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Hadley Jerman
University of Oklahoma

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ACTING FOR THE CAMERA
HORACE POOLAW'S FILM STILLS OF FAMILY, 1925–1950

HADLEY JERMAN

[Prior to the invention of the camera, one viewed oneself as if before a mirror and produced the biographical portrait and the introspective biography. [Today], one poses for the camera, or still more, one acts for the motion picture.

—Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization (1934)

During the late 1920s, American technology historian Lewis Mumford drafted these words in a manuscript that would become Technics and Civilization. At the same time, Kiowa photographer Horace Poolaw began documenting daily life in southwestern Oklahoma with the very technology Mumford alleged altered the way humanity saw itself. As Poolaw began making dramatically posed, narrative-rich portraits of family members, Mumford asserted that the modern individual now viewed him or herself "as a public character, being watched" by others. He further suggested that humankind developed a "camera-eye" way of looking at the world and at oneself as if continuously on display.¹

Among Native Americans this sense of constantly posing for a camera—usually an outsider's camera—was certainly not a new development in 1930. Comanche writer Paul Chaat Smith compares the influence of cameras and Colt revolvers on Native peoples: "If one machine nearly wiped us out . . . another gave us immortality."² Certainly, the invention of Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) impacted Native Americans’ sense of self. The same could be said of motion pictures. In Smith's words, "We starred in scores of movies. The movies gave us international fame. Without them, Comanches would be an obscure chapter in Texas history books. With them, we live forever."³ In 1930 Lewis Mumford

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Hadley Jerman earned her Master of Arts in Art History from the University of Oklahoma in 2009. She wrote her master's thesis on Horace Poolaw's photography. She currently serves as graphic designer for the Sam Noble Museum in Norman, Oklahoma, and as an adjunct professor for the School of Art and Art History at the University of Oklahoma.

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observed that people not only viewed themselves as before a still camera but through the lens of a motion-picture camera. Not merely posing before a lens, humanity now acted. This behavioral and psychological change affected Americans even in the granite hills of southwestern Oklahoma, where in the decade prior to the Great Depression, Horace Poolaw both posed in film stills and captured photographs of his kin acting for his camera.

Despite Poolaw's early experience on the sets of at least two motion pictures, what has been written about the photographer has failed to acknowledge this aspect of his life or demonstrate the relationship between such experiences and his work. In fact, Poolaw's more dramatic portraits, what his daughter, Linda Poolaw, describes as "self-consciously posed," have been most often explained and ultimately dismissed by writers as inspired by vaudeville. Just as experience on film sets has been previously overlooked in Poolaw's personal history, serious discussions of his theatrically posed photographs are nearly nonexistent. Prior to the completion of Laura Smith's dissertation on Poolaw in 2008, writers typically focused on Poolaw's more documentary images in order to discuss his work as a record of Kiowa cultural change, and an antithesis to stereotypical portrayals of American Indians by Euro-American photographers like Edward S. Curtis.

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their lives with his camera but also because they profoundly affected his own work. Nicola had gained nationwide fame performing Native-themed songs as “Princess Watawasso, Bright Star of the Penobscot,” an “Indian mezzo-soprano” on the Chautauqua circuit during the 1910s and 1920s (Fig. 2). In fact, Linda Poolaw credits the inception of performancelike, self-conscious poses in her father’s portraits to his meeting with Watawasso in the mid-1920s.7

In theatrical photographs of Bruce and Watawasso posing as if Bruce were in mid-proposal, or in numerous portraits of Bruce dressed as a Hollywood style cowboy, Watawasso’s stage background seems an overt influence on Horace Poolaw’s work (Fig. 3). Yet, while vaudeville-style portraiture may explain the use of costume and self-conscious posing in Poolaw’s more theatrical images, it does not tell the whole story. Many of Poolaw’s images bear close resemblance to film stills and contain striking lighting and shadow, implied narrative, carefully constructed poses that convey arrested action, psychological tension, and the suggestion of violence or imminent danger.

Poolaw’s circa 1929 portrait of his three-year-old son, Jerry, is one such image. Here, the photographer’s shadow looms into the frame, dwarfing his child who appears dressed as a tiny lawman complete with shiny badge, heavy chaps, wide-brimmed hat, and looped lariat. With eyes closed and a wide grin, Jerry appears oblivious to the menacing figure facing him. Because Poolaw’s body is hidden from viewers outside the frame, his shadow assumes a sinister quality and heightens the image’s implication of potential violence; it resembles a film still captured precisely before the resolution of the young gunslinger’s face-off with his opponent. Not only did Poolaw carefully compose the elements of the photograph to suggest a film-still-like arrested narrative, Linda Poolaw believes he dressed his son for the part—not for play—both here and in other photographs of Jerry in costume made during the late 1920s.8 While dressing, posing, and in this case acting for the camera reflect the influence of vaudeville on Poolaw’s work, such elements also reflect the inspiration of motion pictures. Moreover, long before he met Lucy “Watawasso” Nicola in the mid-1920s, Horace Poolaw had participated in at least two motion pictures on the Southern Plains. As early as 1916, when the young photographer was ten years old, Poolaw witnessed the production of a motion picture at Colonel Charles Goodnight’s ranch in the Texas Panhandle.

**HUNTING BUFFALO WITH BOW AND FILM IN CHARLES GOODNIGHT’S OLD TEXAS (1916)**

Since the 1880s, Charles Goodnight had been raising bison on a ranch near Amarillo, Texas. Later, he crossbred cattle and buffalo, creating a small herd of “cattalo” that he hoped in vain would be commercially viable. Friendship with Kiowas and nostalgia for the
days when Plains Indian hunters pursued bison on horseback led Goodnight to invite Kiowa elders to participate in a buffalo hunt on his ranch on October 6, 1916, more than thirty years after the near-extinction of American bison at the hands of commercial hunters.\(^9\) The event was heralded as the "last buffalo hunt," and much to Goodnight's surprise, attracted a crowd of more than 11,000 spectators who arrived via wagon, automobile, carriage, bicycle, train, and on foot. The three-day event culminated in a barbecued bison feast for 125 of Goodnight's guests.\(^10\)

This initial hunt was filmed, photographed, and covered in local papers. Its popularity led Goodnight to invite the same group of Kiowa hunters to his ranch two months later to perform another hunt—this time specifically for the motion-picture cameras of the Wiswall Brothers, a film production company hailing from Denver. The resulting film, Old Texas, in addition to documenting the hunt, depicts Goodnight's arrival to Texas's Palo Duro Canyon and a Kiowa Sun Dance (which was outlawed late in the nineteenth century by the U.S. government).\(^11\)

Ten-year-old Poolaw probably witnessed both of Goodnight's 1916 bison hunts. Linda Poolaw claims her father vividly remembered the experience, describing it often to family members later in his life.\(^12\) Horace Poolaw had plenty reason to remember the action of the initial hunt and ensuing celebration: a local paper recorded that his father, Kiowa George, was one of the four hunters who completed the kill.\(^13\) Also, Poolaw's family members believe he is likely among the Kiowa children who appear throughout Old Texas during the second hunt.\(^14\)

A local paper reported after the October hunt that while all four hunters' arrows hit the mark, "it was generally conceded that Horse" made the critical shot.\(^15\) In a 1916 still snapped by an unknown photographer during the production of Old Texas two months later, "Chief Hunting Horse" straddles a lifeless bison, raising a bow and two arrows in triumph (Fig. 4). In the photograph, the Kiowa elder's bow and arrows, employed in the hunt at Goodnight's insistence, beaded moccasins, and war bonnet appear juxtaposed with long johns, perhaps worn in defense against the December chill.\(^16\)

This 1916 image sheds some light on a photograph Horace Poolaw made just over a decade later, an image that previously has been viewed as suggesting Watawasso's influence.

Horace Poolaw's melodramatic portrait (c. 1929) of Bruce Poolaw sitting behind the mammoth head of a decapitated bison (Fig. 5) appears simultaneously bizarre and formally stunning, while abounding in incongruity. Both man and beast appear in profile, a double portrait of sorts, with the dark entrance to a canvas lodge severing space behind them. Both figures gaze in the same direction, yet the bison's eye sockets are empty. Except for the startling absence of body beneath the furry neck and beard, the bison might appear to be napping. Instead, this trophy rests on an overturned bucket, his horns angled backward, pointing toward the man's stern visage behind. Sharp forms fill the composition, reinforcing the animal's fate: the bison's polished horns point at Bruce; a stake pierces the ground behind them. The lodge's doorway looms daggerlike, and each individual point of feather in Bruce's war bonnet gleams against softly focused grays of distant grass, fence, and foliage.

Such pointed allusion to the bison's grisly end contrasts with the pair's close proximity and the tonal unity of hide and cloak. In fact, the pair's nearness in space and the similarity in value of hide and cloak create the striking and surreal impression that Bruce Poolaw rides the bison. Isolated in the frame, Bruce and bison appear intentionally oblivious to the camera, as if enacting a scene from a story captured on film. In fact, the image seems a 1929 reprise of the 1916 still shot on Goodnight's ranch. Both men strike dramatic poses more akin to performance than hunt and gaze straight forward with stern expressions. Both men also appear isolated in profile astride bison mounts, and more importantly, both images detail the outcome of contemporary hunts staged for an audience.

In fact, Poolaw's circa 1929 photograph (Fig. 5) details the outcome of a bison hunt.
held near Mountain View at the request of his future sister-in-law, Lucy “Watawasso” Nicola. According to Linda Poolaw, Watawasso purchased the bison from the Wichita Mountain preserve near Fort Sill with the stipulation that Kiowas hunt it on horseback as they did decades earlier. Unlike most of Poolaw’s portraits, here the viewer is allowed to see deeper in space, past Bruce, his shaggy companion, and the lodge, into a hazy yard encircled by a stockade fence. With its subject so carefully positioned in this enclosed yard of close-cropped grass, the photograph seems a dark comment on previous generations of migratory Plains hunters and warriors (and their descendants) forcibly confined on reservations. A performer herself, Watawasso must have recognized that fifty years removed from the days when Plains hunters followed bison herds across the western Plains, the Kiowas who performed the chase and kill now did so as actors.

Like his predecessor at Goodnight’s ranch, Poolaw documented the circa 1929 bison chase in a series of still photographs. Implied narrative and the suggestion of violence makes Poolaw’s theatrical portrait of his brother most film-still-like and seemingly incongruous with other more documentary images in the series. In one photograph made prior to the event, Indian men wearing war bonnets ride in an automobile.
Placards on the doors advertise "These Indians will kill buffalo!" In another photograph, three hunters pursue the bison in a rare-for-Poolaw action shot captured from above, the landscape and figures filling the frame. A crowd dominates a third image, surrounding the obscured form of a lifeless animal. Bruce poses behind the bison's severed head in several photographs made on the occasion, women bend to scrape the hide in another photograph, and in the final image of the sequence, strips of meat hang to dry over a pole (Fig. 6). Poolaw's series, like film stills, simultaneously records Watawasso's hunt and American fascination with nineteenth-century Plains Indian life.¹⁹

Although separated by time and space, the correlation between the bison hunts of 1916 and circa 1929 must have been apparent to Poolaw, still a young man at the time of the hunt orchestrated by Watawasso. The action documented by his lens must have reminded him of watching his father and Kiowa elders chase down a belligerent bison in a half-mile arena ringed with automobiles. It seems no stretch to imagine that this young photographer also recalled the motion and still picture cameras present at Goodnight's ranch in 1916. He—and his brother, Bruce—may even have remembered Hunting Horse straddling the dead bison, and recognized their part in performing and documenting a similar event more than a decade later.

At the same time, Bruce Poolaw's fictional portrayals capitalized on non-Native assumptions and expectations; he made his living from them. His overt and stoic "chief" pose in his brother's circa 1929 photo was pure performance, as was his participation in Watawasso's bison hunt of the same year. In the end, both Bruce and bison in a sense pose as Watawasso's
trophies from her western tour. Given the prevalence of Poolaw's dramatically posed images of the couple in the late 1920s, it is clear that the exposure to Watawasso's vaudeville theatrics played a role in the development of the film-still-like posing conventions Poolaw employed in later portraits. Yet only a handful of years after witnessing Goodnight's bison hunt, and nearly a decade prior to his meeting with Watawasso, Horace Poolaw made even closer contact with motion pictures and cinematic staging on the Southern Plains.

THE DAWN OF OKLAHOMA FILM, 1900–1920

Despite its distance from the national film centers of New York and Los Angeles, southwestern Oklahoma emerged as a film location long before the advent of “talkies.” Early silent films produced in Poolaw’s environs reflected a national interest in western American subject matter. Richard Abel notes that while films of American subjects existed since the 1890s, they leapt in popularity around 1908 and by 1910 accounted for more than one-fifth of films released in the United States. Stories centering on Native Americans were among the most prominent. In fact, during the early years of motion pictures, films with western locales and plots were not called “Westerns” but “Indian and Western subjects,” and between 1907 and 1910, stories with Indian central characters amounted to 50 percent or more of total Western films.

In 1911, after a brief boom in Indian-themed pictures, the market became saturated and film journals heralded the demise of the Western. However, by the end of the 1910s the horrors of World War I had reinvigorated popularity of Indian subject matter as an escape for war-weary
Americans. Nostalgia for a perceived simpler past continued into the Roaring Twenties, marked by the popularity of films like Robert Flaherty's 1922 documentary about an Inuit community, *Nanook of the North*. During this decade, as historian Lawrence W. Levine writes, mainstream American popular culture was "laced through with an emphasis on the self-sufficient heroes of such bygone eras as the Old West, when good and bad supposedly were distinguished with ease and human beings had the capacity to alter their environment." Films produced in southwestern Oklahoma between 1900 and 1920 reflected such themes by constructing a dramatic, often romanticized past in an environment where elements of the "Old West" existed in the form of Indians, bison, and mountains.

The Norman Film Company of Florida produced early films in Oklahoma as did the Lawton-based Geronimo Film Company, which filmed on location in the Wichita Mountains during the 1910s. The Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch, whose action films usually featured cowboy and Indian performers, provided actors and settings for scores of early Hollywood Westerns. Silent film star James Young Deer, a Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) who wrote, directed, and acted in early Westerns, performed for a time with the 101 Ranch. Other film locations included Chilocco Indian School and, near Poolaw's hometown of Mountain View, Oklahoma, Craterville Indian Fair in the Wichita Mountains. William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody's 1913 motion picture, *The Indian Wars*, made in association with Pawnee Bill's Wild West, included scenes that featured Comanche Indians and soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

Among the early shorts filmed in the rugged Wichita Mountains was *The Wolf Hunt*, a fourteen-minute short subject produced in 1908 by Jack Abernathy's Oklahoma Natural Mutoscene Company and filmed by Oklahoma's first motion-picture cameraman, James "Bennie" Kent. Directed by legendary western lawman Bill Tilghman, the film documented Abernathy's technique of catching a wolf with his bare hands and was purportedly recorded for President Theodore Roosevelt. The same company and director also produced *The Bank Robbery* in 1908 in and around the Wichita Mountains. The *Bank Robbery* shared scenes with *The Wolf Hunt* and even included a cameo appearance by famed Comanche chief Quanah Parker. Bill Tilghman's Eagle Film Company delivered an even more narrative-driven silent on a similar topic seven years later in *The Passing of the Oklahoma Outlaw* (1915), a tedious, moralistic film about a group of famed Oklahoma outlaws who receive their just deserts.

While these films largely leaned toward the documentary, other Oklahoma Westerns attempted to provide action-oriented, fictional storylines with characters who performed specific parts. *Early Oklahoma* (1912), a nine-minute short produced by the 101 Ranch, made use of cowboys and Indians from the ranch and its Wild West show. The movie abounds in stereotype. Its Indian characters are violent, vengeful, and untrustworthy (with no scruples as to murdering children if given the chance), no different from many other films featuring Indian themes in the 1910s. It was during this decade of film history that Native Americans became, according to film historian Scott Simmon, "an expendable plot device" and began to be portrayed as violent antagonists to white men. Such portrayals became so unremittingly violent and offensive that in the mid-1910s, Native and non-Native Americans alike objected to the demeaning depiction of Indian people in Hollywood films.

Other motion pictures produced during the same era, however, created a more romantic and nostalgic, if no less stereotypical portrayal of Native people. *The Daughter of Dawn*, a six-reeler produced in 1920 in the Wichita Mountains, departed significantly from most of its predecessors (Fig. 7). According to producer R. E. Banks of the Texas Film Company, the narrative derived from a Comanche or Apache legend. The film was one of the earliest silent features produced completely in Oklahoma and, more importantly, cast entirely of Native
Americans. The film, which attempted to recreate a credible portrayal of Indian experience, capitalized on Euro-American audiences' romantic fascination with nineteenth-century Plains Indian life.

The caricature of Native American life presented by *The Daughter of Dawn* consisted of a love triangle with the added action of a bison chase and a Kiowa-Comanche battle. On one hand, viewers witness a romance presumably occupying a time prior to European intrusion, and on the other, an action-oriented drama complete with raiding, stealing, and gruesome violence. Typical 1920s cinematic representations of Indian life, such as a “scout” positioned high on a cliff, lovers paddling across a lake, a bison chase, and a test of bravery as a means of winning the heroine's hand, all played into mainstream nostalgia for an idyllic Indian past. However, the production of *The Daughter of Dawn* in 1920 must have held some excitement for Horace Poolaw, whether or not he considered it a positive portrayal of his people. The fourteen-year-old not only witnessed the production of the film but may even have captured one image of the moviemaking on his own camera, and also appears in film stills taken on location at the event by his mentor, landscape photographer George Long. Furthermore, Poolaw’s film-still-like photographs made in succeeding years reference the conventions of performed Indian
identity he witnessed as a twenty-year-old aspiring photographer during the production of *The Daughter of Dawn*.

**THE DAUGHTER OF DAWN (1920)**

*The Daughter of Dawn* opens with an image ubiquitous in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painting, photography, and film depictions of Plains Indians—the protagonist White Eagle (White Parker) perches high on a boulder in the Wichita Mountains, scouting for game. He crouches slightly, puts his hand to his brow, and conspicuously acts the “lookout.” The frame telescopes to a circle pinpointing a herd of bison, the solution to his Kiowa village’s food shortage. Old Texas, filmed four years earlier, opened in a similar manner with an Indian figure standing on the rim of the vast Palo Duro Canyon, peering into the distance with his hand to brow. Poolaw, present during both films as a youth, also made use of the cliff-top convention in theatrically posed photographs of Bruce Poolaw and Watawasso in the late 1920s. Bruce appears prominently in a series of vertical images isolated on horseback against the horizon garbed as both cowboy and Indian. Linda Poolaw suggests these photographs reflect Bruce’s dual performance of both “chief” and trick-roping cowboy on New York City stages during the late 1920s.

In another photograph made more than a decade later, Poolaw’s tiny son Robert poses as the “brave” on the mountain. He looks down at the camera from a high vantage point at the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Pageant, mimicking the stereotype of Indians as sentinels or silent observers to passing time. At the same event during the 1930s, Poolaw photographed Charlie Whitehorse posed as a sentinel grasping a long lance, its point greatly enlarged for legibility at distance. Positioned on a ridge, he towers above the elaborate performance taking place in the valley below and the onlookers to the lower left. In other photographs, he points ahead or slumps forward, a living replica of James Earle Frasier’s famous sculpture, *End of the Trail*. These photographs not only allude to film portrayals of Indians in *The Daughter of Dawn* and *Old Texas* but also to modes of depicting Native Americans prevalent for decades in American art and popular culture.

The subtle irony evident in photographs such as the diminutive Robert Poolaw’s cliff-side pose suggests that Poolaw intended to comment on or question performed Indian identity rather than merely document popular nostalgic imagery. Laura Smith thinks that Poolaw poked fun at popular “chief” stereotypes in his photographs of women—and, I would add, children—wearing war bonnets. His photographs overtly reveal his brother and sister-in-law to be performers, he documents his son in the guise of child actor, and he captures Charlie Whitehorse’s representation of Vanishing Race ideology at an elaborately staged performance of Euro-Americans’ version of western American history staged at the site of a major peace treaty between the U.S. government and tribes of the Southern Plains.

Although Poolaw’s portraits reference and subtly challenge existing modes of depicting Native characters in films like *The Daughter of Dawn*, other photographs in his collection suggest the aspiring photographer found the imagery of the film set aesthetically compelling (Fig. 8). In fact, the movie’s lush, cinematic compositions far exceed in artistry earlier films produced in and around the Wichita Mountains. A night scene in the Kiowa camp, one of the most beautifully arranged in the entire film, frames the viewer’s gaze with receding rows of lodges on left and right. Long shadows cast from the lodges at left crisscross the open central ground. The tepees glow in pale creamy tones against hand-dyed cerulean shadows and night sky, and tower above White Eagle as he crisscrosses the central ground. The full moon, the viewer imagines, must be just behind Dawn’s tepee, the nearest on the left and vividly painted by Native artists who would within a decade be known worldwide as the “Kiowa Five.”

A series of $4 \times 5$ negatives made at the Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty Pageant exhibit...
Poolaw's compositional use of diagonals to lead into space and share striking similarities to this village scene in *The Daughter of Dawn*. In one photograph, a group of three tiny figures off center in the middle ground are dwarfed by the towering lodges in the same way Dawn's suitor, White Eagle, is overshadowed during the nocturne in Myles's film. The angle of Poolaw's camera to the row of receding tepees mirrors that used on the film set. Poolaw's camera-eye depicts this real space in a manner akin to cinematic space. The natural environment, with its band of sky, band of dark distant trees, and layers of triangular shapes diminishing into space becomes a backdrop; the central ground resembles a stage prepared for action. Yet the figures Poolaw captures here are small and distant. His photograph is about space and composition, not individuals. Rather, Poolaw creates a space for actors in this series, a stage for narrative drama.

Horace Poolaw was certainly exposed to methods of creating narrative and action-oriented drama during the filming of *The Daughter of Dawn* in 1920. Not only was he on hand for the filming but he posed for film stills made on location by his mentor, landscape photographer George Long. One of Long's surviving stills

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depicts the youthful Kiowa garbed in floral dance dress with right arm raised high and brandishing a weapon (Fig. 9). He confronts Bill “Cyclone” Denton, former ranch hand and performer with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, who levels a pistol at Poolaw’s chest. Both men assume dramatic postures that convey arrested action. Poolaw’s pose, his extended limbs delineated in glaring light against a feathery forest background, suggests aggression. Denton, too, poses in profile, one leg behind the other with arms up and bent at the elbows as he peers down the barrel of his firearm. Both combatants appear stiff, their postures unnatural and arranged for best narrative effect rather than to convey realism. In fact, the composition closely resembles nineteenth-century stereoscopic images of Native and Euro-Americans engaged in mock combat, posing stiffly in profile with weapons raised. To add further interest, Long positioned Denton’s horse halfway into the frame, where it placidly observes the action, and along with Denton, Poolaw, and off-camera trees, casts long shadows diagonally across the ground. Although this and other Long stills of Poolaw and Denton together never appear during the finished motion picture, Long did make other photographs that clearly represent scenes enacted during the production of The Daughter of Dawn. Poolaw’s clothing suggests that if he performed on camera, it may have been during the dance scenes.

Unresolved suspense, stiff poses, frozen action, long shadows, and implied narrative in Long’s Daughter of Dawn photographs also visually correspond to Poolaw’s melodramatic photographs of his family composed decades later. Film-still style appears most evident in a double portrait made at midcentury of Robert and Linda Poolaw dressed as cowboys and pointing toy six-shooters at an off-frame enemy. This photograph is not simply an image of children playing dress-up; Linda and Robert remember their father meticulously instructing them how to pose and what to wear. Captured in three-quarter profile, they peer intently off camera, brows furrowed, in slightly different directions, as if facing multiple adversaries. Stark light illuminates their profiles, casting half their faces in shadow.

In addition to dramatic lighting, Poolaw creates tension through shallow depth of field. The tip of Robert’s gun fades into soft focus near the left edge of the frame. The grass and distant, hazy trees form a soft backdrop framing the crisply focused central figures. Robert stands stiffly, his chin on his chest almost as if creeping forward. His sister stands close to her brother, almost hidden behind his protective frame. The half-illuminated faces of the children convey a noirlike psychological depth as Poolaw successfully conveys a moment of tension in an unknown, yet familiar, narrative. The scene appears straight from motion pictures or television, a Western tale of good and evil, cowboys and . . . Indians? Inevitably, viewers ask, Are Robert and Linda the “good guys”? Whom do they stalk?

If we assume these young cowboys face off against Indian foes, then Poolaw’s children may in fact stalk Hollywood Indians. If so, this and other cleverly constructed Poolaw portraits comprise a complicated response to performed Native identity in American popular culture. In a sense, Poolaw pushes against, targets with his camera, that illusionary, reductive portrayal of Native people in American film as violent antagonists or doomed, romanticized primitive races. His photographs of family members
acting for the camera seem to address some of the questions that contemporary writer Philip Deloria posed decades later in *Indians in Unexpected Places*:

Even as twentieth-century Indian people came to be seen as pacified, the images of Indians in Wild West shows and many Hollywood films increasingly emphasized nineteenth-century Indian violence. How and why did Indian people come to represent themselves in these media at this specific moment in time? In what ways were they complicit in the perpetuation of negative images? And to what extent can we see their lives in show business as pushing back against the expectations that would define them as savages?47

**CONCLUSION**

In 1919 American photography critic Paul L. Anderson described cinema as an “equalizer,” capable of satisfying rural and urban, wealthy and poor audiences’ need for excitement in an inexpensive, mass-produced way.48 Anderson looked forward to the day when motion pictures would rise above their “crude production,” lacking sound and full of unnatural lighting, extreme gestures, and the hasty action inherent with cramming entire narratives into brief spans of time.49 According to Anderson, films produced during Poolaw’s formative years behind a still camera were visually dynamic, if not realistic. It seems no coincidence, then, that Poolaw, who witnessed the emergence of filmmaking on the Southern Plains and even
posed for film stills himself, imbued many of his photographs with visual drama through these same characteristics—implied narrative, melodramatic gesture, and striking lighting. A confluence of pictorial portraiture, film stills, and a documentary approach, Poolaw’s photographs are, however, far from “crude.” Rather, they are thematically sophisticated, capable of implying much about the characters and time period depicted in a visually compelling way.

While Poolaw’s photographs reveal aspects of American popular culture contemporary with their making, they also seem to comment on images of Native Americans in mainstream American entertainment. The performance of Indian identity was no doubt familiar to the photographer, given his brother and sister-in-law’s profession and the presence of Indian fairs, pageants, motion pictures, and Indian-themed serials published in local newspapers. Yet Poolaw’s film-still-like photographs are also personal. Linda Poolaw recalls that her father never reproduced as postcards his film-still-like images, as he did photographs of Indian princesses commissioned for the Anadarko Indian Exposition. Rather, he made them for himself. They feature loved ones in interesting and complicated environments that simultaneously reflect and ironically comment on American popular culture during Poolaw’s lifetime.

Furthermore, implied narratives, dramatic gestures, striking lighting, and the suggestion of danger all suggest that these images are not merely byproducts of Poolaw’s exposure to vaudeville-style posing. Rather, in these photographs Poolaw positions his sitters as if they are actors before a motion-picture camera, participating in narratives of his making. As such, Poolaw’s film- and vaudeville-inspired images invite satirical as well as documentary readings; they reflect and challenge the performance of Native identity. Through his introspective “camera-eye,” photographer Horace Poolaw not only documented his family and community but also unmasked Americans’ fascination with, and Indian performers’ portrayal of, Native identity in the first half of the twentieth century.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 8.
6. See “Made Good,” Mountain View Times, November 30, 1928, 1. In November 1928 the paper reported that Bruce Poolaw had been offered a part by a leading production company, and although he had declined, it would “not be surprising to see young Mr. Poolaw [sic] on the screen in our local Theatre some of these days, in the near future.” The paper noted that on the stages of New York, “Poolaw [sic] made a hit at once and his pictures have been published in many of the newspapers and magazines,” playing a part opposite his wife, who had made “many records for the Victor Talking Machine Company.” Not only were the couple celebrities in Mountain View, Oklahoma, but also on the East Coast, where they lived. In 1943, for example, they appeared in the New York Times in an Associated Press wire photo bestowing a “wampum headdress” on then-first-lady Eleanor Roosevelt after performing in Camden, Maine. See “Induct First Lady as ‘Ow-Du-Sees-Ul,'” New York Times, February 9, 1943.
9. The location must have held painful significance to these Kiowa elders. Just over forty years earlier, in 1874, a group of Kiowas, Comanches, and
Cheyennes fled into the Palo Duro Canyon to evade government troops. Colonel Ranald Mackenzie defeated them there and slaughtered their horses; they were forced to walk back to Oklahoma in winter. Kiowas continue to commemorate the battle today in winter encampments in the Palo Duro Canyon (Linda Poolaw, telephone communication, August 19, 2008). Goodnight arrived in the canyon area two years later and established the JA Ranch. For information about Goodnight's bison hunts, see Alex Hunt, "Hunting Charles Goodnight's Buffalo: Texas Fiction, Panhandle Folklore, and Kiowa History," Panhandle-Plains Historical Review 77 (2004): 1–13.


11. A print of Old Texas was discovered in the archives of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City and commercially reproduced. I am grateful to Tom Poolaw for allowing me to view his copy in Norman, OK, in February 2007. For a description and analysis of the film, see Hunt, "Hunting Charles Goodnight's Buffalo," 6–7.

12. Whether ten-year-old Horace Poolaw attended both 1916 hunts on the Goodnight Ranch or only the December hunt is unclear, although it is likely he attended both hunts. He described the celebration following the first hunt to his children and intimated that his father played an important role in the event. Linda Poolaw, telephone communication, August 19, 2008.

13. Cheney, "Probably the Last Buffalo Hunt."


15. Cheney, "Probably the Last Buffalo Hunt."


17. To family, Watawasso later attributed the bison’s death primarily to exhaustion from lengthy pursuit rather than a well-aimed arrow or lance. Linda Poolaw, telephone communication, February 9, 2008.

18. This photograph resembles the famous 1905 photograph of Chiricahua Apache leader Geronimo driving an automobile with Native American passengers at the Miller Brothers’ 101 Ranch, near Ponca City, OK. Whether Poolaw was familiar with the earlier photograph is unclear, although he did visit the 101 Ranch with Bruce and Watawasso in the late 1920s.

19. The negative numbers for these images in Poolaw’s collection are as follows: X201, hunters in car; 57E12, crowd with dead bison; 57FPMC8, Bruce with bison head; 57UM8, dried buffalo meat; unknown number, women working on hide. The prefix 57 indicates 5 x 7 negatives; the image of hunters in a car was made on a narrower-format negative. Poolaw’s negatives are currently archived at Nash Library on the campus of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha, OK.

20. Bruce and Watawasso probably married en route to New York although the location and date are unknown. The couple eventually returned to Maine where they opened a trading post and hunting lodge. Watawasso later became the secretary of the Republican party of Maine where she helped bring voting rights to the Indian people of her state. Celebrities (including Perry Como) stayed at Bruce and Watawasso’s lodge. Linda Poolaw, telephone communication, February 9, 2008.


23. Simmon, Invention of the Western Film, 37. Simmon (32–33) cites Griffith’s Old California (1910) and The Twisted Trail (1910).


25. Towana Spivey, Fort Sill Museum, e-mail communication, May 27, 2008; Bill Moore, Oklahoma History Center, e-mail communication, May 27, 2008. For James Yong Deer, see “James Young Deer,” Motion Picture World (May 6, 1911), 999, cited in Abel, “Our Country/Whose Country?,” n90.
26. Several photographs taken at the 1925 Craterville Indian Fair include a man shooting motion pictures of the Indian parade. See Frank Rush photograph collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collection. Poolaw also photographed a man filming a group of actors. Linda Poolaw suggests the image may depict the production of The Daughter of Dawn. Linda Poolaw, comments made during Horace Poolaw Photography Project, Chickasha, OK, May 2008.


28. Michael Wallis, The Real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the Creation of the American West (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 377–78. President Roosevelt screened The Wolf Hunt for his cabinet and guests at the White House in February 1909. See also The Wolf Hunt (1908) and The Bank Robbery (1908) in "Film and Video Reference," Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, OK.

29. According to the "Film and Video Reference," The Bank Robbery was Tilghman's effort to reenact the robbery of a bank in Cache, OK, which occurred during the filming of The Wolf Hunt.

30. Simmon, Invention of the Western Film, 37. Simmon cites Griffith's Old California (1910) and The Twisted Trail (1910).

31. For Native response to Hollywood films, see Philip Deloria, Indians in Unexpected Places (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 90–94. Native Americans were not the only viewers outraged at the violent depiction of Native characters in film. In response to W. F. Cody's The Indian Wars (1913), San Francisco Star reporter John F. Murray wrote he hoped Congress would soon pass legislation "forbidding the exhibition of scenes of cruelty" that might instill a negative attitude among Americans toward Native Americans. Cited in L. G. Moses, Wild West Shows, 246. See also 332n77.

32. The opening credits of The Daughter of Dawn attribute the story to R. E. Banks, who had "lived with the Indian for twenty-five years." Charles Simone is credited with the script and the film was written and directed by Norbert Miles.

33. See Leo Kelley, "The Daughter of Dawn: An Original Silent Film with an Oklahoma Indian Cast," Chronicles of Oklahoma 77, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 291. The film has been recently rediscovered and restored by the Oklahoma Historical Society through a grant from the National Film Preservation Foundation. In the film, the Daughter of Dawn (Esther LeBarre, Princess Peka in the credits) loves White Eagle (White Parker, Comanche, son of Quanah Parker) and vice versa, but wealthy, duplicitous Black Wolf (Jack Sankeydoty, Comanche, Sanka Dota in the credits) also pursues her. Meanwhile, Red Wing (Wanada Parker, Comanche, daughter of Quanah Parker) endures an unrequited love for Black Wolf which eventually leads to her demise. Dawn's father, the Kiowa chief, is played by Hunting Horse (Kiowa). Black Wolf and White Eagle undergo a bravery test to prove their courage and win Dawn's hand in marriage. The final Comanche vs. Kiowa battle restores Dawn to White Eagle and ends in Black Wolf's death and Red Wing's suicide.

34. One negative in Poolaw's collection depicts filmmaking in progress. Poolaw's photograph is shot from behind a man operating a motion-picture camera. Both cameras frame a shirtless man—presumably an actor—in the midground, who faces them. Linda Poolaw suggests this photograph was made during the filming of The Daughter of Dawn in 1920. However, as demonstrated later in this article, filmmaking was not an infrequent occurrence around Mountain View, OK, and also took place at the Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch, which Poolaw visited with Bruce and Watawasso circa 1930. Regardless of which movie was being made, clearly Poolaw had an interest in documenting the event. Linda Poolaw, interview by author, June 23, 2008.

35. For portraits of Bruce posing in this series, see Horace Poolaw Photograph Collection, 57FBCH1-12, housed at Nash Library, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Chickasha, OK. Bruce also appears wearing a buffalo horn headdress, with a baby, and posing with a drum in other staged images from the same period. Whether these images were commissioned by Bruce as publicity stills or were initiated by the photographer is unknown.


37. See Horace Poolaw Photograph Collection, 57LE6.

38. For an overview of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conventions of depicting Native Americans in American popular culture, see Brian Dippie, "Photographic Allegories and Indian Destiny," Montana the Magazine of Western History 42, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 40–57.


40. Bill Moore of the Oklahoma History Center alerted me to the painting by Kiowa Five members on Dawn's tepee (personal communication, May 27, 2008).

41. See Horace Poolaw Photograph Collection, 45LE5 and 45LE23.

42. Stanley J. Morrow made a series of stereoscopic images of mock combat between an
unidentified Dakota man and frontier scout Luther "Yellowstone" Kelly in the 1870s near Yankton, Dakota Territory. Long's still closely resembles Morrow's "Hand to Hand," which illustrates the combatants with knives raised, and "Death Stroke," where Kelly delivers a blow to his opponent. Unlike Morrow's narrative, in Long's presumably final image in the series of film stills, Poolaw and Denton shake hands. I thank Byron Price for alerting me to the similarities between Long's stills and Morrow's stereo views (Byron Price, personal communication, August 30, 2010).

43. Although attributed to The Daughter of Dawn, these scenes never appear during the actual film. However, other scenes Long made stills of do appear during The Daughter of Dawn. Poolaw and Denton may have been on location to act as extras if necessary. Bill Moore suggests the Poolaw scenes could have been edited from the final version or are perhaps misattributed to this film (personal communication, May 27, 2008).

44. Poolaw's grandson Tom Poolaw suggests his grandfather's clothing might have been considered "authentic" to the filmmakers, and was possibly worn for dance scenes in film (personal communication, August 2, 2010).

45. Poolaw considered this image among his best. It was included in his selection of images exhibited at his retrospective held at the Southern Plains Indian Museum, Anadarko, in 1979 (Linda Poolaw, personal communication, June 14, 2009). A copy of the print is now on display in the Horace Poolaw Room in the Nash Library at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Chickasha.

46. Robert and Linda Poolaw recalled that the photograph was made one afternoon just after they returned home from school. Their father gave them hats, bandanas, and pistols and directed them to pose (Robert Poolaw, personal communication, February 4, 2009). A vertical portrait of Robert posed as a bandit (45HPF8) from the same day shows the young boy with bandana covering his face and pistol raised. Linda Poolaw remembers her father as a "meticulous" photographer, taking pains (and much time) to pose his subjects (personal communication, February 9, 2008).


49. Ibid., 218–20.