Virginia Wayland

the Indian

looks at the
White Man

1 Apache ceremonial dancer presented as the sota of the coin suit of a rawhide, Indian playing card.

2 A colorful, relaxed Mexican vaquero painted realistically on the caballero of the club suit of an Apache-made playing card.

Anglo artists such as Frederick Remington and George Catlin and writers such as John Gregory Bourke and Josiah Gregg have given us vivid pictures of the migration to, and settling of, the Western United States. We lean heavily on such accounts for our understanding of this period of expansion. However, we seldom stop to realize that we are seeing it from only the Anglo-American point of view. How did it look to the Mexican, the Oriental, or the Indian? We have some Mexican accounts, including those of Spanish church fathers, but from the contemporary Oriental or the Indian there is little recorded history.

It is therefore unexpected and of unusual interest that we find westerners pictured on rawhide playing cards—westerners as seen by Indian artists during the last half of the nineteenth century. These include representatives from all three of the cultures that were mixing to form the "West." Figure #1 shows an Indian ceremonial dancer gaily painted in yellow, red and blue costume complete with feather and arm streamers. The second card shows a colorfully dressed Mexican vaquero sitting on his horse patiently tending his herd of cattle. The third card is an unusually attractive picture of a United States Army trooper mounted on his red horse, dressed in blue tunic and regulation hat. He might be ready for a march into Indian territory. These western figures were part of the everyday life of a Southwest Indian—in the case of these artists, Apache.

It will be shown that most of the card portraits were painted by Apaches but there are a few notable ones from other tribes. We will mention these when they occur.

Why did the Indians come to present, on playing cards, figures chosen from the life around them?

Western Indians seem to have learned about playing cards mainly from the Mexicans. Contemporary observers tell us they saw Indians...
The Spanish-Mexican prototypes for the Indian-bride dresses are not the same as the more widely known French-French dress known as a "bride." The haute couture suits are not hearts, spades, diamonds and clubs (which are really trefoils) but are coins, cups (often covered), swords, and clubs which are really cut limbs of a tree. There are three figure cards: a king or rey, a mounted knight or caballero, and a page or pageote. A Monte pack consists of only 40 cards, with the numeral cards only going from one to seven inclusive.

The Cygnet cards, in which we are most interested, because it is here we find our western portraits. The Indian cards did not, for the most part, try to slavishly follow the Spanish card figures printed on the paper cards. To do this would have required considerable artistic skill and our Indians were not practicing artists. Indeed, too, Spanish court costumes were outside the Indian's range of experience so he simplified his figures to something he personally knew. The king figure was the least understood. In its simpli- fied form it became merely a rectangle with a knob on top, a bell, a horse, and the sota, the mounted and standing man, that the artist painted men they saw about them.

Closest to his vision were his fellow Indians. We have already seen a charming ceramic dancer. Figure 1. More often the presentation was quite simple and limited to a few details. We can recognize these as Spanish figures. A man on horseback were a common sight. Horses played a big part in Indian life. Figure 2. Here, we see a spirited war horse and rider. The clothing horseman is missing.

The pack shown in Figure 3 is of the unfortunate "Upper Right corner" variety and very ornate and prominent. The next figure, #5, is from a late pack collected from a Sioux Indian. This unusually well-drawn pack has provided four of our illustrations because the artist recorded so many delightful people he saw around him. He is also one of our best draftsmen. This pack is attributed to the Sioux tribe and I'm inclined to agree, as typical of the Sioux characteristics. Number five shows a warrior in unmistakable Plains Indian head-dress. The horse is painted a realistic brown with distinctive bridle and ornamental plume. The Indian is seated on a red and green blanket without a saddle, and he wears boots but no spur.

Figure 6 shows a spade, SetUp by which might be Mexican or Indian, but I've classified it Indian because of the bradvs showing so prominently. The spade is missing is quite artistic. It is a brown card with a brown top and two bright red legs—an unrealistic but very attractive design. Note the Arbiter出差降 circuit. The next four illustrations—#7, #8, and 7—are the Indian pictures dressed in headdresses such as we know for the American Artists. The Arbiter出差降 circuit. The next four illustrations—#7, #8, and 7—show Indians wearing headdresses such as are worn for the American Artists. The Arbiter出差降 circuit. The next four illustrations—#7, #8, and 7—show Indians wearing headdresses such as are worn for the American Artists. The Arbiter出差降 circuit. The next four illustrations—#7, #8, and 7—show Indians wearing headdresses such as are worn for the American Artists. The Arbiter出差降 circuit. The next four illustrations—#7, #8, and 7—show Indians wearing headdresses such as are worn for the American Artists.
4 An Indian mounted on a lively horse presented as a caballero of cups from an Apache pack of cards.

5 Plains Indian warrior from a Sioux pack collected in 1893. This artist presented his figures in great detail; thus they are exceptionally valuable as portraits of those settling the Western plains as seen by an Indian.

6 Well-mounted and well-dressed figure apparently wearing clothes bought in settlements and judged to be Indian because of the braids showing beneath the Mexican hat.

7 Two Apache gan or spirit dancers recognizable because of the typical "ear" masks. They are shown on the sides of coins and of cups.

8 Sota of cups presents a gan dancer wearing an elaborate mask and costume in material typical of woven Indian blankets. He also wears the striped "cartridge belt."

9 Mounted Apache wearing a crook from a rawhide pack collected from a Sioux Indian about 1870. These cards evidently migrated north, probably having been won by the Sioux as a gambling stake.

10 Fine figure of a horse and Mexican rider strikingly painted in brown, bright red and black with white on the rider's shirt front. The curving baton-like object is the artist's version of the traditional cup symbol.

11 All the four sotas in this Apache pack present men in the riding costume of more prosperous Spanish-Mexican. Two figures show pistols at the hips.

12 Exotic Mexican figure painted in deep black and yellow as the cuadrado or clubs. Note how carefully the corner ends of the cards have been rounded. Most, but not all, of the skin cards have been so trimmed.
The next figure, #13, is of a Mexican that might well be seen on the dusty streets of a town or settlement.

Young Mexican cavaliers loved to dress up. Matthew C. Field, a promising young American writer, spent a summer on the Santa Fe Trail in 1839 and he describes a colorful young cavalier such as Indians might have seen. He says this young Mexican was mounted on "a remarkably large and well-fed mule, with saddle and other gear gorgeously decorated with silver, and little bells and ornaments jingling as he rode up... This young Spaniard was the fine gentleman of Santa Fe, the very pink of the aristocracy..."

"His sombrero was an enormous, heavy, broad-brimmed beaver with a thin cord of gold wound around it several times... Beneath his dark and raven looks... stone with dazzling effect... His jacket of black cloth was covered with frogs and braid, and fitted him with exquisite neatness. He wore a shirt of American make, or at least not differing at all from our fashion, and round his neck a very elegant black silk handkerchief. He wore no vest, two breast pins glittered in his bosom, and a long, silk sash was wound in many folds around his waist. Suspenders they never wear. The sash, folded tightly around the top of the pantaloons, is the only support given to the habit. These pantaloons have more peculiarity about them than any other part of a Mexican's dress. The outside seam of each leg is left open from the hip down, for the purpose of exposing the white drawers beneath, which are made extremely wide... His boots, too, caught our attention; they were made to lace on the outside of the foot from the sole up, but were left flying open, and thus the white stocking was exposed. The long, silver epaulettes (spurs) were attached to the heel of the boot, buttoned across the instep with a broad strap, and hanging below the foot, so that it was always necessary to remove them upon dismounting..." These bell-bottom trousers with the short, colorful jacket were carefully noted by many of the Apache artists, as in Figures #14, #15, and #16.

Two other personages from the Mexican scene were the Catholic padre and the Mexican soldier. Figure #17 might well be a padre jogging on his mule across the desert between Missions. Figure #18 appears to be a Mexican soldier like those who were sent to protect the settlements and ranchos from the Indians.

Anglo-Americans streamed across the Mississippi on a wide front. Our talented Sioux artist skillfully and interestingly presents some of these he saw on the Western plains. In this pack a date, 1855, is inked on the four of coins. We do not know if this was the artist's date or the collector's date, but it is rather late in the century. Figure #19 shows a fur trapper in typical mountain dress. Figure #20 is a beautifully appointed soldier who was of the type being sent by the American government to make the West safe for settlers. Figure #21 shows a type of settler that was arriving at that time.
Now going south toward Apache country, I've picked four quite different characters that might be seen on the Santa Fe Trail and in the settlements and army camps. Figure 22 shows a red and black trader possibly riding with his wagon loaded with western trading goods. Figure 23 is a relaxed settler or trail rider wandering the settlement streets. The last two figures are certainly more prosperous merchants in coats and more formal trousers (Figures 24 and 25). Figure 25 is from a later pack painted by a Yuma Indian and collected at Yuma in 1905. It may well represent a tourist who was already on his way to sunny California. He is very sporting in pink trousers, yellow coat, black vest and feathered straw hat.

The last portraits to which I would like to draw attention are not strictly pictures of westerners, yet I feel they contribute to our conception of what Apaches were experiencing during this period of western expansion. It is understandable that many of the Indians who got down to the actual work involved in making a pack of rawhide cards should do it in the simplest and easiest way. Simple matchstick-like figures would have been adequate to identify the three types of figure cards. It is perhaps significant that most artists were not satisfied with this but attempted to embellish their figures in some way. Illustration 26 shows no attempt at reality but is rather a simple, child-like design—a fantasy figure.

The artist of the next illustration (27) seems to have had "superman" dreams. None of the twelve men figures painted by this Indian are enclosed by the edges of the card; heads, hands or feet always extend off the edge. Was he unconsciously protesting the Anglo and Mexican invaders who were threatening his personal independence and his way of life? All his men have big torsos and heavy, muscular shoulders. They are decorated in unusual ways. In this illustration, for example, the whole figure is painted in orange with red dots and with red and black fringe decorating the costume. The two delightful kings shown in illustration 28 seem to point to an artist with a sense of humor. They are painted by the same Indian as the lively dancer in illustration 21, so we know he was well capable of painting a realistic figure. The two kings are completely fantastic, neither influenced by the traditional kings on the Mexican printed cards nor by those appearing on the cards of other Apaches. They are even more amusing and delightful when seen in their colors of orange, blue and yellow.

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24 Tall American businessman dressed in a rather formal coat and trousers. The height of some Americans must have impressed this artist. Again we find the arrow used for the suit symbol. From the same pack as #17.

25 Very carefully drawn and painted set of coins. Collected from a Yuma Indian artist, Yuma, California in 1905, with other Indian articles painted in similar colors. This pack was probably never played with by Indians.

26 Simple presentation of a caballero or clubman by an artist who clearly had no practice or skill in drawing but who wanted to impress us with the size and importance of man.

27 Apache set of clubs by an Indian artist who wanted to impress us with the size and importance of man.

28 Two fantasy figures, very much unremarked, from an Apache pack collected about 1903.
The next fantasy figure illustrated in #29 is a favorite of many people. Some might argue that this artist was too strongly influenced by the king in ceremonial Spanish court robes appearing on the Mexican printed cards. However, he has introduced his own feeling for decorating large and small areas with all-over patterns to make an unusually attractive design. He then proclaims his own sense of humor in the jaunty feather on the cap.

The designs on some of the skin cards cause us to wonder how Apaches, living most of their lives at a subsistence level, roaming the mountain valleys, could produce the figures they did. Two of the figures which strain our understanding are in the last two illustrations (#30 and #31). This pack was bought from an Indian woman near Fort Bowie, Arizona, in 1876 by an American settler. These two figures, together with the caballeros in illustrations #6 and #10, are all from the same pack. The king figure is even more unusual than #28, being utterly unlike either Mexican kings or those done by other Apaches, although the figure does wear the traditional king’s crown. The colors are unusually pleasing: subtle, soft yellows and greens with black outline. Note the elaborate necklace and the chain belt.

The soto figure seems to wear knee breeches like the traditional Spanish page, but there the similarity ends. The stylized skirt or skirted jacket with its elaborate under-vest is completely unlike any costume appearing on either Mexican or Apache cards. Again there is an ornate necklace. Perhaps the most unusual feature of both of these cards is the chain arm. This artist painted four of his twelve figures with chain arms; why, we do not know. This feature does not appear on any of the other Apache cards, so it must have been a personal quirk.

It is amazing that an Indian, living most of his life as a nomad in the mountains and possibly only occasionally visiting raw pioneer settlements where there were no artistic advantages, could conceive and execute such delicate ballet-like figures. Certainly this particular Indian had a fertile imagination and unusual artistic ability.

The playing cards we have seen are, in the best sense, a true folk art. Folk art gives a view of an aspect of a culture presented on objects intimately connected with everyday life. This expression must be lovingly done, creating something beyond the minimal demands by an amateur for his own use. We have found these characteristics in the rawhide playing cards. The figures on the cards give us a dramatic expression, from the Indian point of view, of those who were settling the West in the last half of the 19th century.

Virginia Wayland has for fifteen years been exploring the history of playing cards. As the wife of a professor at the California Institute of Technology, she has had the opportunity of visiting many museum collections and the few serious students of playing card history in the United States and Europe while traveling with her husband. Though interested in all playing card history, she has concentrated on American Indian cards because they are the unique contribution of her own country and on English late 17th century cards because they reflect so interestingly aspects of the culture of this particular period. With her husband Mrs. Wayland has written and published three books, all relating to the 17th century English cards—Of Carving, Cards & Cookery, The Winstanley Geographical Cards and Francis Barlow’s Sketches for the Meal Tub Plot Playing Cards. She is at present working on a complete study of the 64 packs of American Indian cards she has located and photographed in 34 international collections.

This unusually attractive yellow, red, and black king figure was painted by the same artist as illustration #14 and shows many of the same design characteristics.

Most unusual presentation of a king of swords; quite outside native Apache cultural patterns. The soft colors are unusually pleasing.

Soto of swords painted in rust red, black, green, and rich brown. Note the inexplicable chain arm.