation between what is seen on TV and how people perceive the world, even if the purpose is purely to entertain. In today's society, which is dominated by social media and other quick forms of information gathering, people are making contact with cultural debates through media. They are not necessarily reading scholarship, but watching TikTok clips, movies, YouTube videos, etc. For museums, the COVID-19 shutdown prevented the public from engaging with education and exhibits. The Smithsonian Institute, for instance, experienced a significant visit drop during the height of the pandemic and has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels. 28.5 and 22.1 million visits were recorded in 2018 and 2019. 3.3 and 5.2 million were recorded in 2020 and 2021. 14.9 and 17.7 million were recorded most recently in 2022 and 2023.[80]

[80] Smithsonian Institution, “Visitor Stats,” Smithsonian Institution, accessed April 4, 2024, https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/about/stats.

This may be positive in some respects because it decenters the hegemony of Western-imagined institutions of academia like universities, museums, libraries, etc. that present information as having an absolute right and endorsed by many layers of the historical record. History in its own terms may be flawed because of its privileging of white, European narratives and linear organization featuring winners and losers. However, the entertainment media like film and TV acts in a way in which its effects are not always questioned or analyzed. Because these mediums are seen as purely for entertainment, viewers are not always critically engaging with the information being imparted to them. In United States society, museums remain the more "legitimate" option for understanding culture, material and otherwise. As the primary avenue, museums have become subject to more scrutiny and interrogation over ethics in recent years, film and television have not been engaged with in the same way for their depictions of material culture.

Cultivation theory's insights to how people internalize the media they consume is useful for understanding the impact treasure hunting media can have on a museumgoer. The reality portrayed in media blurs with the reality of U.S. museums. Cultivation theory explains that media does not cause direct action but can inform a person's worldview. In the case of treasure-hunting media, while it may not spur people to go on an *Indiana Jones*-sized adventure, the media at hand may lead them to believe that it is a normal and natural occurrence. They may begin to associate object histories with a glorious adventure, rather than with plundering or looting. Because of the trend across media that important objects of material culture belong in a Western museum, audiences begin to believe that it is their rightful place. Through Gerbner’s cultivation theory, the effect of media’s representations on perceptions of reality may help

explain the mindset of visitors when entering a museum space. They hold preconceived expectations about what they will see and the importance those objects will have to society.

I argue that cultivation theory demonstrates how entertainment media informs public perceptions of material culture, particularly non-Western material culture within museum spaces. Viewers exposed to large amounts of treasure-hunting narratives may be more likely to understand looting as a result of adventure and victory of good over evil, rather than an unethical means of acquiring cultural artifacts. They may see there to be a higher volume of treasure-hunting, looting, etc. in reality as well.

Therefore, entertainment media and treasure-hunting narratives influence what perspectives the everyday person brings into a museum when viewing a particular exhibition or object. The experience and negotiation of power in the museum or exhibition space is informed by not only its physical qualities, but also the prior encounters with historical objects through the lens of narratives presented in movie theaters and on TV screens. Because media portrays a high prevalence of objects in a museum space, media consumers expect that to be true of the world under Gerbner's cultivation theory. The everyday person has a sustained relationship to material culture through perceptions generated by media. A person enters the museum with preconceived ideas of the space's purpose and what the purpose is of displaying material culture in that venue which extends to the material culture on display.

Framing theory can be applied in the same way to the action/adventure treasure hunting media at hand. Firstly, in terms of objects and material culture, the media often portrays them as waiting to be rescued and stagnant in time. Audiences may transfer attributes such as unmarked and neutral onto objects portrayed. Secondly, the archaeologists, explorers, etc. portrayed in this genre are often celebrated for defying the odds, getting the girl, and saving the day. Audiences

may transfer attributes like heroicness, moral soundness, trustworthiness, etc. onto the people responsible for placing objects in museums, even if that object is hundreds of miles away from its origins. Thirdly, the museum itself is often portrayed as a just way to contain material culture. The museum is a haven for all the material culture "saved" by the heroes of the films. Indiana Jones even once uttered "that belongs in a museum," when rescuing the "Cross of Coronado" in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989),* reinforcing the role of the museum as the final destination for all important material culture.[81] Audiences may transfer characteristics such as safe, ethical, etc. onto museums as institutions of learning and high culture.

The unique genre of settler colonial adventure "treasure" hunting media is marked mostly by trends of legitimizing United States nationhood, fetishization, bad intentioned antagonists, and (most importantly) a hero a US audience can support. The trends in these media, here studied in the contexts of *Indiana Jones, National Treasure, and Outer Banks*, reveal the lasting dominance of settler colonialism over United States narratives. These forms of popular culture indicate a deeper settler colonial society which continues to develop stories which reinforce "American" histories of displacement.

The significance of the genre also extends to the way it shapes the everyday person living in the United States's encounters with museums and material culture. Despite efforts to disrupt the harmful colonial legacies of museums and the collecting of material culture, this genre still influences the space. Cultivation and framing theories help explain how these narratives permeate everyday life and influence perspectives. These fictional narratives become "real" in a way because they interact with ever present conflicts of dispossession, colonial legacies of

[81] The "Cross of Coronado" is fictional and constructed for the purposes of the film. It bridges Jones's childhood and adulthood with his belief (in both times) that it should be in a museum as an important historical artifact. It is named for the Spanish explorer Francisco Coronado.

looting and plundering, etc. Discussions around repatriation and restitution in news media begin to indicate how the lines between ethical debates hinted at on screen clash with the pressing issues facing museum institutions around the world today.

Debates about material culture and museum ethics have been making headlines in recent years.[82] The Benin Bronzes, Parthenon Elgin marbles, and Rosetta Stone are some of the most famous and contested objects making the news, currently in possession of the British Museum.[83] Interestingly, there is also an emerging trend which sees the intertwining of popular culture highlighted in this paper with news articles. Graham Bowley for the New York Times writes, "For U.S. Museums with Looted Art, the Indiana Jones Era is Over." Bowley uses negatively connotated language like swashbuckling, piracy, looting, and villainous to tie unethical past collecting practices to treasure hunting seen in films like *Indiana Jones.*[84] Leveraging agenda setting theory in this context, the article persuades readers to look at collecting through a lens they are more familiar with. By situating the discussion between Indiana Jones collecting and post-1970 UNESCO treaty, the article allows readers to take what they know from popular culture about museum and collecting ethics and then be challenged by the current trend of increased repatriations and other amends.[85]

In a similar vein, Josh Sanburn for Vanity Fair pens the article, "How the FBI Discovered a Real-Life Indiana Jones in, of All Places, Rural Indiana." The article tells the story of an "amateur archaeologist" Don Miller and a raid by the FBI's Art Theft Program. Initially Miller is

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[82] The British Museum has even been treated to its own "Times Topic" headline on the New York Times website.
[83] The British Museum is infamous for denying repatriation claims by using the logic that if they started giving a few things back, they would have to give everything back, see
[84] Graham Bowley, "For U.S. Museums With Looted Art, the Indiana Jones Era Is Over," *The New York Times*, December 13, 2022, see https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/arts/museums-looted-art-repatriation.html.
[85] The 1970 UNESCO convention sought to "prohibit and prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural property," see "About 1970 Convention | UNESCO," accessed May 22, 2024, https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking/about.

painted as a possessor of stolen cultural property, yes, but in a way which is not necessarily vilifying. As the article proceeds, Miller's obsession with and fetishization of people, objects, and cultures makes any reader's stomach go sour. During the raid, the FBI recovered two thousand bones belonging to about five hundred people and "5,000 cultural artifacts and funerary objects out of a total collection of 42,000 items."[86] Once again, the name Indiana Jones is leveraged to bring to a reader's mind a specific image of a treasure hunter, archaeologist, grave robber, etc. The article uses the heroic images of Jones to expose the horrifying practices of theft in name of collecting that United States society has made normal over time.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was signed by the United States Congress in 1990. NAGPRA seeks to combat colonial and settler colonial traditions in the United States by facilitating the return of ancestral human remains, funerary objects, and material culture to federally recognized Indigenous communities.[87] The legislation is flawed, inviting debate around ambiguities in cultural affiliation and histories of disorganized museum cataloging. Despite the progress of NAGPRA, the United States still seeks to confront its colonial past and mistreatment of Indigenous communities. NAGPRA does not resolve centuries of discrimination and mistreatment. Chip Colwell considers how repatriation has changed museums since the 1970s:

> "Repatriation extinguished the old idea that museums could preserve and present Native American culture without any input from Native Americans themselves. In the last forty

[86] Josh Sanburn, "How the FBI Discovered a Real-Life Indiana Jones in, of All Places, Rural Indiana," Vanity Fair, accessed April 10, 2024, https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2021/10/how-the-fbi-discovered-a-real-life-indiana-jones-in-indiana.
[87] Stephen E. Nash and Chip Colwell, "NAGPRA at 30: The Effects of Repatriation," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49, no. Volume 49, 2020 (October 21, 2020): 225–39, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-075435.

> years, the far majority of museums have changed from institutions that resisted repatriation, to regretting their complicity in many collections unjustly taken, to reluctantly complying with repatriation laws, to respecting Native spiritual and cultural beliefs about their ancestors and cultural treasures."[88]

NAGPRA has forced US institutions receiving federal funding to act on repatriation. The act destabilizes museums' role as sole caretaker of culture. Each institution reconciles this relationship differently, with some turning to deceit to maintain power and others doing their best to responsibly and respectfully return components of their collections which require repatriation.[89] Thirty-three years after the passage of NAGPRA, hopes are set on increased collaboration between museum institutions and Indigenous communities. Just as settler colonialism in the United States is ongoing, the work prompted by NAGPRA must also be.

[88] Colwell, *Plundered Skulls and Stolen Spirits,* 264.
[89] Nash and Colwell, "NAGPRA at 30."

CONCLUSION

The linkages between current unfolding narratives of repatriation and the looting and treasure-hunting displayed in media point to an interesting dual understanding in US consciousness. While society partially acknowledges the harm and violence committed in the past, it is still seeking out stories which "uncover" and "rescue" objects of value. The third season of the *Outer Banks (2020)* television series came out in 2023. Despite taking place in the present day itself and being wildly popular at the same time repatriations and museum collecting ethics are being consistently introduced to public consciousness in the news, the most recent season deals with the discovery of El Dorado, the city of gold. The final sequence of the season involves the ragtag group of teenagers being thanked for their discovery and the induction of the material culture used as "clues" into a museum exhibition.[90]

It will be interesting to see how the intersections of what is known from entertainment media, news, and by visiting institutions like museums will continue to intersect over time. For me interpersonally, the most common three responses I get when sharing with someone that I am pursuing an MA in Material Culture and Public Humanities are: "what is that?," "oh so like Indiana Jones," and "do you study the British Museum?" I have had these conversations with people across age groups and find the responses interesting.

The linkage present between museums and media, as evidenced by news articles and museum exhibitions, suggests a better path forward may be possible by leveraging the current public awareness.

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[90] *Outer Banks.* Season 3, episode 10, "Secret of the Gnomon," aired February 23, 2023. Netflix, streaming.

On the museum side, action-adventure treasure-hunting media can be useful in attracting visitors. The allure of the museum coincides with a fascination for these narratives. Because museums have struggled to return to pre-pandemic numbers, engaging with this media can be a powerful tool to invite people into the space. Once there, curators can then subvert visitor expectations and highlight irresponsible collecting habits of the past. A museum can maintain their integrity by displaying their plan to reconcile with historical and present harm. The space for dialogue can also be complimented by opportunities for public feedback. Dialogue can be a powerful tool in prompting collaboration.

Amy Lonetree's work in *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* looks at shared authority between museum curators and Indigenous communities in increasing representation in historically harmful museum spaces. Collaboration lies at the heart of decolonizing practices which "must involve assisting our communities in addressing the legacies of historical and unresolved grief."[91] By giving primacy to Indigenous perspectives, a more accurate, responsible, and holistic history can emerge. By leveraging treasure hunting media (where Indigenous communities and perspectives are often historicized rather than present), museums can show viewers what was left unseen in the movies.

For the film industry, the increased presence of Indigenous filmmakers and actors is hopeful. By increasing visibility, Indigenous perspectives can be removed from their pastness and brought into the present. *National Treasure: Edge of History* is the most recent example of a treasure hunting narrative which sought to increase focus on silences in United States history. However, the show was criticized for political correctness.[92] The genre of treasure hunting films

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[91] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).
[92]Tassi, "Disney Plus's New 'National Treasure' TV Show Is Getting Roasted In Reviews," Forbes.

is so tied to settler colonialism's logic that it is hard to strike a balance which target audiences would still want to view. It cuts to a deeper problem of a refusal to interact critically with media consumed for leisure and entertainment. The culture of the genre may need to shift gradually to escape its cycles of nostalgic settler colonialism reproduction. The introduction of a few elements over time rather than a complete overhaul may be the most appeasing approach. The first step I recommend is not having museums preached as the container for material culture. If the "treasure" at hand is of an Indigenous background, the protagonist can be shown on screen engaging in a collaborative manner with Indigenous characters to not only find the treasure but then to also restore it to a place of their choosing. Again, visibility of Indigenous people in media is important. Negative and stereotypical portrayals of American Indians have been present since the silent film era and the Westerns on television in the 1950s.[93] Holistic and responsible representation provides an avenue for Indigenous youth to see people who look like them on the big screen. Furthermore, it also provides an opportunity to undo harmful stereotypes by showing representations which are closer to reality. In line with cultivation theory, when the on-screen reality and reality blur, they can be more similar rather than harmful and at odds.

A possible future avenue for this discussion could seek to understand why films within this genre are consistently remade and rebooted in a franchise fashion. Is it purely a money-making venture by production companies or are audiences nostalgic for these narratives? Svetlana Boym sees nostalgia as having two types: reflective and restorative. While feelings of nostalgia seem to be for a certain place, they are for a certain time.[94] When engaging in nostalgic activities, people are trying to get back to the time they experienced it rather than the place. Does

[93] Luter, Lepre, and Clark, *Diversity in US Mass Media*.
[94] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

the recent reboot of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (2023)* represent nostalgia for the original childhood audience of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* who are trying to get back to those childlike feelings of wonder and amazement? On the other hand, it may be the constant and consistent entanglement with settler colonialism which causes US society to be unable to dream up futures which are not inherently settler colonial. When looking at outer space narratives in cinema, Veracini goes as far as to write that the end of the world is more feasible and easier to imagine than an end to settler colonialism.[95]

[95] Veracini, "Settler Evasions."

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