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Native Americans in Sherman Alexie's Work

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

1. Studentka s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury nejprve uvede do širšího literárního kontextu americké indiánské literatury a do toho kontextu zařadí autora Shermana Alexie. Dále studentka stručně nastíní historicko-kulturní kontext problematiky, kterou bude v jeho díle sledovat, tj. zabírání půdy, rezervace, vzájemné vztahy majority a indiánského obyvatelstva, fenomén tzv. "urban Indians" a související otázky ztráty kulturní/ etnické identity, otázka tzv. "red rage". 2. Jádrem práce bude analýza zvolených děl především se zaměřením na výše zmíněná témata. Literárně kulturní analýzu studentka opře o relevantní kritické zdroje a vhodně doloží odkazy na primární díla. Pojedná i o formálních prostředcích, které autor používá (např. míšení žánrů, symbolika apod.) 3. Závěrem studentka shrne svůj rozbor a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o literární prezentaci obecné problematiky současné pozice a životního stylu Američanů indiánského původu.

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Prohlašuji:

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse two important novels *Indian Killer* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. These works describe how difficult it has been for Native Americans to assimilate into mainstream American culture in light of the past hardships they have suffered and current difficult living conditions either on or off the reservation.

The point of this analysis is to show that Native Americans had to overcome many insurmountable obstacles after European settlers had arrived in Northern America. Despite this backdrop of a painstakingly torrid journey, some Native Americans have successfully adapted into mainstream American culture and became an integral part of a contemporary American society.

To provide background for the study of Native Americans living in the U.S., historical-cultural context is explained.

Key words

Native American, reservations, poverty, assimilation, *Indian Killer*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Sherman Alexie, identity, urbanization

In this paper, different terms *Native American*, *Indian*, *American-Indian* or *Native* refer to *Native American*. This is done in order to accurately cite the sources used in this paper.

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce analytickým přístupem rozebírá jak obtížné bylo pro Američany indiánského původu začlenit se do americké společnosti vzhledem k tomu, jakým strádáním si museli projít. Současné podmínky na rezervacích i ve městech bohužel jen stěžují jejich právo na plnohodnotný život.

Tato práce ukazuje četné překážky, kterým Američané indiánského původu po příjezdu Evropanů do Severní Ameriky museli čelit. Avšak, navzdory všem překážkám, se někteří jedinci dokázali zcela přizpůsobit americké kultuře a stali se tak nedílnou součástí dnešní kosmopolitní americké společnosti.

Pro porozumění problémům, s kterými se Američané indiánského původu po příjezdu Evropanů na kontinent museli vyrovnávat, práce obsahuje i kulturně-historický kontext.

Klíčová slova

Američan indiánského původu, rezervace, chudoba, asimilace, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Indian Killer*, Sherman Alexie, identita, urbanizace

Aby tato práce podala co nejpřesnější obraz o dané problematice, je použito různých termínů pro označení „Američan indiánského původu“. A to s nejlepším vědomím tak, jak je uváděno v odborné literatuře.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adjusting to any culture can be a difficult process, but it may be overwhelming when culture, passed on from generation to generation, is utterly different than the mainstream culture to which one is expected to be fully adapted. American Indian writer Sherman Alexie illustrates this difficulty in two important novels *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Indian Killer*.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian portrays the inner struggle of a Native American looking for his identity when he is lost between two entirely different worlds. On one hand, he lives the life of a Native American boy called “Junior” living on the Spokane reservation, following all its customs and traditions, but evincing a burning ambition to gain a knowledge different than the one taught at reservation school. On the other hand, he lives the life of a full-blooded Native American in the dominate white world at Reardan High School, where Junior is treated as a social outcast. Despite tough conditions on both sides, Junior shows an extremely strong will and determination to persevere, however he unconsciously loses his identity and experiences “*rootlessness*” – an absence of a feeling of belonging somewhere particular.

The second Alexie’s novel that will be discussed in this paper is *Indian Killer*, a book regarded by many literary experts as a milestone in literature, because it is the first literary work that overtly portrays the topic of “*red rage*” – the impact of years of oppression that Native Americans have faced throughout the U.S. continent. The novel created a considerable controversy particularly because of its depiction of racism and violence. The novel is set in Seattle, Washington in the 1960s, a period when the numerous Indian children were removed from Indian reservations and placed in white adoptive or foster families to fully adapt them into the mainstream white society. As a result of this forced assimilation, these children suffered from what has been called “*Lost Birds*” or “*Split Feathers*” syndrome later in their lives. The main protagonist, John Smith, is adopted as a baby by a white couple incapable of having their own children. Throughout his childhood, John is frequently uncertain about his identity. As Smith grows up, Seattle is engulfed by racism and violence between white inhabitants and urban Indians. That often leads to massacres in the area.

Both *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Indian Killer* won numerous awards. Although the reviews on the novels differ, both novels have entered the subconscious of not only the author's supporters, but also the ones who have rejected his nonconformist literary work.

Native Americans had to overcome many seemingly insurmountable obstacles after European settlers arrived in Northern America. Initially, these settlers considered Native Americans to be uncivilized savages standing in the progress of the New World civilization. In the settlers' eyes, the tribal people needed to convert to Christianity and adhere to the strict values and doctrine natural for European Puritans. These values, however, were foreign to Native Americans, who lived in completely different communities.

Another policy that impacted Native Americans and plagued many tribes, was the segregation of tribes to remote areas, known as reservations. This relocation was implemented, in part, in order to supply Europeans with fertile, resourceful land. Indians' effort to cultivate the infertile soil they were moved to resulted in hardship. Famine and abject poverty became a part of everyday life on the reservations. Alarming, more than forty percent of Indian reservation households struggle below the poverty line, being described as "underclass communities" (Sandefur, 37). These difficult circumstances on the reservations have been accompanied by many social ills including alcoholism, drug abuse and poor health care and conditions.

To flee harsh living conditions, many Indians left the reservations in order to pursue a better future in urban areas. Unfortunately, the government, which had provided the financial support for this move, ended this assistance soon afterwards so Native Americans had to learn to rely on themselves. The prejudice of white inhabitants only increased the hardships urban Native Americans suffered. These social ills are identical to the ones suffered by Indians on reservations, but are much harder to overcome because urban Indians are not eligible for a full health care assistance.

At the end of the 19th century, the U.S. government started to put Indian children into boarding schools. This was a way how to eradicate their tribal culture. Nearly one century later, the removal of tribal children into white adoptive or foster families was an enormous issue. The Indian Children Welfare Act of 1978 was passed to protect the children, their families and Indian cultural heritage. Despite the implementation of this

Act and other attempts to protect Indian culture and indigenous cultural heritage, Native Americans have hard recuperated from the appalling treatment they endured since the first European settlers arrived on the continent. Although some Native Americans have now successfully integrated into the white mainstream American society, bitter memories may stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Personally speaking, what I strongly admire about Native Americans is their will to survive the horrendous treatment and carry on their cultural heritage. When reading a piece of work written by a writer of Native American origin, I am glad that this minority survived and we can read many interesting works by Native American authors.

2. NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

Pre-contact America as a vision, myth or imaginary history is stated as one of the reasons why literature of original continent's inhabitants has been nearly erased from the American cultural subconscious. According to Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, experts on American literature, the incorporation of Indian literature into the American literature canon may be rather problematic, as it questions the boundaries of what has been and is regarded literature (42).

Indian tribes were not thought to have literature of any kind for a long period of time, since the expression "literature" meant the culture of "written" word. For this reason, to speak about Indian orally transmitted literature was logically understood as a contradiction in itself because it was not written. For the first European settlers, Indian orally transmitted stories seemed to remind them of a wild animal language. Because it was not recorded in the written word, it could not be considered appropriate literature. In that time the Indian was seen as a child of nature in contrast to the European colonizer, who was considered a child of culture (Bubíková, 74-75).

Similarly, Bradbury and Ruland maintain that Indians represented wild savages to the Puritans. As the land was guaranteed exclusively to Christians, the indigenous tribes were seen as unadaptable evil spirits and ghosts who needed to be eradicated. Apart from European presumption of inappropriacy of Indian literature, this is another argument why until recently Indians have been excluded from literature and society and have never enriched the culture the way African-Americans did (42).

With reference to Paulette F. Molin, this argument, however, cannot be regarded valid anymore for the Indian literature experienced Renaissance movement and one can now recognize many Indian authors. The change began in the 1960s, when Native Americans asserted their rights and were "able to speak for themselves" (28). This era is famous for N. Scott Momaday, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for the novel *House Made of Dawn* in 1969. This work stimulated interest in Native American literature. Vine Deloria, Jr., another renowned Indian literary Renaissance writer, published *Custer Died for Your Sins* the same year. Both works helped Indian literature penetrate public consciousness, because they were published in the late 1960s and general reading public was not widely familiar with such type of literature yet (28).

Other native authors that greatly contributed to the Renaissance period are Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor and Louise Erdrich, whose works have been published since the second half of the 20th century until present time. These Renaissance writers paved the way for contemporary authors such as Sherman Alexie, Susan Power, Leanne Howe or David Treuer to contribute to Native American literature. One can see that Native American literature is now thriving as many more new voices emerged from divergent tribes and different parts of the U.S. continent, such as Taiaiake Alfred, Delphine Red Shirt or Richard Van Camp (Molin, 28).

Alan R. Velie, the author of *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History* says that the increase of interest in American Indian literature triggered a huge wave of criticism. This criticism has reviewed American Indian work from the white academic point of view. As a result, this analysis has been, in many cases, intolerant and vague because comparing Indian American and white American standards may be inappropriate as both cultures utterly differentiate in lifestyle and perception of literature (2).

Similarly, Molin defends Native work, when she points out that “tribal literatures are the most American of American literatures“ (28). She claims that due to oral transmission of literature pieces, current tribal literature is full of wisdom and in no way shallow or stereotypical. Velie also supports the argument for Native American literary proliferation. He maintains modern Native American writers are the most promising in artistic creativity. Moreover, it is their biracial identity that makes their work highly valuable. These authors possess a deep knowledge of their original, tribal traditions. Furthermore, as urban Indians are individuals living in a predominantly white society world, they possess a different insight into western culture (12-13).

A specialist in history of Native American literature, Joshua David Bellin, also argues Native American literature appreciation. He states that mankind should no longer see the Natives the way they were perceived in the past – as demons – but rather as writers, whose capabilities were not recognized in the past and who deserve admiration for the way they contributed to literature of the U.S. continent. On the other hand, the author admits that critics, if they do not overlook Indian literature completely, often consider it as a separate unit without realizing how genuinely American this literature is (1-2).

Similarly, Arnold Krupat, one of the most renowned critics working in Native American studies today, in his study *Red Matters* admits that although Native American literature has been recently subjected to both negative and positive criticism, the literature itself has been widely neglected by the general public. The author asserts that the media is responsible for the general disinterest in Native Americans, who, as a result, are excluded from political and social spheres of life in the U.S. He notes that a reason why media frequently ignore Native Americans is their lack of interest in popular culture, particularly in politics, which is a common subject in the media. Furthermore, insufficient numbers of Native Americans among students and professors may be the reason this ethnic minority is overlooked in academia. Krupat, however, claims that the inattention to Native American cultural studies or literature is decreasing. He expects this neglected field to soon be flourishing (preface part).

In the next chapter, one of the most highly acclaimed Native American authors, Sherman Alexie, will be introduced and his work and influence will be discussed. Particular focus will be paid to the numerous positive and negative responses to his literary work, as Alexie is a controversial personality in the literary field.

3. SHERMAN ALEXIE

Sherman J. Alexie was born on October 7, 1966, on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. Alexie's father, a Coeur d'Alene Indian, worked as a truck driver and became a heavy drinker, who often abandoned his family for days. Alexie's mother worked as a clerk and occasionally took part-time jobs to make extra money for their six children. Alexie was born with a hydrocephalic tumor on his brain and underwent an operation when he was 6 years old. He had minimal chances of survival, but young Alexie proved the doctors wrong and survived (Grassian, 1).

After the surgery, he suffered from severe fits and seizures, which caused him to be ostracized by other Indian children. His outcast status nurtured a passion for reading

books. He often spent time in the school library and read many books from the library by the age of twelve. He soon realized the significance of humor not only as a tool to divert the mockery of other children, but also as a precious tool to enrich himself. Young Alexie attended tribal school until eighth grade, later transferred to an all-white high school in Reardan, Washington. Perhaps surprisingly, Alexie quickly assimilated and soon became a respected student. He graduated from Reardan with honors, but soon resorted to alcoholism, which was gradually dragging him down. It was not before he was robbed at knifepoint when he suddenly realized that he needed to change his attitude to life. When he decided to quit his drinking habit for good, he returned back to studies, this time at Washington State University (Grassian, 2-3).

Initially, it was not Alexie's primary goal to pursue a writing career. In an interview, he admits that despite his passion for reading at a very early age, he never thought of being a writer. He started attending literature classes only because they fit into his university schedule and because he needed to substitute his laboratory classes, which were no longer bearable for him (Nygren, ¶ 7).

Alexie admits that some of the classic literature work was utterly new to him. However, as he highlights: "I fell in love with it [literature] immediately. I knew I was going to be a writer" (Nygren, ¶ 7). Before Alexie was provided with Native Indian work to read, he had no idea that such a literary canon existed. As he further points out, only after reading *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back*, an anthology on Native literature by Joseph Bruchac, Alexie realized he had a strong passion for writing. He wanted to write about daily life on the reservation because this was familiar to him. He had a deep knowledge of ceremonies and habits that were the part of everyday Indian life (¶ 9).

Alexie is an extremely prolific writer and his works have been successful both critically and commercially. He has written twenty-two works of fiction and poetry to date. His first collection of poetry *The Business of Fancydancing* was published in 1992. The author quickly followed with *I Would Steal Horses*, a poetry chapbook - a pocket-sized booklet, released in the same year and another poetry book *First Indian on the Moon* released in 1993. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award. Alexie followed with the novel *Reservation Blues*, which won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1996.

In the same year, the novel *Indian Killer* was published. In 2007, he was awarded the National Book Award for Young People's Literature for his young-adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. His other major success includes the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, which he received in 2010 for the collection of short stories and poems *War Dances* (Grassian, 4-5).

Alexie admits that most of his literary career is based upon Indian characters. His work is filled with Indians as he has always felt extremely guilty about leaving the reservation. When not working on the next blockbusting piece of work, Alexie visits charity and fund-raising events. Presently, Alexie lives in Seattle with his wife and two sons (Konigsberg, ¶ 12-17).

Sherman Alexie unarguably represents one of the most visible Native authors of the present time and, as such, has received many controversial responses from literary critics, cultural commentators and book reviewers. As journalist Lynn Cline explains, Alexie possesses an extraordinary skill – he “makes readers laugh even as he breaks their hearts“ (Introductory section). In her contribution to *The Santa Fe New Mexican* sheet, the author emphasizes Alexie's mastery to combine biting humor with tragic elements to portray the biased treatment of Indians, such as relocation of Indians to the reservations in the past and the unbearable conditions on such reservations in the present (introductory section).

Critics, who write odes on his poems and novels suggest that it may be mainly construction of a “hyperrealistic persona“ (Evans, ¶ 2) that attracts the attention of a mass reader and which is so closely connected to Alexie's personal life (Evans, ¶ 2). According to Kenneth Lincoln, a literary critic, it is “parodic antiformalism [which] may account for some of Alexie's mass maverick appeal“ (10). He highlights that “this Indian gadfly jumps through all the hoops, sonnet, to villanelle, to heroic couplet, all tongue-in-cheek“(9). In fact, Lincoln nicknames Alexie “Indian Oscar Wilde“ (10) and points out that since his work was published, the widely neglected Indian literature has experienced a sky-rocket success in forms of enormous book selling deals. In addition to this, it is Alexie's well-recognizable humor, which Lincoln acknowledges (10-14).

While Lincoln accepts that for some readers Alexie's poetry may be appealing and he says that "his [Alexie's] firecat imagination plays tricks on the reader, for our supposed good, for its own native delight and survival" (11), he also doubts Alexie's motives. One can notice a particular negative critique, when the author suggests that Alexie "is more performance than poem, more attitude than art, more schtick than aesthetic" (14). Also, Lincoln seems to hesitate about some of Alexie's writing qualities, when he states: "Alexie is definitely talented, deeply impassioned, hyphenated American-Indian; but to what end?" (14).

Another negative point, which the scholars often make is Alexie's excessive usage of the same setting and impeding characters by the same negative qualities. Frequently, the author is criticized for stereotyping Indians in the eyes of Euramerican readers. Particularly in his early work, experts criticized Alexie for writing about alcoholism, as this topic was extensively used by other Indian writers. Alexie, nevertheless, objects that although his work may portray some stereotypical concepts of Native Americans, it still portrays the reservation accurately (Nygren, ¶ 13). It is the mass media that the author blames for twisting the real facts and for not informing the world about virtues that Indians, in general, have. On the other hand, he does not deny that he himself does not write about these positive traits (Sundt, ¶ 17-19).

Another negative objection regards Alexie's verdict that non-Indians should stop writing about Indians, because Indian authors have not "found their voice" yet. Alexie finds it nearly impossible to write about a reservation without the actual experience of living on the reservation. As he points out, Indian authors will not be widely published until white authors who have no personal experience with the life on the reservation keep writing about Indians (Krupat, 4). The author discusses his idea in the novel *Indian Killer*:

"How can Wilson present an authentic and traditional view of the Indian world if he isn't authentic and traditional himself?" asked Marie. "I mean, I've done some research on this guy. He isn't even Indian at all. How would he know about the despair, or happiness, in the Indian world?" (*Indian Killer*, 66)

Alexie's patronizing attitude has riled many scholars. In Krupat's view, there are many authors who apply their critical perspective to Native American literature without being

of Indian descent. What the author argues is that the Indian identity does not necessarily condition the right to legitimate person's perspective (2).

According to other opponents, application of such patronizing view would even restrict Alexie himself – as he, himself, occasionally works with fictional minds of white people (Egan, ¶ 9). Jonathan Miles, an author of the article *Sherman Alexie's cultural imperialism*, also contradicts such idea, when he objects that to label someone's literature as inappropriate just because the person is not a member of that particular social group is absurd. Miles criticizes Alexie's protectionist stance when he maintains that Alexie's attitude may be “inimical not only to art and journalism, but also to science“ (Miles, ¶ 7). As the author says, one can hardly imagine even reading travelogues – which generally fit the reading taste of wide public – that have been commonly written by foreign writers and not by the actual inhabitants of the particular place. Ultimately, the author claims that to follow Alexie's protectionist attitude would then make impossible for women to write about men and vice versa (Miles, ¶ 7).

Regarding his enormous success on the market, Alexie does not deny that to be of mixed-blood Indian origin makes the author much more desirable for the public. As he states, due to his origin he is automatically regarded an extraordinary and “exotic“ writer, for his lineage highly increases the chances of becoming a successful writer. Naturally, it is significant to choose the right theme appealing to readers (Nygren, ¶ 18). As Alexie further explains, nowadays' readers are ravenous for biracial stories, such as “love affair, friendship or mentoring relationship“ between a white and Indian individual. He concludes that it is also a mixed-blood authors' much better access to the publishing channels, which makes the books salable (Highway, terminate section).

On the other hand, Louis Owens, the author of *Mixeblood Messages*, seems to be more dramatic in his view of what content should a typical Indian novel contain. The author is convinced that it is absolutely necessary for the Indian work to indicate universally recognizable markers of “Indianness“ (70), no matter how vague and obsolete they may be. For instance, he suggests that an Indian reservation in the novel should be heavily dysfunctional and that “a mixblood inhabiting an urban landfill reservation“ (71) may not be of any interest to a mass reading public. According to the author, among the most catchy motives are Indians inhabiting buildings of the worst conditions possible,

individuals feuding each other and a profound self-destruction with high proportion of accidental death triggered by excessive alcohol consumption.

Owens further points out that the pain and suffering is an inevitable part of Indian life on the reservation and as such must be also portayed. The author contributes to the idea of “doomed Indianness“ (70), when he states that “the Indian is valuable as a bit of color, as an invaluable link to the stolen landscape of America, as an index to the Euramerican’s lost mystical self“ (70). While he lists the criteria that will add to the marketability of the Indian novel, he also states that these motives may also show Indians as beings only “doomed by firewater“ (72) and will hide the individual’s qualities as a direct consequence. As a result of the common topics discussed in Native American literature, it comes as no surprise that a typical Indian may be stereotyped in Euramerican reader’s eyes (71-72).

Generally in Alexie’s work, the characters suffer from “collective trauma“ (Nygren, ¶ 32) or “blood memory“ (Nygren, ¶ 33), as Alexie himself explains. Suffering, according to Alexie, is an integral part of “Indianness“ (Nygren, ¶ 26). Alexie compares diaspora of Indian tribes to diaspora of Jews. The only different is that Jews were victimized for much longer period of time. As Alexie claims, it is fairly impossible to measure the proportion of “Indianness“ in an individual. The only indicator of “Indianness“, he suggests, may be indicator of pain, as he sees an Indian identity and pain closely intertwined (Nygren, ¶ 33).

Alexie intentionally created the characters to relieve his own feeling of trauma, as he believes writing is similar to a therapy. In his view, there is no act of redeeming for John Smith – the antagonist in the novel *Indian Killer*. Alexie’s characters suffer and feel pain on purpose as the writer regards pain to be the only corresponding measure for Indians (Nygren, ¶ 68-69). Alexie justifies the portrayal of violence in Native American work as a logical consequence of hundreds of years of oppression, colonization and murders. In his own words, Native American literature is about “humiliation and shame“ (Nygren, ¶ 25).

There were many painful moments that Indians had to endure, throughout the history. Therefore, it follows that the topic of oppression and hardship is crucial to Indian literature. As Alexie points out, he is not very hesitant to write about it. He feels

that Indian tribes have been oppressed for a long time and there is no need to remain silent about this.

However, in contradiction to Alexie, Gerald Vizenor, one of the Native American writer, is purposefully rigid about the topic of victimization. According to Sarah Phillips Casteel, the characters in Vizenor's work "resist cultural erasure and victimhood" (17). Thus there is a sharp contrast between Alexie's and Vizenor's fiction.

Regarding formal literary devices, Alexie has gradually developed his specific, recognizable literary style. The author uses a lot of humor, irony and satire in his work. Alexie sees humor as the way to enable the dialogue happen. In fact, the author views humor as an excellent means of self-defense, or when talking about issues that may be considered taboo for some of the readers. He is, however, fully aware of the stir that his work may cause. The readers often criticize his frequent usage of humor, because they feel that the author writes about extremely serious and important issues in rather a humorous way (Nygren, ¶ 51-53). The importance of laughter and lightening the atmosphere when discussing momentous issues is commonly used in his novels:

I wish I were magical, but I am really just a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 7)

From the excerpt above, it is apparent that Alexie uses much wit in his work. On top of that, he is capable of joking about the most serious motives, such as poverty on the reservation. Alexie does not avoid using swear words, particularly in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The novel is a semi-autobiographical narrative told in the first person. The book is rich with dialogues and the protagonist's insights. For the reader following the uncomplicated language of the novel, the form of the book represents an escapist kind of literature, despite the complicated content.

The author works with "parody intertextuality" and "ironic re-thinking of historic events" (Nygren, ¶ 54), which often indicate the postmodernists' literary tools. Alexie, however, rejects to be classified as a postmodern writer. As he explains, to label someone a postmodernist or to label one's ethnicity Native American does not prove anything. According to him, such markers are pointless and vague (Nygren, ¶ 55).

The novel *Indian Killer* is a novel which has an omniscient narrator and is characterized as “murder mystery“ (Highway, terminate section). This third-person narrative is not reckoned as an easily readable book, as leaping over several characters’ perspectives frequently results in a blurry content. Generally, the book is rich with symbols and metaphors, which largely stem from Indian mythology (Hewitt, introductory section).

As already mentioned above, Alexie is rightfully called “Indian Oscar Wilde“ (Lincoln, 10), particularly for his literary oeuvre. The author frequently uses hate speech and interrogation techniques to strengthen the perception there is no possible solution to the racial hatred portrayed in the book. Throughout the story, it may be complicated to find answers. Instead, the book is filled with the divisions within society and arguments following each other in rather a swift pace. Generally, the sentences are very short and dynamic. The exchanges are fast and angry, disregarding someone’s latitude for expressing their own opinion. These literary techniques reflect the theme of *Indian Killer*, as they suggest an extremely fragile relationship and cultural controversy between the white and Indian community (Hewitt, terminate section).

In the next chapter, the novel *Indian Killer* will be discussed. At first, basic facts will be revealed. Secondly, Alexie’s motives for writing the book will be explained. Furthermore, the reviews of the novel will prove that *Indian Killer* is by many literary scholars considered to be a milestone in Native American literature, particularly due to its revolutionary portrayal of “*red rage*“, racism and violence.

3. 1. SHERMAN ALEXIE AND INDIAN KILLER

The novel was published in 1996 as a response to critics and audience regarding the author’s previous work gloomy, although Alexie himself considers his preceding novels and poem collections humorous with happy ending (Highway, terminate section). To some scholars, the release of the book was shocking. For these scholars, the novel represented “a departure from the humorous and compassionate attitude“ (Mariani, ¶ 1) from previous Alexie’s works.

With reference to John Hewitt, a writer and the owner of *Writer's Resource Center*, one of the numerous reasons why the novel is so dark is the fact that the characters hardly any time manifest a sign of civility. Instead, there are numerous examples of confrontation, arguments and “angry rhetoric“ (§ 8). In an interview, Alexie justifies his motives for writing the controversial novel: “Critics and audience kept talking about *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues* as if they were dark, depressing, Kafka-ish, cockroach-nightmare-crawling-across-the-floor kind of books“ (Highway, terminate section). To come up with a truly depressing novel, Alexie wrote *Indian Killer*. The novel is classified as “murder mystery“, however the author himself, at the very beginning, intended to write about “*Lost Birds*“ – about Indian children being adopted by white families, later facing psychological complications as dysfunctional behavior, problems with alcohol, drugs and abnormally high suicide rate (Highway, terminate section).

Alexie shows that the positive reviews on his writing style and his ability to play with the language prove well-founded already with the title of the book *Indian Killer*, which is controversial in literal meaning itself. The title of the novel is palindrome – the word or expression which is read the same from beginning or backwards. For this reason, the title itself may be highly attractive to the readers. In fact, the title of the novel does not suggest if the plot will be about the killer murdering Indians or the killer being of Indian ancestry. As Alexie himself explains, the book is about both tendencies - about Indians killing whites and about whites killing Indians (Highway, terminate section).

The story is about John Smith, an Indian, who is adopted by white wealthy parents Daniel and Olivia Smith. Unfortunately, they are not able to have their own children. The story takes place in Seattle in the 1960s, the decade which was notorious for numerous cases of Indian children's adoption. Despite the couple's intention to provide John with loving family background, they fail to recognize John's real needs. Regrettably, their “well-intentioned ignorance and obliviousness“ (Grassian, 106) result in John's despair and feelings of alienation from the society. He suffers from psychological trauma and later develops patterns of dysfunctional behavior. The protagonist develops the sense of intense hatred towards the white race and although the perpetrator is never revealed in the story, the reader can sense John being the merciless

killer of white men. He does not find any redemption in his sins and commits suicide at the end of a novel. Even though it is visible the main protagonist is “mentally unstable“ (Grassian, 108), Alexie does not guide the reader whether John’s dysfunctional behavior stems from his Indian genes or whether the problem is “socially based“ (Grassian, 108). Alexie skilfully incorporates continual doubt into the story, which results in reader’s disability to strictly convict the crimes that have been done. Despite the cold-blooded crimes, it may be difficult for the reader to sentence the crimes definitely.

Alexie chose the setting for the novel intentionally – he has been living in Seattle for many years, therefore he has a deep knowledge of the city and its local conditions. In the novel, Alexie “implicates the city of Seattle for its lack of diversity and lack of equal opportunity for minorities“ (Grassian, 120). In fact, he criticizes the city for being “ethnically segregated“ (Grassian, 120), for the minorities commonly reside in one part of the city and the white population in the other.

Alienation between different minority groups constitutes one of the main concerns, too. In the novel, for example, John Smith realizes the common ground between African Americans and himself, but it represents a huge challenge to him merely to have an ordinary conversation with two African Americans in Seattle’s Best Donuts. The racial tensions in the city of Seattle become even more undisguised when the local media start to label the killer the “Indian Killer“. This allegation triggers an enormous wave of racism, mainly from the side of white population, who start to attack random Indians. For instance, Aaron Rogers, one of the white boys, leads brutal attacks against often defenseless, homeless Indians as revenge for his white brother David, who was seemingly killed by Indians. Surprisingly, Alexie, at the end of the novel, reveals he was not killed by them (Grassian, 120).

Disturbingly, Indians are not portrayed as suppressors of violence in the novel, but rather as extremist and blood-thirsty minority who consistently supports “Indian Killer“ in his crime. Moreover, the local Indians are convinced that the murderer is the contemporary reincarnation of their national hero and adhere to him (Grassian, 120). Throughout the novel, Alexie widely criticizes the police department of Seattle for racism and discrimination aimed at urban Indian minority:

“Oh, shit, of course. I remember you. The rookie. Lost your breakfast.” Wilson blushed. “Shit, that case is low priority, rook. One dead Indian don’t add up to much. Some other Indian guy killed her, you know. Happens all the time. Those people are like that. You ask me, it’s PEST CONTROL.” (*Indian Killer*, 160)

From this excerpt, it is obvious that the local police department is not neutral. During one of the attacks, an Indian homeless woman called Mary, was brutally killed. Her body was found by Jack Wilson, who, some time later, stops at the police department to see how the investigation proceeds and if the murderer of the horrendous crime was caught. Instead of a proper investigation of the case, the police officer makes racist remarks and rejects to further inquire into the murder case. In fact, he sympathizes with the perpetrator, as it was “only” an Indian person killed and such case is not worth the effort of the proper police inquiry.

At the moment, when the victims are white and the killer presumably Indian, the police is suddenly very active and eager to start an investigation. Alexie suggests that if the killer and his victims were members of a minority, there would hardly be any concern about it. For instance, there is a considerable grief over a dead body of David, a white boy, found close to the Indian casino. On the other hand, there is no serious concern about the Indian victims after the numerous whites’ rampages. At the police station, the local police officers always believe the white men’s reports, but when an Indian comes to report that he/she was attacked by a white person, the officers usually accuse them of being drunk and delusional (Grassian, 122).

As already mentioned above, Alexie’s *Indian Killer* does not belong to easily readable books. In fact, the novel is filled with many insoluble tensions and negative emotions. Throughout the novel, John Smith’s story reminds the reader the numerous mistakes which were made in a mutual relationship between European white colonizers and Indians in the past. The main hero is a complicated character that can be viewed from two possible contradictory angles – on one hand, he is an individual to feel pity for. On the other hand, he is a destructive element to be feared of. As Amber Scott adds to the point, any human being, regardless of his/her race and social background is able to get involved in the same “unforgivable horrors” (terminate section). At the same time, humans are naturally empowered by the “innter strength” and strong will to persevere.

It is clearly visible that the main hero is often torn between two entirely different worlds. As a consequence, he often immerses into his own thoughts and fails to distinguish between reality and his brutal fantasies. At the end of the novel, the “Indian Killer“ does not murder Wilson, a white man, but commits a suicide, instead. Before he jumps from the roof of a building, he cuts Wilson in the face. John believes that the mark on Wilson’s cheek will “forever mark him as a symbol of white theft and perversion of Native culture“ (Grassian, 124). John’s inner thoughts as well as the act of suicide is in detail described in the book:

John dropped the knife, turned away from Wilson, quickly walked to the edge of the building, and looked down at the streets far below. He was not afraid of falling. John stepped off the last skyscraper in Seattle. John fell. (*Indian Killer*, 411-412)

The passage above depicts the last moments of John’s life. Typically for Alexie, the excerpt contains concealed symbol characteristic for figurative language. It seems that by not murdering Wilson and committing suicide, John craves for redemption. He puts himself into the role of martyr as a symbol of salvation for his nation. At the beginning of the novel, Father Duncan, a priest, shows little John a stained glass with depiction of Indian massacre of Jesuits:

“Did the white people leave?“ asked John. “Some of them did. But more came.“ “It didn’t work.“ “No.“ “Why didn’t the Indians kill all the white people?“ “They didn’t have the heart for it.“ (*Indian Killer*, 14)

Do the aforementioned passages suggest that John was hit by conscious stream of Indian identity, at the end of the novel? “Indian Killer“ murdered many white men with the exception of his last victim that he left mutilated. Does his last act mean that he did not have “the heart for it“ (*Indian Killer*, 14)? It seems that particularly at the end of the novel, John finds his lost identity.

Although the previous works became universally successful, the responses to *Indian Killer* has considerably varied. Divergence in reviews on the novel may be caused by the violent content, which is overtly expressed in the book.

Due to the outright violent content, the novel is a milestone in the Native American work to date. In fact, it is the first Native American work which depicts the topic of “red rage“ so explicitly. With reference to Jon Reyhner, “red rage“ is “the

result of impact of generations of trauma, violence and oppression“ (§12), which colonialism caused to Indian tribes. In current American society, Indian students and their families have purposefully refused the adaptation possibility in the institutions. This attitude can educe “oppositional identities“ (§ 9). Alarmingly, many Indian students even deprecate the education, including literacy.

Historically speaking, in the life-long ostracized cultures, patterns of abnormal behavior can be observed. For instance, the abuse of illegal substances, such as alcohol and drugs has been one of the major problems of Indian society. Additionally, the constant abhorrence towards other Indians who become successful and manage to flee the destitution stereotype often arises (Reyhner, ¶ 8-10). As Alexie himself admits:

All those qualities about me that made me an ugly duckling on the reservation – ambitious, competitive and individualistic – these are not necessarily good things to be when you’re part of a tribe. I’ve always loved books. I’ve always loved reading. I planned on becoming a doctor, a pediatrician. (Highway’s interview, middle section)

With reference to Krupat, one of the most highly acclaimed scholars of Native American literature, Mommaday’s *House Made of Dawn* “dramatizes a number of important issues“ (108), but it does not “overtly represent Indian rage“ (108) as such. Similarly, in Silko’s *Ceremony*, the abrupt need of rage must be suppressed by the main hero. On the whole, the works by Mommaday, Silko, Vizenor or Deloria, Jr. strive to be resilient to the biased treatment received by Indians (Krupat, 108).

On the other hand, Alexie positions the theme of “*red rage*“ as a nucleus of the story. According to him, the revenge is justifiable and as such inevitable for the Native Americans. Throughout the novel, the vengeance is necessary and it must not be suppressed under any circumstances (Krupat, 103).

Krupat unfavourably criticizes *Indian Killer*. The author states that the novel depicts the idea that “anger, rage and a desire for murderous revenge must be expressed, not repressed or channeled into other possible action“, which he finds highly disturbing (Krupat, 103).

Similarly to other scholars, Grassian identically finds *Indian Killer* departing from the Alexie’s previous novels and poetry collections. His view corresponds with Krupat’s, when he points out that *Indian Killer* greatly differentiates from the Native

American work written to date. The author compares Alexie's *Indian Killer* with his previous work *Reservation Blues*. He claims that whereas the topic of "ethnic hybridity" (104) is approached as beneficial in *Reservation Blues*, in *Indian Killer* it represents the source of destruction and violence.

In an interview conducted by Joelle Fraser, Alexie explains his initial stimulus for the novel: "I was sitting at Washington State with frat guys in the back row who I wanted to kill. And I would fantasize about murder" (terminal section). Regarding "red rage", the novel is highly disturbing. Particularly some passages do not overtly show violence, but symbolically portray the abhorrence towards the white world:

With this mask, with this mystery, the killer can dance forever. The killer plans on dancing forever. The killer never falls. The moon never falls. The tree grows heavy with owls. (*Indian Killer*, 420)

At the end of the novel, the presumably "Indian Killer" performs a Ghost Dance. This ceremonial is more than five hundred years old and was danced in order to drive the invading colonizers out and resurrect the dead Indians. Mainly at the end of the novel, Ghost Dance symbolizes the arousal against the white oppression. Throughout the novel, Alexie's Indian characters desire the whites to "banish from the continent" (Grassian, 125). Similarly, in Krupat's view, "Indian Killer" does not yearn to end the war between the whites and Indians. What he/she desires is revenge and death of all inhabitants of European origin (102).

Scott also admits that it feels irritating to read a contemporary novel which depicts so much bitter detest against the white world. For the author, however, it is equally disturbing to read about whites beating defenseless Indians (terminal section).

Lydia Cooper also finds the novel *Indian Killer* profoundly disturbing. She describes the book as highly troublesome. The author explains that the novel contains explicit examples of "suffering that are manifestations of the symbolism and rhetoric of religious violence" (§ 1), particularly depicted at the terminal section of the book. Furthermore, she implies that John's suicide - the final act at the end of the novel - can be viewed as atonement, which is often regarded as an excuse to justify horrifying attitudes towards certain groups of people (§ 1-2).

Giorgio Mariani seems to be more contradictory in his view of *Indian Killer*. On one hand, he finds the novel filled with "red terrorism fueled by an anti-racist racism

analogues“ (§ 1). On the other hand, the author admits that the novel is far more contradictory in its message, when it not only “justifies“, but also “repudiates violence as a creative force“ (§ 1). As Mariani says, Alexie’s principal goal is to depict “perverse and mutually destructive nature“ (§ 12) of confrontation between whites and Indians. To conclude, Alexie’s *Indian Killer* illustrates a deterrent example of violence breeding only violence, no matter on what grounds the actual reason for such aggression has its roots (§ 12).

From the very beginning of the novel, a reader may think that John Smith is the “Indian Killer“, due to his peculiar behavior and inner driving force. However, the real murderer is not explicitly revealed in any part of the novel. In fact, there are more characters who detest whites and could be, therefore, regarded the murderers. As Grassian says, “Alexie’s intention is to show how Indians commonly experience violent rage and anger due to marginalization, discrimination, and unequal power struggles“(117).

In the next chapter, basic dates about *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* will be introduced. Typical themes of the novel will be analyzed. Furthermore, positive and negative reviews of the book will be discussed.

3.2. SHERMAN ALEXIE AND *THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN*

The novel for young adults was published in 2007. It is an autobiographical first-person narrative, and as Alexie himself says, he is extremely proud of himself for using this voice for the novel. Originally, the draft was written in the third person. Alexie, however, soon realized that such narrative distance also created emotional distance and was, therefore, useless. Alexie admits that he unconsciously used the third person voice, as he was “afraid of his own history“ (Garcia, introductory section). Although Alexie is not a pioneer in “dressing up autobiography for a younger audience“, his book is meeting with an enormous success (Harmanci, § 4).

The story is about an Indian boy Arnold Spirit called “Junior“, who lives with his parents on the Spokane reservation. As the novel is autobiographical, the main protagonist represents Alexie himself, or at least, reminds him in many ways. Arnold was also born with a hydrocephalus on his brain, a handicap, which he survives. Similarly to Alexie, Arnold suffers from severe seizures and bedwetting during his childhood. His appearance differs from norm as Arnold has an enlarged skull, wears glasses with thick frames and stutters. Due to his impairments, the main protagonist gets ostracized by other children. He finds comfort in drawing cartoons and wanderbouts with his best friend, Rowdy.

Later, Arnold decides to flee the poor conditions of the Spokane reservation. Unfortunately, his burning ambition is not met with much sympathy on the reservation. When Arnold transfers to Reardan, an all-white school, the situation does not improve. He is constantly bullied and mocked in the all-white environment. Gradually, Arnold’s toughness earns other schoolmates’ respect. However, back on the reservation, he is considered a traitor because he left the reservation and became successful. Particularly one of the ending scenes, where Arnold plays the basketball game against the reservation school, is highly emotional. The moment Reardan team wins, Arnold feels very happy. However, he starts to feel guilty after he realizes what such defeat means to the tribe:

Okay, so maybe my white teammates had problems, serious problems, but none of their problems was life threatening. But I looked over at the Wellpinit Redskins, at Rowdy. I knew that two or three of those Indians might not have eaten breakfast that morning. (*The Absolutely Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 195)

Deplorable conditions of life on a reservation resulting in the desire to flee away is one of the main topics in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. As Nygren points out, Alexie’s portrayal of reservation has changed in his work. The author maintains that Alexie’s early work is characteristic for viewing reservations as “a geographical space of borders and confinement“. On the other side, in Alexie’s more recent fiction, “the reservation changes its ontology and becomes a mental and emotional territory“ (§ 5).

Alexie himself admits that reservation borders play a vital role in Indians’ lives. As he points out, although Indians become successful off the reservation, they still carry

the reservation stigma inside. Such stigma has an undeniable impact on ethnicity, personal decisions and love life (Nygren, terminal section).

The book has received many positive responses not only from critics, but also from wide public. For instance, Bruce Barcott, a contributing editor at *Outside* magazine, highlights not only Alexie's mastery to speak in a 14-year-old boy's voice to express his thoughts and emotions, but also Alexie's poetic oeuvre to play with the language (§ 2-7).

Similarly, Brian Crandall, one of the renowned scholars in the pedagogical field, reviews Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in a highly positive tone. The author particularly views the novel as an excellent teaching aid for disabled pupils or pupils born with impairments. According to him, the novel is well-outlined and enriched by beautiful illustrations. These illustrations, on the top of a very good writing style, add to a meaningfulness of the novel. Moreover, as he highlights, they may be highly beneficial for students to evoke thinking about their peers who may have special needs. Crandall sees an implicit similarity between Arnold Spirit's condition for education and the disabled students' condition. The author claims that the similitude is based on the fact that until the disabled child proves that he/she does not belong to the predestined educational environment and actually can achieve better studying results, he/she has to conciliate with the fact nothing will change. Similarly to Arnold Spirit, only after he insists on continuing his education off-reservation, he is allowed to show his full potential. Therefore, the author sees a very forceful motivation, especially for the disabled, in the book (introductory section).

On the other hand, Crandall also makes a negative comment on *The True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. He states that not all children born with impairments, such as brain hydrocephalus, have the equal educational opportunities as Alexie's autobiographical character Arnold Spirit. Arnold refers to his tumor as "brain grease" (Alexie, 2), but he may use the humor only because his impairment was not "the cause for mental setback" (Crandall, § 11). Therefore, Alexie's occasional insensitivity and irreverent humor may not be tolerated by the readers conditioned with such defect.

Other negative responses include the objection that deplorable life on the reservation is stereotyped. However, the author insists on his literary illustrations and

says that the poverty and miserable conditions are facts, which are inevitably a part of an everyday life on the reservation (Nygren, ¶ 13).

As the book became an enormous success, Alexie was offered to sell his copyright to a film industry. However, the author refused the tender. He felt it was nearly impossible to find the main actor starring Arnold so that he would utterly put himself into the role. Furthermore, he was worried that no one could possibly act out such passion for basketball as he developed (Konigsberg, ¶ 4).

The book has won numerous awards, such as the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the 2008 Boston-Globe Horn Book Award, the 2009 International Book on Books for Young People Sweden – Peter Pan Prize, the 2010 California Young Reader Medal. Additionally, the novel was a finalist for the 2010 California Young Reader Medal (Alexie's web).

To partly clarify the reasons for his success particularly throughout the U.S., Alexie explains that the choice of his future target reader may have been one of the crucial moments, when writing the novel. As he points out, he purposely aimed at teenagers. The author regards them very devoting readers in the U.S. Moreover, the author credits the part of his literary success to his capability of being versatile and working with multi-genre topics. In his view, not many authors do that (Konigsberg, ¶ 13-15).

In contrast to *Indian Killer*, the novel is easy to read. In fact, it is possible to finish the book in one day or so, as the plot is clearly structured and the usage of humor makes the book unputdownable. In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Alexie sticks to the narration throughout the novel, so the reader will not get lost as with *Indian Killer*.

In the following chapter, the first contact of European colonizers with Indians will be discussed. To illustrate the erstwhile perception of Indians, works of famous authors will be used.

4. THE FIRST CONTACT AND THE PERCEPTION OF INDIANS

The status of American Indians has been questioned since Columbus confused them for the natives of India (Velie, 1). Due to the Doctrine of Discovery principle, Christian European settlers were given the right to colonize any piece of territory which was not “discovered“ before, particularly if they came in contact with non-Christian peoples. According to the Doctrine of Discovery, Indians were heathens and as such had rights merely to occupy the land, not to hold the title to it. For this purpose, “the rights of the original inhabitants were...necessarily and to a considerable extent impaired“ (*Johnson v. McIntosh* in Biolsi, 233).

With reference to Roy Harvey Pearce, one of the literary historians and author of the numerous study books on Native Americans, European settlers were beset by the Indian question as soon as they reached the coast of the American continent. To fully comprehend the local inhabitants, they had to apply not only the theoretical approach – in form of studies of such “creatures“ (1), but also the practical one – in form of cohabitation with them. For the puritan colonizers, who followed their own policy and a certain sense of order strictly adhered back in England, it was highly disturbing to meet an uncivilized savage. According to European colonizers, any deviation from what was considered pure and appropriate in puritan England had to be eliminated. The settlers were obsessed to conquer the New World and to civilize the original inhabitants under any circumstances, even if it meant their annihilation (4).

In the colonizers’ view, Indians were devils unable to convert to Christian religion and they stubbornly insisted on practising their own religious ceremonies. For this reason, “a holy war between the forces of God and the Devil“ (Velie, 1) was inevitable. Indian was seen as a shady monster and as such was portayed in the works of renowned authors, such as Mark Twain or Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Similarly, the director of Native American Studies at Portland State University in Oregon, Thomas Biolsi, asserts that Indians have always represented only a fragment in American multi-cultural society. For this reason, the indigenous peoples have always been viewed as “the others“ (268). The following is an excerpt from the 16th century anthology *Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, which describe peculiar Indian lifestyle:

They live in caves of the earth and hunte for their dinners or praye, even as the beare or other wilde beastes do. They eate rawe fleshe and fishe, and refuse no meate, howsoever it be stinking. They are desperate in their fight, sullen of nature, and ravenous in their manner of feedinge...For their weapons, to oiFende their enimies, or kill their pray withall, they have dartes, slings, bowes, and arrows headed with sharp stones, bones, and some with yron. (archive)

Indian as an untamed savage is also portrayed in the work of the writer James Fenimore Cooper, who became famous for the set of five historical novels known as *The Leatherstocking Tales*. The complex work tells the different stories of Indian fighter and Natty Bumppo, an American scout for the British military. *The Leatherstocking Tales* is “a complex and adventure-packed trip into the lush and unpredictable wilderness of the 18th century America“ (Clark, ¶ 1). In the best known of the five series, below is illustrated that an Indian was seen as a dangerous savage by James Fenimore Cooper:

“Hugh!” exclaimed the SAVAGE, whose treacherous aim was so singularly and so unexpectedly interrupted. Without making any reply the French officer laid his hand on the shoulder of the Indian, and led him in profound silence to a distance from the spot, where their subsequent dialogue might have proved DANGEROUS, and where, it seemed, that one of them, at least, sought a VICTIM. (*The Last of the Mohicans*, 116)

In the 1770s, the European settlers were eager to establish their splendid New World civilization. The Indian was seen as uncivilized and primitive human being that was consequently obliged to make way to a civilized American nation. Soon the whole future of the civilization hinged on “an idea of a new order“ (Pearce, 4). In the New World, there was no space for an unadaptable and uncivilized Indian. The doctrine of new order was essential for European settlers and the Indians served as a deterrent example of what the settlers might have been without following the principle (Pearce, 3-4). With reference to the author, “America had to be planted, so that sub-humans could be made human“ (6).

Soon, however, they learned that their positive mutual relationship may bring benefits to both sides. For Virginian Indians, the planters’ armoury and modern

weapons ensured their protection against neighboring tribes. The planters respected their claims to land and would officially purchase pieces of land, which they needed for farming. The colonizers were aware of the influence of Powhatan, an Indian leader, and knew that he could very easily set allied tribes against them. Powhatan died in 1616. His follower, Opechancanough, continued comradely strategy only to surprise the European settlers with an attack on March 22, 1622. That day, the Indians slaughtered more than 300 white settlers (Pearce, 6-10).

Their attack, however, did not stay without a response for a long time and triggered many massacres to follow. Subsequently, the annihilation of Indians was justifiable (Pearce, 10-11). The following illustration is an excerpt from Edward Waterhouse's *Declaration of 1622* and shows the atmosphere, as well as biased feelings against the Indians:

A Declaration of the state of the Colony and Affaires in Virginia. With a Relation of the barbarous Massacre in the time of peace and League, treacherously executed upon the English by the Infidels, 22 March last....The Country being in this estate, an occasion was ministred of sending to *Opachankano* the King of these Savages, about the middle of *March* last, what time the Messenger returned backe with these words from him, That he held the peace concluded so firme, as the Skie should sooner fall than it dissolve: yea, such was the treacherous dissimulation of that people who then contrived our destruction, that even two days before the Massacre, some of our men were guided thorow the woods by them in safety.... (Kingsbury, *Edward Waterhouse's Declaration*)

Therefore, in the 17th century Virginia, an Indian was no longer viewed as an indifferent tool in the devil's hands, but as a vindictive monster, who stood tenaciously "in the path of civilization" (Pearce, 11) and as such had to be eliminated.

In the following chapter, reasons for the Indian Removal Act of 1830 as well as its consequences will be discussed.

5. INDIAN REMOVAL AND THE GENERAL ALLOTMENT ACT OF 1887

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, That it shall and may be lawful for the President of the United States to cause so much of any territory belonging to the United States, west of the river Mississippi, not included in any state or organized territory, and to which the Indian title has been extinguished, as he may judge necessary, to be divided into a suitable number of districts, for the reception of such tribes or nations of Indians as may choose to exchange the lands where they now reside, and remove there; and to cause each of said districts to be so described by natural or artificial marks, as to be easily distinguished from every other. (Randall, *Indian Removal Act of 1830*)*

At the beginning of the 19th century, industry was booming in the U.S. When the U.S. territory was about to expand to lower South territory, white settlers had to face an obstacle – indigenous Indian tribes occupying the area. To ensure the space for growing cotton, the colonizers pressed the U.S. government to pass the law in order to acquire the land. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was passed on May 26, 1830 by the Twenty-First Congress of the United States of America. As already mentioned, Indians were seen as savages incapable of civilizing and thus were made not fit into the Christian society. This was another conviction that contributed to the “continued displacement“ (Biolsi, 269) and removal of the unadaptable Indian tribes from the fertile land which white settlers were so eager for. In Biolsi’s view, the Indian Removal Act was “a federally mandated ethnic cleansing policy“ (506), which had annihilating impacts on the native peoples. Many of Indian peoples underwent starvation and fought diseases, which resulted in deaths of great numbers.

The removal treaties had its origin in the state of Georgia, which was originally home to the Cherokee Indians. By 1802, the Native peoples claimed enormous territory in Georgia. They had owned this piece of land for generations and they pleaded the U.S. government to pass a written document about their titles to land.

There were many conflicts between European colonizers and the Natives, as their lifestyles greatly differed. However, when the Indians sought help at the newly elected president Andrew Jackson, he refused to solve the conflicts. The only possible solution, later fatal for the Indians, was to remove them to the West lands. Intentionally,

the president intended to minimize the contact between the Cherokees and colonists in order to decrease the conflicts. According to him, it was of the best interests for the Cherokees to move West to prevent their devastation. With reference to Bellin, the tribes were marched out with the following farewell words: “West the Cherokees must go; there, in a space without culture, they can reclaim their true and only nature“ (Bellin, 57). The other Southeastern Indians, namely the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, the Creeks and the Seminoles experienced similar disputes and relocations (Frank, ¶ 4).

The aforementioned five tribes were labelled “civilized“ and later called “*Five Civilized Tribes*“, as they were able to adjust to white predominant culture. Most importantly, they were willing to convert to Christianity. They adapted into the norms typical for white Anglo-American settlers, such as “written constitutions, literacy, intermarriages to white women, central government or animal husbandry“ (Frank, ¶ 2). On the other hand, the “wild“ Indian tribes insisted on their own traditional habits passed down from generation to generation and strictly adhered to them. They worshipped several Gods, oral tradition bore a great significance to them and they preferred traditional hunting instead of civilized husbandry (Frank, ¶ 2). The following excerpt demonstrates the attitude of the government towards the unadaptable tribes:

To the operation of the physical causes, which we have described, must be added the moral causes connected with their [Indian’s] mode of life, and their peculiar opinions. Distress could not teach them providence, nor want industry. As animal food decreased, their vegetable productions were not increased. Their habits were stationary and unbending; never changing with the change of circumstances. How far the prospect around them, which to us appears so dreary, may have depressed and discouraged them, it is difficult to ascertain, as it is also to estimate the effect upon them of that superiority, which we have assumed and they have acknowledged. There is a principle of repulsion in ceaseless activity, operating through all their institutions, which prevents them from appreciating or adopting any other modes of life, or any other habits of thought or action, but those which have descended to them from their ancestors. (excerpted Lewis Cass, *Removal of the Indians*)

Particularly Eastern media soon started to pay attention to the “Indian problem“. Their disapproving attitude forced the U.S. federal government to change the principal approach from isolation of Indians to assimilation of them (Sandefur, 37-38).

One of the means of possible assimilation was the implementation of The General Allotment Act of 1887. The Act is called The Dawes Act after its author, the Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts. The Dawes Act had two primary goals. At first, to provide the white ranchers with fertile and resourceful land and to ensure the economic development of the U.S. Secondly, to adapt tribal members into mainstream culture and “dissolve tribes as sovereign entities“ (Biolsi, 115). The principle of The Dawes Act was to break the reservation land, otherwise owned by the tribe, and grant the particular pieces to Indian individuals. Naturally, this was against the Native Americans’ basic tenets of the common ownership of the land.

White settlers felt an abrupt urge to morally educate Indians since they arrived to the U.S. continent. Indians considered their land sacred and venerated the common ownership. In European settlers’ view, Indians were supposed to learn the value of individually owned property, which would later bolster the desire for wanting more. The private ownership was meant to make Indians dissatisfied with their simple way of life and awake the lust for money (Merill Gates in Wilson, 299).

At that time, to protect individual’s possession and to fight for its maintain was a common practice, in European eyes. Such attitude aroused patriotic feelings and prevented laziness (Merill Gates in Wilson, 299). Therefore, the implementation of The Dawes Act was supposed to develop “a stronger personality in Indian“ in order “to make him responsible for the property“ (Merill Gates in Wilson, 299). This was the necessary requirement in order to acquire the U.S. citizenship. Significance of the Indian common ownership was often challenged by white settlers. The Senator Henry Dawes also widely criticized such a way of lifestyle:

They have got as far as they can go, because they own their land in common...There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization. Till these people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress. (Dawes in Wilson, 300)

The implementation of The Dawes Act was not effective for the Indians. At first, lands that were granted to Indians regularly stretched at deserts and as such were nearly impossible to cultivate. Furthermore, newly introduced agriculture differed from the original way of Indian’s life greatly. Thus, many of them were not able to successfully implement the new techniques. Another concern was that a few individuals, who were

willing to try it, could not afford the needed tools, seeds or animals necessary for agriculture implementation. Inheritance also caused problems. Some of the children, who inherited the land to farm on, were sent to boarding schools, therefore could not carry on their duties. Multiple inheritance was another concern, as usually more than one individual inherited an allotment. Therefore, the property size was not enough for an effective farming (OurDocuments, ¶ 5).

Similarly, Sandefur maintains that The Dawes Act did not have positive impacts on Indians. According to him, the conditions on reservations quickly deteriorated when the allotment was implemented (38).

As a result of The Dawes Act, there was an enormous loss of tribal land. Furthermore, Indian population was compressed either due to “surplus land“ (Biolsi, 116) or by the sale of allotments by individuals, who hold the official titles to the land. Overwhelmingly, more than 100 million acres were transferred from the tribes to non-Indians between the years 1887 and 1934. The negative impact of The Dawes Act is still discussed today, as it is interpreted as the renouncement of “tribal sovereignty“, which was guaranteed to the tribal members (Biolsi, 115-116).

In the following chapter, the main reasons for the establishment of reservations will be discussed. Their negative as well as positive aspects will be outlined.

6. RESERVATIONS

As a result of hatred towards Indians and European colonizers' lust after the resourceful Indian territory, the tribes were relocated to remoted areas known as “*reservations*“, mainly by the beginning of the 20th century. Particularly in the second half of the 19th century, the tribal communities were militarily forced to these reservations, located in the west part of the continent (Biolsi, 113).

Gary D. Sandefur, a professor of sociology and an affiliate of the Institute for Research on Poverty has also enriched Indian studies with his numerous findings. In his view, to

enable the economic growth, Indians were removed to areas which were not desirable for the white majority. These territories were frequently removed from densely populated areas and infrastructure. The aim of the removal policy was to isolate Indians from land rich with natural resources and to prevent them from contact with major population centers of quickly developing U.S. continent (37).

With reference to Biolsi, the problematic occupation of one territory by more than one culturally diversified native tribe was one of the key factors for the temporary poor reservation conditions. Despite the hostility between the particular tribes, they were forced to inhabit the same territory. Naturally, this situation led to many tensions among the tribes. Another key factor responsible for the inadequate reservation conditions was the struggle to get over the transition from independent status to reservation status. Inauspiciously, the wild animals and natural resources were decimated, conventional trade links reduced and the usage of lands critically restricted. All these factors have profoundly contributed to the atrocious conditions on Indian reservations (113-114).

Life on a reservation represented a painstaking experience for the Native Americans. Not only did they have to adjust to the challenge of living in an utterly new land, but they also suffered miserable living conditions in that new land due to the abject poverty on the reservations. Additionally, insufficient health care caused severe diseases, such as diabetes and obesity. Alcohol abuse, car accidents and suicides, which all occur more frequently on a reservation than in the dominant white society, are piteous proof of the low standard of living on a reservation. These factors combine together to result in a much shorter life-span for Native Americans on a reservation than among the general population - the average life expectancy of a Native American living on a reservation is about 12 years lower than of the general U.S. population (Biolsi, 112-113). The often alarming conditions on a reservation are mentioned in the novel. As Alexie points out:

Reservations were meant to be prisons, you know? Indians were supposed to move onto reservations and die. We were supposed to disappear. But somehow or another, Indians have forgotten that reservations were meant to be death camps. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 216)

On the other hand, Biolsi (2004) outlines an improving situation on the reservations since the 1970s. He states that tribes can more easily control their own resources than in the almost two centuries since the first reservations were created. Moreover, “industrialization, gaming and tourism“ (112), to name just a few economic sources, contribute to a “well-being“ (112) of the tribes and have profoundly increased individuals’ income. These aspects improved the standard of living on a reservation.

This view is in correspondence with what Sandefur says. With reference to the author, there have been many positive aspects of life on a reservation. First, it aids in maintaining their native language. Native Americans, unlike Hispanics, speak hundreds of different languages and dialects. When Native Americans leave the reservation and move into American society, they are generally unable to retain their native language, which represents a huge cultural loss. Second, unique family and community values can only be preserved on a reservation. These gradually cease to exist when a Native American moves out of a reservation. Paradoxically, this results in the individual generally moving away from the reservation with the intention of enhancing their life, only to find that certain shared family and community values are difficult or impossible to maintain away from the reservation – further eroding that individual’s quality of life. Third, social services and health assistance programs can be positive factors of a life on a reservation. According to Sandefur, these services are free and as such broadly available to Native Americans living on a reservation. However, off the reservation, Native Americans are not eligible for these programs. Instead, when a reservation member moves off the reservation, he/she will have to acquire the health care services at a significant cost. Apparently, this results in confusion by Native American’s looking for adequate health care (40).

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Alexie, however, contradicts Sandefur on the point of health care. Alexie maintains that Indian Health Service, even though free of charge, was in fact not useful and major dental service was available only once a year. He also writes how inadequate funding and the cruel practices of white doctors, based on superstition, made his experience with Indian Health Service so negative:

My teeth got so crowded that I could barely close my mouth. I went to Indian Health Service to get some teeth pulled so I could eat normally,

not like some slobbering vulture. But the Indian Health Service funded major dental work only once a year, so I had to have all ten extra teeth pulled in one day. And what's more, our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the Novocain. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 2)

Alarming, even though health services are available to Native Americans on reservations, they still experience much lower health status, compared to other U.S. nations. According to Indian Health Service, the appalling living conditions on reservations are mainly caused by poor education, alarming poverty and disproportionate division of health service (§ 2).

To conclude, although there may be a moderate improvement over the last decades, there is still much poverty on the reservations. In order to solve the persistent problems on the reservations, one has to realize the basic factors that contributed to current situation on the reservations. According to the author, it is the economic, physical and social isolation, which is responsible for the pitiful conditions on reservations. Therefore, the solution to the reservation problems may lie in the decrease of their isolation and gradual integration of the reservations into the mainstream American society (Sandefur, 41).

The following chapter will discuss young Indian generation and their desire to flee the atrocious circumstances on the reservation. This desire, however, results in loss of Indian identity. In order to provide background for the escape, the situation of education of on-reservation institutions will be outlined.

7. LOSS OF IDENTITY AS A RESULT OF LEAVING THE RESERVATION

The unbearable conditions have triggered a desire, particularly in young and capable Native Americans, to leave and settle down off the reservation. One such effort is shown in Alexie's book. The young protagonist quits attending a reservation school,

where most of his Native American mates study and decides to transfer to Reardan High, a white school off the reservation. Alexie describes how his decision might lead to torture from his tribe:

”It’s going to be hard to get you to Reardan” Dad said. “We can’t afford to move there. And there ain’t no school bus going to come out here.” “You’ll be the first one to ever leave the rez this way,” Mom said. “The Indians around here are going to be angry with you.” Shoot, I figure that my fellow tribal members are going to torture me. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 47)

For a close Native American community, getting out off a reservation and studying at a predominantly white school was an inconceivable act, which deserved a severe punishment. Alexie explains the significance of a tight-knit Native American community from the historical point of view:

“Well, in the early days of humans, the community was our only protection against predators, and against starvation. We survived because we trusted one another.” ”So?” “So, back in the day, weird people threatened the strength of the tribe. If you weren’t good for making food, shelter, or babies, then you were tossed out on your own.”(*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 132)

According to the internet source, mutual affiliation among the tribe members is essential and even children, from a very early age, are brought up to “interdependence among members“ (American-Indian families, ¶ 12) of the community. The Native Americans are filial tradition-keepers and they prefer the well-being of the whole clan, instead of an individual. Such attitude to child-raising greatly differs from Euro-American families, who encourage their offspring to be independent (¶ 12). The hero’s longing for independence is misunderstood as disloyalty by his community on the reservation.

One of the major reasons why Arnold leaves the Spokane reservation and suffers from his lost identity is an inadequate education possibility. The way Native Americans have been educated has been a serious problem since the first reservations were opened. Reservations were seen as the place to assimilate Native Americans into a non-Indian culture. Native American’s traditional values were repressed and boarding schools

became a tool to battle Native American “tribalism” (Biolsi, 114) and accomplish a successful acculturation process into the mainstream society.

According to Thomas R. Hopkins, on-reservation schools do not meet the standards and in comparison to off-reservation schools, lack behind in material and non-material provision to assure a successful learning process. Native American schooling is insufficient and the conditions are deplorable. According to the author, there is an abrupt need to alter teaching methods which have become out of date during the last two or three decades. As he further maintains, the relationship between a tutor and a student is too tight and official, which threatens a genuine and successful learning process. Lastly, Hopkins criticizes a lack of material equipment, which would make the students grasp the knowledge more effectively. Overall, the author calls for “a modern education improvement” (379) and points out that the Native Americans will not have an equal opportunity to educate unless the new approaches in education replace the old-fashion principles (378-379).

Under these circumstances, one cannot blame a young Native American student that gets determined to flee the poverty, leave the reservation, and pursue his/her dreams out off the reservation. On the other hand, Hopkins admits that to put a child into a non-reservation public school can have a harmful effect on his/her psyche as the environment completely varies. Importantly, it is vital to respect children’s “natural ties” (402). However, as he further continues, the trend to sign up a Native American child to the non-reservation public school has been on its increase, rather than vice versa (402-403). A perfect illustration of this issue is depicted in the novel:

Well, let me tell you. Agnes Adams is my mother. MY MOTHER! And Adams is her maiden name. So that means my mother was born an Adams and she was still an Adams when she wrote her name in that book. And she was thirty when she gave birth to me. Yep, so that means I was staring at a geometry book that was at least thirty years older than I was. I couldn’t believe it. How horrible is that? My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That is absolutely the saddest thing in the world. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 31)

The fact that young Native Americans in the reservation schools study from the outdated materials their parents studied before them extensively startles Arnold and he throws the book at his white teacher, Mr. P. After Arnold’s suspension from school, Mr.

P. visits Arnold in order to convince him about his abilities. In fact, he reveals Arnold's high potential for studies and pleads him to leave the reservation. As he admits, he cannot blame Arnold for his anger as he himself, being a teacher, was asked to practise violent methods when teaching Native Americans. Additionally, as Mr. P. confesses, he was supposed "to kill the Indian to save the child" (Alexie, 35) in order to make the Native American give up his/her original cultural heritage. Their conversation unleashes Arnold's desire for adequate education. Since he decides not to give up, he wishes to transfer and applies for Reardan. Incongruously, Arnold's desire meets with his parents' agreement. On the whole, they do not want their child to stagnate and become a drunk addict, a life pattern that is likely to reappear, regarding Native American society. Alcohol is one of the topics discussed in Alexie's work:

"Who has the most hope?" I asked. Mom and dad looked at each other. They studied each other's eyes, you know, like they had antennas and were sending radio signals to each other. And then they both looked back at me. "Come one," I said. "Who has the most hope?" "White people," my parents said at the same time. That's exactly what I thought they were going to say, so I said the most surprising thing they'd ever heard from me. "I want to transfer school," I said...going to Reardan is truly a strange idea. But it isn't weird that my parents so quickly agreed with my plans. They want a better life for my sister and me...Yeah, Dad is a drunk and Mom is an ex-drunk, but they don't want their kids to be drunks.(*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 45-46)

Arnold envisions Reardan school as the place where "kids are the smartest and most athletic" and where "they are the best" (Alexie, 46). The main protagonist refuses to attend any other school but Reardan, as the idea of studying there becomes simply overpowering. At Reardan, Arnold is often ridiculed and psychically attacked for being the only Native American at school. One day, after his schoolmate embarrasses him by telling a racist joke aimed at Native Americans, Junior punches him straight in the face – something, which he regards being a common reaction to an offense. In Reardan, however, his peculiar acting is condemned by the class. After this incident, Arnold realizes that he will have to reconsider his behavior, as what is widely accepted and considered standard on the Spokane reservation does not necessarily have to be accepted at Reardan. Causing an affray in a public white school can be penalized as a violation of the school policy. As a consequence, Arnold gets utterly confused and

begins speculating about the whole incident. He compares the white boy's coward reaction to what he would expect from a Native American and anticipates the white boy to take a revenge and kill him later. Arnold regards revenge to be the common practice of the tribal community.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist faces a fundamental dilemma whether to stay faithful to his original Native American cultural heritage and follow all its traditions or whether to betray his native bloodline by accomplished assimilation into the white dominant culture. Such betrayal comes by merely adjusting to white people's environment.

From the historical point of view, white people have been in charge of the country the Native Americans were the first to occupy, yet who are not, in many cases, considered equal to the Euro-Americans in control. Especially young Native Americans, whose intention was to leave the reservation and seek a better future often experienced "rootlessness" – being torn between two diverse cultures and not knowing where to belong. This is one of the major topics widely depicted in Alexie's book:

"The people at home," I said. "A lot of them call me an apple." "Do they think you're a fruit or something?" he asked. "No, no," I said. "They call me an apple because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside." "Ah, so they think you're a traitor." "Yep." "Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community." (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 131)

By attending a white school, Arnold finds himself in an extremely unpleasant position – the Native American community regards him a traitor. Similarly, students in Reardan also mock him and treat him as an outcast. Although studies in Reardan represent a huge challenge due to its advanced curriculum, Arnold steadfastly aims to improve his social status, which seems to be of a crucial character in the environment of Reardan. Furthermore, Arnold has to struggle with ostracism not only off, but also on the reservation. As a result, such inner fight launches the gradual loss of the hero's identity and he consecutively becomes torn between the Native American and white world. As already mentioned above, Native Americans were used to living a communal life - they shared their belongings. On the grounds of such attitude, individualism and private

interests were not only frowned upon, but could have been also severely punished, as shown in the following excerpt:

Can you imagine what would have happened to me if I'd turned around and gone back to the rez school? I would have been pummeled. Mutilated. Crucified. You can't just betray your tribe and then change your mind ten minutes later. I was on a one-way bridge. There was no way to turn around, even if I wanted to. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 55)

The passage demonstrates the importance of a Native American community acting in accordance with their traditions, and the need to behave on behalf of the society as a whole.

Following chapter discusses boarding schools as the means of assimilation. To fully understand the conditions prevailing in the boarding schools, historical context will be provided.

8. BOARDING SCHOOLS AS THE MEANS OF ASSIMILATION

Boarding schools became another way how to annihilate Indian culture, the way of life and artistic expression. The first boarding school was established at Carlisle Barracks in the state of Pennsylvania on November 1, 1879. The founder, Captain Richard Henry Pratt, zealously advocated the idea to remove Indian children from their natural environment and expose them to a strict discipline and hard work. In his eyes, this was an optimal way how to adapt them into the white dominant society. Pratt's famous motto was straightforward: "*Kill the Indian and save the man*" (Utley, introductory section).

In Tim Vanderpool's view, forced education policy had disastrous impacts on Indian families. Whether toddlers, five years old or teens, Indian children were abducted from their homes and sent to boarding schools in order to assimilate into the white desired culture. Immediately after the arrival to the school, their heads were shaven and they were provided with school uniforms. Their original names were changed and each

Indian child was assigned a number. For the U.S. government, to take Indian children away and “americanize” them was cheaper than to claim a war to Indians. For Indians, however, the loss was incalculable (§ 1-2). The theme of boarding schools and tribal schools with lessons conducted by white teachers is frequent in Alexie’s novel:

“You killed Indians?” “No, no, it’s just a saying. I didn’t literally kill Indians. We were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything. We weren’t trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture.” (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 35)

In the passage above, Arnold talks to his white teacher, Mr. P. The protagonist seems to be completely overwhelmed by the hopeless situation at the tribal school and decides to leave the reservation in order to seek a better future elsewhere. When he discusses his future possibilities with Mr. P., the teacher reveals appalling facts about practice applied at schools where he taught.

Simple mathematics contributed to implementation of Pratt’s plan. As mentioned above, to kill an Indian in a war cost much more than to assimilate a child into the white mainstream society. To further lower the costs of this cultural genocide, the boarding schools were run as inexpensively as possible. For instance, daily meals were insufficient for Indian children. The small portions of food often resulted in children’s severe malnutrition. Indian children were physically abused, exposed to military drills and expected to manage a heavy workload more appropriate for adults than children. The Indian children were severely punished for using their own language, because the main idea of boarding schools was to eradicate the Indian culture and family bonds, commonly maintained by speaking. Moreover, the schools were frequently overcrowded. Unarguably, all these factors contributed to deaths of many Indian pupils (Vanderpool, introductory to middle section). Physical abuse, one of the rife inhumane practices commonly applied at the schools managed by white governance is illustrated in Alexie’s novel:

“I can’t apologize to everybody I hurt,” Mr. P. said. “But I can apologize to you.” It was so backward. I’d broken his nose but he was trying to apologize to me. “I hurt a lot of Indian kids when I was a young teacher,”

he said. "I might have broken a few bones. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 35)

The excerpt above proves the cruel treatment that the Indian children attending boarding schools endured. Mr. P., a teacher at the tribal school, used to teach at boarding schools before he started his career at Wellpinit High School. As he himself admits, in order to turn Indians into a civilized Christian nation and assimilate them into the white American society, he commonly used violence in order to "*kill the Indian and save the man*", a famous Pratt's dictum.

Pratt advocated off-reservation boarding schools for the following reasons. At first, it was more difficult for the children to run away and return back to their homes, if the school was located in a remoted area. Secondly, the assimilating attempts would be useless if the children returned to their original tribal environment every summer. To increase effectivity of the boarding schools, Pratt proposed the policy of abducting children from their homes at their very early age. To complete the mission, it was not desirable to send them back until they reached the age of adulthood. Naturally, this was the period when their "*Indianness*" was repressed and their feelings to appertain to their original environment severely damaged (Anonymous, ¶ 4).

Disturbingly, although boarding school policy contravenes basic human rights, it was not criticized by the U.S. public for a long time. One of the reasons may be the portrayal of an Indian as a savage in dime novels, popular throughout the continent in the late 19th century. For illustration, the magazine *Harper's Weekly* spoke highly of the boarding schools. Particularly, in one of the articles published on April 26, 1890, one could not but notice the gaudy headings supplemented by contrastive pictures of Indian children before the implementation of the program and afterwards. Whereas the recently removed children were displayed as barbarians oddly dressed, the ones successfully adjusted into the mainstream society were shown as neatly trimmed clerks wearing businesslike clothes. However, according to many supporters of this highly abusive program, to assimilate the savage into the modern society meant an enormous step towards the better future for Indians and the overall world (Anonymous, ¶ 4).

Today, only four boarding schools remain throughout the continent. Importantly, attendance is voluntary. Nowadays, many former pupils have rather bitter memories of the schools. These bitter memories are caused by Pratt's harsh regime that dominated

the schools. Although the same level of physical and sexual abuse does not continue in these schools, there are still cases that are not in accordance with human rights, such as racial discrimination or religious suppression (Anonymous, ¶ 8).

On the contrary, Judith A. DeJong points out that current boarding schools differ greatly from the institutions established at the end of the 19th century. According to her, there is a perceptible focus on penetration of indigenous Indian culture into these educational institutions. Moreover, “individual development and academic success“ (¶ 1) of Indian pupils is encouraged. As she explains, current boarding schools are a rich mixture of versatile environment that puts emphasis on historical and cultural background of different tribes. Also, there is frequent monitoring of resources, staff and administration. Today, every boarding school attempts to encourage healthy social environment, behavior in accordance to norms and supports moral development of the students.

Generally, students attend the boarding schools for different reasons. For example, if they experience problems in their original environment, boarding schools offer a possible solution. Another advantage of the boarding schools is the effort to protect Indian pupils who have just turned to age associated with risky behavior (DeJong, ¶ 1).

Erikson in DeJong claims that there are different phases of development, throughout an individual’s life, such as “trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity and intimacy“. With reference to him, each phase had indispensable succession on the previous one. Therefore, if an individual does not successfully accomplish the preceding phase, the following one may not develop into its full potential. It is a sorrowful fact that many Indian pupils entering the boarding schools have already experienced harsh living conditions. On a reservation, many of them have found out that the only chance to survive means to mistrust. Many of them were forced to attain maturity too fast and become responsible at a very early age. These Indian children commonly struggle with the burden of shame and guilt related to particular situation, which they were forced to solve. It has become a huge obstacle for these children to accept that one’s life can be also a success instead of a constant failure. For the employees working at boarding schools, it represents a profound challenge to positively guide the children towards their better future (¶ 2-4).

To conclude, the forcible withdrawal of Indian children from their original surroundings and the consequent effort to assimilate them into the white mainstream society resulted in a detriment to genuine Indian culture. Despite the fact that not all of the native experience was solely negative, treatment at boarding schools frequently counts among the main culprits in the current crisis and dysfunctionality in the Native American communities.

In the following chapter, Indian generation born around the 1960s called “*Lost Children*“, “*Lost Birds*“ or “*Split Feathers*“ will be discussed. Furthermore, characteristic syndromes that the generation suffers, such as psychological trauma, loss of Indian identity or racial discrimination, will be described.

9. LOST BIRDS GENERATION

With reference to Carol Locust, a Cherokee publishing in the *Pathways* magazine, an Indian generation removed from their original Indian environment and placed in the adoptive or foster non-Indian families is called “*Lost Children*“, “*Lost Birds*“ or “*Split Feathers*“. According to the author, it is highly probable that these children will suffer from psychological trauma which may cause further complications later in their lives. The experts summarize the problematic indications under the term “*Split Feather syndrome*“, which typically occurs at young Indians being placed in non-Indian families. The syndrome can be usually diagnosed at individuals whose culture faced extermination. According to the Indian individuals, there are several reasons contributing to the development of the syndrome. Most importantly, it is the loss of Indian identity, which has the most harmful effect on them. Secondly, the loss of the biological family, as well as cultural heritage and ceremonial experience also contributes to the development of the syndrome. Additionally, growing up being

different while facing discrimination from the white society are another elements responsible for adoptees' psychological trauma (§ 1-13).

Generally, loss of Indian identity is one of the major topic in Alexie's work. In the novel *Indian Killer*, the main protagonist John Smith suffers from feelings of loss identity. He was adopted at a very early age and belongs to the generation of "*Split Feathers*". His adoptive family is white and contradictory in its habits and values to John's original Indian family. In fact, John has never met his biological indigenous parents, nor his birth brothers or sisters. The main hero often wonders about his identity and seems to be completely lost in the white world. The feelings of loss identity result in dysfunctional behavior and cause him severe psychological trauma, characteristic for Indian children being adopted or fostered by white families. Looking for lost identity is one of the central ideas in Alexie's novel:

John only knew that he was Indian in the most generic sense. Black hair, brown skin and eyes, high cheekbones, the prominent nose. Tall and muscular, he looked like some cinematic warrior, and constantly intimidated people with his presence. When asked by white people, he said he was Sioux, because that was what they wanted him to be. When asked by Indian people, he said he was Navajo, because that was what he wanted to be. (*Indian Killer*, 32)

In the excerpt above, John is bewildered about his real identity and in his mind, he invents the tribal one. When writing the novel, Alexie did not even leave the main protagonist's name to chance. Ironically, John Smith was the first English explorer captured by Indians. He was saved by Pocahontas, Powhatan's daughter.

With further reference to *Locust*, the loss of Indian identity ranks among the factors having the most profound impact on the development of the syndrome. However, as the author points out, one should not confuse the loss of Indian identity with loss of personal or family identity. Although the loss of Indian identity still bears some attributes of the loss of personal identity, the loss of Indian identity concerns sense of belonging to a particular culture. When the author conveyed a survey about "*Split Fathers*", most of the respondents expressed very close affiliation to their tribes and they possessed a very fierce sense of belonging to their tribe. In fact, the individuals showed almost a "defiant pride" (§ 17) in being a Native American. Their "reciprocal possessiveness of cultural identity" (§ 17) might be compared to Holocaust survivors,

who faced biased treatment and annihilation. Particularly, the sense of belonging to an Indian tribe and awareness of ancestral roots was fundamental to the respondents. Therefore, an Indian identity is highly significant because it contributes to the completeness of an Indian individual (§ 16-18).

However, not only the loss of Indian identity, but also loss of Indian cultural heritage, family and tribal ceremonial experience may create damaging effects in Indian's lives. Generally, the principle of "reciprocal possessiveness" could be applied in this example, as the interviewees not only grieved the loss of their Indian family, but they seemed to be very distressed about the family losing them (Locust, § 19). The issue of "reciprocal possessiveness" and uncertainty about origin is shown in the passage:

Reggie slashed the air with his empty hand. He thought of Bird, that brutal stranger who pretended to be Reggie's father. Reggie wondered if he'd been stolen away from his real family. Maybe there was an Indian family out there who was missing a son. Maybe Reggie belonged to them. (*Indian Killer*, 320)

In Locust's view, on a reservation, the interviewees were surrounded by humans similar to them, where they could recognize themselves and where they could harmonize with the society. As he highlights, such feeling is essential to fulfill basic human needs. Similarly, the right to participate in ceremonies also appeared to be very meaningful to the respondents. Alarmingly, half of the adoptees was never given a chance to attend a powwow, an Indian typical celebration, or other Indian ceremonies. These individuals stated they felt robbed of their Indian cultural heritage. They also claimed that despite the poor conditions on the reservation and their biological parents heavily drinking, they were still proud of their cultural heritage. For this reason, no matter how hard some of the adoptive families tried to erase their adopted children's attraction to the original settings, the children still had an unceasing sense of belonging to their native tribe. Thus, being a Native American bore an undeniable significance to them (§ 19-27). In the following excerpt, a successful white parent's effort to "americanize" his Indian child is shown:

Over the years, Reggie had come to believe that he was successful because of his father's WHITE blood, and that his Indian mother's blood was to blame for his failures. Throughout high school, he'd spent all of his time with white kids. He'd ignored his mother, Martha. He hadn't gone to local powows...He'd pretended to be white, and had thought his white friends accepted him as such. He'd buried his Indian identity so successfully that he'd become invisible. (*Indian Killer*, 94)

The experience of growing up being utterly different from the surrounding white society has greatly contributed to the development of the syndrome. When the “*Split Feathers*” were discussing what they had meant by being different, some of them referred to their protruding appearance – dark skin, dark eyes, long hair. However, most of them agreed on psychological differences between them and their white counterparts. The ones who experienced extrasensory abilities claimed these extraordinary perceptions made them vary greatly from their classmates. Also the way of thinking and acting, which was, according to the white environment typical for Indians, greatly contributed to the alienation from the society. Some of the respondents said it was very disappointing not to accomplish their classmates' conceptions about Indians in general, although these conceptions were usually of a stereotypical character. On the other hand, some of the respondents felt pride of their otherness. To conclude, all the stated differences made the Native Americans feel isolated from the society but proud at the same time, which often resulted in perplexity in their lives (Locust, ¶ 32-34).

Discrimination experienced from the dominant culture has led to feelings of alienation and isolation from the contemporary society. Grounded on the “*Split Feathers*” testimonies, discrimination gradually started to occur from their white adoptive or foster family, their relatives, from their classmates, schools in general and other social institutions. The society continued ostracizing Indians throughout their puberty age. For the teenage Indians, to date their white counterparts was unthinkable. White parents did not like the idea of an interracial relationship and recommended to Indians to develop an intimate relationship with another Indian. The adoptees stated this was the first time they realized the force of racial hatred and prejudice (Locust, ¶ 35). In the passage below, one can see that Alexie touches this matter in his novel:

The girls' fathers were always uncomfortable when they first met John, and grew more irritated as he continued to date Mary, Margaret, or Stephanie. The relationships began and ended quickly...“I just don't think it's working out,” she'd tell John, who understood. He could almost hear

the conversation that had taken place. “Hon,“ a father would say to his daughter. “What was the boy’s name?“ “Which boy, daddy?“ “That dark one.“ “Daddy, he’s adopted.“ “Oh. Are you going to see him again?“ “I hope so. Why?“ “Well, you know. I just think. Well, adopted kids have so many problems adjusting to things, you know. I’ve read about it. They have self-esteem problems. I just think, I mean, don’t you think you should find somebody MORE APPROPRIATE?“ (*Indian Killer*, 17-18)

The complications continued until their adulthood. When applying for a job, the Indians faced many obstacles. For instance, the position would be rather given to a less qualified non-Indian person. Furthermore, if they were lucky enough to get a job, their promotion scarcely happened. One respondent even stated he was asked to cut his hair not to look “so Indian“, when applying for a job. However he refused, as he felt this was the only Indian cultural heritage he could still claim (Locust, ¶ 36).

As the “*Split Feathers*“ study shows, the affected individuals agreed on other responsible elements contributing to the syndrome. Among them are, for instance, abusive behavior from their foster families or relatives, not being told the accurate information about their adoption, or being concealed the true facts about their origin. Some of the respondees pointed out that the absence of a kindred spirit to talk to also counts among the factors which added to their misery (Locust, ¶ 14). In the following excerpt, abusive behavior towards an Indian is shown:

As for Bird Lawrence, he’d hated hostile Indians so much that he insisted Reggie use Polatkin, his Indian surname, until he’d earned the right to be a Lawrence, until he’d become the appropriate kind of Indian...Bird had punched Reggie in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him. When Reggie could speak again, Bird had continued the surprise quiz. (*Indian Killer*, 93)

The following chapter discusses The Indian Children Welfare Act of 1978. This Act was the answer to poor treatment Indian children received.

10. THE INDIAN CHILDREN WELFARE ACT

According to Andrea Wilkins, there have been numerous termination policies of the 20th century that disastrously impacted Native Americans. However, the author sees Indian children removals and their following placement to the foster families as the policy doing the most harm. As she points out, taking the children out from their biological families and putting them into boarding schools in order to assimilate them into white American mainstream society had a devastating impact not only on the children, but also on their indigenous families. Furthermore, she claims this policy also had a horrendous effect on “community ties“ (§ 1). A respond to the atrocious treatment of Indian children was The Indian Children Welfare Act (§ 2).

The act was passed in 1978 on the basis of unique political status of Indian children and their poor treatment throughout the after-contact history. Historically, a disturbingly huge percentage of Indian children has been removed from their natural environment to be replaced in non-Indian families. With reference to National Indian Child Welfare Association, “Indian children have a unique political status as members of sovereign tribal governments“ (NICWA, § 2). For this reason, Indian tribes including their children must be protected. Furthermore, their significant cultural heritage and resources must be preserved. The mass removal has meant gradual loss of Indian identity and loss of tribalism (§ 1-3).

With reference to B. J. Jones, there is a shortage of federal laws that would administer adoption, custody and foster care. Thus the enactment of The Indian Child Welfare Act may be surprising for many lawyers who meet with an Indian custody case for the very first time. Jones highlights the importance of comprehension of The Act, because there are still many cases to be solved at the court. The author supports the need for such a law by providing the reader with alarming numbers – according to him, 25% to 35% of Indian children from various states have been removed from their traditional environment. He blames the adoption agencies that failed to understand the traditional Indian rearing of children. These agencies viewed Indian day-to-day life as contradictory to the children’s real needs. Disturbingly, on average one in four Indian children were taken from their homes and put into adoptive families only because “a paternalistic state system failed to recognize traditional Indian culture and expected

Indian families to conform to non-Indian ways“ (§ 4). Other children have been taken because of the unbearable and for children inappropriate living conditions on the reservation. These conditions have been a good ground for the authorities to blame the Indians for negligence and insufficient care. Jones concludes that it is a huge failure to extract an Indian child from their original surroundings as only the tribal affiliation ensures the unique Indian culture to persevere. If the adoption is unavoidable be it for different purposes, it must be done in accordance with the children’s needs while honoring tribal values and beliefs at the same time (§ 1-6).

“Indian?”asked Daniel. “As an American Indian?” “Yes,” said the agent. “The mother is very young, barely into her teens. She’s making the right decision. She’ll carry the baby to full term and give it up for adoption. Now, ideally, we’d place this baby with Indian parents, right? But that just isn’t going to happen. The best place for this baby is with a WHITE family. This child will be saved a lot of pain by growing up in a WHITE family. It’s the best thing, really.”(*Indian Killer*, 10)

The passage above is an illustration of erroneous assumption made by the adoption agency. Olivia and Daniel are a white affluent couple incapable of having their own children. For this reason, they contact adoption agency to find them a baby. The agent offers them an Indian baby, because he advocates that the Indian child will have better life with an adoptive family. The agent, however, does not think of possible consequences of removing the child from his tribal environment.

The Indian Children Welfare Act (later referred to as ICWA) represents a huge progress ahead because it guarantees jurisdiction in “child custody matters“ (Wilkins, § 3) to the tribe itself. In addition to this, the state court is obliged to transfer the cases of child custody to tribal court “upon the request of the tribe, parent or Indian custodian“ (Wilkins, § 3), except the cases where there is a good reason for the state court to keep the case and where the placement in a non-Indian family may be for the best of child’s welfare.

ICWA determines the minimal standards to be met in the case of Indian child removal. For instance, there has to be clear evidence that the government made every possible effort to prevent the breakage of the original Indian family. Furthermore, the government is obliged to prove that residence at home could seriously harm the Indian child in a psychological and physical way and that removal of the child is urgent. If the

out-of-home placement is for the aforementioned reasons inevitable, ICWA ensures that Indian children get in touch with their biological families whenever possible, in order to retain Native American tribal heritage and sovereignty (Wilkins, ¶ 4-5).

Similarly to Jones, Wilkins highlights the urgency to be familiar with The Act. In her view, the overall aim of The Act is not possible to achieve if the implementation of the policy is not put into practice. Nowadays, an insufficient enforcement of ICWA has become a real issue throughout the U.S. As she continues, too many state officials do not have accurate information about The Act or just reject to apply it. Regrettably, their ignorance or reluctance to implement The Act has resulted in numerous Indian children being placed to adoptive or foster families, although the initial goal of The Act was contradictory (Wilkins, ¶ 6).

In the following chapter, gaming industry and its contradictory views will be discussed. Furthermore, Alexie's positive attitude to gambling will be explained.

11. GAMING INDUSTRY AND ITS CONTRADICTIONARY VIEWS

From the historical point of view, gambling has been known to Native Americans since pre-contact times. It had the form of placing bets on some kind of a sport event, for instance betting on snakes. Naturally, Indian gambling of that time was rather a small-scale local entertainment and only remotely resembled the gambling that is generally known today. More developed form of gambling dates to the year 1979, when the Seminoles opened the first official gambling parlor. The Seminoles were among the very first tribes to establish a larger-scale gambling industry. Since then, gambling industry on reservations has been constantly booming (Johansen, 100). Johansen lists the reasons why the Indian gaming industry has gradually become so popular:

The advantages [of on-reservation casinos] included a lack of state-imposed limits on the size of pots or prizes, no restrictions by the states on days or hours or operations, no costs for licenses or compliance with state regulations, and (unless they were negotiated) no state taxes on gambling operations. (Johansen, 101)

By the 1990s, gambling industry represented a great source of income for some of the "formerly impoverished" (Johansen, 101) Native American tribes. One of the most

profitable casinos of that period was Little Six Casino in Minnesota, which opened in 1982. Bruce E. Johansen sees the establishment of the casino to be a noticeable turnaround not only because of the financial revenues, but also because the individuals were, owing to the casino, suddenly eligible for homes, if they did not have any. Another point, which is highlighted by the author is the sophisticated system around the industry, for instance the provision of day care for children of working parents. Another positive thing is that within a year of its establishment, the incomes were so immense that the mortgage could have been repaid. In fact, the revenues from Little Six were key factors in development of infrastructure in Prior Lake, Minnesota, such as building a health clinic, cultural center or paving of the area. By 1984, Little Six became the biggest employer in Prior Lake not only employing Native Americans, but also non-Natives. Without any doubt, providing non-Natives with job opportunities has contributed to the improvement of relations between Indians and whites (101-102).

Another example of the gambling industry is the Foxwoods Resort Casino complex operated by Pequot tribe. This complex is located in the area between Boston and New York City. The casino was opened in 1992 and by 1995 expanded so vastly that it became the largest casino in the U.S. The significance of the casino is enormous, as it has been contributing with huge amounts of money to the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution's new National Museum of the American Indian. Other local facility, which has been funded from the casino's income is Connecticut Aquarium (Johansen, 106-107).

Reservations have maintained framework exempt from state regulations, which has become a great advantage for the residing tribes. In his novel, Alexie is concerned with the general opinion on the autonomy of reservations:

The Indian tribes insist that they have the legal right to establish casinos. They contend that the state has no say in these matters because of treaties that the tribes signed a century ago with the federal government. Can you believe this, folks? The Indian tribes believe that they are above the law. I wonder how far these Indians are willing to take this. What's going to happen next? When you wake up tomorrow morning, will there be an Indian tribe camped out on your front yard, demanding that your land revert back to them? (*Indian Killer*, 117-118)

The economic and partially political power that tribes due to the on-reservation casinos had held, encouraged Congress to pass the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The purpose of The Act was to inquire into the gaming industry, which became an extremely powerful and competitive weapon in the hands of on-reservation Native Americans. This Act implemented state control over Indian gaming and has dealt with gaming agreement with the states. Despite the regular interventions and surveillance of Congress, gaming industry has contributed to the reservation income in great numbers, particularly, if the casino operations are successful (Biolsi, 238).

Biolsi can see a great importance in on-reservation casinos. He claims that “the economic consequences of gaming revenues have been significant for the dozen or so tribes that have captured windfalls from their casinos“ (126). The author lists some positive aspects, which the revenues from gaming brought to reservation tribal members, such as decreasing dependence on federal funds and collecting capital for other economic growth needed on the reservations. Another positive factor, which the author comments on are increased job opportunities – a turnaround which became vital for survival of the reservation community commonly plagued by high unemployment rates and poverty. Last but not least, due to the finances obtained from prosperous gaming industry, Indian territory can grow steadily for the first time since European settlers arrived in the continent (Biolsi, 162).

Alexie also belongs to the advocates of the reservation casinos. The author regards forestry, casinos and bingo halls to be the main sources of the income for the reservations. He says that the casinos created new job opportunities and decreased unemployment rates on the tribal lands. In fact, he maintains: “On my reservation unemployment was about 90% before the bingo halls and casinos; now it’s about 10%“ (Highway, introductory section). In a different interview, Alexie claims that “the casinos are a sign that Indians have completely assimilated “ (Yeagley, ¶ 5). Alexie is aware of the positive impacts, which the casinos and gambling parlors bring to the on-reservation tribes. In his novel *Indian Killer*, one can notice numerous passages addressing this issue:

“I only challenge you when you’re wrong. You just happen to be wrong about Wilson. I mean we need the casinos. It’s not like we’re planning a rebellion. We’re just putting food in our cupboards. If eating is rebellious, then I guess we’re the biggest rebels out there. Indians are just plain hungry.“ (*Indian Killer*, 84)

The existence of gambling industry on reservations has aroused bitter controversy. Another Native American renowned writer, Louise Erdrich, has raised the complex question of Indian casinos in her novel *The Bingo Palace*: “It’s not completely one way or another, traditional against the bingo. You have to stay alive to keep your tradition alive and working (221)“. In fact, one of the characters in the novel admits that although tradition and protection of the sacred land represent a very strong motivation for Indians, one needs to stay alive to continue passing the tradition on.

Considering the contradictory opinion on gambling on the tribal territories, there are many experts and also members of wide public who can appreciate positive impacts of on-reservation casinos. However, some experts in the field of Native American studies realize it may be much more intricate problematics than it appears to be. For example, Biolsi lists many positive impacts of the casinos, while he explains that the key factor whether the gambling facility will or will not be the source of financial income is profoundly conditioned by “proximity to a larger population“ (Biolsi, 299). As he states, many tribes reside in remoted areas, therefore gaming does not represent a substantial income for them. Throughout the continent, there are 562 officially recognized tribal communities. Only a handful of them, however, have received considerable amounts of money from the gambling facilities (Biolsi, 299).

Overall, there are many more negative aspects of the casinos being established on the reservations. At first, owing to enormous revenues, the gambling industry threatens the financial input to reservations, where the casinos are not established or where the gaming industry is not booming. The perception that all reservation casinos are lucrative is wrong. In fact, the tribes owning the prosperous casinos are not obliged to share their income with the tribes, who do not possess any or whose casinos are unprofitable. If the government cuts down on the federal funds, it may result in a struggle for life for these reservations. Another concern regarding Indian gaming is the relationship between gambling customs, parental gambling and other risky behavior. Specifically teens considered, gambling is one of the fastest growing addictions in the U.S. Generally, there is only little known about what harmful effects may gambling have on particular Indian families (Biolsi, 126).

Another concern that has been raised is increased traffic, as thousands of visitors often block the roads, which local inhabitants need to use when they commute to work.

Lastly, the casinos are responsible for the rates of reported crime and corruption in the area (Noonan, middle section).

For the aforementioned reasons, some of the tribes have refused Indian gambling on their reservations, despite the fact that the income from hazard would contribute to amelioration of the life quality of many Indians living on the reservations (Biolsi, 162). Moreover, strict adherence to tradition and untarnished reputation has made some tribes follow the Indian oral tradition warning the tribes against “the perils of overindulgence in gambling” (Johansen, 108). The commitment to protect the tribal land and keep it pure for the next generations is illustrated in Louise Erdrich’s novel *The Bingo Palace*:

And yet I can’t help wonder, now that I know the high and the low of bingo life, if we’re going in the wrong direction, arms flung wide, too eager. The money life has got no substance, there’s nothing left when the day is done but a pack of receipts. Money gets money, but little else, nothing sensible to look at our touch or feel in yourself down to your bones...Our reservation is not real estate, luck fades when sold. Attraction has no staying power, no weight, no heart. (221)

As the author highlights, money has merely transitory meaning and cannot be compared to the significance of a reservation. In Erdrich’s view, gambling, although being a good source of income for the reservations, is immoral as it undermines the real life values.

In conclusion, although gaming plays a vital role in current Native American economics, it is important to realize that gambling industry may one day lose its luster. Therefore, to discover a resource that will be sustainable and culturally appropriate at the same time may represent a serious challenge for the Native American tribes.

In the next chapter, urban Native Americans will be discussed. At first, history will be briefly outlined. Secondly, the Relocation Program and its primary purpose as well as its consequences will be discussed. The chapter will further follow up with the loss of identity as a usual repercussion of Native Americans’ migration to urban areas. The chapter will finish with Alexie’s urban experience.

12. URBAN INDIANS

Are urban Indians different from the Indians still residing on the tribal lands? What is their mutual relationship like? In order to conduct an inquiry into the field of a current life or urban Indians, these questions have to be answered.

As Biolsi maintains, particularly in the 1950s, Indians were encouraged to leave their “poverty-stricken“ (513) homes and move to urban areas to get better jobs and schooling. Such act offered them a fresh start and an opportunity to begin a new life. Similarly to Biolsi, Tracy Ullman agrees on the arguments to resettle Indians. According to her, one of the main reasons to move Indians to cities were the living conditions on the reservations and poor economic opportunities. Disturbingly, unemployment rate on the reservations was somewhere between 50% - 80%, therefore relocation of Indians to urban areas seemed like a good solution (§ 3).

According to Gwen Carr, a Chairwoman of the National Urban Indian Policy Coalition, the Relocation Program of the 1950s was supposed to acclimate the Indians in the cities in order to lessen the treaty responsibilities of providing Indian tribes with job opportunities on the reservations after the World War II (§ 6). When the Relocation Program began, Indians coming to urban areas were trained for job positions, such as cooks and household keepers. However, as soon as the government stopped providing them with financial support, these Indians found themselves in a similar situation which they had tried to escape – they faced poverty and hopelessness, similarly to the on-reservation circumstances (Ullman, § 5).

As Gloria Hillard points out, the federal financial aid lasted just for the first month only to make Indians rely on themselves from the very beginning of their urban life (§ 7). Dawn T. Trice explains that urban Indians often become invisible regarding the funds and health care, although they occupy the cities in great numbers. In fact, the urban Indians outnumber the on-reservation Native Americans ten to one (§ 8).

In 1900, only 0.4 percent of the American Indians in the U.S. lived in urban areas. By 1950, this increased to 13.4. percent. However, by 1990, 56.2 percent of American Indians lived in the cities (Thornton in Biolsi). These figures show that the influx of Indians to urban areas has been on its dramatic increase, throughout recent

years. The cities with the largest Native American population are New York City, Oklahoma City, Phoenix, Tulsa and Los Angeles (Biolsi).

With reference to Jessica Martin, 60% of Native Americans live in off-reservation areas, these days. As many of urban Native Americans face the gritty reality of being unemployed, they resort to alcoholism – to the demon that has plagued many Native Americans back on the reservations. Such demeanour gives them the opportunity to flee the city environment they are incapable of adjusting to. Regrettably, the populations of urban Native Americans and Native Americans living on the reservations suffer from identical health and social problems. The absence of belonging – lost identity, however, is even more absorbing as urban Native Americans find it extremely demanding to adjust to the city life (§ 3).

With further reference to Martin, the problem consists in the sorrowful reality that most of Indians do not have an adequate access to the financial and health care services, even though they had a full access to them while living on the reservations. On the tribal territory, these basic human needs are provided by tribal and federal agencies. However, in urban areas, these organizations are often non-profit. This results in the lack of services for urban Indians. Martin further objects that the number of organizations supporting urban Indians in the U.S is insufficient (§ 3).

Similarly to Martin, Carr also criticizes the inadequate number of the institutions available to urban Indians. According to her, there are merely thirty-four urban Indian health clinics throughout the U.S., which results in more than 75 % of urban Indians being left without health care assistance (§ 11).

As Ralph Forquera maintains, urban Indians, as any other American citizens, are eligible for full health coverage if they fulfill the requirements in the health care program. Low-income urban Indians who meet the stated criteria are therefore eligible for medical care benefits. Many urban Indians, however, believe the health care should be given to them automatically by law or treaty. For this reason, they assume they do not have to enroll in the health care programs for general population. Another problem is that many urban Indians refuse to go through an extensive paperwork process. Lastly, ineligibility to health care benefits as their jobs have not been “subject to the Social Security payroll tax“ (§ 13) results in inadequate health care for urban Native Americans. Self-imposed barriers may apply when they decide to enroll in the program

and are referred to different health care institution. The impressions of disinterest and mistreatment then often strengthen their obdurate attitudes towards the federal government (§ 13).

According to the National Urban Indian Family Coalition (later referred to as NUIFC), when compared to non-Indian city inhabitants, urban Indians' rates of accidental or alcohol-related deaths are considerably higher. In addition to this, urban Indians are more likely to suffer from cirrhosis or similar liver diseases. Disturbingly, Indian women living in the urban areas have much lower rates of prenatal care and much higher rates of infant mortality, not only compared to non-Indian women, but in comparison to Indian women residing on the reservations as well (11).

Regarding economic stability, urban Indians often find themselves in an unpleasant position of homelessness. Generally, the number of privately owned houses is likely to be much lower than with their non-Indian counterparts. If an Indian owns a house, it will very likely lack basic facilities, such as plumbing, kitchen equipment or phone service (NUIFC, 11). The critical life conditions that urban Indians often experience are described in Alexie's novel:

On any given night, a couple dozen Indians usually staggered through the downtown streets. Aaron had often seen them. Homeless drunks. Men and women. Sitting in their own vomit. Rotten faces, greasy hair, shit-stained pants. (*Indian Killer*, 211)

As many urban Native Americans find themselves in a position of being unemployed, they reside to alcoholism. In fact, even though affiliations between urban Indians and Indians living on the reservations are sometimes problematic, their populations get threatened by the same factors, which are often multiplied in the rather hostile urban environment (NUIFC, 6). That urban Indians suffer from identical health problems as Natives on the reservations is shown in Alexie's novel:

“How did she die?” I asked. “There was a big party at her house, her trailer in Montana-,” he said. Yep, my sister and her husband lived in some old silver trailer that was more like a TV dinner tray than a home. “They had a big party-,” my father said. OF COURSE THEY HAD A BIG PARTY! OF COURSE THEY WERE DRUNK! THEY'RE INDIANS!
(*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, 205)

The excerpt above reflects the real fatal accident, which happened to Alexie's sister. With the perception of better life, she left the Spokane reservation, settled down in Montana and got married to another Indian. However, the joy of a newly pursuit life did not last for too long, because she and her husband died in a trailer that burnt down when they fell asleep drunk.

According to NUIFC, there are four categories of urban Indians – “long term residents, forced residents, permanent residents and medium or short term visitors“ (6). “Long term residents“ are urban Indians, who have lived on the particular land for generations and who had inhabited the area before the city was established. The term “forced residents“ refers to the Natives, who were relocated to urban areas because of the alarming conditions on the reservations. Another category, “permanent residents“ are Indians who left the reservations in search of a better life, however were not forced to do so. “Medium and short term visitors“ are Indians who just visit their relatives or move to the cities with the idea to receive higher education. These visitors usually do not have the intention to stay in the urban areas for good (6).

Generally, the length of stay and the reasons for it as well as other elements are considered footholds in the studies of urban Natives. It is fundamental to realize what factors distinguish urban Natives from their on-reservation counterparts. With reference to NUIFC, it is an insufficient research, which is responsible for lack of information on actual needs and social ills of urban Native Americans. Unarguably, a few reports that have discussed the urban Natives so far can serve as a precious tool. On the other hand, the research is often inaccurate and examines urban Indians from the national point of view, without specific focus on particular communities. These studies frequently do not distinguish between the Indians on and off reservation, which makes the collected data distorted (4).

With reference to Carr, it is the movement to adapt Indians into the mainstream American society that has resulted in shortage of data available on the actual status of urban Indians. Lack of this data leads to insufficient number of programs and projects that hinge on the statistics and that are instrumental in assistance and support to urban Indians (§ 7). For this reason, NUIFC emphasizes the need for accurate information, which would refer to urban Natives and would address the actual relationships amongst

Natives in particular cities as well as their affiliations to Indian relatives still residing on tribal lands (4).

Without any doubt, the role of Indian organizations is highly significant. These organizations not only take care of well-being of urban Indians and ensure that the tribal heritage will be carried on, but they also serve as the support centers when their clients need to discuss some concerns. Naturally, the role of such “tribal embassy“ (NUIFC, 12) is irreplaceable for urban Indians. These organizations provide the urban Indians with “cultural connectedness“ in the form of educating long-term Indian residents about their culture. Additionally, they function as shelters where medium-term Indian residents “maintain their culture in a context“ (12), particularly if returning to the reservation on a regular basis is not feasible.

Martin’s view seems to be in correspondence with what Carr claims. As the author says, there is an abrupt need to gather urban Indian demographic material and community database in order to combat social ills of the “invisible minority“ (§ 13). What is more, the isolation of urban Indians needs to be obviated and the change for the betterment bolstered (§ 13).

In Martin’s view, a setting example of providing care to Indians is urban Indian coalition in Canada called the National Association of Friendship Centres (later referred to as NAFC). The author claims that NAFC has become successful in understanding and later representing real needs of urban Indians, during the last decades. The author highlights the strengths of the coalition when she maintains that NAFC provides the urban Indians with financial support, training and technical assistance. Additionally, the coalition is able to arrange for advocacy services if needed. The author particularly emphasizes the significance of numerous conferences that contribute to the urban Indian community development in Canada. Urban Indians are prone to suffer from “socio-economic distress“, similarly to other minority groups. As the number of Indians living in the urban areas has been constantly increasing, the issue needs to be properly addressed (§ 3-19).

Regarding Sherman Alexie and his urban experience, in an interview conducted in 2003, he said that “Indians can reside in the city but never live there“ (Campbell). However, the author later admits that his opinion on urbanization has changed since. Similarly to millions of Americans, he was also deeply affected by the events of

September 11, 2001. He says he does not feel as “fundamental“ anymore and that he is frightened by people who feel they have exceptional knowledge. The author strongly criticizes the war in Iraque and claims that what is right may be relevant to each person (Campbell, ¶ 21).

To conclude, from the very beginning, the relocation of Indians from the reservations to urban areas was meant to solve the problems Indians had to struggle with. The typical process was to provide an Indian with a one-way bus ticket and make them travel to the places, which were geographically and culturally remote from their original reservations. These Indians were expected to begin an utterly new life and adapt into the urban area without hesitation. The consequence of this massive relocation policy is that many Indians have successfully assimilated into the mainstream society. This assimilation resulted in the loss of their tribal heritage, which gradually decreased under the pressure of urban area lifestyle. However, successful adaptation of some individuals represented an enormous challenge. Inadequate housing conditions and inimical attitude from the majority environment frequently counted for a major obstacle in achieving a successful life in the new surroundings (NUIFC, 12). Today, successfully integrated urban Native Americans know they must rely on themselves instead of U.S. government subsidies. The present challenge is to bring up their children so they maintain their cultural heritage, while at the same time becoming integrated into mainstream society.

13. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Native Americans have faced many serious obstacles after European settlers arrived in Northern America. These puritan settlers have mistreated Native Americans since they discovered The New World. According to Europeans soon inhabiting the continent, the Native Americans were untamed savages, whose only chance of salvation consisted in converting to Christianity. As Native Americans adhered to other forms of religion and society, outstanding disputes between them and Europeans frequently arouse. When the tension between whites and Native Americans escalated, they were relocated west of the Mississippi to cultivate the land which only remotely resembled their former lands rich in fertile soil. These new territories called “*reservations*” also lacked other natural resources besides fertile land. Therefore, these lands were cultivated with extreme difficulty and the daily life for American Indians was filled with hardship.

Purposefully, Native Americans were excluded from social contact with European settlers in the 19th century and the economically booming America. Shortage of fertile land and the enforced isolation from the social and commercial urban hubs widely contributed to alarming conditions, such as extreme poverty, inadequate education and unemployment on the reservations. Alarmingly, more than forty percent of Native Americans living on reservations suffer from poverty and can be described as “underclass communities” (Sandefur, 38) that frequently struggle for their own life.

The very existence of Indian reservations have often triggered a wave of outrage. Critics view the reservation system as an example of hypocrisy contrary to the principle of justice and liberty. For this reason, many American citizens wish the reservations ceased to exist (Sandefur, 38).

These atrocious conditions have resulted in many young Native Americans yearning for a better future off the reservation. At the same time, it is quite surprising there are many Native Americans who strongly oppose leaving the reservation or dismantling the reservation system. These tribal members, however, enable the traditional ways of life to persevere. Without their strong will and determination, the genuine Indian culture would gradually disappear (Sandefur, 40).

Although the conditions on reservations are in many cases highly disturbing, life on a reservation also has a few positive impacts on the Native American culture. The supporters of reservations often see these areas as the cultural base, where native languages are spoken and passed on. Moreover, reservations promote family and community bonds, as part of long-standing traditions (Sandefur, 40).

Despite these positive aspects of a reservation life, many Indians and non-Indians who are familiar with the present-day conditions on the reservations are dissatisfied with them. This dissatisfaction and desire to improve the well-being of Indians still residing on the tribal land has led to two major efforts (Sandefur, 40).

One type of program enables particularly young individuals to leave the reservation and seek better opportunities elsewhere. These individuals are eligible for not only work assistance programs, but also vocational and higher educational help. Primarily the younger generation, very well aware of the difficulties on the reservations, leave the reservation to seek a better future in mainstream society. These young people need to be offered good employment opportunities, as well as social services - in order to successfully adapt (Sandefur, 40).

Another major effort to improve tribal life focuses on the development and support of economies on the reservations. Generally, reservation economies have stagnated owing to the poor policy responsible for the creation of reservations itself – the removal and isolation of Indian population from the centers and industrial hubs at the beginning of the 19th century. Today, the most thriving economies result from the discovery of natural resources, such as oil and timber. Other reservations take advantage of their proximity to major tourist attractions, for instance casinos and ski resorts. Nevertheless, it is necessary to point out that these benefits are available only to a handful of reservations and that many of them are still desperate for economic development (Sandefur, 40).

The current status of urban Native Americans is mixed. Many people still keep the image of Indian as “*noble savage*” with multi-feathered headdress and a bow and arrow. But Indians are becoming just as integral to modern America as any other minority. It may cause a shock for some to realize that instead of regularly attending powwows and wearing moccasins, Native Americans listen to hip-hop music, wear Nike sneakers and behave pretty much the same way as any member of popular culture

(Steele, ¶ 4-5). However, maintaining family bonds and Indian community is crucial to many Native Americans, and so organizations that help urban Native Americans preserve their cultural heritage are very important.

Generally, Native American literature portrays daily life of Native Americans filled with hardship. Many Native Americans write about traditions and their lifestyle. the topic of victimization and oppression, which are crucial for Native American literature. Other Native Americans write about loss of Indian identity or dilemma whether to stay on the reservation or seek a better future.

In his two novels, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and *Indian Killer*, Sherman Alexie writes about all these typical themes. However, his work profoundly differs from other Native American writers to date. Alexie's work is groundbreaking and by many considered a milestone in literature, because he refuses the victimization. Instead, his work is filled with "red rage", racism and violence. Alexie's Indians reject to be the victims of racism, violence and oppression and they seek revenge. In his work, the author portrays the fragile relationship between Native Americans and whites. For mankind, it is vital to realize the mistakes that have been made and avoid them in the future in order to ensure peaceful coexistence throughout the continent.

RESUMÉ

Práce se zaměřuje na analýzu života Američanů indiánského původu. Analýza je provedena na základě dvou románů Shermana Alexie *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* a *Indian Killer*, která v kombinaci s fakty ze sekundární literatury nastiňuje obraz postavení indiánské menšiny v americké majoritní společnosti.

Během historie po objevení Ameriky v roce 1492, museli indiánští obyvatelé čelit mnoha četným překážkám. Nejprve byli evropskými osadníky považováni za divochy, jejichž životní styl byl v kompletním nesouladu s puritánskými Evropany a jejichž jedinou možnou spásou bylo přestoupit na křesťanskou víru. Američtí Indiáni byli považováni za bytosti zmítané nadpřirozenými zlými silami. Dále byli vnímáni jako nepřizpůsobiví pohané, kteří již svojí samotnou existencí bránili rychle se rozvíjícímu americkému kontinentu v průmyslovém a civilizačním rozkvětu.

Četné neshody a souboje mezi oběma kulturami byly díky nesourodému životnímu stylu na každodenním pořádku. Tato situace přiměla prezidenta Andrewa Jacksona, aby navrhnul vládě zákon o přesunu Indiánů. Tento zákon vešel v platnost v roce 1830 a Indiáni tak museli opustit území, která po dlouhá staletí vlastnili. Dalším z důvodů „přesunout“ Indiány byla dychtivost Evropanů po úrodné půdě, kterou původně Indiáni obdělávali, a která byla bohatá na živiny pro pěstování bavlny. Ať už pomocí různých úmluv nebo násilným přinucením, Indiáni museli na území západně od řeky Mississippi.

Naneštěstí, území, která byla Indiánům předurčena pro obdělávání půdy, byla v blízkosti pouští, a tak byla místní půda jen těžko obdělávatelná. Obrovská vzdálenost od nyní osídleného východního pobřeží zapříčinila, že Indiáni byli zcela odtrženi od hlavního ekonomického dění země. Jelikož byli Evropané vždy posedlí otázkou asimilace Indiánů, přišli s novým nápadem. Indiánům bylo v roce 1887 nařízeno, aby půdu, kterou obdělávali, rozdělili na části a ty tak místo společného zemědělství obhospodařovali každý sám. V očích Evropanů, právě zodpovědnost sama za sebe a za svůj majetek byla jedním z hlavních ukazatelů pro úspěšné splnutí Indiánů s žádanou majoritní společností. Bohužel pro Indiány, nové způsoby zemědělství a neschopnost obdělávat neúrodnou půdu vyústily v hladomor a ten pak v četná úmrtí na rezervacích.

Otřesné podmínky na rezervacích přetrvávají do dnešní doby. Je smutnou pravdou, že až 40 procent rezervací žije na pokraji chudoby a mnohdy tak bojují o holý život. Chudoba spolu s nedostatečnými pracovními možnostmi a nedostatečnou zdravotní péčí je důvodem, proč se velká většina Indiánů žijících na rezervacích uchyluje k alkoholismu a drogám, které jim mají dopomoci uniknout z tíživé životní situace. Nadměrná konzumace alkoholu a drog je častou příčinou sebevražd i náhodných úmrtí, která jsou u Indiánů daleko vyšší ve srovnání s ostatními obyvateli Ameriky.

Je pravdou, že existence kasín na indiánských územích je alespoň částečnou náplastí na problémy na rezervacích. Kasína jsou dobrým zdrojem pracovní síly a financí. Obrovské sumy peněz, které jsou kasíny vydělány, tak mohou být použity pro stavbu klinik nebo vylepšení místní infrastruktury. Navíc, jelikož některá kasína pro svůj plynulý chod potřebují tisíce zaměstnanců, najímají Indiáni pracovní síly i z řad jiných amerických občanů. Tato situace přispívá ke zlepšení vzájemných vztahů mezi Indiány a ostatními Američany žijícími na kontinentu.

Na druhou stranu, kasína mají negativní vliv na rezervace. Ne všechna kasína vydělávají, a tak kasína, která mají obrovské zisky mohou v budoucnu zavinit, že rezervacím, které potřebují od vlády podporu, bude podpora zamítnuta. Navíc, díky obratu obrovských sum peněz dochází i ke zvýšení kriminality a korupci v daných oblastech.

I když kasína přinášejí do místních pokladen obrovské finanční prostředky, některé kmeny nesouhlasí s tím, aby na jejich územích byla kasína budována. Pro tyto kmeny je úcta k indiánské tradici nade vše, a to i za cenu, že budou i nadále žít v chodobě. Do budoucna je potřeba, aby kmeny, které z existence kasín „těží“, přišly s jiným zdrojem finančních prostředků. Zájem o kasína totiž nemusí být věčný a i ona mohou brzy ztratit svůj nynější třpyt.

Další bolestnou ránou, kterou Indiáni utrpěli byl vznik tzv. internátních škol. Tyto školy vznikly na konci 19. století a byly dalším způsobem, jak asimilovat indiánské obyvatelstvo. V očích Evropanů bylo levnější asimilovat indiánské děti do majoritní společnosti, než kdyby Indiánům vyhlásili válku. První internátní školou byla Carlisle Barrack v Pensylvánii, která vznikla v roce 1879. Tato škola byla řízena kapitánem Richardem H. Pratterem, jehož oblíbeným sloganem bylo „Vymýtí Indiána a

zachránit člověka“. Aby vláda utratila co nejméně finančních prostředků, byly tyto školy řízeny co možná nejlevněji. Strava a hygiena na těchto školách byla nedostatečná a školy byly často přeplněné. Navíc, v duchu Prattova motto, děti byly fyzicky trestány a zneužívány. Často musely vykonávat fyzicky namáhavé práce, které svojí povahou byly spíše určeny dospělým než dětem. Děti byly ve třídách trestány za používání vlastního jazyka. Díky nelidským podmínkám, které na školách často převládaly, docházelo k četným úmrtím indiánských dětí. Nejhorší na této politice bylo, že v tehdejší společnosti nebudila vůbec žádný odpor. Veškeré zacházení s dětmi mělo vést k jejich lepší budoucnosti. Avšak generace, která toto zacházení přežila, dodnes vzpomíná na tato místa s velkým odporem.

Pokud děti nebyly odvezeny do internátních škol, byly určeny k adopci do bílých adoptivních rodin. Tato politika se rozmohla především v 60. letech 20. století. V této době byly z indiánských rodin odněty tisíce dětí, které byly poté vsazeny do zcela odlišného rodinného zázemí. Generace, která tento masivní přesun utrpěla, je popisována jako generace „Ztracených dětí“, „Ztracených pírek“ nebo „Ztracených ptáčat“. Zcela odlišné zvyky a životní styl, jakožto i konfrontace s mnohdy nepřátelským okolím jsou faktory, které přispěly k tomu, že tato generace trpí četnými syndromy a ztrátou kulturní a etnické identity po celý život.

Odpovědí na tuto politiku byl zákon o ochraně práv indiánských dětí z roku 1978. Podle tohoto zákona, indiánské děti a jejich kulturní dědictví musí být chráněno a k přesunu do „neindiánské“ rodiny může dojít pouze za předpokladu, že podmínky v původní rodině jsou opravdu katastrofální a hrozí vývoji samotného indiánského dítěte. Bohužel, v dnešní době se jen málo právníků dopodrobna vyzná v tomto zákoně, a tak rozepře o opratrovnictví často končí dlouholetými kauzami u soudu.

Až 60 procent Indiánů dnes žije ve městech nebo jejich okolích. Jejich situace je však tíživá – mnozí z nich odešli do města s vidinou lepší budoucnosti, avšak brzy po příjezdu do města museli čelit mnoha četným překážkám. Nejenže jim vláda po prvním měsíci života ve města zamítla finanční pomoc, ale mnozí Indiáni měli i obrovské problémy sehnat zaměstnání. Navíc, zdravotní péče je pro Indiány žijící ve městech omezená. Mnoho z nich tak žije v otřesných podmínkách, v bytech bez základního vybavení a dostatečných hygienických podmínek. Tito životem zhrzení jedinci se pak taktéž uchylují k alkoholismu a drogám, stejně jako na rezervaci. Organizace na pomoc

těmto Indiánům mají nezastupitelnou roli, jejich počet je však omezený. Nezřídka se tak stává, že mnoho Indiánů končí bez domova na ulicích.

V našich myslích dnes možná stále přetrává obraz Indiána s čelenkou z peří, ozbrojeného lukem a šípy. Zapomínáme, že i indiánské obyvatelstvo je nedílnou součástí dnešní kosmopolitní Ameriky. Jako jakákoliv jiná menšina, i Indiáni se úspěšně vmísili do majoritní americké společnosti. Ti, kteří se úspěšně přizpůsobili životu ve městech pak stojí před obrovskou výzvou – jak vychovat své potomky, kteří si na jedné straně zachovají své kulturní dědictví, ale na straně druhé se zcela přizpůsobí životu v dnešní moderní americké společnosti.

Indiánsko-americká literatura byla po dlouhou dobu považována za méněcennou součást literárního kánonu. Pro Evropany, ústní tradice bez písemného záznamu nebyla plnohodnotnou literaturou. Indiánsko-americká tvorba tak byla dlouho vnímána na samotném pozadí literatury. Zlom nastal až v 60. letech 20. století díky románům *Dům z úsvitu* od Navarra S. Mommadaye, který byl v roce 1969 oceněn Pulitzerovou cenou. Vine Deloria Jr. pak ve stejném roce publikoval román *Custer umřel za vaše hříchy*. Obě tato díla jsou považována za průlom v indiánsko-americké literatuře. Od té doby máme možnost přečíst si tvorbu mnoha indiánských autorů, jako jsou Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, David Treuter, nebo Sherman Alexie.

Spisovatel Sherman Alexie se narodil v roce 1966 v městečku Wellpinit, Washington na rezervaci vlastněné kmenem Spokanů. Jeho otec pracoval jako řidič kamionu a bohužel jako velká většina Indiánů žijících na rezervacích, i on se stal alkoholikem. Matka Alexie pracovala jako úřednice na rezervaci. Navíc si však přivydělávala příležitostnými pracemi, aby uživila svých 6 dětí.

Alexie se narodil s nádorem na mozku, který mu ve věku 6 let úspěšně odoperovali. Jeho postižení však nezůstalo bez následku – jako malý chlapec Alexie trpěl častými záchvaty, koktal a nosil silné brýle s tlustými obroučky. Právě jeho odlišný vzhled od ostatních indiánských dětí zapříčinil, že se mu děti často posmívaly a šikanovaly ho. Mladý Alexie proto hledal útěchu v knížkách a brzy pochopil, že humor a vtip v literatuře mu pomáhá překonávat obtížné životní období. Lásky k literatuře pak Alexieho provázela celý život. Po několika pokusech studia na univerzitách se rozhodl, že se stane spisovatelem.

Sherman Alexie je velice plodným spisovatelem, jeho tvorba čítá na 22 sbírek prózy i poezie. Alexieho tvorba je často humorná, autor ve svém psaní používá satiru a parodii. Právě pro rozsáhlé používání humoru je i často kritizován, protože bez ostychu vtipkuje i v těch nejvážnějších situacích.

Román *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* je autobiografickou tvorbou. Děj příběhu pojednává o Arnoldu Spiritovi zvaném „Junior“ – mladém Indiánovi žijícím na rezervaci. Arnold hluboce touží po znalosti a možnostech, které mu rezervace nemůže nabídnout. Za tuto knihu byl Alexie mnohokrát oceněn.

Narozdíl od ostatních americko-indiánských autorů Alexie odmítá své postavy stylizovat do role obětí. Naopak, v románu *Indian Killer* jeho postavy krvelačně touží po odvetě. V tomto aspektu, Shermanu Alexie právem náleží prvenství. Tento spisovatel je proto mnohými považován za průkopníka v americko-indiánské literatuře, protože v jeho tvorbě nechybí „red rage“ – již zmíněná touha po odvetě a nesnášenlivý postoj k americké majoritní společnosti. Osobitý styl Shermana Alexie a jeho spisovatelský um mu vysloužily přezdívku „indiánský Oscar Wilde“. To, že mu toto označení právem náleží dokázal nejen svým spisovatelským umem, ale již samotným názvem románu *Indian Killer*. Jde o palindrom - a tak je již název románu plný rozporu a nedorozumění. O to víc však ve čtenáři vzbuzuje touhu román přečíst.

Román *Indian Killer* byl zajímavou ukázkou literatury, která svým poselstvím nemá obdoby. I když ve mě kniha často vzbuzovala rozpaky, nutila mě zamyslet se nad hroznými skutky, kterých je lidstvo, bez ohledu na rasu či náboženské založení, schopno.

Román *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* pro mě byla příjemným překvapením. Doporučuji ho proto každému, kdo má rád humornou tvorbu a kdo se chce dozvědět trochu více o dnešním životě Američanů indiánského původu.

Jsem přesvědčena, že obě díla si najdou mnohé příznivce a že zpráva, kterou Sherman Alexie prostřednictvím své literatury vysílá nás inspiruje v tom, že se vyvarujeme obrovských chyb, kterých jsme během své historie učinili a vezmeme si z nich ponaučení.

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