



## PORTRAYAL OF INDIANS AND THEIR PROBLEM OF LAND DISPLACEMENT IN JAMES FENNIMORE COOPER'S THE LEATHERSTOCKINGS TALES

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**Cite This Article:** Vikash Singh, "Portrayal of Indians and Their Problem of Land Displacement in James Fennimore Cooper's The Leather Stockings Tales",

International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Modern Education, Volume 9, Issue 1, Page Number 17-19, 2023.

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### Abstract:

This research paper aims to present James Fennimore Cooper's attitude towards Indians, who has been considered particularly sympathetic to the Indian people in their struggle against displacement by white society because of his portrayal of honourable and brave Indians in the Leatherstocking Tales. *The Leatherstocking Tales* seem to support this interpretation of Cooper since they contain numerous remarks that are in favour of the idea that Indians have a right to their ancestral lands. However, the United States was debating and enacting an Indian removal strategy at the same time that Cooper penned and published the five Leatherstocking Tales: *Pioneers* (1823), *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *Prairie* (1827), *Pathfinder* (1840), and *Deer slayer* (1841). Most Indians residing east of the Mississippi were relocated to uncharted territory west of the Mississippi as a result of this policy. While some Native Americans supported this approach, others, most notably the Cherokee, opposed and sought to preserve their culture on their ancestral territories. Four thousand Cherokee people died on the "Trail of Tears" to their new home as a result of a treaty that ceded these territories and was ratified by an unrepresentative minority of the Cherokee population. Cooper largely considered the Indian as raw material for romance; as a result, the novels feature assertions about Indian land rights and wrongs done to the Indian because they add to the romanticised image of the Indian. In essence, Cooper had no political or social ties to the Indian population.

**Key Words:** American- Indians, Displacement, Culture, Ancestral Lands Etc.

### Introduction:

*The Leather stocking Tales* were analysed as texts that in part influenced political and social attitudes about Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century, rather than just as romances of a bygone frontier. Cooper's imaginary Indians were not entirely the product of his own imagination or of meticulous, first-hand recollections of actual Indians. Instead, he accepted them, according to Roy Harvey Pearce; "as his culture gave them to him," (Pearce 201). The novels cover the time period from the early 1740s, when conflicts between France and England first erupted, through 1805, when the United States was establishing its control over the recently acquired Louisiana Territory.

The novels cover a time span from the early 1740s, when conflicts between France and England first erupted, through 1805, when the United States was solidifying its control over the recently acquired Louisiana Territory. According to the various stages of his profession, Natty Bumppo, the central figure in all five stories, goes by the names "Deer slayer," "Hawkeye," "Pathfinder," "Leather stocking," and "The Trapper." Bumppo spends much of his time with Indians, some of whom he loves, trusts, and befriends while others he dislikes, distrusts, and battles. He lives on the frontier, away from the civilization of his fellow white people. The Deer slayer, which describes Natty's transition into manhood, occurs first in the internal chronology of the five tales. Following that, *The Last of the Mohicans* and the events in *The Pathfinder's* mature life are related.

The story *The Pioneers* depicts him when he is elderly but still active and robust, whereas *The Prairie* describes his extreme old age's frailty but independence as well as his eventual demise. *The Pioneers* is a book about American frontier civilization in its secondary stage of growth, with barely tangential attention paid to Indian-white ties. The Indians had been driven off their lands, and other than old Mohegan John, none remained to inspire sympathy or condemnation, much less terror, in the hearts of the settlers. As Mohegan John says; "There will soon be no redskin in the country. When John has gone, the last will leave these hills, and his family will be dead" (*The Pioneers*, 407)

Cooper has effectively downplayed the severity of the issue by framing the debate of indigenous land rights in the perspective of a humorous case of mistaken identity. By putting Natty Bumppo's concern for Indian rights in the context of Judge Temple's friendship with Oliver Edwards, where it has no bearing, he has negated it. Thomas Philbrick comments; "By the end of the novel, Oliver is not only the legal heir to the estate which Judge Temple has held in trust for Edward Effingham, but symbolically he is the inheritor of the Indian's moral claim to the land" (Philbrick, 589). Thus, the novel's dynamic argues that whatever legal and moral claims to the land the Indians may have formerly held have been nullified.

Cooper illustrated the consequences of Indian-White relations as he saw them in the first half of the nineteenth century in Mohegan John's degradation. Many well-intentioned European folks advocated a removal programme as the only means by which the Indian people could be saved from total extinction after observing such degeneration in the Indian peoples surrounding them. Cooper gave the impression that Indians had no place in white civilisation by describing John's inebriation, marginal standing in white society, and eventual return to Indian beliefs in such graphic detail. By doing so, he added to the rising support for the expulsion of Indians.

More than any other *Leatherstocking Tale*, *The Last of the Mohicans* centres on Indians in the context of the French and Indian War (1754–1763) and the earlier conflict between Huron and Delaware Indians. Hawkeye and his comrades battle the terrible Magua. The work almost completely equates Indian culture with a love of violence, vengeance, and torture since violence plays a significant role in the plot. The excesses of civilization and the ongoing conflict between them and the whites in the Lake George region must be endured by the Indians, but they are eventually able to mature in their civilization. Four major components of the novel can be explored in order to comprehend how it depicts Indian life: its portrayal of Indian character, the idea of race, the issue of Indian land rights, and the elegiac tone it takes on in relation to the Indians. The dominating part played by the cunning Huron, Magua, has a significant impact on how Indians are generally portrayed in the book. Magua discusses his previous interactions with white people and attributes the white man's depravity on his drinking:

Magua was born a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes; he saw the suns of twenty summers make the snows of twenty winters run off in the streams, before he saw a pale-face; and he was happy! Then his Canadian fathers came into the woods, and taught him to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal. The Hurons drove him from the graves of his fathers, as they would chase the hunted buffalo . . . .

"Was it the fault of Le Renard that his head was not made of rock? Who gave him the fire-water? Who made him a villain? 'Twas the pale-faces." (The *Last of Mohican*, 91)

*The Last of the Mohicans* is a novel that depicts Indian character, the idea of racial purity, a discussion of Indian land rights, and the melancholy atmosphere brought on by the departure of Indians. A sympathetic understanding of Indian difficulties is aided by both the land rights and the image of a disappearing Indian tribe. However, rather than any political commitment, both of these have a tendency to be nebulous feelings of good intent. They are further obscured by the derogatory portrayal of Indian character and the focus placed on racial purity. These elements of the book suggest that the Indian could successfully integrate into a community that is properly civilised and be protected from the excesses of civilisation.

The frontier has moved westward on *The Prairie*, and a new cycle of Indian-white relations has started. This change is in line with American history, which depicts a series of frontiers that are always expanding. The fact that this book examines Indian-white relations at a historical era that is more contemporaneous with Cooper's writing than any other *Leatherstocking* book is also significant. In this book, diverse Indians reflect five different points of view on the issue of land use and ownership, which is significant. The Sioux Indians want to drive out any invading Europeans and maintain the country exclusively for themselves. The Pawnee Indians are aware of the need to adapt to the spread of American culture westward. Natty Bumppo, the trapper, wants to leave the area untouched so that it can serve as a haven from the unfriendly practices of the communities. The squatter, Ishmael Bush, is interested in settling on desirable parcels of property without regard for legal title. These five points of view are brought into conflict by a somewhat improbable storyline. Cooper thus had a significant opportunity to deal with various and opposing perspectives of a frontier region in *The Prairie*. Natty Bumppo views Indians as either good or bad, and he associates this goodness or badness with their tribe affiliations, just like in the other *Leatherstocking Tales*.

*The Prairie* represents both the enormous labour of nation-building and the potential greatness of the country and its institutions. This dedication is evident in an editorial paragraph where he praises the American people's great history, discusses the need for agricultural development before the fuller achievements of civilization can be attained, and then speaks of; "those distant, and ever receding borders which mark the skirts and announce the approach of the nation, as moving mists precede the signs of day" (*The Prairie*, 69).

The ideas regarding land and land ownership are only one aspect of *The Prairie* that has to be mentioned. The Trapper serves as a bridge between the two races, he scornfully rejects education, the story uses a double standard to describe "good" and "bad" Indians, and it is concerned with maintaining racial purity.

The Trapper serves as a link between the Indian and the white man throughout *The Prairie*. However, this bridge mostly only allows for one way of traffic. In other words, the Trapper serves to put the Indian in a setting that the white characters-and white readers-can understand. He doesn't offer a comparable service of translating for the white people to the Native Americans. The white people do not feel the need to defend themselves to the native people. American white culture is accepted as natural and doesn't need justification or explanation. The onus of achieving harmony between the two races is solely on the Indian, who explains himself to the white person through the Trapper's intercession. The prospect of educating the Indians so they may have a role in American civilization is not specifically mentioned by the Trapper.

*The Prairie* was published in 1827, and it took another 13 years for the next two novels in the *Leather Stocking Tales* series—*The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deer slayer* (1841)—to be released. Cooper had returned to America during this time, was involved in personal legal disputes, was losing readers, and he had re-examined many of his previous, more idealistic beliefs about American democracy. Indian survival had developed past a purely theoretical debate over Indian land rights. It was now a historical reality. However, the Seminoles, a Florida tribe of Creek Indians who had intermarried with freed black slaves, continued to fight against survival at this time in what is known as the Second Seminole War (1835-42).

In contrast to the other Leatherstocking books, *The Pathfinder* features more scenes on the water than on the ground. The main theme of the book is Natty Bumppo's love for Mabel Dunham, the daughter of an old army buddy, and his failed proposal to her. It places more emphasis on white betrayal than Indian treachery. The courtship's tale and its resolution have significant ramifications for our comprehension of the hero and his role in the Leatherstocking saga because of this final characteristic. The portrayal of Indians and their interaction with white people in the novel is then briefly examined.

*The Deer slayer*, more than any other Leatherstocking Tale, offers a positive portrayal of Indian culture and people. The Huron leader Rivenoak blends his political shrewdness with a fundamental dedication to fairness and fair play. He utilises demagoguery to achieve his goals, just like Magua and Mahtoe, although his goals are not as lowly and treacherous as those of the other two Indian leaders. The Hurons honourably demanded a ransom in exchange for chessmen rather than scalping their white prisoners. Hetty Hutter is revered by the Mingos. Tom and hurry treat her with condescension. The Hurons send out a warning with a bundle of bundled pine knots when they declare war.

The first three Leather stocking Tales contain a lot of rhetoric concerning Indian land rights, but the overall impact of the books substantially undermines the speech's credibility. The disputed claim for the area surrounding Lake Glimmerglass in *the Deer slayer* places the issue of ownership below that of possession. The novel does not raise any issues with the further expansion of American possession and Indian dispossession because it was written in the 1840s with a century-long perspective.

To sum up, James Fenimore Cooper's five novels all focus on different facets of Indian culture and white-Indian relations, which tend to dominate the reader's comprehension and dispel any notions of white injustice. Therefore, Mohegan's ineptitude in assimilation into white culture and his intoxication and degradation are highlighted in *The Pioneers*. The novel *The Last of the Mohicans* emphasises Tamenund's pathos, Magua's treacherous and vengeful personality, the fear and possibility of miscegenation, the foreordained death of the last of the Mohicans by another Indian, and women and children as victims of the abuses of civilization at Fort William Henry. *The Prairie* depicts Indian life in terms of inter-tribal conflict, Sioux cupidity, theft, and treachery, gruesome torture preparations, and Pawnee compliance with American goals. *The Pathfinder* places a strong emphasis on the treachery, bloodlust, and inebriation of Indians, while *The Deer slayer* also includes images of Indians being tortured. Of course, the final four novels in the Leatherstocking series also feature Chingachgook, Uncas, or Hard-Heart, the good and honourable Indian. They in no way imply that even these good Indians could be able to function or be happy in a white culture. It's crucial to remember that a large percentage of Indian characters in the novels are solitary individuals rather than people who are deeply anchored in their tribal traditions. Each of the following tribes—Chingachgook, Uncas, Magua, Arrowhead, Dew of June, and Hist—is divided from its own people.

*The Leather stocking Tales* aided in the acceptance of the idea that Native Americans had a place in both the past and present of America. The typical reader in Cooper's time would come to the conclusion that whatever needed to be done or could be done about their current predicament after taking into account all aspects of Cooper's portrayal of Indians and their relationships with Europeans. It is a well-known reality that white people and the United States rule the world. The American hegemony has occasionally caused issues for both American Indians and Indians worldwide. The advancement of the Indians is at risk because the Europeans, who believe themselves to be higher born, are elitist.

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