

American who art thou?

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ I have lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans” laments Tamenund (Cooper 382) in the book Last of the Mohicans. The death of Uncas and Cora marks the end of the Mohican people. Chingachgook indeed outlived Uncas his son but he is now childless and his people will now pass into legend and song. Ironically, the people described by Cooper in his book are Mohicans (Britanica). But their names rightly belong to another tribe known as the Mohegan (Britanica). The adventures of Uncas shed light on the true meaning of American.

An American is a truly difficult to define creature. The US constitution defines as;

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Section 1)

US citizenship, for those who are not born with it, is surprisingly hard to acquire. Yet thousands of people from the third-world will try every year to gain entry. America is believed to be the land of milk and honey. Millions more would attempt to enter if they only had the means. All seek the freedom and liberty promised by the Statute of Liberty to the Huddled masses.

Those who are not Natural Born American Citizens can aspire to receive visa to work in the States. If fortune smiles upon them they can be granted citizenship after proving themselves to be good law abiding people. This also in tales absorbing American Values and ethics although compared to other nations America has a high tolerance for those who think out of the box and the non-conformists.

Media can often be used to reinforce or even create a new identity for a people. For example, Nazi propaganda transformed the innocent Jews into the demons who were behind all the ills of the world. The book *Last of the Mohicans* and the movie *Last of the Dogmen* are examples, of how media can be used to form a country's sense of identity.

In the movie *Last of the Dogmen*, Lewis Gates pursues escaped convicts into the Montana countryside. All he recovers are a few scraps of cloth, some blood and an old fashioned Indian arrow. Despite the doubts of scientist, Gates believed that there is a lost Indian tribe somewhere out there. Working on a hunch the Indian arrow leads him down a trail of pursuit of a lost tribe of Dog Soldiers. He eventually encounters the Dog soldiers and they believe him to be their foe. Upon his escape he essays to protect them from being discovered and polluted by civilization.

In the movie the American was defined as a Native American, one of the Dog Soldiers whose ancestors once roamed the plains of America free and untamed by today's mores. The noble savage is worthy of protection from the corrupting influence of mainstream society.

By comparison the Last of the Mohicans is about a Mohican caught in the French-English war in Canada. The French are trying to overwhelm Fort William Henry with the aid of the Hurons and the Iroquis. Hawkeye is given the task of escorting the commanders two daughters to safety past the Indians. On the road they encounter Chingachgook and Uncas the last of the Mohicans in the region. The plot of Hawkeye's guide is soon exposed the guide betrays the company and the two Mohicans agree to be their guides.

In the forest, Hawkeye, the Mohicans and their charges face many perils including many Indians who are haunting the woods in search of them. One of the members of the group is wounded by a sniper and they are soon immobilized. The group hides in a cave but is flushed out by a much larger party of Hurons. Now prisoners of the Hurons they are granted a chance at freedom if Cora would but consider to marry Magua.

Haughty Cora refuses and soon the enraged Magua decides that the entire party should just die. At that very moment, the Mohicans and Hawkeye attack rescuing the captives and slaughtering the Hurons. Magua escapes but the captives are now safe. Eventually they stop at an old building where a lot of Mohicans died and where Chingachgook and Hawkeye fought together. Soon they are finally within the fort's walls and are safe.

In the fort, Duncan wonders how the fort can hold off so many attackers. Their only hope is for Webb to arrive with reinforcements. Duncan is sent as an emissary to the French commander Montcalm. All this succeeds in doing is letting Duncan know that the French are aware of the dire plight of the English Fort. The commanders, Montcalm and Munro eventually meet and

Montcalm hands Munro a letter detailing how Webb is unable to send reinforcement. He asks the English to surrender. Munro naturally abhors surrender, but upon hearing the generous terms offered by the Frenchman agrees to sign a treaty. Peace it seems is achieved.

But not all are pleased with the accord. Magua is indignant in claiming that his warriors will have no scalps while the white men become friends. While the English are fleeing from Fort William Henry the Hurons attack killing many innocent people. Cora is found by Magua and again he asks for her to be his wife but again she refused. So Magua captures Alice instead.

A rescue effort goes horribly wrong when Duncan, Uncas and Hawkeye go to the Huron Village. Uncas is caught and is at the mercy of the Huron. This time the rescue goes well as Duncan is able to rescue Uncas. After a side-trip among the Delaware who are overjoyed at seeing Uncas, a Mohican. Uncas prepares his forces to attack the Hurons. In the battle that follows Magua is killed, Cora is also killed but ere the battle is ended Uncas too dies.

Oddly, enough Cooper's view of Mohican Indian is wildly at variance with the movie version. Cooper's Mohicans are musket carrying warrior who could fight equally well as the Europeans they traveled with. By comparison Wyeth portrays Uncas with a dagger, a tomahawk, and a bow and arrow- weapons of precolonial warfare and the customary attributes of an Indian brave. Cooper's Uncas suggests the complexity of the character's position as a conventionally educated, English-speaking American Indian, Wyeth generalizes and romanticizes the Indian hero's appearance. Wyeth's version

simply conforms to his understanding of American Indians, which was tightly bound to the ideal of an untamed wilderness.

Hawkeye is the book's consummate American, he is the friend of Chingchagook. In chapter three of the Indian's struggle for identity is first given shape. He was of unmixed blood and his tribe is the grandfather of nations. In the past his people fought the Iroquis, who were now mercenaries at the employ of the French, However, now the tribe is depleted and only Uncas his son remains of the Mohicans. Uncas and Chingchagook are firmly with the English as they are prepared to die fighting the Iroquis. Also in this chapter is the interplay of ideas and beliefs between Chingchagook and Hawkeye. This would later be an important ideal of Americans. The free exchange of ideas and belief or the so called Marketplace of ideas.

Another example of the struggle was the discrimination Cora Munro suffered as opposed to the respect that Alice Munro received. Both were the daughters of a prominent military commander but because of Cora's skin color and heritage she is looked down upon. Although later in the story she would fall in love with Uncas.

An American is one who can identify with the values and morals of the American people in General. It is the question of what those values are that is problematic. One of the first defining events of being an American was Declaration of independence. As written by Thomas Jefferson the American people believed that " All men are created free and equal under God".

Previous to the declaration, Americans were still very much under the heel of the primitive feudal system they inherited from the British. The King, three

thousand miles away ruled their lives by fiat. His lords and nobles ran roughshod over his subjects. This same struggle for equality is seen when Chingchagook and Hawkeye are discussing the differences between the English and the Mohicans.

Another related event was the Civil war. The ideal of free and equal was put to the test. Till then it was a hypocrisy, the US claimed that its people lived in equality. Yet in the Southern States nearly 1/3 of all people were slaves who had no civil and political rights.

The black man was a slave unfitting even of the title man, he toiled in the cotton plantations endlessly providing wealth for the arrogant white masters. Tens of Thousands would die before the African-American could take part and received citizenship in the country. An example, of this discrimination is when Cora rejects Magua's offer to be his wife. In exchange for the freedom of the thralls. Still Cora refuses because even if she was a Quadroon she still held herself better than the filthy Indian Magua.

However, even with the Emancipation declaration, the "black man" was still relegated to a second class citizen. It was not until Martin Luther King Jr. came forth daring violence and persecution in order to end the discrimination and bigotry that plagued African Americans in the south. The struggle for equality can also be seen in the desire of Magua to be wed to Cora where Cora constantly refuses him because of his inferior stock. In the past, there were laws in place, particularly in the south, which prevented a black person from marrying a white person.

Manifest Destiny, that doctrine that said that America should expand to the Pacific and beyond was another important event that helped change the American Identity. The Expansion to the west would come at the expense of Mexicans and Indians who would lose their lands. In that point of history a great influx of Irish, Germans and other European immigrants came to America to seek the freedom promised by the Statute of liberty. They were soon welded into the American people and brought their work ethic and industry to increase the vigor of the rising Hercules that was the Union.

The World Wars are another defining event in American History because the US having gained prominence among nations was now ready to take its place among the stars. America sent legions of its finest youths to go forth and fight in Europe and Asia for the defense of the weak and innocent against those who would oppress them. The same way Uncas was willing to endanger himself for the sake of foreigners he barely knew.

The American identity remains vague and hard to define. Literature and other media can help express and expound it. But ultimately it must shine forth from the heart of every American Citizen. Simply, put an American is one who lives and breathes the American ideals. In a sense Hawkeye was an American because he respected the views of those who were not in concurrence with his. He also fought hard for the protection of the weak and innocent. Finally, he was a true friend to his allies.

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