Troubling the Cold War Logic of Annihilation: Apocalyptic Temporalities in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

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COLD WAR MILITARIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES HAS LONG BEEN acknowledged to depend on two interlocking premises. First, as Tony Jackson and Jodi Kim have pointed out, the Cold War nuclear threat was predicated on a *contingent* possibility of annihilation, of genocide conducted in a sudden flash of light (Jackson 325–26; Kim 3–4, 248n9). Sites of Cold War conflict—military bases, NATO or Warsaw Pact cities—*might* be consumed in sudden nuclear holocaust, or they might not. Whether the powers able to bring about this mass death are understood to be the Soviet Union and China or, in post–Cold War politics, to be rogue states and terrorists, military power in the United States since 1949 has at least in part been based on the contingent possibility of mass death in North America. The United States' power, as a result, is continually shadowed by its negative: the possibility of national oblivion. The coupling of power with potential annihilation, moreover, has colored United States culture. The resultant anxieties can be seen in everything from *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) to *The Road* (2006). Second, United States war planners have responded to the threat of destruction by developing preemptive and second-strike capabilities on a massive scale. The United States can, in other words, bring about holocausts of its own.

I suggest that a powerful and largely unrecognized critique of this logic has emerged from American Indian writers, particularly Sherman Alexie. I say this critique is unacknowledged because, although Alexie is widely taught in ethnic studies courses, few scholars have read his work within the "broader frame of reference" that Clemens Spahr calls for (161).[1] But in the works of American Indian writers like Alexie we find an engagement with Cold War nuclear logic that reveals its continuity with other "total war" military thinking. This engagement shows that the apocalyptic dreams of the nuclear

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age are part of a longer history of apocalypticism. American Indian writers are uniquely equipped to critique the logic of United States military power, and they have: from Mitch Cullin's *The Post-war Dream* (2008) to Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), and even John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854). Ever since American Indian writers have been writing fiction, many of their texts have contained powerful and often overlooked critiques of United States militarization and of the rationale that sees in the contingent potential of apocalypse a justification for preemptive, apocalyptic violence.

But *apocalypse* contains multiple, overlapping meanings. The word's first meaning in English is simply "revelation," as in the prophecy revealed to John of Patmos by God in the final book of the Christian Bible. *Apocalypse* here refers not to the end of the world but to the knowledge of the end of the world. Only later did the conventional present-day understanding of the word emerge: apocalypse as the end ("Apocalypse"). And yet "the end of the world" is misleading because in Christian theology the end functions as prelude to rebirth. This is why, I suggest, the apocalyptic dreams of United States military power are seductive. The ubiquitous end of the world described in Cold War cultural productions brings not a total rupture with the past but an opportunity to remake it in an imagined future. American Indian writers, I suggest, have done more than reveal the apocalyptic dimensions of United States military power. They have offered a way of unsettling the ostensibly redemptive promise of apocalyptic, total-war violence. This disruption is critical because, rather than rebirth, sudden acts of massive violence have actually produced what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence."

For Nixon, slow violence is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, an attritional violence that is not typically viewed as violence at all" (2). For example, it is the ongoing violence done by the presence of Agent Orange after the official withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam, causing thousands of deaths and birth defects over decades, and not the violence of the United States' defoliation campaign itself (13–14). For Nixon, the problem of slow violence is one of apprehension. He asks, "How do we bring home—and bring emotionally to life—threats that take time to wreak their havoc, threats that never materialize in one spectacular, explosive, cinematic scene?" (14). American Indian writers offer one answer by unsettling the apocalyptic logic of military thinking in the United States and revealing its violent dimensions, fast and slow. Alexie's apocalyptic narration unsettles the conventional story of apocalypse, a story of rupture and rebirth. Alexie reveals the inescapable link between dreams of spectacular violence and the slow, attritional violence that develops as a consequence of these dreams.

His first short story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), is emblematic of this intervention. Released in a twentieth-anniversary edition in 2013 (Alexie and Walter), the collection continues to be read as a break from the earlier "Native American renaissance," to borrow Kenneth Lincoln's phrase (8). This renaissance was ostensibly marked by "a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms" (Lincoln 8). Alexie's text is more iconoclastic, funnier, and more idiosyncratic than "renewal of oral traditions" implies, and this is perhaps why so many critics have, as Tom Farrington puts it, voiced concerns about the text's "cultural authenticity" (521). Despite these critical concerns, the collection has achieved something close to canonical status in the ethnic studies classroom and in the broader culture. One of a small number of texts that represent American Indian literature to nonspecialists, it offers students, scholars, and casual readers a chance to un-

derstand Indian life, from reservation culture to humor, from sports to the pull of tradition to the ongoing struggle against racism.[2] But far less attention is paid to the way that Alexie's text allows readers to consider the non-Indian world—the primarily white culture of militarism in the United States to which Alexie also responds. By suggesting that his text speaks in and upends the apocalyptic dimensions of United States military power, I hope to make a twofold intervention. I propose that his text offers an urgent and largely ignored critique of the apocalyptic logic of United States militarism and that logic's slowly unfolding consequences. I also offer an example of a reading practice, a way to reconsider newly canonical American Indian literature as making visible the global routes of a United States culture against which that literature is ostensibly counterpoised.

The culture to which I refer offers apocalyptic narratives with a fairly consistent structure: a sudden rupture leads to a less-than-total destruction of civilization in the United States, a small group of survivors lives on, and this narrow remainder begins to rebuild a purified version of the nation and, sometimes, to avenge its losses. Alexie's stories systematically deploy an indigenous perspective to unsettle this dyad of apocalyptic fantasy and military ruthlessness. His characters narrate holocausts that have already happened, that will happen, that are happening. Alexie consequently redraws the Cold War map, linking colonial sites in the United States, such as Indian reservations and uranium mines, with sites of the United States military's violence abroad. The collection speaks in the grammar of the mid-century thriller. In one surreal moment, George Armstrong Custer presses "the button"; in another, a quiet child suddenly says "$E = MC^2$"; in a third, a hurricane making landfall on the United States Pacific Coast is "like Hiroshima or Nagasaki" (104, 128, and 6). And yet instead of playing out the apocalyptic endings of United States culture—endings in which survivors are purified and reborn—Alexie reveals the slow violence of apocalyptic aftermaths. He demonstrates that the ongoing physical presence of United States power on and around the Spokane Reservation (in the form of a uranium mine, an air force base, and a police presence) literally and figuratively poisons the land and people.[3] For a Spokane or Coeur d'Alene Indian, the apocalypse is not a potentiality; it is an ongoing reality and a remembered past. Alexie's work, then, critiques the fiction that nuclear weapons represent a moment of historical rupture, indicating instead that nuclear weapons are a continuation of the military logic that has historically privileged a fear of the future over an awareness of the past and present. And the historical and spatial position of Indians, as the targets of this logic, connects them to a global matrix of United States power and to its ongoing, slow consequences.

Mainstream United States culture, moreover, requires this critique. As Jodi Kim (248n9) and Donald Pease have pointed out, in some ways the Cold War never really ended. The preemptive logic of George H. W. Bush's new world order (which predates *The Lone Ranger and Tonto*'s publication) and that of the war on terror (during which the collection was rereleased with two previously unpublished stories) both constitute a prolonged coda to the Cold War logic of potential annihilation. United States military expansion during the Cold War was predicated on the potential destruction of the nation. The RAND Corporation scholar Herman Kahn's still-frightening (and infamous) work of military strategy *On Thermonuclear War* (1960) includes the phrase "we need" more than ninety times, proposing the maintenance or procurement of weaponry able to keep the United States' losses below forty million in the event of hostilities.[4] And one has only to look at the legitimate concern about "loose nukes" today to see that, in some ways, United

States military power depends on a similar fear of mass death in North America and elsewhere. Alexie's collection responds to the Cold War's false endings and to the ubiquitous radioactive land of postapocalyptic novels, films, and television shows by invoking the actually radioactive land of the Spokane Reservation. Alexie, then, offers a window onto the slowly unfolding apocalypse: not the coming end of the world but the remembered end; not postapocalyptic rebirth but the slow violence of apocalyptic aftermaths.

The Apocalyptic Temporalities of United States Culture

To explore how Alexie's collection offers an indigenous critique of United States military power, we must answer two questions. First, how have past critics and cultural producers conceptualized the Cold War's apocalyptic nuclear threat? In particular, I am interested in the way the contingency of annihilation—the uncertain possibility of a holocaust—structures how United States Americans have been conditioned to think about nuclear war and war more broadly. In a universe of possible holocausts, all preemptive wars are ultimately defensive. Annihilation of an enemy is justifiable, by this logic, to prevent annihilation of one's own nation (although, as I will show, the lineage of this thinking stretches to the period before the advent of nuclear weapons). Second, how does Alexie's collection challenge this thinking? If the nuclear threat is contingent, how does indigenous experience—which includes the memory of past holocausts—refigure military logic? Alexie, I will argue, disrupts the Cold War's contingent time and replaces it with a slow temporality that remembers holocausts and notes their ongoing repercussions. While the United States military patrols the postcolonial world in the name of preventing future genocides (in Israel, South Korea, and so on), Alexie calls attention to the ongoing colonization of North America, the site of past, unresolved acts of ethnic cleansing.[5] This linking of the colonized reservation world with the ostensibly decolonized global South answers nationalist narratives by revealing that the two sites represent a distinction without a difference. His work disrupts a forgetful military logic that looks only to the unrealized holocausts of the future and ignores the traumas and ruptures of the past and present. But before discussing Alexie's strategies for disrupting this military logic, we must first turn to the logic itself.

Jacques Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)" is a useful guide to this. Derrida does not see the simultaneous emergence of deconstruction and the potential of nuclear destruction as coincidental. In his fourth missile/missive, he reminds his readers that in imagining nuclear holocaust, we are "dealing hypothetically with the total and remainderless destruction of the archive." Because we are waiting for an annihilation that might never arrive, we exist in an age defined by the deferral of absolute knowledge. Derrida goes on, "Literature belongs to this nuclear epoch, that of the crisis and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical and ahistorical horizon of an absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse, without revelation of its own truth, without absolute knowledge" (27). Tony Jackson sums up Derrida's claims by writing that thermonuclear war, "what most people take to be the end of the world," is in some sense a continually anticipated but continually deferred event (325).[6] Nuclear apocalypse is a contingent possibility. But I suspect that Jackson's phrase "the end of the world" is misleading, despite its ubiquity. Although there are debates about whether a massive nuclear exchange would eradicate the human species, in mainstream cultural discourse in the United States human beings almost always survive. It is beyond the scope of this essay to fully argue this claim, but a few examples will illustrate my point.

While works involving the total destruction of humanity have certainly been made, ostensibly postapocalyptic works more often feature some fraction of human survival or rebirth. At the end of Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach* (1957), nearly every character swallows a pill to quietly die before suffering radiation poisoning, but Captain Dwight Towers and his crew are still alive on the final page (although they, admittedly, also plan to kill themselves after scuttling the boat [325]).[7] Most post-nuclear-war literature offers a more explicit picture of human survival or regeneration. In the film adaptation of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1960), for instance, a nuclear apocalypse is made explicit, but equally explicit is the human future of postapocalyptic renewal. This tradition of human survival continues with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), in which, although things could "not be put right again," survivors nonetheless live on (287). My point here is that, while nuclear holocaust could cause Derrida's "total and remainderless destruction," it is in fact understood conventionally to entail the destruction of civilization. When we think of the end of the world, we do not picture the actual end: we imagine the son in *The Road* wandering away from the corpse of his father; we imagine Captain Dwight Towers cruising into the Pacific with a steely crew of loyal sailors; we imagine Rod Taylor in *The Time Machine* returning to the future to help the Eloi rebuild human civilization. This devastated survival is, I think, a structural element of the way narratives work. It is difficult to tell the story of an empty landscape. But the result is that when cultural producers imagine nuclear holocaust, they imagine survival, fractured continuity, and rebirth.

It is important, then, to remember that this is the experience of the First Nations in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere in North America. Even if they did not experience an apocalypse in the literal sense (the world itself did not end), they certainly experienced something akin to the massive rupture imagined by postapocalyptic novels and movies.[8] Alexie illustrates this. The 1862 smallpox epidemic, which *Lone Ranger and Tonto* refers to obliquely, provides an important example. First, some background is necessary. In March 1862, the steamer *Brother Jonathan* made its way to Victoria, Vancouver Island, from San Francisco. One passenger, infected with smallpox, developed symptoms on the journey. The traveler was inadequately quarantined, and upon the ship's arrival in Victoria, a smallpox epidemic spread rapidly throughout the region (Van Rijn 542; Boyd 172–201). Because white settlements had adequate inoculation and vaccination campaigns, set up quarantine hospitals, and destroyed infected clothing and blankets, the casualties among whites were relatively few. Kiran Van Rijn documents how British and United States policies exacerbated the problem of infection among the people of First Nations—policies that ranged from the withholding of information about inoculation to the militarily enforced expulsion of not only sick but also healthy indigenous people from white settlements. This expulsion accelerated the spread of the disease as individuals returned to their families or made their way to other settlements (551, 548). Van Rijn also discusses the often repeated story that two white traders, Jim Taylor and Angus McLeod, gathered blankets from the dead at Nancoolten and sold them to the Tsîlhoqot'in, starting a new outbreak. While the veracity of this incident is unclear—Van Rijn attempted to track down its original source but came up empty—the larger point still holds. The policies of Anglo-American institutions in the region led to the annihilation of human life among First Nations (Van Rijn 558n32).

I suspect that Alexie refers to the 1862 smallpox outbreak when, in "A Drug Called Tradition," Junior experiences a vision and says, "*They're all gone, my tribe is gone*. Those blankets they gave us, infected with smallpox,

have killed us. I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick, too" (17). Geographically, at least, the link makes sense. The characters in the story live on the Spokane Reservation, near the site of the 1862 catastrophe. And yet I would suggest that it is not critical that we determine whether Alexie's text refers to this incident or to any of a number of others, such as the better-known incident involving Lord Jeffrey Amherst during the Seven Years' War. Alexie's lack of specificity calls attention to the apocalyptic dimensions of disease in North America—and to Amer-European military complicity. As Adrienne Mayor points out, in most references to smallpox blankets today "details such as time and place are mutable." Moreover, she writes, "mere mention of the blankets also works as a shorthand censure of Europeans' treatment of native people in the New World" (55, 54). By referring to smallpox blankets, Alexie's text conjures a verifiable record of mass deaths in North America and an accessible folkloric archive of symbols associated with that history.

In essence, Alexie brings his readers to a site of ethnic cleansing but then invokes not this single act but a long succession of acts that brought about the transformation of the world. The 1862 smallpox epidemic may not have been apocalyptic in a literal sense, but the invocation of smallpox blankets calls to mind white complicity in this and other epidemics, the collective result of which was the transformation of the Western Hemisphere. The allusion reminds readers that North America today is a postapocalyptic landscape. Recall, too, Junior's claim during his vision: "I'm the last, the very last, and I'm sick, too." His experience as the lone survivor recalls Cold War fantasies.[9] But it also recalls a longer tradition of lone survivors in literature, a tradition Jonathan Elmer recounts. This tradition includes Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). "In each case," Elmer writes, "a more or less thinly characterized figure finds himself radically isolated in a surreal environment from which much of the mediating social reality has been stripped away" (9). In other words, there is a long tradition of abstracting the ostensibly representative individual in order to personify the collective.

And yet I would suggest that Alexie's project—written more than a century after the texts with which Elmer concerns himself—does something slightly different. Junior announces that he is the lone survivor of a kind of apocalypse, but he is not actually the last, and the event he describes was only *part* of an apocalyptic transformation. He makes his announcement during a vision as he sits among friends, all of whom are engaged in the act of remembering the violence that produced the present world. We do not have the "remainderless destruction" Derrida describes, but we are nonetheless faced with the aftermath of an ended civilization. As in the 1960 adaptation of *The Time Machine*, to take one example, we are left with a thin, imperiled community living amid the ruins of the past. The key difference between Alexie's postapocalypse and more mainstream versions, then, is that the Indian community in Alexie's text is unable to rebuild because the slow violence of reservation life continues to unfold (Nixon 2).

Alexie repeats this motif of remembered apocalypse throughout the collection. He does this in two ways. First, he connects his characters to the memory of actual, nearly remainderless historical devastation. But, second, he calls attention to how this destruction is linked to United States military logic. In "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," Thomas has a vision in which he becomes one of the eight hundred horses Colonel George Wright ordered destroyed after the battle of the Spokane Plains in 1858. Patrycja Kurjatto-Renard writes that this scene is paradoxically one of cross-cultural understanding because the soldiers in the account come to respect the bravery of the horse Thomas inhabits, allowing him to escape. This may be true,

but it is also important to keep in mind—as Kurjatto-Renard acknowledges—that the scene recounts a real event and that Wright's goal in destroying the horses was to "destroy the very basis of the existence of the tribe" (237–38). The wars between the United States military and the Pacific Northwest Indians were perhaps not literally apocalyptic, and yet United States military strategy during these conflicts contained apocalyptic dimensions. It is only through recognition of these dimensions that Alexie will allow readers to imagine cross-cultural understanding. Throughout the short stories, Alexie keeps memories of violence clearly within the narrative frame.[10]

Moreover, the collection links these memories of destruction to imagined apocalyptic moments in the present or near future. The clearest instance of this practice appears in "Distances," a story that begins when the narrator tells us, "After this happened, after it began, I decided that Custer could have, must have, pressed the button, cut down all the trees, opened up holes in the ozone, flooded the earth. Since most of the white men died and most of the Indians lived, I decided only Custer could have done something that backward" (104). The catastrophic history of nineteenth-century settler-colonial violence has been inverted: in place of massacres of Indian tribes and pandemics that disproportionately struck Indians, we have a single United States military defeat elaborated into a nuclear genocide. Custer, the army colonel whose hubris led to the annihilation of his own cavaliers, is just crazy enough to have "pressed the button" and destroyed the wrong population. But the logic of nuclear destruction here remains. The point of "the button" is genocide—the remainderless annihilation of a people. (It is important to remember that, even here, only "most of the white men" die—some survive, although we do not see them in the narrative.) Derrida claims that although the possibility of nuclear war represents a radical break with the past because it "has no precedent," the way we talk about war has not changed since Homer, Quintilian, or Cicero (23, 24). His point is that despite the unprecedented potential of nuclear weapons, the calculations people make about wars have not fundamentally altered. Alexie narrates the link between the logic of nineteenth-century warfare (remember Colonel Wright's goal: to "destroy the very basis of the existence of the tribe") and the logic of nuclear war: both seek the total destruction of an enemy (Kurjatto-Renard 237).

One might be inclined to believe that the doctrines of deterrence and of "limited wars" (in Iraq, Vietnam, and Korea) make clear a difference. By this logic, prenuclear wars could be apocalyptic (one could attempt to bring about the "end of the world" for an enemy), but the ability of nuclear weapons to bring about the "end of the world" for everyone paradoxically defers the end. In an evenly matched nuclear conflict, each side can bring about the "end of the world" for the other—and so all nations have an interest in avoiding war. This is the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, and it is aptly called MAD. I think it is also misleading. In fact, many military thinkers believed throughout the Cold War and perhaps continue to believe that one can win a nuclear conflict by employing the centuries-old logic of military ruthlessness. The best example of this comes from Herman Kahn, who writes that "thermonuclear war is likely to be an *unprecedented catastrophe* for the defender. Depending on the military course of events, it may or may not be an unprecedented catastrophe for the attacker" (10). Nuclear war, like conventional war, presumably favors the aggressor who employs surprise and shows little mercy.

Other thinkers were concerned less with surprise and more with ruthlessness. Consider SIOP-62. The Single Integrated Operational Plan for Fiscal Year 1962, about which President John F. Kennedy was briefed in September 1961, was designed, in the words

of Joint Chiefs Chairman Lyman L. Lemnitzer, to "permit the United States to prevail in the event of general nuclear war" (qtd. in Sagan 22). Lemnitzer took an approach different from Kahn's, believing that the United States could "prevail" over the Soviet Union even if the former were the defender—but only if United States military forces launched a full arsenal of nuclear weapons against an "optimum-mix" of targets, likely resulting in 285 million Sino-Soviet deaths and an unspecified number of deaths in the United States (qtd. in Sagan 36–37; see also Rhodes 87). Or consider Secretary of State Dean Rusk's comments to the president and his advisers during the Cuban missile crisis: "Mr. Khrushchev may have in mind . . . that, uh, uh, he knows that we have a substantial nuclear superiority, but he also knows that we don't really live under fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that, uh, he has to live under fear of ours" (qtd. in Trachtenberg 177). While Rusk was not advocating full-scale war with the Soviet Union (far from it: he read the incident as a political problem with a political solution), he took it as an article of faith that the United States could win a nuclear war.

Continuity exists between this nuclear-war thinking and non-nuclear-war thinking. The logic Colonel Wright employed when he struck suddenly against the Spokane Indians in 1858 and destroyed not only their means of waging war but their "basis of existence" continued into the twentieth century and animated nuclear and nonnuclear strategic planning (Kurjatto-Renard 237). Ward Wilson writes of the United States bombing campaign against Japan that "beginning in March 1945, US bombers had conducted a campaign of air attacks against Japanese cities that killed more than 330,000 civilians and wounded 472,000, made more than 8 million homeless, and burned more than 177 square miles of urban area" (168). One might conclude that United States military planners' pre-nuclear-war goals included destroying the "basis of existence" of the Japanese state. And this logic continued with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While many present-day scholars think of nuclear war as a transnational catastrophe—the destruction of almost all human life—the point of war from the perspective of the war planner is to destroy *enemy* life and infrastructure. Strategic military planners—from Wright to Khan to Lemnitzer—depend on a particular logic: if the attacker moves quickly and destroys everything, human life and the means of production, the enemy will be annihilated, and retaliation will be impossible. One can bring about the end of an enemy's world.

Moreover, Alexie positions this logic as part of a long Amer-European genealogy (although Indians co-opt it, as we will see). In "Indian Education," the reader is introduced to Randy, a sixth grader and "the new Indian kid from the white town of Springdale." After Randy arrives in his new school, he is tormented by Stevie Flett, who "called him a squawman, called him a pussy, called him a punk." The two meet on the playground, where Stevie challenges Randy to throw the first punch. Randy does so, and he breaks Stevie's nose. Alexie's narrator, then, leaves us with a kind of moral: Randy teaches "the most valuable lesson about living in the white world: *Always throw the first punch*" (175–76). This is the logic of Colonel Wright, in 1858, and of Herman Kahn, in 1961, reduced to a playground confrontation: strike first and strike ruthlessly. I do not mean to imply that "Indian Education" offers up a direct connection to military logic. If the story is considered independently of the collection in which it appears, the lesson—"*Always throw the first punch*"—is simply another example of the way racism begets acts of interpersonal violence (176). And yet in the context of the text's references to elements of political history, from Wright to smallpox blankets, the reader would be forgiven for thinking that Randy has learned a larger lesson about how

the culture of the United States frames acts of violence, personal or political. The logic of striking first and striking ruthlessly applies as easily to battlefields as to playgrounds.

In "Distances," Alexie extrapolates this logic to the scale of global holocaust. In doing so, he indicts the colonized response to United States power: a strike-first thinking that mimics the logic of United States military ruthlessness. (This is similar to the way he indicts the Randys of the playground—with understanding but with obvious ambivalence about their strategy for dealing with the white world.) After surmising that Custer "pressed the button" and ended the world, the narrator thinks better of his theory and wonders whether "the Ghost Dance finally worked" (104). This remark refers to the 1890 Lakota Ghost Dance, part of a movement inaugurated in 1887 by Wovoka, a Paiute Indian born around 1858 in Mason Valley, Nevada. Rani-Henrik Andersson writes:

> The basic idea of the ghost dance was that there would be a time when all the Indians, living and dead, would live happily forever in a world where no death, sickness, or misery would exist. There was no room for white people in the new world; only Indians were to survive the great transformation, whether an earthquake or some other kind of natural phenomenon. (27)

The Ghost Dance, in other words, structurally resembles mainstream apocalyptic fantasies, but it reverses them. Andersson writes that Wovoka's dance, which emerged from Christian revival movements, contained all three traditional senses of apocalypse: revelation, destruction, and rebirth. The idea of the dance was revealed to the prophet in a vision, and the dancers would, according to this vision, bring about through their performance both the end of the world and its renewal (25–27). I should be clear that I am not suggesting a moral equivalence between the logic of the Ghost Dance and that of the United States military. Numerous accounts of the dance, including the unevenly reliable firsthand version offered in John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (198–99), reveal that it was entirely ceremonial and never violent. I am suggesting, however, that Alexie expresses understandable skepticism about freedom movements that reproduce the logic of apocalypticism and violence, that hope for—as Black Elk described it—a "whirlwind" that will "crush everything on this world" (qtd. in Neihardt 198). Alexie's skepticism is built on historical understanding. On 23 December 1890, the apocalyptic revival movement was used by a United States army colonel, James Forsyth, as a pretext for surrounding a Lakota encampment at Wounded Knee Creek. When a scuffle the next day led to the discharge of a rifle, Forsyth's artillery opened fire. By the time the chaos ended, between 160 and 300 Indian men, women, and children lay dead ("Wounded Knee Massacre" 349–50).

Perhaps this is why Alexie's treatment of Indian apocalypticism is nearly as critical as his treatment of military examples of the same logic. In "Distances" the postapocalypse is not the one prefigured by the Ghost Dance—one in which the remainder "would live happily forever" (Andersson 27). Instead, Alexie gives readers a picture of ongoing trauma. Tremble Dancer has "burns and scars all over her legs," possibly from radiation poisoning (105). Others display the same symptoms. And conflict has emerged between the "Urbans" and the "Skins," the Indians who lived in the city and on the reservation, respectively. In this way, Alexie's story functions as apocalypse (revelation), even as it narrates an apocalypse (an end of things). And yet it is, finally, a critique. Attempts to annihilate enemies and to be reborn in the aftermath will always backfire: Custer "pressed the button" and destroyed his own nation accidentally; the Ghost Dance works but ultimately poisons the Indians who employ it. This is a devastating critique of Kahn's

military logic, which predicted that the United States economy would recover within twenty years if "only" forty million people in the United States were killed in a nuclear strike.[11] In Alexie's stories there is no recovery, and the memory of trauma is ongoing. It makes sense that this critique would emerge in the early 1990s and would remain relevant to a post-9/11 audience. As Derrida points out, the hope that one nation might win a nuclear war persisted in military planning circles into the 1980s (26). Moreover, as I said above, the military logic advocating annihilation of an enemy can be read into prenuclear wars with First Nations and even into the First Nations themselves. People have long desired not only to defeat their imagined or real enemies but to extirpate them. In Alexie's world such desire only begets death, and hope for a more secure future after the apocalypse is revealed as a fraud. Alexie's characters live in the apocalyptic aftermath, the world after the destruction of everything and after the revelation of what that destruction must engender. Alexie's characters live with slow violence, and we will turn next to this rethinking of temporality.

The Slow-Moving Catastrophe

Until now, I have discussed possible future apocalypses (nuclear strikes, the Ghost Dance) and remembered past moments of violence (smallpox epidemics, massacres). But the most obvious way in which Alexie addresses the apocalypticism of United States power is by critiquing its presence on the Spokane Reservation and connecting this presence to sites of United States military power around the world. Alexie, in other words, reveals the slow violence of United States militarism—the way that an attempt to forestall the end, or to forget the endings that have already occurred, engenders a slow-moving catastrophe (Nixon 2). Consider, for instance, Midnite Mine. Alexie's collection is full of references to the uranium mine's presence on sovereign Indian land. Beginning with the discovery of uranium on the Spokane Reservation in 1954, Midnite Mine supplied yellowcake first to the military for nuclear weapons and then to private companies for civilian reactors, poisoning the surrounding land and groundwater (Cornwall). In "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor," Jimmy tells Simon that he has cancer (Alexie 157). As an article in the *Seattle Times* pointed out, "No one has done the difficult medical detective work" to prove whether the frequent incidences of cancer on the reservation were caused by the nearly thirty-year presence of a uranium mine and processing plant so close to homes, but "there's ample evidence that uranium mining causes lung cancer and other fatal lung diseases." Moreover, studies of uranium mining on other reservations have shown conclusively that the presence of mines at those sites caused cancer (Cornwall).

In another short story, "The Fun House," a woman walks to the banks of Tshimakain Creek, where the water "was brown, smelled a little of dead animals and uranium," and says she will "probably get sick" after wading in (Alexie 79–80). While the story ends in a moment of triumph, a moment in which she reclaims her identity and a sense of her own power, the ongoing presence of uranium-poisoned water serves as a reminder of the forces that worked to deprive her of that identity. In "Flight," one of the two stories added in the 2003 edition, Joseph scoffs at the destructive potential of uranium. Alexie writes, "'Uranium has a half-life of one hundred thirty-five million years,' somebody told Joseph, and he said, 'Shit, I can tell you stories that will last longer than that'" (225). Uranium is a poisonous presence throughout the collection. Alexie's writing, then, links the apocalyptic with the geologic, the fast and deferred with the slow and ongoing. In other words, he invokes the present-tense violence of the postapocalyptic landscape: the violence of a *closed* uranium mine, of a landscape *after* the last war.

By doing so, Alexie sutures the temporality of United States military power and the temporality of its victims. He shows how the apocalyptic logic of United States power depends on an ignorance of the past and present; he shows also how past and present are visible to those who have been the targets of violence by the United States. For Nixon, the key question of slow violence is the question of visibility:

> Apprehension is a critical word here, a crossover term that draws together the domains of perception, emotion, and action. To engage slow violence is to confront layered predicaments of apprehension: to apprehend—to arrest, or at least mitigate—often imperceptible threats requires rendering them apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony. An influential lineage of environmental thought gives primacy to immediate sensory apprehension, to sight above all, as foundational for any environmental ethics of place. . . . How do we both make slow violence visible yet also challenge the privileging of the visible? (31–32)

I would suggest that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto* functions as just the "imaginative testimony" for which Nixon hopes. But this testimony does more than simply make visible the slow violence of Indian landscapes, with their uranium smells and story-length half-lives. Alexie reveals that the slow violence engendered by military logic is based on another kind of apprehension—an anxious premonition of deferred oblivion. Apocalypse is the continually postponed and partly desired moment of near-total destruction and rebirth, and Alexie's short story collection reveals that United States military power has long been dependent on apocalyptic premonitions. The result of this relation between the apocalyptic and the military is a curious sort of blindness. If we look always to the potential horrors of a deferred end of the world, we fail to see former and ongoing horrors. This is the problem of apocalyptic "fancy," as Ian Baucom has it: the "problem of a long-distance sympathy so extreme that" those who suffer are rendered "not just unfamiliar but invisible" (234). Alexie makes these sufferings visible by asking his readers to step outside United States military thinking for a moment and to look back at it from a position among its targets.

Alexie reveals, moreover, that the Indian reservation offers an ideal position from which to view the apocalyptic apprehensions of that thinking. Nearly thirty years ago, Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill coined the term "radioactive colonialism" to describe the relation between United States military power and Indian reservations in the twentieth century. "Outright colonies," according to LaDuke and Churchill, "do exist here in North America" (128). These colonies, they argue, have been central to United States nuclear military power. They point out that in 1974 all government-controlled uranium production took place on reservation land (108). American Indians, then, have been on the receiving end of both kinds of military violence, the fast and the slow. With an eye toward this history, writers like Alexie are uniquely positioned to make visible the interconnection between national apprehensions of oblivion and the ongoing, and often unrecognized, violence these apprehensions enable.

Thinking of the reservation as a colonial site allows us to redraw the map of United States power: to place the nation-state in the margins and the colonial and decolonized sites of its military action in the center. If we think of the uranium mine as a site of slow violence (or of "radioactive colonialism," to follow LaDuke and Churchill), then Alexie's frequent references to global military interventions by the United States make more sense. These accounts proliferate in the collection. Readers are told that "[t]he white people always want to fight someone and they always get the dark-skinned people to do the fighting" (120). Victor's father tells his son that Victor should not want to "fight a war

for this country" because "[i]t's been trying to kill Indians since the very beginning" (29). These accounts figure Indian soldiers for the United States not as instruments of the state's power but as its victims. They are linked to other victims in the global South, moreover. Indians have much in common, we learn in another story, with people who suffer "brutal things . . . in places like El Salvador" (186). By 1992, around the time of the collection's publication, the United States had spent twelve years and four billion dollars backing an anticommunist regime in El Salvador in its struggle against Marxist guerrillas, a struggle that had resulted in 75,000 Salvadoran deaths (Danner 10; Soares 58). Alexie's mention of "brutal things" in El Salvador is no oblique reference to a distant past. It refers to how a desire to defer a potential world order—in this case, a communist Latin America—enables ongoing violence that remains invisible to most people in the United States.

Alexie's collection forces us to look at the "terminally invisible" people of the past and present (Nixon 278). In another instance in the collection, these invisible subjects are revealed as victims even when they are part of a war's exterminating capacity. In Vietnam an "Indian boy . . . blew his fingers off when an M80 exploded in his hand" (152). Alexie confronts a United States military logic that is not new, not confined to the nuclear age, and in doing so his account makes legible a global network of connections among "brown-skinned people" for whom the apocalypse is not a potentiality but a present and ongoing reality.[12] The colonized and decolonized world—from its Indian reservations to its Salvadoran hinterlands to its Southeast Asian jungles—is a postapocalyptic landscape. And, perhaps most important, this landscape is inhabited by people who live with the ongoing repercussions of past acts of violence. The unnamed boy has only "a thumb left to oppose his future" (152). He is, like so many other victims of United States militarism, living with the aftermath of violence even as those all around him in the United States look to the potential violence of an imagined future.

When the World Does Not End

United States military violence has often been predicated on preempting an outsize catastrophe. Consider a few presidential examples. In October 2002 President George W. Bush defended his proposal for an invasion of Iraq in this way: "Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud" ("Bush"). Twenty years earlier, President Ronald Reagan imagined the threat of hemispheric violence emerging from the island nation of Grenada. In his October 1983 televised address, he said, "Grenada, we were told, was a friendly island paradise for tourism. Well, it wasn't. It was a Soviet-Cuban colony being readied as a major military bastion to export terror and undermine democracy. We got there just in time" ("Reagan Address"). In April 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower articulated his "falling domino" principle, later known as the domino theory, which ostensibly justified United States intervention in Vietnam. He predicted that "millions and millions and millions of people," from Burma to Indonesia, could fall under the sway of global communism ("Counting" 156). And a century before that, in August 1856, President Franklin Pierce predicted that "[i]n the Territories of Washington and Oregon," Indian tribes would continue "a war of extermination against the white inhabitants" (395). His address offered a justification of the military action against Spokane-area nations that Alexie would later refer to in "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" (96–97).

I offer these examples not to conflate their historical particularities but rather to suggest that United States military logic, while developing differently in different historical circumstances, nonetheless follows a famil-

iar temporal pattern. Military planners look to potential future catastrophes—to a flash of violence that has not yet come. White settlers in Washington and Oregon had not been exterminated, but their extermination could be imagined. Grenada was not a Soviet-Cuban colony, but it was "being readied" to become one. The "smoking gun" of Iraqi aggression never manifested itself as a "mushroom cloud," but such a cloud could be predicted and feared. United States military logic depends on apprehension—not visibility but anxiety about the imminence of violence. This is an apocalyptic temporality: the prophecy of sudden rupture that—like the mushroom cloud of an Iraqi bomb—might never arrive.

And yet this temporality seems persuasive only from a position inside United States military power. The future is unknowable, and catastrophic violence often occurs without warning. Prophecies of doom, therefore, are often mistaken. But such prophecies have consequences. To a writer like Alexie—who can stand simultaneously within the mainstream, militarized culture of the United States and without, in that culture's radioactive colonies—the terrible consequences of ignoring the past and the slow-moving present are obvious. Alexie, then, holds a position of privilege, but it is a curious sort of privilege. He can narrate the ways that United States military power, from the Spokane Plains to Wounded Knee to El Salvador, attempts to preempt an imagined apocalyptic future. In "Imagining the Reservation," Alexie asks the reader to imagine that "Crazy Horse invented the atom bomb in 1876" (149). Elsewhere the short story collection demonstrates what happens when the apocalyptic temporalities of militarism are inverted, when the Ghost Dance works or when Randy throws the first punch (104, 176). Here, as well, Alexie privileges forgiveness over retribution or preemption (150). And yet his central concern in this story and in others is to reveal that the dream of apocalyptic preemption is inescapably linked to a global network of nearly invisible, slow violence in the form of human and environmental catastrophes. Alexie invites us to imagine a past in which apocalyptic violence has been averted, and then he asks, "Would Lester FallsApart still be shoplifting in the 7-11?" (149).

The collection points to a present-tense slow violence and its matrix of interconnections. The stories privilege the perspective of American Indians in understanding the militarism of the United States' culture. They connect the history of violence in North America to that in the rest of the world. We need to recognize these links. The apocalyptic temporalities of violence committed by the United States are likely to persist in the twenty-first century. As Ward Wilson points out, the belief that one can win a nuclear war remains. Because future nuclear confrontations will not likely involve the entire arsenals of the United States, Russia, or China, "[t]he chance . . . of a nuclear war involving an exchange of only a handful of nuclear weapons is significant and continually increasing" (179). In practice, according to Wilson, this means that governments are more likely to believe that by deploying their nuclear arsenals, they can extirpate an enemy and suffer limited consequences. But I would argue that these changing geopolitical conditions exacerbate a pervasive mode of thinking about war that predates nuclear weapons. To understand the danger represented by this forgetful mode of thought—this mode that always looks to the unrealized future and obscures the present and past—we must look to those writers who have cause to remember obscured histories. We must consider, in other words, how we might live with one another in a world that is not ending.

Notes

1. The scholarship on Alexie's first short story collection is voluminous, but it can generally be divided

into three broad categories. Largely absent today are the 1990s-era critiques of his writing as "harmful pandering" to white expectations, to use Joseph L. Coulombe's characterization of the early debate (94). For these critiques, see Bird; Cook-Lynn; and Owens. Evans offers a cogent response to these criticisms that prefigures Coulombe's. More recently, scholars have read Alexie's early work either as an intervention into the mainstream culture of the United States, one that troubles stereotypes of indigenous peoples (Carroll 75; Roth; Slethaug), or as a kind of strategic adaptation of and negotiation between mainstream and indigenous cultures (Winkler; McGrath). Andrew Dix's work does not fit neatly into this framework. Dix is interested in the subtle "Red Power" subtext in Alexie's "otherwise cosmopolitan" collection of short stories, an observation I will build on here (73).

2. See, respectively, Slethaug; Coulombe; Winkler; Carroll; and Dix.

3. I will explore these references in greater detail throughout. I am referring to Fairchild Air Force Base, which is less than an hour's drive from the Spokane Reservation (Alexie 214). Alexie refers to the uranium poisoning of the local water supply throughout the collection (39, 79, 125, 225) and less frequently to the damage caused by a police presence (165).

4. For Kahn's chilling table of estimated casualties, see 20. His proposed purchases are too numerous to recount here, but one might start by reviewing his requirement for expanded missile and bomber forces and the distribution of tax revenues (279, 548).

5. Present-day Israel was occupied by the Ottoman Empire from 1516 until the First World War. In 1920 Israel became a protectorate of the British Empire as Mandatory Palestine. The present-day Jewish state was established in 1948 (Miller 2, 3, 14). South Korea was a territory of the Empire of Japan. The Meiji government of Japan began the process of colonization in 1876 but did not formalize it until 1905. Korea's colonial status officially ended with the Japanese surrender to the United States in 1945 (Dudden 52, 66, 64).

6. Pease is insightful here as well. He writes, "Hiroshima had turned the entire US social symbolic system into the afterimage of a collectively anticipated spectacle of disaster, a self-divided (rather than self-present) instant, that had always not yet taken place (hence always anticipated) but had nevertheless always already happened (in the lived experience of anticipated disaster)" (565).

7. Admittedly, this is a pretty bleak ending, even by the standards of postapocalyptic literature. Nonetheless, the (faint) possibility of human survival is on offer on the final page because Towers's submarine disappears over the horizon, still guided by its crew.

8. Charles C. Mann gives a good account of the debates about how many indigenous people lived in the Americas before 1492 and how many died as a result of contact with Europeans. The estimates of pre-1492 inhabitants have an extreme range, from the improbably low 8.4 million to the politically contentious 120 million (107–08). Regardless of the numbers, contact with Europeans resulted in a cultural transformation akin to the apocalypses portrayed in novels and films. This transformation brought the end of a particular world order and the birth of a radically new one.

9. Examples of the lone-survivor motif are too numerous to recount here, but even an examination of the first season of *The Twilight Zone* (1959–60) reveals the ubiquity of the nuclear-era fantasy of loneliness in an empty landscape. From the first episode, "Where Is Everybody?" to "The Lonely," "Time Enough at Last," and "I Shot an Arrow into the Air," the Cold War television program played on the anxious fantasy of finding oneself alone in a landscape emptied by disaster, nuclear or other.

10. Frequent references to Custer and Crazy Horse continue this logic of total destruction. Whites responded to Custer's defeat at Little Bighorn with bloodlust. Paul L. Hedren describes the often repeated manifestation of this: Buffalo Bill Cody scalped a Cheyenne warrior named Yellow Hair at the Battle of Warbonnet Creek, declaring it the "first scalp for Custer." Cody worked a re-creation of this moment—during which he held the "first scalp" aloft—into his stage show (16).

11. One thinks here of George C. Scott as General Buck Turgidson, offering a satiric defense of preemptive nuclear war in *Dr. Strangelove*: "I'm not saying we wouldn't get our hair mussed, but I do say no more than ten to twenty million killed, tops, depending on the breaks."

12. This is not to say Alexie excludes whites, but he is ambivalent toward their condition. When, on a flight, Victor and Thomas meet Cathy, a white former Olympic gymnast whose shot at competing was deferred because of the United States' boycott of the 1980 Olympics, Thomas tells her that she has "got a lot in common with Indians" because both she and Indians have been victimized by United States war logic. But Victor questions this commonality when he dismisses Cathy's friendliness toward him and Thomas, arguing that "everybody talks to everybody on airplanes" and that "we can't always be that way" (67).

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