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## The Cowboy Conundrum: An Examination of Representation Within the Western Film Genre

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***The Cowboy Conundrum:  
An Examination of Representation Within the Western Film Genre***

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the  
Department of Communication Arts.

By  
*Madelynn Elizabeth Woodard*

Under the mentorship of *Professor Matthew Hashiguchi*

**ABSTRACT**

*Despite historical demographic data indicating otherwise, much of the Western Film Genre depicts The Cowboy as a white male individual. Previous research has demonstrated that filmmakers often tell and depict stories within which they identify themselves, and with the predominant population of directors within the Western Genre being that of white men, the narrative of the West being portrayed on screen has shifted public perception to an inaccurate portrayal of the history of the West. From Vaqueros to liberated slaves, much of the Cowboy community was comprised of Black, Spanish, Mexican, and Indigenous people of color. This study employed a quantitative analysis and discussion of the race of the top- billed performers in the IMDb Top 100 Westerns of All Time to better understand the dominant American perception of The Cowboy iconography. Contrary to the historical demographic data, 100% of all top billed performers were White. This clearly indicates the disparity between historically accurate demographic data and modern Hollywood representation of the Cowboy. This data is significant, because it gives an accurate depiction of how representation can affect the long term perception of a historical icon.*

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### The Cowboy Conundrum:

#### An Examination of Representation Within the Western Film Genre

In American media, there are few symbols of iconography as renowned and long-lasting as that of The Cowboy. The mounted rider on horseback, waving his Stetson hat as his horse rears back in the sunset is an image that has reached a level of cultural penetration and legendary status that is granted only to the likes of media giants. The Cowboy's status and presence in American media is rivaled only by the likes of Disney's Mickey Mouse, and even Mickey has spent time saddled up as the iconic cowboy. It is important to discuss The Cowboy's status and imagery; historians know their accurate demographic makeup in history to be largely a role held by black, indigenous, and latinx people of color (to be referred too as BIPOC for brevity for the remainder of the study), but public interpretation of The Cowboy identity is of a white man (Newman 42). This disparity between fact and fiction requires a closer examination. The Western film genre in this respect can be held largely responsible for the erasure of the important history of cowboy culture held by various BIPOC communities. Much of the Western Film canon does not include these narratives at all, either by not featuring these stories or by portraying BIPOC characters as villains and minor background characters. By whitewashing the lead roles of cowboys, intentionally or inadvertently, the public mindset in regards to their history is such that the Cowboy is no longer associated with the communities from which Cowboy culture originated.

There is a large gap in research present in this area. The goal of this research is to provide objective empirical evidence in regards to the state of race representation in the Western film genre. The goal of this research is to contribute to an existing knowledge

regarding Whitewashing, and to evaluate the potential Whitewashing occurring in the Western film genre. This research contributes demographic information regarding popular Western films. In this paper, there will be a literature review regarding relevant information important to the study. Following, a section of the paper will detail the selected methodological approach. After the methodology section, a section will detail the results, followed by a relevant analysis. To close, there will be a section recommending future research routes prior to the conclusion. The research project will investigate the racial demographic of mainstream Western films via descriptive analysis, breaking down the representation statistically to answer the research questions.

### **Literature Review**

In the literature review section, important themes required to understand key elements of the study will be addressed. Understanding the definitions, history, and past research of these topics are pivotal components to considering the data collected and outcomes of the study. Contained in this section will be information regarding media representation, whitewashing, the Western genre, The Cowboy, and BIPOC presence in the Old West. Additionally, the research focuses specifically on Cowboys, including their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their modern perception, the Western film genre and its tropes, and discussion of representation and whitewashing in modern media.

In Kim Newman's 1990 book titled *Wild West Movies, Or, How the West Was Found, Won, Lost, Lied About, Filmed and Forgotten*, Newman defines the Western genre as a work of fiction that takes place towards the end of the 19th century and early 20th century located in the American west. Common protagonists seen are cowboys and gunslingers on horseback, armed with weapons such as pistols and rifles of the era

(Newman 23). Featured characters may include bandits, prostitutes, outlaws, sheriffs, in addition to stereotype laden character groups including “Indians, Spaniards, and Mexicans,” (Newman 26). The white male cowboy often lives by his own rules. He is not confined to the limitations of law or the government, often taking on a larger-than-life “outlaw” persona.

The landscape plays a prominent role within the Western genre, as the location helps provide context to the often lawless nature of events contained within Western stories. Often portrayed as a “mythic vision of the plains and deserts of the American West,” focal points of the setting include desolate frontier towns, arid stretches of scenic landscape, saloons, ranches, and railways (Cowie 33).

Westerns frequently rely on formulaic storytelling, employing not only the character types listed above, but additionally follow common plots. There is the common and more recently criticized ‘Cowboys vs. Indians’ trope, wherein cowboy protagonists confiscate territorial Native American land, a bounty hunter seeking his prize, railway robberies, and revenge stories centered around codes of honor and ambiguous moralities, colloquially known as ‘White Savior’ narratives (Newman 23). These stories contain themes of freedom and individual liberty, glorifying and romanticizing many of what people today might consider to be quintessential American values. The Western genre often leans on the use of these stereotyped characters and stories, exchanging character and world building with the hope that the audience is familiar with the iconography of the American West. In a modern context, it is important to question whether or not the use of stereotypes is useful, or if it is ultimately damaging to the marginalized communities they represent.

Despite The Cowboy being portrayed as a predominantly white caricature, the reality is white communities were not introduced to Cowboy Culture “until 200 years after its inception,” (Williams). Cowboy Culture was originated by a group of 16th century Spanish colonists. These colonists brought with them horses and cattle to the Mexico and Texas regions, which “created a demand for skilled vaqueros to rope, ride, control, and protect the animals.” (Gandy 191). These skilled Spanish and Mexican horsemen and cattle wranglers, soon dubbed Vaqueros, were the forefathers of the modern Cowboy. The demand for Vaqueros boomed, and soon thousands of Cowboys were living and working in Mexican territory. In her article “How Hollywood Whitewashed the Old West” author Leah Williams says this:

“By the late 19th century roughly one in three cowboys was Mexican. The recognizable cowboy fashions, technologies, and lexicon—hats, bandanas, spurs, stirrups, lariat, lasso—are all Latino inventions.” (Williams).

As Cowboy Culture moved west, Native Americans were trained to become cattle herders. After the civil war, “the Union’s victory... left Blacks in Texas free but not well off,” (Goldstein-Shirley 82). A large number of former slaves were left homeless, as “many estimated the number to be closer to 4 million at the end of the Civil War,” (Johnson 587). Thus began many freed individual’s migration West. With the change of scenery, those who moved adapted into Western culture, and eventually some experts estimated “one in every four cowboys was African-American,” (Gandy 190). This is significant, as we now know that Cowboy culture as a whole is an amalgamation created from several different BIPOC communities.

## **Representation**

In the 2017 Huffington Post article “Why On-Screen Representation Actually Matters” authors Sara Boboltz and Kimberly Yam discuss the importance of conscious casting. In the article, University of Massachusetts at Amherst professor of communication Michael Morgan is quoted saying “Stories affect how we live our lives, how we see other people, how we think about ourselves,” (Boboltz). Representation matters because seeing someone with whom is identifiable as similar with any given individual is empowering. It makes oneself feel connected with their community, and to be seen in a different way. In Jonda McNair’s article for National Association for the Education of Young Children, “I Didn’t Know There Were Black Cowboys,” McNair discusses the importance representation has on literacy development: “it is critical for children of color to see themselves, their culture, and their perspectives in the media,” (McNair 65). It is crucial for representation in all media to be diverse, including people of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

In Kara R. Miller’s 2018 study “A Sturdy Glass Ceiling: Representation of Women on Screen and Behind the Scenes of Hollywood’s Top 100 Films Throughout the Years,” Miller examines the disparity of representation between male and female executives in the top 100 grossing films of different time periods (Miller 25). In addition to researching executive representation, Miller’s study focuses on “what factors, if any, are more likely to influence the presence of women in other roles,” (Miller 25). The study considered the impacts and influences that were put on the roles of hiring women into the roles of “producers, executive producers, directors, cinematographers, writers, editors, and lead actors,” (Miller 25). Ultimately, Miller concluded that the most influential

component to female representation on set in various roles was having a female lead (Miller 30). Representation can serve as a powerful motivator. Additionally, the method used in Miller's peer-reviewed research provided a model for part of the methodology seen and used in this study, as many similar techniques in data collection were used.

In JoEllen Shively's 1992 University of Michigan study "Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western Films Among American Indians and Anglos," Shively addresses how Native Americans react to the 'Indian' stereotypes present in John Wayne movies. While the White audience was not greatly impacted by Wayne's use of the Indian character trope, Shively found that the Native Americans did not identify with the 'Indians' pictured in the film. Shively says "For Indians, the film was more about cowboys than about Indians. This does not hinder their enjoyment of the film or make it less meaningful, because they did not view the Indians on the screen as real Indians," (Shively 730). Ultimately, the caricature-like way in which the John Wayne film 'Indians' are portrayed led to the Native American viewers being unable to identify with them.

The Western genre is often criticised for its reliance on stereotype, and this is none more evident than when observing the names of non-white characters such as "Mexican Henchman" or "Facetious Redskin," (Williams). As Nicole Martins of Indiana University stated:

"There's this body of research and a term known as 'symbolic annihilation,' which is the idea that if you don't see people like you in the media you consume, you must somehow be unimportant," (Boboltz).

'Race, gender, sexual identity, and other identifying factors that comprise the media one consumes provide markers that allow audiences to create emotional connections with



characters. These emotional bonds help explain why an audience resonates with one story rather than another. If the audience is not empathetic to a story, it is not retained, and can create disparities in representation due to a lack of interest (Yuen, 2017).<sup>1</sup> This is important, especially when considering the context of the Cowboy narrative, because of the potential lack of white audience member's retention or interest in the BIPOC Cowboy narrative, Hollywood simply sees the concept as unmarketable, thus leaving the perspective out of production altogether.

### **Selective Exposure Theory**

According to Mercadal (2018), selective exposure theory is the idea that people expose themselves to media that are more likely to support their prior opinions.

“Selective exposure is the theory that people self-select to be exposed to media outlets that validate their existing ideas. Selective perception forms part of a set of theories about factors and processes that act as a mediating conduit and/or a barrier between the message and the receiver as understood in the conventional communication process: Information flows from a sender to a member of the audience, known as a receiver.” (p. 1)

The concept surrounding selective exposure is that as a people we are more likely to engage with content that does not disrupt or conflict with our preexisting belief set and values (Valenzuela, 2015). People exhibit confirmatory biases when presented with content; selective exposure theory helps us to explain why people are more likely to engage with certain types of content over others (Johnson, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> Material featured in this section originally seen in prior research done by author, M. Woodard (2019) *Identifying Patterns in Mise En Scène: An Analysis of Academy Award 'Best Picture' Winners*. For COMM-5333 THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION, FALL 2019

Castle and Stepp (2018) found that selective exposure in film viewership is largely centered around social identity. Conceptually, people make emotional connections to characters and personally identify more with characters they believe look like them. According to Lewis, Grizzard, Choi, and Wang (2018), enjoyment and appreciation are both important components of the film viewer experience, and that one is more likely to enjoy and appreciate a film if they have the ability to relate to the central character.' By casting white characters as Cowboy heroes, while simultaneously vilifying the people from where a culture originated, revisionist history erases public knowledge of a culture's origin.

Within the concept of Selective Exposure Theory, when evaluating why Whites are the preferred demographic Hollywood prioritizes, a look at the demographic composition of the body of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences provides a clearer look into the majority of active prominent filmmakers. The Academy is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1927, through their annual event, The Academy Awards, recognize achievements in film including acting, writing, directing, cinematography, costume design, set decoration, film editing, sound achievement, sound effects, original song, original music score, live-action short subject, documentary feature, documentary short subject, visual effects, and makeup design (Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2019). The Academy is considered one of the dominant bodies of all people involved in the filmmaking process. The Academy's original 36 members have greatly increased and is currently composed of 6,261 voting members (Kaplan, 2006). Upon appointment to The Academy, voters then become members for life (Horn, 2012). A 2012 study performed by the Los Angeles Times found the Academy voters are 94%

caucasian and 77% male. Additionally, the voters have a median age of 62, while people younger than 50 constitute only 14% of the membership (Horn, 2012). Weaver (2011) additionally found that white people are more likely to have a positive viewing experience if they share a similar ethnic or religious background with a character.’<sup>2</sup>

### **Whitewashing**

In Claire Starling’s “Whitewashing in the U.S. Film Industry” Starling defines Whitewashing as:

“when film producers actively seek and cast white actors for roles that were originally meant for people of color, whether it is that the character is described as a certain race or their ethnicity is clearly defined within the story,” (Starling 1).

Whitewashing is inherently problematic, as it seeks to strip opportunities for representation in storytelling from qualified actors and actresses of color while simultaneously removing stories of people of color from dominant narrative. In her article, “Interrogating (neo)colonialism in the contemporary western: Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *The Revenant* (2015)” author Dolores Tierney points out “revisionism apparent in recent historiography of the American West” (Tierney 98). This revisionism is ultimately damaging, by whitewashing the Western narrative, it strips Native Americans, African-Americans, and Latinxs of their agency to tell their stories.

In the study “Whitewashing Through Film: How Educators Can Use Critical Race Media Literacy to Analyze Hollywood’s Adaptation of Angie Thomas’ *The Hate U Give*” five main elements of Critical Race Theory are listed: “(a) the intercentricity of race and

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<sup>2</sup> Material featured in this section originally seen in prior research done by author, M. Woodard (2019) *Identifying Patterns in Mise En Scène: An Analysis of Academy Award ‘Best Picture’ Winners*. For COMM-5333 THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION, FALL 2019

racism, (b) the challenge of dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, (e) the transdisciplinary perspective.”

(Dowie-Chin 131). Author Dowie-Chin emphasizes “the cinematic responsibility of screenwriters and producers to portray people of color and their lived experiences in a way that is accurate and true,” and that they must “value accurate representation beyond profitability,” (Dowie-Chin 140). This call to value representation over revenues has fallen on deaf ears in the Western genre, as seen in the example of The Cowboy image.

In following context of the literature review, this research sought to answer the following questions:

***Research Question 1-*** What is the racial demographic composition of top billed performers in IMDb’s Top 100 Westerns of All Time?

***Research Question 2-*** How does the demographic composition shift over time?

### **Method**

The study utilized quantitative methods to answer both research questions. To answer research question 1 and 2, data was collected on the race and gender of the actors in the films. To answer research question 2, the data was separated into different time frames to track over time. This study was conducted studying films from a broad range of time, including the late 1920s to the mid-2000s. The purpose of the study was to collect objective demographic data regarding representation in the Western film genre to contribute to future understanding of the lasting impacts of whitewashing on the cultural image of The Cowboy. The researcher collected demographic information pertaining to the race and gender of lead performers from the sample 104 films present in IMDb's Top 100 Western’s of All Time List.

The researcher chose this sample pool for a number of reasons. IMDb is a platform that aggregates audience reviews and is the predominant source in entertainment for cast and crew lists. Due to the nature of the audience rating system, this means that the films in the selected sample are the 100 most popular western films according to a wide pool of reviews by the public. This list was not created by a critic, based solely on one individual's personal opinion. The researcher considered this to be ideal, as the iconography of the Cowboy image was built and reinforced by the audience that consumed this media, not predicated upon one individual perspective. By using aggregate popularity, this list circumvents outliers of forgotten films no longer a part of public consciousness. Additionally, it pulls from a wide time span of films, so the scope of the data collected is not limited to simply one era of Western film.

Data collected was statistically analyzed and was prepared by determining performers in lead role categories, then documenting the individual performer's race and gender, and the year of film production via their information listed on IMDb. All collected data was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After all the data was collected, percentages were generated regarding the categories of data collected. Percent change was examined in addition to an examination of the demographic comprehension. Data was analyzed by cross referencing with credible historical information regarding period demographics.

For analyzing the data, descriptive analysis was used in determining the race of the individual actors in question. The data collected during the course of the study pertained to the race of lead performers in the selected sample. This data is relevant to the

research questions as the information collected relates to a cultural understanding of the pertinent demographic history of cowboys.

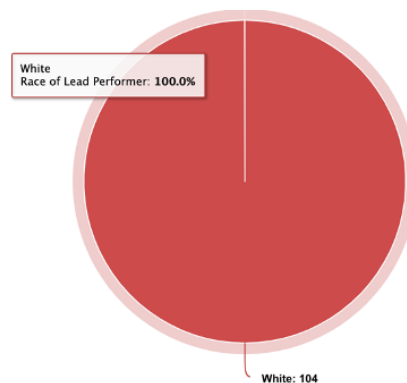
When considering other methodological options, the researcher determined that qualitative data collection would not yield the desired objective results. Due to the modern cultural climate, when discussing sensitive and controversial subjects such as race and gender identity, it was determined that remaining objective in research collection would contribute the most constructive information to the existing literature.

The study's methodological approach was created in part by referencing the methodological approach used in the "A Sturdy Glass Ceiling" (2018) study. A Sturdy Glass Ceiling (2018) similarly evaluated crew lists and relevant historical information pertinent to demographic context. From retrieved data, researchers monitored trends in relation to female executive film representation. Additionally, methodological approaches similar to the "Cowboys and Indians: Perceptions of Western Films Among American Indians and Anglos" (1992) study were considered, wherein the study focused on data collected gauging the varying reception of certain movies across differing demographic audiences. For this study, the researcher ultimately determined that data regarding demographics recorded in film would offer a more objective data set than qualitative data collected from working with a human test group.

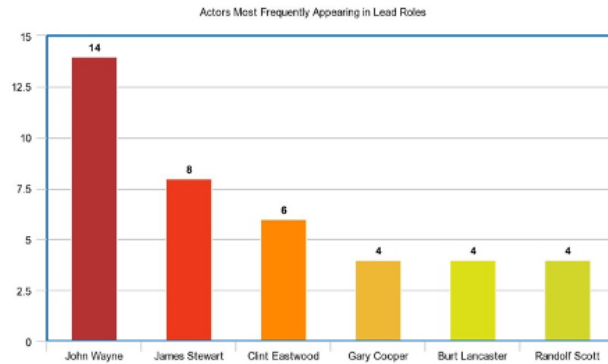
Ultimately, this methodological approach contributes to topical knowledge and understanding by creating a data set that can ultimately be evaluated for whitewashing and understanding the damaged historical presence and audience perception of the non-white cowboy.

## Results

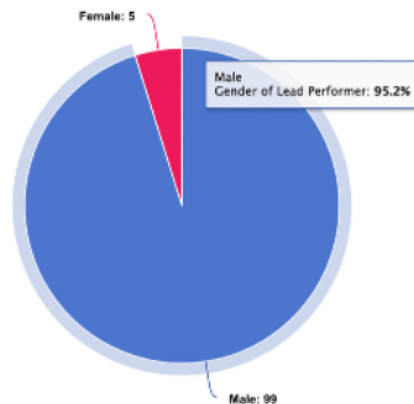
These films studied took place over the range of 1923, with the film *The Covered Wagon* (1923), to the 2008 film *Appaloosa* (2008). Notably, 89% of all films contained in the IMDb Top 100 Westerns were released prior to 1980. Upon the conclusion of research, the research collected was decisively one-sided. In the entirety of all 104 movies studied, 100% of the top billed performers were identifiable to the researcher as white or white passing. Additionally, of these roles, many of the lead roles were played by many of the same actors.



These actors are depicted in the bar graph, ‘Actors Most Frequently Appearing in Lead Roles’. Some of these names are John Wayne, who starred in 14 films; James Stewart, who starred in 8; Clint Eastwood, who starred in 6; and Gary Cooper, Burt Lancaster, and Randolph Scott, all of whom starred in 4 films a piece. All details regarding the names of lead performers and the films they starred in can be found in the index.



Notably, of these roles, while all performers were white, five of the lead roles were performed by women. This means that 95.2% of lead roles were performed by white men, while 4.8% of lead roles were performed by white women. These actresses include Joan Crawford, Jane Fonda, Suzy Amis, and Marlene Dietrich. Marlene Dietrich played two leading roles.



## Discussion

Upon entering this research, there was an element of expectation regarding the dominant race of performers in the leading roles of the films studied. It was, however, surprising to find that 100% of these roles were held in this aggregate list by Caucasian performers, as a few Modern Western films and TV Shows premiering in the past 20 years have featured black and indigenous people of color in lead roles. These stories notwithstanding, there are BIPOC roles in some of the Top 100 films that were not seen



in the data collection portion of the study due to the limitations of the method selected. By using only the top-billed performers, some characters such as prominent African American actor Morgan Freeman's Ned Logan in the 1992 film *Unforgiven* (film placed 6th out of 100) were not seen, as he was the 3rd highest billed performer, rather than the number one top billed performer, the only role evaluated in this study. Another role not seen in the data is Spanish actor Javier Bardem's role in the 2007 Coen Brothers' film *No Country for Old Men* (film placed 13th out 100, Bardem is 2nd highest billed) in which he plays the homicidal villain Anton Chigurh. Some additional outlier roles are latino actor Diego Luna as Button in *Open Range* (2003) (film placed 49th out of 100, Luna is 3rd highest billed), and Native American actor and Sioux tribal member Russell Means as Chingachgook in *Last of the Mohicans* (1992) (film placed 51st out of 100).

Interestingly, these roles all take place after the 1990s, which is pertinent to **RQ2** 'How does the demographic composition shift over time?'. When evaluating the data purely based on that in the selected data set of the top billed performer, the simple answer is that the demographic composition doesn't shift. Nevertheless, when incorporating lower billed roles, some leads, some supporting cast, we do see roles played by BIPOC actors slowly rise in frequency after roles seen in *Unforgiven* and *Last of the Mohicans* in 1992. Notably, with these films displaying outliers in roles, all top performers are still white men.

As mentioned prior, there are Western films starring BIPOC such as Martin Campbell's *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) starring top billed performer Antonio Banderas, and Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012) and *The Hateful Eight* (2015), starring top billed actors Jamie Foxx and Samuel L. Jackson. Additionally, more series

and films featuring BIPOC have risen in popularity such as Western-Style Star Wars Series *The Mandalorian* (2020) starring top billed actor Pedro Pascal, *The Harder They Fall* (2021) starring top billed actor Idris Elba, and the HBO series *Westworld* (2016) featuring a number of BIPOC actors in their cast. Notable in this aspect, despite some of these films performing extremely well at the box office, *Django Unchained* netting 425.4 million USD at box office, *The Hateful Eight* netting 156.5 million USD, and *The Mask of Zorro* netting 250.3 million USD, these smash success films have not permeated mass psyche enough to appear on the aggregate Top 100 Western Films of All Time. This could be due to concepts surrounding Selective Exposure Theory and the desire for Hollywood to continue to engage in a white savior hood narrative because the white cowboy is what the audience expects when watching a Western film. Perhaps as the Diversity movement and push for inclusivity in Hollywood becomes more prominent, actors that fit into a more accurate understanding of the Cowboy demographic, those of the Hispanic and Black communities, will feature more center stage in narratives that originally evolved from Western roots.

An additional aspect of this research to discuss in context are concepts surrounding intersectionality. Defined by Oxford as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage,” (OED) when examining these casts lists through the eyes of intersectionality it is important to note that the only BIPOC being cast within these roles of the Top 100 Western Films are men. Black, latina, and indigenous women did not appear prominently in the Top 100 cast lists, and the BIPOC led productions discussed in

this research that did feature BIWOC in their casts lists are *The Harder They Fall* with actresses Zazie Beetz and DeWanda Wise 2nd and 6th billed, *Django Unchained* with actress Kerry Washington as 4th billed, *The Hateful Eight* with actresses Dana Gourrier and Belinda Owino billed 10th and 16th respectively, *The Mandalorian* with actresses Gina Carano and Ming-Na Wen billed 4th and 10th, and *Westworld* with Thandiwe Newton 4th billed. Nowhere in these do Native American women appear, nor do any of these productions have BIWOC billed in the top billed spot.

An impediment of the methodological approach used in this study was largely grounded in its scope. All data was collected and processed by an individual researcher functioning within a time constraint. While one hundred films is not an insignificant sample size, it does not encompass the entirety of the Western film canon. An additional challenge in regards to the creation of the methodology of the study is the limited amount of research in this particular field of film history, making it difficult to borrow the methodological approaches from other successful studies.

Despite the imposition of certain limitations, the position it created inspired creativity to mitigate impact as much as possible. By using IMDb the sampled 104 films provided a broad range of storytelling over a wide-span of time and ensured audience recognition by employing aggregate audience scoring. The movies coming from said range allow cultural shifts to be observed. Additionally, limited research allowed the rare opportunity to contribute to a relatively small set of data. Thus, it suited the researcher's objectives by providing a larger picture of the representation that comprises the most popular Western movies.

### Conclusion

When considering the research questions,

**RQ1-** What is the racial demographic composition of top billed performers in IMDb's Top 100 Westerns of All Time?

**RQ2-** How does the demographic composition shift over time?

The answers found upon data collection are considerably simple when looking at the data on a surface level. The demographic composition is 100% White in those lead roles. With this conclusion, unfortunately the composition does not have a representative shift over time. With new options for Westerns starring BIPOC actors in lead roles having appeared in the past 15 years, we might soon start to see this shift take place.

In the quest for representation, it is important to remember why representation matters. Filmmakers have a responsibility when depicting certain realities to remember the power of schemas, and how their depiction of historical events, even if they are fictionalized, permeate the widespread perception of people who performed those roles. When the average person thinks of a Cowboy, they likely think of Clint Eastwood, or John Wayne, who's collective 22 films they both have starred in dominate the public perception of the cowboy. This erasure damages not only the history of Cowboy culture, but through revisionist history pushes a white savior narrative whilst simultaneously demonizing the black, latinx, and indigenous people of color that helped to create that culture to begin with. By opting not to include these narratives, Hollywood further marginalizes these communities.

In order to create spaces in which BIPOC can star in more representationally accurate Western films, we must first have conscious and intentional discussions as to how the industry got to where it did in the first place. We cannot reverse the damage that has been done to the image of the Cowboy without acknowledging what the damage is that has been done. It is additionally important to acknowledge the progress Hollywood has made and is currently making to get to a more historically accurate place, acknowledging things such as schemas, cognitive biases, and the social implications of excluding BIPOC from narratives that are inherently part of their history. To conclude, the reason why this discussion matters lies in the words of Maya Angelou: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

## Index

Position	Title	Name of Lead P	Name of Charac	Race of Lead Pe	NOTE:	Year	Directors
1	Once Upon a Tir	Henry Fonda	Frank	White		1968	Sergio Leone
2	The Searchers	John Wayne	Ethan Edwards	White		1956	John Ford
3	Red River	John Wayne	Thomas Dunson	White		1948	Arthur Rosson, Howard Hawks
4	High Noon	Gary Cooper	Marshal Will Kar	White		1952	Fred Zinnemann
5	Shane	Alan Ladd	Shane	White		1953	George Stevens
6	Unforgiven	Clint Eastwood	Bill Munny	White		1992	Clint Eastwood
7	Johnny Guitar	Johnny Guitar	Joan Crawford	White	Female	1954	Nicholas Ray
8	The Wild Bunch	William Holden	Pike	White		1969	Sam Peckinpah
9	Bad Day at Blac	Spencer Tracey	John J. Macreed	White		1955	John Sturges
10	Greed	Gibson Gowland	McTeague	White		1924	Erich von Stroheim
11	Stagecoach	John Wayne	Ringo Kid	White		1939	John Ford
12	McCabe & Mrs.	Warren Beatty	John McCabe	White		1971	Robert Altman
13	No Country for C	Tommy Lee Jones	Ed Tom Bell	White		2007	Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
14	They Died with T	Errol Flynn	George Armstrong	White		1941	Raoul Walsh
15	Will Penny	Charlton Heston	Will Penny	White		1967	Tom Gries
16	The Treasure of	Humphrey Bogart	Fred C. Dobbs	White		1948	John Huston
17	Butch Cassidy a	Paul Newman	Butch Cassidy	White		1969	George Roy Hill
18	The Ox-Bow Inci	Henry Fonda	Gil Carter	White		1942	William A. Wellman
19	The Man Who S	James Stewart	Ransom Stoddard	White		1962	John Ford
20	Monte Walsh	Lee Marvin	Monty Walsh	White		1970	William A. Fraker
21	Broken Arrow	James Stewart	Tom Jeffords	White		1950	Delmer Daves
22	My Darling Clem	Henry Fonda	Wyatt Earp	White		1946	John Ford
23	Lonely Are the B	Kirk Douglas	John W. "Jack" E	White		1962	David Miller
24	Rancho Notorio	Marlene Dietrich	Altar Keane	White	Female	1952	Fritz Lang
25	Fort Apache	John Wayne	Capt. Kirby York	White		1948	John Ford
26	She Wore a Yell	John Wayne	Capt. Nathan C.	White		1949	John Ford
27	Rio Grande	John Wayne	Li. Col. Kirby Yor	White		1950	John Ford
28	The Gunfighter	Gregory Peck	Jimmy Ringo	White		1950	Henry King
29	Rio Bravo	John Wayne	Sheriff John T. C	White		1959	Howard Hawks
30	Winchester '73	James Stewart	Lin McAdam	White		1950	Anthony Mann
31	Hondo	John Wayne	Hondo Lane	White		1953	John Farrow
32	The Man from Li	James Stewart	Will Lockhart	White		1955	Anthony Mann
33	Ulyana's Raid	Burt Lancaster	McIntosh	White		1972	Robert Aldrich
34	Blood on the Mo	Robert Mitchum	Jim Garry	White		1948	Robert Wise
35	Major Dundee	Charlton Heston	Major Amos Che	White		1965	Sam Peckinpah
36	The Magnificent	Yul Brynner	Chris Larabee A	White		1960	John Sturges
37	The Naked Spur	James Stewart	Howard Kemp	White		1953	Anthony Mann
38	Per un pugno di	Clint Eastwood	Joe	White		1964	Sergio Leone
39	Per qualche dol	Clint Eastwood	Monco	White		1965	Sergio Leone
40	Il buono, il brutt	Clint Eastwood	Blondie	White		1966	Sergio Leone
41	Bend of the Rive	James Stewart	Glyn McLyntock	White		1952	Anthony Mann
42	Tumbleweeds	William S. Hart	Don Carver	White		1925	King Baggot, William S. Hart
43	Hombre	Paul Newman	John Russell	White		1967	Martin Ritt
44	Hud	Paul Newman	Hud Bannon	White		1963	Martin Ritt
45	Don't Fence Me	Roy Rogers	Roy Rogers	White		1945	John English
46	Dodge City	Errol Flynn	Wade Hatton	White		1939	Michael Curtiz
47	The Big Sky	Kirk Douglas	Jim Deakins	White		1952	Howard Hawks
48	Ride the High C	Joel McCrea	Steve Judd	White		1962	Sam Peckinpah
49	Open Range	Kevin Costner	Charlie Waite	White		2003	Kevin Costner
50	The Westerner	Gary Cooper	Cole Harden	White		1940	William Wyler
51	The Last of the I	Daniel Day-Lewis	Hawkeye (Natha	White		1992	Michael Mann
52	The Shootist	John Wayne	J.B. Books	White		1976	Don Siegel
53	Destry Rides Ag	Marlene Dietrich	Frenchy	White	Female	1939	George Marshall
54	The Professiona	Burt Lancaster	Dolworth	White		1966	Richard Brooks
55	Tall in the Saddl	John Wayne	Rocklin	White		1944	Edwin L. Marin
56	Ride Lonesome	Randolf Scott	Ben Brigade	White		1959	Budd Boetticher
57	The Plainsman	Gary Cooper	Wild Bill Hickock	White		1936	Cecil B. DeMille
58	Cat Ballou	Jane Fonda	Cat Ballou	White	Female	1965	Elliot Silverstein
59	The Tall T	Randolf Scott	Pat Brennan	White		1957	Budd Boetticher

60	Jesse James	Tyrone Power	Jesse James	White			1939	Irving Cummings
61	Little Big Man	Dustin Hoffman	Jack Crabb	White			1970	Arthur Penn
62	Riders of the Purple	Ed Harris	Jim Lassiter	White			1996	Charles Haid
63	The Alamo	John Wayne	Col. Davy Crockett	White			1960	John Wayne
64	The Far Country	James Stewart	Jeff Webster	White			1954	Anthony Mann
65	3 Godfathers	John Wayne	Robert Marmaduke	White			1948	John Ford
66	Appaloosa	Ed Harris	Virgil Cole	White			2008	Ed Harris
67	Forty Guns	Barbara Stanwyck	Jessica Drummond	White			1957	Samuel Fuller
68	3:10 to Yuma	Glenn Ford	Ben Wade	White			1957	Delmer Daves
69	Gunfight at the O.K. Corral	Burt Lancaster	Wyatt Earp	White			1957	John Sturges
70	Sergeant Rutledge	Jeffery Hunter	Lt. John Cantrell	White			1960	John Ford
71	Little Big Horn	Lloyd Bridges	Capt. Phillip Dutton	White			1951	Charles Marquis Warren
72	7 Men from Now	Randolf Scott	Ben Stride	White			1956	Budd Boetticher
73	Santa Fe Trail	Errol Flynn	Jeb Stuart	White			1940	Michael Curtiz
74	The Paleface	Bob Hope	Painless' Peter F. Williams	White			1948	Norman Z. McLeod
75	Angel and the Badman	John Wayne	Quirt Evans	White			1947	James Edward Grant
76	Duel in the Sun	Jennifer Jones	Pearl Chavez	White			1946	Otto Brower,
77	How the West Was Won	James Stewart	Linus Rawlings	White			1962	George Marshall
78	The Big Trail	John Wayne	Breck Coleman	White			1930	Raoul Walsh
79	Paint Your Wagon	Lee Marvin	Ben Rumson	White			1969	Joshua Logan
80	Tombstone	Kurt Russell	Wyatt Earp	White			1993	George P. Cosmatos
81	Hearts of the West	Jeff Bridges	Lewis Tater	White			1975	Howard Zieff
82	Hang 'Em High	Clint Eastwood	Marshal Jed Coburn	White			1968	Ted Post
83	Ten Wanted Men	Randolf Scott	Jon Stewart	White			1955	H. Bruce Humberstone
84	The Virginian	Gary Cooper	The Virginian	White			1929	Victor Fleming
85	Lone Star	Chris Cooper	Sam	White			1996	John Sayles
86	Run of the Arrow	Rod Steiger	O'Meara	White			1957	Samuel Fuller
87	The Vanishing American	Richard Dix	Nophahie	White			1925	George B. Seitz
88	The Outlaw Josey Wales	Clint Eastwood	Josey Wales	White			1976	Clint Eastwood
89	Jeremiah Johnson	Robert Redford	Jeremiah Johnson	White			1972	Sydney Pollack
90	Cowboy	Glenn Ford	Tom Reese	White			1958	Delmer Daves
91	Barbarosa	Willie Nelson	Barbarosa	White			1982	Fred Schepisi
92	One-Eyed Jacks	Marlon Brando	Rio	White			1961	Marlon Brando
93	Bad Company	Jeff Bridges	Jake Rumsey	White			1972	Robert Benton
94	Ramrod	Joel McCrea	Dave Nash	White			1947	André De Toth
95	The Long Riders	David Carradine	Cole Younger	White			1980	Walter Hill
96	The Missing	Tommy Lee Jones	Samuel Jones	White			2003	Ron Howard
97	Four Faces West	Joel McCrea	Ross McEwen	White			1948	Alfred E. Green
98	The Ballad of Little Jo	Suzy Amis	Jo Monaghan	White	Female		1993	Maggie Greenwald
99	The Covered Wagon	J. Warren Kerrigan	Will Banion	White			1923	James Cruze
100	No Name on the Mountain	Audie Murphy	John Gant	White			1959	Jack Arnold
101	Brokeback Mountain	Jake Gyllenhaal	Jack Twist	White	LGBTQ Narrative		2005	Ang Lee
102	Western Union	Robert Young	Richard Blake	White			1941	Fritz Lang
103	Support Your Local Sheriff	James Garner	Jason	White			1969	Burt Kennedy
104	The Kentuckian	Burt Lancaster	Elias Wakefield	White			1955	Burt Lancaster

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