

Willie boy history and legend essay



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The film *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* was directed by Abraham Polonsky, and shared similarities to Lotto's novel, but also distorts some key facts in the story in order to create a more compelling film narrative. Some of the presented "facts" in the film perpetuate the Indian-hating myth, as they build on the misleading details that were presented in Harry Layton and Ben De Cossio's Indian-hating stories. Even if Polonsky wanted to show the Indian's perspective, or at least treat his story with a degree of ambiguity, his basis of the story on these Indian-hating texts and the limited ability of film to visualize reality leads to a narrative that strays from story in ways that only perpetuate the divergence of myth and history. Part of the reason that this event drew so much attention, and why it was made into a novel and film, is because the story has many elements of the classic Western, and it is these elements that the film, as a part of the Western genre, that the film attempts to accentuate and add to the myth surrounding the event. The film's story is a sort of depiction of the dying moments of the Wild West, despite the fact that the Wild West was all but gone, and some of the Wild West elements presented is doctored to make the actual history surrounding the event more interesting.

Perhaps the most popular rendition of Willie Boy's manhunt comes from Harry Lotto's novel, which influenced the Abraham Polonsky film starring Robert Redford. The film offers an alternate yet similar account of the events. In their book, "The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian Hating and Popular Culture," Larry E. Burgess and James A.

Sand's say that when "When Polonsky rewrote Lotto's story for the screen, he made significant changes, some of which adversely affected historical

accuracy' (56). For one, Layton supports the action that Willie Boy was drunk on the night he killed Michael Boniface, which is also a key component to the character of Willie Boy in the movie, but he could not have purchased alcohol on the reservation as he does in the film because there were no bootleggers on the Moron Reservation. Burgess and Sand's state, "Liquor initiates the action-? not from a bottle found stashed in a bunkhouse but from a bottle Willie Boy purchased from a bootlegger ("blind piggery") on the Moron Reservation at Banning" (57) This is a total fabrication, made to show the influence of the evil white an on the Indian.

Still, the notion of the drunken Indian is used in both accounts of events to provide reinforcement to Native American stereotypes. In Lotto's research, he primarily interviewed surviving members of the posse that hunted Willie Boy, perhaps prompting a biased account of the story. This biased account is transferred to Poltroons movie, in which he ambiguously treats the portrayal of Willie Boy, inferring that he killed Lola, and was drunk when he killed Old Mike and ran off with Carlo. To further add to the stereotype of the drunken Indian, "Coops father ad been killed by a drunken mixed blood some time before the story begins" (57). This also adds to the drama of the narrative when Coop and Willie Boy face off at Ruby Mountain in the final shootout, in which Coop shoots Willie Boy, and then finds out that Willie Boy had no bullets. The real history shows that the posse stalled out at Ruby Mountain, and heard one single shot as they retreated from a standoff with Willie Boy. The posse suspected that Willie Boy had committed suicide, but did not bother to make sure until President Taft was due to arrive in town, and the story aught wind. Furthermore, Layton infers that Willie Boy did indeed shoot

Carlo, Lola in the film, but at the same time entertains the possibility of other motives rather than just the simplistic view that she was slowing him down and so she had to be eliminated.

The film, however, is ambiguous in depicting Lola's death, as we see her already dead at Twenty-Nine Palms. To enhance the love story between Willie Boy and Lola, Polygons chooses to keep her around for most of the film even though she was actually found dead long before Willie Boy. In most accounts of the Willie Boy manhunt, including Lotto's, there is speculation that Willie Boy's culture embraced the ideology of marriage as being legitimated through kidnapping. Layton blindly accepts this myth and believes this was the root of Willie Boy's motivation. This is played out in the film, as Lola says that she is disapproving of Willie Boy's marriage by capture, and that she wants to become a schoolteacher and part of the white, civilized culture, as opposed to the savagery represented by marriage by capture of the Native Americans.

In 1994, Larry E. Burgess and James A. Sand's published their interpretation of the different accounts of what occurred during the Willie Boy manhunt in "The Hunt for Willie Boy: Indian Hating and Popular Culture. Collectively, they sought to expose the myths that were so prevalent in previous accounts of the story by researching not only the immediate press coverage surrounding the manhunt, but the cultures of Chumier and Apatite cultures to best understand the motives of both Willie Boy and Old Mike. Together they uncovered that Old Mike most likely disapproved of the marriage because of the fact that Willie Boy was a Ghost Dancer, which is blasphemy in the beliefs

of Chummiier culture. The two authors also strongly support the idea that Willie Boy was not drunk when he killed Old Mike.

They attribute the perpetuation of this myth to coincide with prejudices towards Native Americans and group Ben De Occurred and Harry Layton in with the Indian Haters during this period. Finally, Sand's and Burgess speculate that not only was Willie Boy not involved with Carload's death, but that he did not learn of her death until he took his own life on Ruby Mountain. It is not just the proximity of these events to Southern