

**Where the Wild Horses Roam:  
The Cross-Cultural Debate over  
the Fate of Wild Horses on Yakama Tribal Lands**

**By: Jennifer Smith**

**Abstract**

The horse has been recognized as an integral part of the Yakama people's culture for the better part of the last two centuries. However, in recent decades, the wild horse population on Yakama tribal lands has significantly increased, leading to a polarizing debate over their management. The debate over the management of wild horses on Yakama tribal lands provides a useful lens through which to examine the current state of Native-Settler interactions. In this essay, I draw on the works of scholars Rifkin, Wolfe, Furness and Rosaldo to examine the complexity of enacting Native sovereignty in the presence of animal advocates motivated by imperialist nostalgia that employ repressive authenticity grounded in the larger frontier narrative. Through the analysis of scholarly work and public commentary, I show how animal advocates use these ideas cumulatively as means to justify the persecution of the Yakama people by imagining themselves as the protagonists in the struggle of civilization vs. savagery. Finally, I weave in my own personal experiences with horses and suggest that we explore multiple perspectives that take seriously the agency of the horse, while considering our relations with non-human animals.

## **Introduction**

The horse has been an integral part of the Yakama people's culture for the larger portion of the last two centuries. Offering increased mobilization, and alternative methods of transportation, the horse has earned, and thus been afforded, a special place of significance in their culture. However, as times have changed, technology has advanced, and the role of the horse has been significantly altered, the relationship between the horse and the Yakama people appears to have shifted considerably. Because of this, the horse, has at times found itself in the precarious position of proving itself worthy of the right to exist. As of late, this has become an increasingly difficult task for the wild horse populations currently residing on the tribal lands of the Yakama nation in the Eastern part of Washington State. With population size steadily increasing, the Yakama nation has found itself immersed in a controversial debate over the most effective methods to manage uncontrolled wild horse populations on tribal lands.

In response to the Yakama's desire to employ methods of population control, including the use of horsemeat processing facilities, outside agencies such as the Humane Society and the American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign (to be referred to hereafter as the AWHPC) have sought to intervene citing similar motivating factors. The Humane Society considers horse slaughter as neither a viable nor humane way to address the Yakama's growing challenges, and thus they have offered alternative solutions, such as long-term birth control medications and castration. However, the Northwest Tribal Horse Coalition (to be referred to hereafter as the NWTHC), which is comprised of the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla and Shoshone-Bannock tribes, have stated that these methods are slow acting, expensive, and do not offer the immediate relief from the damage to highly sensitive ecosystems brought about by flourishing herds (NWTHC). Echoing the concerns of the Humane Society, the AWHPC, well supported by

affluent and wealthy individuals such as Robert Redford and Carly Simon, have been very vocal of their disapproval of the Yakama nations advocating of horse processing plants. In addition to the support of the Humane Society's methods of intervention, the AWHPC supports the use of ecotourism that would allow the public onto Yakama tribal lands; this, undoubtedly, would present its own set of unique challenges.

Thus, the question remains, "What happens to these wild horses and who decides?" The answer to that may be far more complicated than any of the invested parties could ever imagine. In this essay, I will incorporate textual analysis of scholarly works and public commentary, as well as my own personal experiences with horses over the last twenty years in an effort to develop a broader understanding of the complexity of the issue at hand. In the process, I will argue that the debate over the fate of the Yakama nations' wild horse population is further complicated by the intervention of outside organizations who in an effort to revitalize the frontier narrative, become motivated by imperialist nostalgia, thus employing the use of repressive authenticity. Cumulatively, these actions interrupt the Yakama nation's ability to enact their political sovereignty and incite an ongoing battle where animal advocates imagine themselves the protagonists in the struggle of civilization vs. savagery. Inspired by theoretical works of Rifkin, Furniss, Wolfe and Rosaldo, I will explore how the horse becomes a tool utilized symbolically by the Yakama nation and animal advocate groups as a terrain of struggle. In the process, the agency of the horse as a sentient, living being is lost, as its right to exist hinges on the outcome of a debate far larger than the animal.

In recent public statements made by representatives of the Yakama nation, they have argued that their ability to enact their political sovereignty is hindered by the interference of outside organizations. To clarify, the ability to enact their political sovereignty would afford

them the freedom to decide what management practices would be most beneficial based on their current situation to bring herds down to a manageable size. Yakama Tribal Council Chairman Harry Smiskin emphasized this in a recent article for the *Yakama Herald Republic*. Smiskin says, “The fact remains that the feral [wild] horses are on the closed part of the reservation and are the responsibility of the Yakama Nation” (Pengeman 2014). While that may resonate as sound logic, what scholar Mark Rifkin refers to as the “peculiar” nature of Native sovereignty creates a series of blurred lines when Natives attempt to assert their political sovereignty in a legal context (Rifkin 88). This becomes apparent when taking into consideration the ambiguous nature of the *Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971*. While the Act attempts to define the conditions for Wild Horse and Burro management, it also declares the Wild Horse and Burro national symbols that enrich the American way of life (Public Law 92-195). The identification of the wild horse as a national symbol will be incorporated in the language used to mobilize invested animal advocates in the decades to come.

Although the Humane Society has publicly condemned horse slaughter based on the processes inability to be humane in any capacity (something I will discuss in more detail later), both certain representatives for the Humane Society and the AWHPC have organized themselves around the idea of wild horses as iconic cultural symbols and the last remaining piece of the American West. As such, they believe, wild horses should be left to reside on their “homelands” in their natural state (AWHPC; Scott Beckstead). The organization around these kinds of ideas is largely representative of what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has deemed “*imperialist nostalgia*.” Rosaldo defines imperialist nostalgia as, “a particular kind of nostalgia ... found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (Rosaldo 69). Moreover, it affords those who have been afflicted by this nostalgia the opportunity

to absolve themselves of any of the guilt associated with their role in transformation. That said, the imperial gaze (see E. Ann Kaplan 2012) that often precipitates imperialist nostalgia is damaging enough on its own, but becomes even more so when it acts as a catalyst for other destructive behaviors.

Concomitant to imperialist nostalgia is the idea scholar Patrick Wolfe refers to as “*repressive authenticity*.” Wolfe identifies repressive authenticity as, “a style of romantic stereotyping” often present in settler-colonial discourse (Wolfe 2006; 402). The use of repressive authenticity, as Wolfe describes, is problematic as it attempts to define Native communities within the parameters of the settler-colonial vision of Native “authenticity”. In the process, it deprives Native peoples of their ability to make important decisions by invalidating their opinions. This can be witnessed when viewing the commentary of AWPHC members and supporters on social media, as well as reflected in the statements made by representatives of the Humane Society. But imperialist nostalgia and the use of repressive authenticity are not simply mechanisms employed only when contentious cross-cultural debates arise; they are engrained into our way of thinking and perpetuated in a variety of different mediums.

Take for example DreamWorks 2002 film, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*. Set in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century American West, it is the story of a wild Kiger mustang that is ripped from his family by the US cavalry only to resist the process of civilization (by failing to become the subservient mount of the cavalry general), and befriends a young Lakota boy labeled by the cavalry as a “hostile”. Through the course of the film, Spirit and his Indian friend “Little Creek” endure a series of trials and tribulations that concludes with the friends evading the Cavalry and achieving their freedom. After a heartfelt goodbye, Spirit and Little Creek venture off onto into separate, yet equally uncertain futures on the frontier (Spirit 2002). *Spirit* has proven to be

problematic for a number of reasons (for a deeper critique see C. Richard King 2008). The film reinforces the myth that all Native peoples are inherently tied to animals and nature, and allows viewers the freedom to mourn the loss of days gone by. Additionally the battle of civilized man (The United States Cavalry) vs. the uncivilized (Spirit and Little Creek) recreates past tensions moving them into the domain of the present. Thus, viewers become fully immersed in feelings of imperialist nostalgia and motivated to invoke the frontier narrative (See Furniss 2006). The invocation of the frontier narrative affords those who indulge it to imagine themselves protagonists in the fight of “civilization vs. savagery” (Furniss 2006; 173). When all of these ideas fall into place, the next logical step in the process is the use of repressive authenticity in an effort to project Western myths onto Native peoples.

### **Significance of the Horse in Yakama Culture**

“Revered for its endurance and strength, the horse has become a symbol of the true Yakama.”

*-Yakama Nation*

Although limited, references to the significance of the horse within the Yakama people’s culture does exist in varied sources. For example, in a collection of letters written by George Gibbs in the early 1850’s, he observed that the Yakama had a plentiful supply of horses that were often sold or traded to gain access to game not readily available in their region. Specifically, in 1854 Gibbs wrote, “Of game the Yakima country is as destitute as that of the Klickitat—so much so that ten deerskins will purchase a horse” (Gibbs 1854; 14). However, horses were not reserved solely for sale or trade for the acquisition of goods; they were also raced at tribal gatherings. As a testament to this, in the same report in 1854 Gibbs states, “The Yakima’s.... assemble with them [The Klickitat] for the purpose of gathering berries and racing horses”, adding “A horse of

proved reputation was a source of wealth or ruin of his owner” (10). By the time of Gibbs’ observations in the early 1850’s the Yakama clearly had a cemented horse culture. This can be affirmed by my own working knowledge that the ability to acquire, connect, and train a horse is not a process that happens overnight. In order for the Yakama to have been actively engaged in a horse culture, (as it appears they were), there would have been a significant period of knowledge transmission that would have precipitated the acquisition of such a specific skill set.

The Yakama people refer to the horse as the K’u-See. According to their oral traditions that have been passed down through generations, the wild horse has been around as long as the Yakama can remember and remains “a symbol of the true Yakama Spirit and strength that survived the most difficult times over the last 200 years” (K’u-see Project). The perseverance of the Yakama’s horse population was something George Gibbs repeatedly noted. In fact, on one occasion Gibbs described the Yakama herds as, “hardy, and capable of shifting with but little food (Gibbs 1854; 10). This hardiness and perseverance allowed the Yakama horses to thrive in less than desirable conditions that would have not been conducive to more domesticated breeds, such as the thoroughbred. Interestingly, this is the same degree of perseverance that is still present in the Yakama wild horse population that allows them to survive on the limited resources available on the arid Yakama tribal lands.

While the Yakama declare that horses have been with them for as long as they can remember, Gibbs surmised “It is probable that the Shoshone’s or Snakes, a brand of the Comanche’s, first introduced them [horses] from the South” (Gibbs 1854; 10). Scholar John C. Ewers echoes the belief that horses originally reached the Northwestern Plateau via acquisition from the Shoshone. Ewer writes that the Plateau tribes likely “obtained their first horses directly from the Shoshoni or indirectly from tribes previously supplied by the Shoshoni” (Ewers 1955;

6). This information too provides a source for where the Yakama may have acquired their knowledge of horse culture and subsequently their horsemanship skills. Although evidence suggests that the Yakama obtained horses originally from the Shoshone or related tribes, there is nothing offered within the texts I have reviewed that concretely establishes a timeline for when the horse first appeared in Yakama culture. Thus, as it stands, the Western notion of temporality has been usurped by the Yakama's assertion that the horse has "always" been with them. The use of the term "always", depending on its interpretation, serves to operate as an interesting site of contention in the cross-cultural debate between the Yakama nation and animal advocates.

### **The Irony of the Horse as a Native or Invasive Species**

"Lands that were once plentiful with deer and elk now have none as the *native* species are being run off by this *invasive* species."

-Harry Smiskin and Virgil Lewis, *Yakama Nation* (2013)

"Native, invasive, reintroduced native—it's irrelevant, because the American culture was born with a respect and reverence for the horse and all that it did in aiding to build this country."

-Scott Beckstead, *Humane Society of the United States* (2014)

Although the Yakama people state that horses have been with them "as long as they can remember" (K'u-see Project), in recent months, representatives from the Yakama nation have publicly declared the horse an invasive species; overrunning the land, damaging sensitive ecosystems, as well as traditional and medicinal plants (Pengaman 2014). This begs the question, "What constitutes a native or invasive species, and why does it matter?" Like the answer to the question of, "Who should have the final word over the fate of these horses", the complexity of

the issue alludes to the fact that the qualifications for what species are native or invasive are not universal.

Author and scholar Claire Kim (2014) recently wrote about a California Court case brought forth by the California Fish and Game Commission prompted by the concerns of animal advocates. Recognizing that science based logic stood a better chance of being taken seriously in a court of law than an empathetic plea, animal advocates went to the FGC expressing real concern that these turtles and other imported animals were being bought at Chinese markets and released or escaping into the wild. This presented a real danger that the FGC could not ignore, as these *invasive* species could produce “ecological harm” to the environmental conditions of the *native* species of the region (Kim 2014; 5-2). This created a win-win situation for animal advocates as they secured the support of the FGC (albeit for unrelated concerns) by restructuring their argument in an effort to manipulate the outcome in their favor.

Intriguingly, the argument made by the FGC prompted by concerned animal advocates in California is similar to that which is being argued by the Yakama nation. Publicly declaring the horse an invasive species provides leeway to introduce ecological harm as a sound and tangible reason for proposing culling the wild horse population as a means to produce a rapid reduction in herd size and repair damaged lands. Moreover, we should take a moment to consider that alternative reasoning for the Yakama nation’s appropriation of the argument employed by members of the settler community. Recognizing the history of power relations between settler and Native communities that have been heavily skewed in favor of the former, the argument presented by the Yakama nation also offers Native peoples an opportunity to push back against the dominant power structure. In doing so it raises questions as to why the same argument would be valid for one group but not another. However, that may be a question that warrants a more

thorough examination at a later date, and thus I will move on to the argument of those in favor of the horse as a native species.

Positioned in a cemented stance that seeks to declare the horse a native species, the AWHPC argues that the horse, through prehistoric origins, is a native species to North America. In fact, on the FAQ section of the AWHPC website, they state: “Wild horses are a reintroduced native wildlife species.... How they disappeared....If in fact they actually ever became extinct here, is a mystery” (AWHPC). The statement alluding to the idea that horses may have never disappeared is problematic as it raises questions as to how the idea of the extinction of the horse came to be (if it did) and who reached the conclusion based on what evidence. This is a question that I raised in a recent interview with Humane Society representative Scott Beckstead. When asking Beckstead if he thought the horse should be considered a native or invasive species, he responded “Through paleontological evidence we know that the horse has been present for hundreds, thousands, maybe millions of years and that the climate in North America is conducive to the occupation of the horse.” He added, “We know that at one point they became extinct through human hunting and potential climate changes due to the ice age....but native, invasive, reintroduced native—it’s irrelevant” (Beckstead 2014). But in some capacity *it is* relevant as it determines what kind of protections horses are entitled to; especially as set forth in the *Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971*. A piece of legislation both the AWHPC and Humane Society frequently reference in their arguments.

The information that has been presented in the paleontological and the historical records asserts, “Evidence documents the dispersal of *Equus* [Genus] from North America to Asia 2-3 million years ago” (Kirkpatrick and Fazio 2010). According to a variety of scholars, including Dr. Ross McPhee, the curator of Mammology at the American Museum of Natural History, the

horse went through its most recent extinction anywhere from 13,000 to 7,600 years ago in North America with some species in the arctic evident in the record until 2,000 years ago (American Museum of Natural History). That said: how does any of this determine the status of the horse as a species? There is a long circulating hypothesis that the horse was reintroduced around the time of the appearance of the Spanish Conquistadores in North America in and around the sixteenth century; because of this, are they considered a reintroduced native species? Does the fact that they were domesticated prior to reintroduction factor into the horses' status as native, invasive, or reintroduced native? The variety of answers to this question only serves to engender more confusion, thus adding more fuel to the fire of an already heated debate.

A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* written in response to some animal advocate's insistence that the horse is a "reintroduced native species" seeks to shed some light on how the term may or may not be applicable to today's wild horse populations. According to journalist Karen Klein, "It's ....a stretch to say that the Ice Age horse that went extinct thousands of years ago was.... the same as the one that now roams Western lands (Klein 2014). However, others, such as scholars Jay Kirkpatrick and Patricia Fazio (2010) suggest that the modern horse is a descendant of the genus *Equus*, and thus is deserving of being considered a native species. Moreover, Kirkpatrick and Fazio (2010) state that there are key things to consider when declaring a species native, "1) where it originated; and (2) whether or not it co-evolved with its habitat". The contention is that the horse meets the criteria for it to be declared a native species and whether it was domesticated or not before reintroduction is irrelevant.

But not all scholars are as convinced as Kirkpatrick and Fazio. Case in point, during a recent interview on *HuffPost Live* surrounding the debate over wild horses on the Navajo tribal lands, guest Professor and Chair of American Studies at State University of New York Donald

Grinde Jr., was quick to declare the horse an invasive species irrespective of its prehistoric origins or later reintroduction into the environment. Grinde Jr. contends that horses are not native to North America as they were reintroduced by the Spanish already domesticated before becoming what we now refer to as “mustangs” or “wild horses”. Grinde Jr. goes further to argue that outside interests intervening in an attempt to save wild horses on reservation lands infringes upon Native sovereignty and the ability for tribes to manage wildlife And resources (HuffPost Live 2013). Grinde Jr.’s concerns over the infringement upon Native sovereignty are not without merit. Federally recognized tribes do hold a unique status as sovereign nations and as such have the jurisdiction to oversee and implement management plans in regard to wildlife and resources on tribal lands. However, as the debate over whether the horse is native, invasive or reintroduced to North America wages on, there are others who suggest that it is time that indigenous voices decide how they handle what *they* consider invasive species on *their* lands.

Although referencing the issues surrounding wild horses on First Nations land in Canada, Bhattacharyya and Larson’s 2014 forthcoming piece contends that the need for indigenous voices in discourse surrounding invasive or introduced species is imperative to developing effective and appropriate management practices. More specifically, they declare, “Indigenous peoples may interact with introduced species differently from other cultures, societies and communities, and may be particularly affected by authoritarian management and control measures” (Bhattacharyya and Larson 2014; 1). Bhattacharrya and Larson make an excellent point. The interaction of the Yakama with the wild horses that exist on tribal lands is presumably far different than the interaction of an animal advocate or member of settler society that might have interactions with one or a several *domesticated* horses.

Thus, how can we use these ideas to develop a better understanding of the current situation on Yakama tribal lands? And, how do “authoritarian management and control measures” affect the Yakama nation’s ability to exercise their sovereignty and effectively implement wild horse management plans based on how *they* interact with the species? On the Northwest Tribal Horse Coalition website they state, “It is important the members of Congress recognize that Indian tribes are sovereign units...and the United States Congress and the Federal courts have repeatedly recognized that fact (NWTHC). While it has been recognized that federally recognized tribes are in fact sovereign nations, their ability to fully enact sovereignty is often complicated by continuous outside intervention and legal language that is riddled with ambiguity.

### **The Peculiarity of Native Sovereignty**

“Though the Indians are acknowledged ...unquestioned right to the lands they occupy ... it may well be doubted whether those tribes which reside within the acknowledged boundaries of the United States can, with strict accuracy, be denominated foreign nations. They may, more correctly, perhaps, be denominated domestic dependent nations.”

-*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831)

Defining Native sovereignty, especially in political and legal contexts is an extremely complicated task. According to *Merriam Webster*, sovereignty is, “The authority of a state to govern itself or another state” (Merriam Webster). Many times the federal courts have acknowledged that Tribes are their own sovereign nations and as such have the ability to manage their own affairs. However, as scholar Mark Rifkin suggests, “Native peoples appear as a gap with the U.S. legal discourse” (Rifkin 2009; 89). This has created what Rifkin refers to as the “peculiar” nature of Native sovereignty: a place where legal and political lines are blurred. The

Yakama nation has openly stated they feel the intervention of outside agencies jeopardizes their ability to enact their political sovereignty; thus raising the question, “If federally recognized Tribes are considered sovereign nations, why can outside interests intervene?” More specifically, in a case such as this, where the Yakama as a sovereign nation is attempting to exercise sovereignty to manage tribal wildlife and resources, “Why do outside sources intervene?” In a situation as complex as this, let us examine a few specific instances where the peculiar nature of Native sovereignty allows those with competing interests to manipulate its meaning.

In 2013, Ben Shelly the president of the Navajo nation stated that the failure of federal agencies to help tribes manage their natural resources violated their trust responsibility (Taylor 2013). The obligation of the federal government to aid in the protection and preservation of sensitive ecosystems is outlined within secretarial order 3206, also known as the *American Indian Tribal Rights, Federal-Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act*, signed in on June 5, 1997. Within this act it clearly states that, “Indian lands are not federal public lands or part of the public domain, and are not subject to federal public land laws”, adding “These lands are managed by Indian tribes in accordance with tribal goals”, and “Departments and affected Indian tribes need to establish and maintain ...working relationships and...partnerships to promote ...conservation of sensitive species and the health of ecosystems upon which they depend” (Order 3206 1997). The language utilized within this secretarial order clearly states three key things that are currently sites of contention in the debate over wild horse management practices: sovereignty, responsibility, and ecological conservation.

The Yakama and the Navajo nations cite very similar concerns in regard to the problems encountered when dealing with growing horse populations. Both nations contend that sensitive ecosystems are placed in harm’s way by continuing to allow flourishing herds free roam of tribal

lands. That said: The competing interest of animal advocates who contend the horse is a native species and thus should be protected is complicated by the variety of interpretations that could befall the term “sensitive species”. If those who interpret the meaning of the order are swayed in favor of the argument that the horse *is* a native species to North America what options do Native nations have to refute this interpretation? Moreover, if animal activists (based on language set forth within the *Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971*), can effectively argue that the horse *is* a national symbol important to the American people, how can we ensure that interpretations of laws are not made solely based on the idea of nationalism? These conflicts that pit competing interests against one another, in this case America v. sovereign Native nations, is where the lines of Native sovereignty become inexplicably blurred.

Public law 92-195 is a piece of legislation passed in 1971, in an effort to preserve dwindling populations of wild horses and burros residing on various lands across the United States. Recognized as the Wild Horse and Free Roaming Burro Act, it gives control of the management of herds on public lands to the Secretary of the Interior, who in turn, had bestowed upon them authority to both oversee and dictate what practices were best suited for multi-use land management. However, there are specific regulating factors presented within the Act itself that if interpreted as they are written would exempt sovereign Native nations from being legally bound to its adherence. For example, Section 2, letter E. states, ““public lands” means any lands administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Land Management or by the Secretary of Agriculture through the Forest Service”(Public Law 92-195). Tribal lands such as those belonging to the Yakama nation are not public lands, or so I naively assumed. In an effort to find some degree of clarity in regard to this complex question I reached out to one of my respected mentors, Professor Alexandra Harmon.

Professor Harmon actively teaches in both the History and American Indian Studies departments at the University of Washington and has extensive background in law. Upon conversing with her, I learned that the state of land “ownership” in regard to Native peoples is *still* an extremely complex matter. Professor Harmon stated, “In most cases, but not all, the U.S. government holds reserved lands....for their Indian “wards” ” (Harmon 2014). Having been declared “domestic dependent nations” by Judge Marshall in the 1831 *Cherokee v. Georgia* case, Native nations would be unable to escape the repercussions that resulted from the paternalistic nature of the language used by Marshall. Thus, paternalism as expressed by the United States federal government, would dictate the nature of United States-Native relations for decades to come. And let’s face it: old habits die hard. The contradictions that exist when attempting to invoke Native sovereignty, especially in the presence of competing interests in the form of invested American stakeholders only serves to confirm Rifkin’s argument that:

Settler-state sovereignty can be viewed less as an expression of the nations rightful control over the land within its boundaries than the topological production of the impression of boundedness by banning—rendering “peculiar”, “anomalous”, “unique”, “special”—competing claims to space and collectivity (Rifkin 2006; 98).

The idea of competing claims to space and collectivity is especially important when considering who has access and ultimately control over tribal lands. Rifkin’s idea of “peculiar” sovereignty is an accurate representation of the non-specific, easily manipulated, blurred position that Native nations are forced into by an overarching sovereign polity like the United States. By seeking to manipulate and interpret the parameters of Native sovereignty based on how it can best be used to procure advantageous outcomes, the United States can ultimately maintain the security of their

position as the dominant power.

Although Native sovereignty can be easily morphed to suit the better interests of the opposing parties, specifically in regards to the interpretation of the ambiguous language set forth in the Wild Horse and Burro Act, a Utah representative by the name of Chris Stewart (R) is proposing the original act be amended. The implementation of what Stewart has deemed the *Wild Horse Oversight Act of 2014*, would give states and Tribes the ability to enact management practices for wild horse populations on their lands. Federally referred to as H.R 5058, it would amend the already present Public Law 92-195 by adding the following:

At the request of the legislature ... of a State or ... of a federally recognized Indian tribe, the Secretary ... shall allow the State or federally recognized Indian tribe to assume all management and protection functions under this Act regarding wild free-roaming horses and burros on land within the boundaries of the State or federally recognized Indian tribe (H.R. 5058 2014).

While it is only a proposal, implementing this amendment to the preexisting legislation might act to clarify the language present in the original text, while providing grounds for states and tribes to exercise management practice that suit their collective interests. However, getting the bill successfully pass will not likely occur without strong opposition.

According to the website govtrack.us, the bill, introduced July 10, 2014, has a 54 percent chance of getting past the approval committee, with only a 15 percent chance of being enacted (govtrack.us 2014). The issues associated with the passing of such a bill may lay largely in part with the language utilized to ensure protection of wild horses and burros that is present in Public Law 92-195. The language in question is as follows:

Congress finds and declares that wild free-roaming horses and burros are living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West; that they contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people (Public Law 92-195).

The use of the phrases “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West” and “enrich the lives of the American people”, not only serves to promote nationalism, but invokes feelings of imperialist nostalgia.

The idea that Americans can organize around horses as living symbols of the American West has allowed for groups like the AWPHC and the Humane Society to appropriate this language to support their cause. In doing so, they can absolve themselves of any responsibility Americans had with the decline of the American West and wild horse populations facilitated through westward expansion and industrialization. Instead engaging in a reenactment of the issues that were present during the time they are mourning. In the case of animal advocates motivated by imperialist nostalgia, they have chosen to imagine themselves protagonists in the struggle of civilization v. savagery, choosing to point out the savage and uncivilized behavior of the Indian: in this case the Yakama nation.

### **Imperialist Nostalgia and Repressive Authenticity: Revitalizing the Frontier Narrative**

“During the Yakama scandal over the summer, where individuals rounded up horses on tribal lands, reports say that horses were not given any food or water prior to transfer, and the tribe just doesn’t appear to care”

-Scott Beckstead, *Humane Society of the United States* (2014)

“Native Americans traditionally will not kill a doe that is nursing a fawn. The fact that nursing foals are being taken from their mothers sends a message that there is a clear departure from the traditional ways. We are calling upon

Traditional Tribal Elders for their input and leadership. Procedural steps are being taken to convene a traditional tribunal to re-evaluate the Native American position on what is happening to wildlife and horses on their lands.”

Neda DeMayo, *Return to Freedom and AWHPC* (2014)

Mobilized around idea of imperialist nostalgia, animal advocates, specifically those with an interest in saving and preserving the wild horse populations on Yakama tribal lands, have employed damaging tactics meant to both highlight the Yakama nation’s “savagery” and their inability to conform to the Western ideas of what it means to be “authentically” Native. Although it would seem that these tactics are contradictory, they serve to reinforce animal advocates positions as protectors of an iconic symbol of American culture (wild horses), who stand in the contrast with those who they believe would see it destroyed. Thus battle lines have become clearly drawn. These dynamics bear a striking resemblance to what Renato Rosaldo calls imperial nostalgia. He states: “imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man’s burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones” (Rosaldo 1989; 108). If imperialist nostalgia invokes a desire to “uplift” what the “civilized presume to be savage,” how does it become justifiable to utilize repressive authenticity, which seeks to bind Native peoples to romantic Western stereotypes?

Repressive authenticity is a byproduct of imperialist nostalgia and grounded in the larger frontier narrative. The frontier narrative, as Elizabeth Furniss suggests, “typically romanticizes Indigenous peoples”, while consisting of a “set of symbols and metaphors that can be drawn on to create histories that may...celebrate...past actions of colonial expansion” (Furniss 2006; 172-173). Thus, each idea has the potential to inflict a great deal of damage onto groups of people that have been historically marginalized or oppressed. However, when these ideas become

catalysts for one another, and are exercised by groups within the dominant culture, they not only inflict damage on marginalized or oppressed groups, but also exacerbate pre existing tensions. Because of this, little hope remains for a mutually beneficial partnership thus creating a binary of us versus them. Examples of these ideas in action can be found in the statements of the AWHPC and supporters on their official Facebook page, as well as within the statements of some Humane Society representatives.

On June 4, 2014, the AWHPC reported on its public Facebook page that there were foals (horses under one year) in need of rescue on a feedlot near the Yakama Indian reservation. For the purposes of clarification, a feedlot generally serves an intermediary for processing plant pick up for several types of livestock destined for slaughter. Although, it is not unusual for outside buyers not associated with the horse meat market to purchase horses off feedlots, as often times they can be bought at a reduced price. This is evidenced by the fact that the owner of the feedlot in question allowed rescuers and their interested parties the opportunity to purchase younger wild horses. However, it was clearly not the goal of the AWHPC to portray any aspect of this incident in a favorable light. Instead they posted a picture of corralled horses that stated the following:

Here are the battle lines, my Friends: On one side, ruthless cruelty and greed in the form of the Yakama Tribe...sending hundreds - and ultimately thousands - of wild horses to horrific deaths ...the other side, big-hearted, selflessly dedicated rescuers, working hard to save the orphaned baby foals from terrible deaths. This is but one front in a very real war that is waging ... a war of cruelty against kindness, ignorance against enlightenment, greed against respect. We all must choose which side we're on - and those who choose to stand by and do nothing have chosen a side nonetheless (AWHPC Facebook 2014).

There can be no doubt that the AWHPC has positioned themselves in an “us vs. them” stance. Moreover, they go to great lengths to utilize language that highlights their good deeds in the face of the Yakama’s deplorable actions. Descriptive words such as “big-hearted” and “selfless” are used to identify the efforts of the AWHPC, while they identify the Yakama nation as purveyors of “ruthless cruelty and greed”. These problematic descriptions may serve to garner support for the AWHPC, but they also serve to perpetuate the idea that the AWHPC is the purveyor of civilized ideas in the presence of the hostile and savage Natives. After all, no *civilized* person could idly stand by and allow an “orphaned baby” to suffer a “terrible death”, could they? Interestingly, appeals to emotion serve to emphasize the battle of the civilized vs. the savage as well, opening up a space for angry AWHPC supporters to vehemently voice their disapproval for the Yakama nation in its totality.

As the post becomes flooded with emotionally charged supporters of the AWHPC’s plight, the comments becoming increasingly hostile and full of overarching generalizations of how angry supporters believe Native peoples should act. Moreover, invocation of the frontier narrative allows some supporters to restructure the events of history to downplay any of the consequences of colonial expansion for Native peoples. As a testament of the use of repressive authenticity and the invocation of the frontier narrative, I have chosen a small sample of the many comments that were posted; they appear below:

Shame on Elders of Yakama tribe. What happened to being one with nature? No pride just greed. Shame on you!!

Darlene R., *AWHPC Supporter* (2014)

It appears that the US was far too generous with the treaties with the Yakama...we should cut their lands in half and give the horse a sanctuary. We could build a wall across the land and one side has the wild horses and on the other, the horse's asses that don't seem to appreciate what they have. Sympathy for some Native Americans is hugely overplayed...obviously, the Yakama care more about their booze and quick cash than they ever did for their Mother Earth. They have no shame and hopefully will share the same end as the horses they condemned. Yakama will be synonymous with worthless horse killers...what a legacy!!!

- Dave L., *AWHPC Supporter* (2014)

I don't understand why the native people, with their beliefs, are doing this????

-Suzi L., *AWHPC Supporter* (2014)

This post had over 1,000 comments and 3,000 Facebook “likes”. Comments like those made by Darlene, Dave and Suzi, were a common theme amongst the thread. Dave chose to invoke the frontier narrative as a mechanism to justify his scathing remarks of the Yakama nation. More specifically, he emphasized the “generosity “ of the federal government during the treaty making process with the tribe while citing common Native American stereotypes (such as alcoholism and greed) as motivators for taking a pro-horse slaughter stance. However, Darlene and Suzi employed repressive authenticity as a means to shame the Yakama peoples for not adhering to the Western idea of what it means to be Native. By using overarching generalizations of Native Americans as having a unified set of beliefs that should govern how they interact with

the natural world, Darlene and Suzi have used repressive authenticity to promote the idea of homogeneity amongst indigenous peoples.

Historian Patrick Wolfe, who developed the idea of repressive authenticity, suggests that in settler-colonial discourse it is “concomitant with genocidal practice” (Wolfe 2006; 402). To be clear, genocide does not specifically apply to extinction through death, but as Wolfe has noted genocide can include acts of assimilation as well acts that repress Native groups, failing to allow them the opportunity to take part in their own modernization. This is the damage of repressive authenticity: it forces Native peoples into Western categories developed by romantic notions of how “authentically” Native people should act. Moreover, when these groups defy the Western expectations or no longer fit neatly into the category in which they have been assigned, their identity is questioned and the dominant culture feels it their duty to remind Natives of their place within that culture. The use of repressive authenticity on its own, as well as in conjunction with other damaging ideologies, has resulted in the AWHPC and their supporter’s ability to justify their outspoken bullying of the Yakama nation. However, this has not been limited to just the AWHPC Facebook commentary, angry AWHPC supporters; one in particular, took the opportunity to move the argument over to the Yakama Indian Reservation Facebook page.

Around the same time in early June, when the AWHPC had posted scathing comments on the capture and transfer of wild horses on Yakama tribal lands to a nearby feedlot, AWHPC supporter Elizabeth H. took to the Yakama Indian Reservation Facebook page to post the following statement:

I AM POSTING MY DISGUST OVER YOUR ANTICS OF ROUNDING UP  
THE WILD HORSES ...PROTECTED UNDER THE WILD FREE ROAMING

HORSE AND BURRO ACT OF 1971 AND DELIVERING THEM TO...BE SOLD AND SHIPPED FOR SLAUGHTER. 80 PERCENT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE OPPOSED TO SLAUGHTERING HORSES. YOU ARE GOING BEHIND THE AMERICAN CITIZEN'S BACKS.

HOW DARE YOU DO THIS TO THE WILD HORSE? YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO THE NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE -- NOT THE GOVERNMENT -- WHO HAVE RESPECTED YOUR RACE, CULTURE, AND RELIGION...YOU RECEIVE AID FROM THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT BECAUSE OF YOUR RACE AND CULTURE. THEN YOU TAKE FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE THE WILD HORSE, BECAUSE IT'S FREE TO YOU, AND YOU SELL IT FOR SLAUGHTER.

YOU ARE A DISGRACE TO YOUR NATION AND ALL THAT IS SACRED...

THIS IS A MODERN DAY "TRAIL OF TEARS."

-Elizabeth H., *AWHPC Supporter* (2014)

Of all of the posts that I forced myself to read in the process of conducting research for this essay, this was *by far* the most disturbing. Elizabeth H. has hijacked and morphed history in an effort to negate the damage inflicted on indigenous peoples through the process of colonialism. Instead, she perpetuates the idea that Native Americans receive some form of governmental "aid" as a show of respect for their "race, culture, and religion." Moreover, she compares the Yakama's sale and transfer of wild horses to a feedlot to one of the most heinous acts committed against Native American peoples; the Trail of tears. I am not sure what I find most offensive about this text: Elizabeth's clear and apparent desire to declare her Americanism thus acting as the temporary

voice of the American people, or the lack of understanding (or blatant denial) of the history of colonization in the United States. But unfortunately, Elizabeth H. is not alone.

Recently, I interviewed the Humane Society's Senior Director for the state of Oregon, Scott Beckstead. An avid supporter of alternatives to the slaughter of wild horses, such as immuno contraceptives and adoption when possible, Mr. Beckstead shared some interesting insight on the Humane Society's (and perhaps his own personal) perspectives on the problems that Tribes composing the NWTWC are experiencing due to increased wild horse populations on tribal lands. When I asked about the number of wild horses currently residing on tribal lands, Scott failed to give me a numerical response but instead said that tribes "failed to give an accurate count". He elaborated further by stating that the Warm Springs tribe located in Eastern Oregon states their wild horse population to be over six thousand, but according to Beckstead (2014), "In 2010 they could only find 42 to round up". That said: there was no information provided to refute the population estimated provided by the Warm Springs. Additionally, wild horses reside in small groups or bands that typically consist of a lead stallion, his mares, and their offspring. It is extremely unlikely that all six thousand of these horses, on a reservation that covers over a million acres, would be residing in close proximity with one another (NWTWC). So it is entirely possible that the Warm Springs is giving a fairly accurate head count, but do not have the means, financially or otherwise to undertake the process of rounding up large numbers of wild horses spread out across reservation lands.

As the interview progressed, Beckstead (2014) declared that slaughter "is not a money maker" and "being pro-horse slaughter invites negative press that gives tribes a black eye that could impact them economically". Additionally, he questioned the validity of concerns over the severe ecological damage and environmental degradation tribal lands were experiencing due to

overpopulation. However, what I found most interesting about this interview, were the reasons cited for the preservation of wild horses. During our interview, Beckstead took a few moments to clarify the significance of the horse wild or otherwise, and thus why it should be preserved. He stated, “American culture was born with a respect and reverence for the horse and all that it did to build this country. They are symbols of freedom and an iconic species that stands for something important for all Americans.” Finally, he added, “80 percent of Americans oppose horse slaughter” (Beckstead 2014). These same reasons were expressed by the AWHPC and many of their supporters; including Elizabeth H. This *idea* of iconic wild horses simultaneously promotes nationalism and motivates imperialist nostalgia, which is linked to notions of repressive authenticity within the frontier narrative. Meanwhile, the horse is used by the Yakama nation as a symbol to demonstrate the repercussions of intervening agencies infringing upon their ability to enact their political sovereignty. As it stands, the symbol of the horse is utilized by *both* parties as a terrain of struggle for a series of unrelated issues. This raises the question, “What is in the best interest of these horses?”

### **Straight from the Horse’s Mouth: Kind of...**

“For what the horse does under compulsion, as Simon also observes, is done without understanding; and there is no beauty in it either, any more than if one should whip and spur a dancer.”

-Xenophon

Over the years, I have developed a special place in my heart for horses. From the time I was a small child, my family was involved in horse racing and I grew up in a situation where exposure to horses was an everyday part of life. From the mornings spent with my father, a racehorse trainer, to the afternoons when I rode my show horse for hours after school; I lived and breathed horses. As I grew older, my passion for horses only intensified, and I went into the

business of horse racing. For sixteen years I managed large racing stables of thoroughbred horses, traveling between Washington and Oregon to participate in the seasonal race meets. However, the time and energy that is necessary to devote to the care and attention of racehorses is not exactly conducive to the family life. Thus, in 2010 I left the business to focus on raising my three kids and to return to school.

However, when I exited the business, I took with me a souvenir in the form of a seventeen-hand, dark bay gelding by the name of Piracy. "Pirate", as we call him, is a horse who had been under my care for two years, gone through two surgeries and a series of injuries that had ultimately ended his racing career. Even though he had been a productive racehorse for five years and had made a significant amount of money, his owner thought it best to send him to auction, where, with the severity of his injury, he would have most certainly ended up at slaughter. Because of my affection for this animal who I had spent two years caring for, I felt it necessary to forego everything I knew about how expensive horses could be or how painful it is to lose a horse to one of the many illnesses or injuries horses can often sustain. So, I threw caution to the wind and brought home this giant beast with a face only a mother could love. That said: my motivations for taking on the responsibility of caring for this animal were based on the fact that he didn't deserve to be disposed of because he was no longer useful. But, I knew that with my previous experience I was prepared and capable of handling that responsibility. The same responsibility that often gets overlooked by those who acquire horses based on unrealistic expectations and questionable motivations.

Horses are fascinating and beautiful creatures. They are herd animals, and as such, do best in the company of others. However, they have a flight response that is unrivaled by any other non-predatory animal I have ever been in contact with, which can also get them in quite a

bit of trouble if they aren't careful. I do not know how many times I have seen a frantic horse injure themselves running through a fence, busting through a stall gate, or having a momentary bout of claustrophobia in a horse trailer. *But*, they are kind creatures: mothers love and care for their foals and go through a great deal of distress when they are separated from them, something we "horsey" people refer to as weaning. In the thoroughbred world, it generally occurs before six months and if you are unfortunate to have the duty of "weaning" babies bestowed upon you, it is a heartbreaking, but "necessary" experience when you have domesticated horses bred for a specific purpose. Racehorses are weaned around three to six months of age as they often begin the "breaking" process at about eighteen months of age. The term breaking refers to the initial training on the ground and under saddle that facilitates their transition from youngster to racehorse. Because of this, members of all facets of the racehorse industry generally operate on the same weaning timeline in an effort to discourage the youngster's attachment with their mother and create a more mature individual at a faster rate. Even so, after the weaning process is complete, I have often found myself wondering how I would feel in that situation and then ascribing those feelings onto the mares that have been separated from their foals.

However, there are dangers associated with ascribing human emotions onto animals. You start to treat them like people, which, clearly they are not. For example, it pains me like no other to separate a mare and a foal, because it would cause *me* great emotional pain to be separated from my child. Because of this, I can certainly empathize with the reactions of the distressed mothers and youngster's. However, does this mean we should push for mares and foals to be united longer, as human mothers and offspring would be? This is not something that occurs in the wild; in fact, bands of wild horses generally have a lead stallion. Thus, when juvenile males reach the age of sexual maturity around the age of eighteen months to two years, they are ran off

be the lead stallion and subsequently start their own band. Weaning is not an unnatural process for horses, it just happens to occur at an earlier age in race and other domesticated horses. That said, it does not mean we as humans can or should not be emotionally affected, it just means that we need to think more practically and logically about what is best for these animals by considering how they behave as a unit in non-domesticated conditions. But this rationale has not been utilized by certain animal advocacy groups, such as the AWHPC.

As another example, the AWHPC has pictures on their Facebook page depicting a captured wild horse, with the caption, “I want to go home” (AWHPC Facebook 2014). But do wild horses *really* understand the notion of home in the same capacity we do? I have had domestic horses that have escaped a stall or a fence line only to return home after they have had their fun, but domestic horses are also dependent on humans for food and water, and thus returning “home” is a mechanism for survival, it doesn’t necessarily mean that they missed me (although I would like to believe they do). Moreover, I fear that the continued humanization of wild horses by animal advocate groups may not only garner support for their cause based on questionable motivating factors, but lure individuals who are not prepared for the long term responsibility of a horse into adoption. Thus, continuing the vicious cycle of horse abandonment, and what Beckstead (2014) calls “The horse slaughter pipeline.” So, how do we come to understand what is best for animals, in this case wild horses, when we are surrounded by humanized animal images?

Frans de Waal refers to this phenomenon as *Bambification*, or the intentional depiction of animals with endearing human characteristics meant to evoke emotion and protectiveness (DeWaal 260). This is certainly the case for DreamWorks animated wild stallion *Spirit*, he possesses large, round eyes, and frequently makes very human like expressions (he smiles and

grimaces). But does this mean we are to be driven to protect and preserve things only when they appear human enough to evoke an emotional response? Yakama nation tribal chairman Harry Smiskin doesn't think so. In a letter to President Obama in 2013, Smiskin wrote, "We should not manage these horses based on purely emotional arguments, story books or movies we all saw as children" (Associated Press 2013). While Smiskin raises a valid point that in that it may not be in the best interest of these horses to manage them through emotion, is processing through slaughter really a "humane" solution? In an effort to answer this question, let us examine the horse slaughter pipeline.

In the words of the Humane Society: "Horse slaughter, whether in U.S. or foreign plants...cannot be humane because of the ...unique biology of horses" ([humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org)). During my interview with Beckstead (2014), he elaborated on the process and how it all began with the horse slaughter pipeline, first stop: the auction. The auction, as Scott states, "is chaos" for horses intended for meat and they are often frightened and "beaten and whipped" into the ring. I have been to horse auction, several to be exact, and I can attest to the fact that there are clear distinctions between the horses that are there to be sold to "homes" and those to be sold to slaughter. In the auctions I have attended, horses intended for slaughter purchases are sent through the ring loose: without a saddle or rider, and are generally purchased based on their weight. About eight years ago when I attended an auction in Washington, I sat with a "kill buyer" and asked him what determined the horse he bought. He told me that he often bought horses based on weight and size, but also bought horses that he thought may have market value outside of slaughter in an effort to make a quick buck. Sadly, it gave me a slight degree of comfort to know that not everything he bought that day was destined for slaughter. But for those who are destined for the slaughter house after auction, the journey is not a pleasant one.

Shortly after the conclusion of the auction, when the buyers have been paid and bill of sales released, horses destined for slaughter are “loaded onto the slaughter van and often travel hours and hours with no rest, care, food or water” (Beckstead 2014).. Being placed in a situation where they are crowded into a van not separated from the other horses without access to food or water would be something most if not all would not be accustomed to. Moreover, as tensions run high for frightened and frantic horses, many sustain painful injuries or suffer abuse at the hands of the van driver. As an example, Beckstead told me that many times “unruly horses have their eyes gouged out in an effort to keep them quiet”. There is no part of me that can find the rationale or humanity in that. However, this is not the end of their terrifying journey. Once they reach their final destination, they are off loaded at the slaughterhouse where they can hear the other horses being slaughtered, and smell the blood and fear. Beckstead shared with me that he had the daunting task of watching hours of horse slaughter footage from a “humane” Canadian processing plant and not once did a horse ever go into the kill box without being forcibly coerced. Moreover, once in there, the person operating the captive bolt gun (meant to penetrate the brain and cause instantaneous humane death) must hit a large flailing animal with the brain the size of an orange. Beckstead recalled one large draft horse having to be hit with the captive bolt eleven times.

I struggle terribly to write about the process of horse slaughter. There is not any part of me that can find the humane, but is the lack of humanity really what any part of the debate over the fate of wild horses on the Yakama tribal lands is about? According to Beckstead (2014) there are a hundred thousand horses sent to slaughter each year, and with the wild horse population in the United States around 30,000 to 40,000 with 13,000 estimated on Yakama lands, it is obvious that tribes are not the only ones pro-slaughter. In fact, during a 2013 interview on *HuffPost Live*

surrounding the controversial debate over the fate of excess wild horses on Navajo tribal lands, The Navajo nations Presidents spokesman Erny Zah said that they were not even able to give the wild horses away for a dollar thus concluding that there are not enough people willing to adopt horses to allow for a positive impact on herd size. In response, Keith Dane, a representative for the Humane Society argued that the number of horses sent to slaughter had actually increased to one hundred and sixty thousand suggesting that more people were purchasing horses (HuffPost Live 2013). But how does Danes argument make sense? Ultimately, more people may be acquiring horses, but that has also increased the number being sent to slaughter. Additionally, the round-up, care and handling of wild horses by tribes necessary to make them adoptable is not free. It also is not feasible to assume that everyone interested in acquiring a horse is competent or skilled enough to undertake the training and care of a horse that has had very limited if any human interaction. Because of this, there has to be a very real concern for both the safety of those who adopt the horse as well as for the safety of the horse. I can personally attest to the fact that when domestic horses sustain injuries and illness, it can often be very costly and can have dire consequences based on the horse's anatomical structure. Moreover, horse are large and powerful creatures, and although not vicious by nature, they can inflict serious injuries on those who may not be experienced enough to handle them and even those who are. Thus, does the push by animal advocates to consider adopting out wild horses to those who may not be prepared potentially cause more harm than good and even contribute to the horse slaughter industry? Maybe so, but until the fight over wild horses actually takes into consideration the horses perspective, I doubt that any real and significant common ground will be established between tribes and animal advocates.

I consider myself lucky. I was able to give Pirate a home and repay him for all of the joy

that he may not even be aware he brought into my life and the contribution he has made to my family as a whole. I took in this horse; this kind and sentient being because he was and still is a very important part of my life and ultimately my friend. But that has come with a price. Caring for him has meant that we have to stretch purse strings that literally have no elastic left. It means that rain or shine he still needs to be fed and cared for. He loves my children and will gladly follow them around the pasture and eat the tiny pieces of grass that they shove in his face in the kindest manner. But he is constantly renegotiating the terms of our relationship, which is fine, because I take that as a sign that he is comfortable with where he is; so much so, that when he doesn't feel like being brushed he has no problem telling "no". Even so, if I had to do it all over again, I would take him without a moment's hesitation.

### **Conclusion**

As is stands, none of the parties have really taken the time to consider the impact of their actions on the horses caught in the middle of this contentious debate. The representatives for the Yakama nation have argued that bringing back slaughter to the United States could increase revenue, create jobs, and provide a humane solution to their wild horse dilemma (Associated Press 2013). However, the Humane Society and the AWHPC argue that these horses are part of our national history and living reminders of the American West. Therefore, they should be preserved in their present state and "managed on the range" (Beckstead 2014). Although the AWHPC and the Humane Society advocate using long term birth control, adoption, and ecotourism as alternatives to slaughter, none of the solutions offer the immediate relief the Yakama nation deems necessary to give sensitive ecosystems time to recover. Because of the inability to find a mutually satisfactory long-term solution the debate over the fate of these horses has morphed into something far larger. While the Yakama argue that the intervention of

these outside agencies have challenged their sovereignty, the AWHPC and the Humane Society, motivated by imperialist nostalgia have employed repressive authenticity and grounded both in the larger frontier narrative creating a polarized debate less about the horses, and instead centered around the reimagining of the struggle of the civilized vs. the savage.

The Yakama people have continued their attempt to navigate the peculiar nature of Native sovereignty; even though they face strong opposition from animal advocates who have the ability to manipulate the language used in laws pertaining to the protection of Wild horses by evoking feelings of nationalism. The ambiguity of language and the flexibility of native sovereignty to be manipulated on a situational basis make it extremely difficult for clear lines to be drawn between US and Native interests. Moreover, the designation of Natives as exceptions makes it difficult to enforce sovereignty that has been designed by an American polity that is fundamentally ambiguous. However, the implementation of the Wild Horse Oversight Act might aid in clarifying language and give tribes the right to exercise the best management practice for wild horse populations that are specifically tailored for their current situation. That said, the right to exercise political sovereignty should not necessarily mean that all wild horses should go to slaughter. Conversely, advocating for saving wild horses should not be based on preserving them as national symbols and the last remaining piece of the American West.

Horses are beautiful, wonderful and kind creatures; they are also expensive to care for. Wild horses may be hardy, but they are not living in a situation where resources are always abundant. The horses on Yakama tribal lands potentially face the real threat of starvation. They may thrive due to lack of predators and the ability to acquire forage before other species, but it's only a matter of time before they exceed the carrying capacity of the land, and then what? Do organizations like the AWHPC and the Humane Society have the resources to care for thousands

of wild and hungry horses? Moreover, how do animal advocates reconcile themselves with saving wild horses yet other animals still suffer the fate of slaughter to become dinner on the plates of millions of family's every day.

Beckstead (2014) says that "just because horses are livestock doesn't make them a food animal" and going further he states that horses should be exempt from slaughter because there isn't a national infrastructure for horses like there are for "pigs, cows and chickens" who, he claims, are "desensitized" to the process. But is it fair that we bestow the same hierarchies on animals that we have bestowed on people? That we place value on certain animals over others based on their importance to us? Have we learned nothing from the damage we have inflicted on our fellow humans through these same systems of hierarchy?

Ultimately, these horses (and other non-human animals) should not be considered commodities that can be disposed of when we have grown tired of their presence, nor should they be humanized in an effort to evoke feelings of endearment and further a cause. These are living, breathing, feeling beings that have complex lives that may or may not rival our own. For this reason we need to consider how we interact with animals and recognize their agency and the responsibilities owed them as our relations. In doing so, they no longer remain terrains of struggle, where humans are granted the right to decide when it is or is not acceptable for them to exist.

## Works Cited

- "3206 -American Indian Tribal Rights, Federal-Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act - LaserficheWebLink." *3206 -American Indian Tribal Rights, Federal-Tribal Trust Responsibilities, and the Endangered Species Act - LaserficheWebLink*. Web. 16 Aug. 2014.
- "American Museum of Natural History." *American Museum of Natural History*. Web. 16 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.amnh.org/science/divisions/vertzoo/bio.php?scientist=macphee>>.
- American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.wildhorsepreservation.org>>.
- "American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign." *Facebook*. American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign, n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014. <<https://www.facebook.com/FreeWildHorses>>.
- Bhattacharyya, Jonaki, and Brendan Larson. "The Need for Indigenous Voices in Discourses about Introduced Species: Insights from Controversy over Wild Horses." *Environmental Values*, 2014: 1-26. Accessed August 9, 2014. [www.ericademon.co.uk/EV/papers/Bhattacharyya.pdf](http://www.ericademon.co.uk/EV/papers/Bhattacharyya.pdf).
- "Cherokee Nation v. Georgia." *LII / Legal Information Institute*. Web. 16 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/30/1>>.
- DeMayo, Neda. "Return to Freedom Wild Horse Preservation Foundation Responds to Concerns over Yakima Wild Horse Roundups. June 11, 2014 | Returntofreedom.orgreturntofreedom.org." *Returntofreedomorg*. 13 June 2014. Web. 16 Aug. 2014.

- De Waal, Frans B.M. "Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial Consistency in Our Thinking about Humans and Other Animals." *Zoological Philosophy* 27.1 (1999): 255-80. DOI: 10.5840/philtopics199927122. Web. 9 Aug. 2014.
- Ewers, John C. *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture: With Comparative Material from Other Western Tribes*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1955. Print.
- Furniss, Elizabeth. "Challenging The Myth of Indigenous Peoples' 'last Stand' in Canada and Australia: Public Discourse and the Conditions of Silence." *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*. Ed. Annie E. Coombes. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. 172-91. Print.
- Gibbs, George. *Indian Tribes of Washington Territory*. Fairfield, WA: Galleon, 1967. Print.
- Grinde, Donald, Jr., ErnyZah, Keith Dane, and Alastair L. Bitsoi. "Environmentalists vs. the Navajo Nation." Interview by AlyonaMinkovski. *HuffPost Live*. N.p., 21 Aug. 2013. Web.
- H., Elizabeth. *Yakama Indian Reservation Facebook Page*. June 2014. Public Commentary
- Harmon, Alexandra J. "Questions about Tribal Land Ownership." E-mail interview. 2 Aug. 2014.
- "Horse Slaughter: The Humane Society of the United States." RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014. <[http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/horse\\_slaughter/](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/horse_slaughter/)>.
- "Humane Society Perspective on the Debate over The Fate of Wild Horses on Yakama Tribal Lands." Telephone interview. 12 Aug. 2014.
- Kim, Claire Jean. *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*.

Cambridge Press, 2014. Print.

King, C. Richard. "Natives, Nostalgia, and Nature in Children's Popular Film Narratives."

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 10.2 (2008): 1-7. Web. 9 Aug. 2014.

Kirkpatrick, J.F., and P.M. Fazio. Revised January 2010. Wild Horses as Native North American Wildlife. The Science and Conservation Center, Zoo: Montana, Billings. 8 pages.

Klein, Karen. "Is America's Wild Horse an Invasive Species, or a Reintroduced

Native?" *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 3 July 2014. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

<<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-wild-horse-endangered-20140703-story.html>>.

*K'u-see Wild Horse Project*. Yakama Nation Wildlife, n.d. Web.

<[www.ynwildlife.org/Wildhorseproject.php](http://www.ynwildlife.org/Wildhorseproject.php)>.

L., Dave. *American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign Facebook Page*. June 2014. Public Commentary.

L., Suzi. *American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign Facebook Page*. June 2014. Public Commentary

"Northwest Tribal Horse Coalition." *Yakama Nation Wildlife*. N.p, n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

Pengeman, Kate. "Yakama Land Can't Sustain Growing Wild Horse Population." *The Yakima Herald Republic*, January 6, 2014. Print.

R., Darlene. *American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign Facebook Page*. June 2014. Public Commentary.

Rifkin, Mark. "Indigenizing Agamben: Rethinking Sovereignty in Light of the "Peculiar" Status of Native Peoples." *Cultural Critique* 73 (2009): 88-124. Print.

Rosaldo, Renato. "Imperialist Nostalgia." In *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*.

Boston: Beacon Press, 1989: 68-87. Print.

Smiskin, Harry, and Virgil Lewis. "Yakama Nation Lauds Judge's Ruling in Horse Meat

Litigation." *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*. 12 Nov. 2013. Web. 16 Aug.

2014.

"Sovereignty." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

<<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovereignty>>.

*Spirit, Stallion of the Cimarron*. Dir. Kelly Asbury and Lorna Cook. Perf. Matt Damon and

James Cromwell. A & M, 2002. DVD.

Taylor, Kevin. "They Eat Horses, Don't They? Bucking the Slaughterhouse Ban on Horses."

*Indian Country Today*. Medianetwork.com, 13 Nov. 2013. Web. 9 Aug. 2014.

<[ndiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/13/they-eat-horses-dont-they-bucking-slaughterhouse-ban-h](http://ndiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/13/they-eat-horses-dont-they-bucking-slaughterhouse-ban-h)>.

United States. Bureau of Land Management. United States. Forest Service. *A Report to Congress*

*by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture on Administration of the Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act, Public Law 92-195*. Washington, D.C.:

U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Bureau

"Wild Horse Oversight Act (H.R. 5058)." *GovTrack.us*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

<<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/113/hr5058>>.

Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism And The Elimination Of The Native." *Journal of Genocide*

*Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409. December 1, 2006. Print.

"Yakama Indian Reservation." *Facebook*. Yakama Nation, n.d. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

<<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Yakama-Indian-Reservation/135452903153138>>.

"Yakama Nation Presses Federal Government to Explain Ban on Horse Slaughter."

*OregonLive.com*. Associated Press, 1 Apr. 2013. Web. 10 Aug. 2014.

"Xenophon Quotes." *BrainyQuote*. Xplore. Web. 16 Aug. 2014.

<<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/x/xenophon.html>>.