

# Document Format

English 1406/1413/1423

# Formatting Basics

- A title page is required
- All essays should be double-spaced
- Use 12pt Times New Roman Font, 12 pt
- Use 1" or 2.54 cm margins (ie. most word processors default to this)
- The last page of each essay should be the works cited page in MLA format (see Chapter 7 of Casson and Writing Aids link on class web page)

# Title Page

PLASTIC INDIANS AND ABORIGINES:  
MOBILISING ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN A GLOBAL AGE

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# First Page

## Plastic Indians and Aborigines: Mobilising Aboriginal Identity in a Global Age

A block away from where my wife and I have been living during our sabbatical in Perth, on the main drag in the Perth suburb of Subiaco (Subi for locals), there is a little New Age store called "Wild Things" that sells, among other things, knickknacks of Aboriginal culture. The fact that artefacts of Aboriginal culture have been commodified to sell in a little shop in a suburb of Perth should be no surprise. Australian businesses have capitalised on Aboriginal culture, just as businesses in my home country of Canada have. Indeed, our respective provincial, state, and federal governments market our nations both to us and to international tourists by appealing to romanticised notions of Aboriginality: ads represent a palatable indigeneity, often at odds with real conditions of Aboriginal existence, to create a welcoming, exotic, inclusive, and indigenous image of the nation. So you should be no more surprised to find this little store in Subi, than you should be to find seemingly countless stores in the CBD selling didgeridoos and boomerangs that say I love Australia. Except that up until recently, as you walked by this shop, you would notice that the centrepiece of the shop window was a life-sized Aboriginal mannequin sitting in the lotus position—or in the words of my childhood, sitting Indian style—wearing the headdress of North American indigenous chiefdom.

The incongruous nature of that mannequin has been troubling me since my first days in Subi, so I would like to begin this paper on mobilising Aboriginal identity in the global age on a self-indulgent note by trying to answer a question: what does that mannequin signify in Subi? Of course, its meaning could vary with each passerby on Rokeby Road, but I will indulge in strategic essentialism, here, limiting interpretive perspective to a few salient subject positions.

# Subsequent Pages

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To its target consumer, a person who follows the philosophies of the New Age—one influenced directly or indirectly, by the writings of Baba Ram Dass, Judith Skutch, David Spangler, or Marilyn Ferguson with a little Carlos Castaneda thrown in for good measure<sup>1</sup>—to this person who sincerely believes in the interconnectness of things, in the accessibility of the spiritual world, perhaps, even in the god within us all, the mannequin is very meaningful: as a representation of an indigenous ideal, it symbolises an animist connection with nature, a holistic approach to Mother Earth and the physical and spiritual succour she represents. The New Age desire for spiritual convergence (this is a New Age term that has been adopted by the gurus of globalisation) is powerful enough to transform this dislocated mannequin made who knows where into a meaningful symbol of global indigeneity.

That just might be looking on the brighter side of things. Alternatively, the mannequin signals the pervasiveness of the global economy, and gives us some idea about how the New Age ethos fits within that economy<sup>2</sup>: signs and symbols that originate in North America have been manufactured, marketed, and mobilised for New Age consumers in Australia. It signals the postmodern condition: the fact that these idealised signs of Aboriginality have no recognisable trace to their origins tells us that culture—caught as it is within a globalising discourse—is in a state of flux. It signals the uninterrupted dominance of Aboriginal peoples by a capitalist system that continues to mask itself as Western liberalism.<sup>3</sup> Well-intentioned and not-so-well intentioned New Age producers and consumers spring from the Western liberal tradition. Paradoxically, they assert their agency, their will to self-determination, perhaps, even their resistance to the dominant ideology of global capitalism, by mobilising and exploiting an idealised Aboriginality. The product they are making and buying is instant indigeneity. Just add money, and a dose of good intention, and you too can be indigenous.

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But are these alternative readings of plastic Indians altogether *too* dark? One might argue that New Age consumers, enabled by the postmodern condition and the global economy, actually form strategic alliances with Aboriginal peoples through their consumption of indigeneity; and furthermore, that these potential alliances more than compensate for the appropriation of Aboriginal signs and symbols.<sup>4</sup> As Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo point out in their general definition of globalisation, in a globalised world “commodities drift briskly from one locality to another, becoming primary mediators in the encounter between cultural others”(3). Even if we acknowledge the asymmetrical power relations determining such exchanges, then, we must recognise how the mannequin might be read as a mediator between Canada’s indigenous peoples and New Age consumers in Australia. As such, it is a potential site for transcultural solidarity and resistance.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with that argument, however, is that it ignores a fairly important fact: most New Age adherents in Sydney are not creating alliances with real Aboriginal peoples in Canada when they idealise The Chief or buy dream catchers made in the Pacific Rim; they are creating alliances with simulacra and simulations of Aboriginality. The mannequin Chief is a romanticisation: as such, it blinds New Age consumers to the real conditions of Aboriginal existence and to the real power relations between the dominant and the dominated in my home country. That Chief seems pretty content to me. He does not seem concerned with depressingly high rates of poverty, incarceration, infant mortality, sexual abuse, substance abuse, or suicide—contemporary legacies of colonisation in Canada. Sitting in his little space, this symbol of deteritorialised Aboriginality seems remarkably unconcerned with the issue of land claims.

I provide this brief consideration of a plastic Indian—a seemingly mild manifestation of the way Aboriginal identity is mobilised in a Global economy—first, because I felt the

# Works Cited

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## Works Cited

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# Quotation Rules

## • Poetry/Verse

- Quotations of up to 3 lines should be integrated in your paragraphs within quotation marks. The end of each line should be distinguished with a slash (/).
- Quotations greater than 3 lines should be offset from your paragraph by 2 left indents/tabs. Do not use quotation marks around indented passages.

## • Prose

- Quotations of up to 4 typed lines should be integrated in your paragraphs within quotation marks.
- Quotations greater than 4 typed lines should be offset from your paragraphs by two indents/tabs. Do not use quotation marks around indented passages.

# Poetry Quotation: Example 1

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Antony says of Brutus: "This was the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.74).

"Friends, Romans, countrymen," begins Antony's famous speech, "lend me your ears; / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him" (3.2.80-81).



# Poetry Quotation: Example 2

Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" is rich in evocative detail:

It was winter. It got dark  
early. The waiting room  
was full of grown-up people,  
arctics and overcoats,  
lamps and magazines. (6-10)

# Prose: Example 1

For Charles Dickens, the eighteenth century was both “the best of times” and “the worst of times” (35).

“He was obeyed,” writes Conrad of the company manager in Heart of Darkness, “yet he inspired neither love nor fear, nor even respect” (87).

## Prose: Example 2

At the conclusion of *Lord of the Flies*, Ralph and the other boys realise the horror of their actions:

The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, Ralph wept for the end of innocence.... (186)

# Title Formatting Rules

- Italicize or underline the titles of books, anthologies, journals, plays, long poems published by themselves as books, magazines, television series, and movies
- Put quotation marks around the titles of short stories, poems published singly or within collections, journal articles, magazine articles, and television episodes