

The imaginary indian and the noble savage



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The Imaginary Indian and the Noble Savage: Errant Constructs Mia [ID The construction by Europeans of “ savage” or Aboriginal peoples has always been oriented towards establishing Other-self paradigms, even when these regimes lionize the Other. The same is true of the “ imaginary Indian”, the construct Crosby identifies that serves to Otherize the Indian no matter whether the narrative is positive or negative. Crosby opens by arguing, “[I]nterest in First Nations people by Western civilization is...recent...; it dates back hundreds of years... collecting and displaying “ Indian” objects and...” Indians” as objects or human specimens, constructing pseudo-Indians in literature... dominating or colonizing First Nations people...salvaging... material fragments of a supposedly dying native culture...” (p. 267). She notes that many modern Native Americans wanted to be “ white” or at least not different, even as Native Americans are considered exotic. The “ imaginary Indian”, then, is the mythological construct of the Native American (and, to an extent, aboriginal peoples in general) by people in the West who seek out what they want in this definition: Constructing the savage as violent and warlike if the goal is conquest, as shamanic and in touch with nature when Western anxieties over their own relationship to nature and God is being threatened or challenged. But the definition itself requires reference to other concepts, like “ postmodernism”, or a challenge to unrestrained narratives of progress created by modernity; “ fine arts institution”, itself an abstract concept based on cultural definitions of “ fine art” dominated by social elites; “ colonization”, or the intellectual and physical process of domination of other societies; and “ hegemony”, or discursive dominance by established groups.