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Representing Peoples Through Their Monsters: Native American and Latinx Representations in Fantasy Television

James Rocha and Mona Rocha

Monsters-of-the-Week and Cultural Representation

The influence of Joss Whedon's work can be seen throughout much of the television that followed his hit fantasy and science fiction TV shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Angel* (1999-2004), *Firefly* (September-December 2002), and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010). One of the main positive features of these shows that was enhanced through Joss Whedon's influence was the incorporation of folklore and cultural traditions in the development of monsters-of-the-week for the heroes of any given show to battle.

On the other hand, it is also well known that Joss Whedon's shows were not quite as diverse and racially sensitive as they should have been.[1] Subsequently, many of the fantasy and science fiction shows that Joss Whedon variously

Mona Rocha is an Instructor for the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures at California State University, Fresno. Mona is the author of many works of popular culture, with chapters in books such as *Psych and Philosophy* and *Westworld and Philosophy,* among others. She is also the author of *The Weatherwomen: Militant Feminists of the Weather Underground* (McFarland 2020) and co-author of *Joss Whedon, Anarchist?* (McFarland 2019).

James Rocha is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Fresno. James is the author of many works of popular culture and philosophy, with chapters in *Mr. Robot and Philosophy*, *Veronica Mars and Philosophy*, and *Psych and Philosophy*, among others. Additionally, James is the author of *The Ethics of Hooking Up* (Routledge 2020) and co-author of *Joss Whedon, Anarchist?* (McFarland 2019).

influenced also demonstrated this lack of representation and failure to commit to racial sensitivity. [2] While some showrunners who worked closely with Joss Whedon, such as David Greenwalt (*Grimm*, 2011-2017), try to bring more diversity of representation to their shows, other showrunners some of whom consider themselves indebted to Whedon appear to still lag behind. [3] Hence, this article examines forms of representation provided by three similar and closely related fantasy TV shows: Joss Whedon's *Angel*, David Greenwalt's *Grimm*, and Eric Kripke's *Supernatural* (2005-2020). But since representation and diversity involve so much, the issues at hand will need more specificity first.

Representation matters. Being able to see people similar to you represented on TV can be important for a variety of reasons. Encountering diverse identity types that are represented as worthy of respect can diminish the power of ignorant and harmful stereotypes. It can also encourage inclusion through showing the interconnectedness of people from different identity types. Positive representation accomplishes all of this and more.

Let's say that a representation of a given identity type is positive if it represents that identity type three-dimensionally and faithfully (where people who have that identity type would be the chief arbiters of what is faithful) and the representation depicts the people of that identity type as worthy of respect, people with full human dignity. For instance, even though recent events have revealed that Joss Whedon is problematic as a person,[4] nevertheless he provided positive representations of women because one could reasonably argue that his lead characters, such as Buffy, Inara, and others, are three-dimensional, realistic, and worthy of our respect. Among other reasons, Buffy can be seen as a positive representation because

she takes on a leadership role, consistently solves or assists in solving problems that arise, and works to be a better moral person as the show develops. Likewise, one could see Inara as a positive representation because her intelligence is highlighted, she is presented as a moral center for the crew, and though other characters, such as Mal Reynolds and Jayne Cobb, may disrespect her at times, they are presented as wrong for doing so. So a positive representation allows us to see the character not as fitting stereotypes or deserving disrespect, but as a strong character who deserves respect.

Just as positive representation can improve society, negative representation can make things worse. Let's say a representation is negative if it presents an identity type in an unrealistic fashion or presents the identity type as not deserving respect or as not having human dignity. Negative representation can enhance the worst of stereotypes and possibly create new, harmful ones. Ranging from maids (such as in *Devious Maids*, 2013-2016) to gangsters (such as in *Sons of Anarchy*, 2008-2014), numerous Latinx characters on TV, though fictional, have had real and possibly grave impacts on setting back race relations for the country. While representations of Latinx people as maids or gangsters can be partially faithful (some Latinx people are in each position), representing them mainly in those positions and without showing there is much more that Latinx people can do would be disrespectful, and hence would count as negative representation. We will be using "Latinx" in this essay as an umbrella term to characterize anyone, of any gender, who descends from Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking countries in Latin America, Central America, and North America (though the term is sometimes used less widely).

Further, Native American characters have been poorly portrayed going back to the earliest cowboy shows on

television. Even more recently, such as in the 1990 film *Dances with Wolves* or the 1992 film *The Last of the Mohicans*, Native Americans are often viewed either as savages (if they attempt to resist the seizing of their land or even genocide) or romanticized if only they accept assimilation to white culture (such as the Lakota Sioux in the former film and Mohicans in the latter).[5] Consequently, such representations are negative insofar as they suggest assimilation is required for being worthy of respect.

Positive representation can boost social movements that try to fight oppression and pursue social justice, especially in terms of inclusion and equity. Although Ricky Ricardo on *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) may not be a perfect character, it was important both for Latinx people and for others to see a Latinx character who was successful and tried to be a loving family man. Similarly, it was positive for children to see Maria as a regular character on *Sesame Street* (1969-present). Such characters can convince people to diminish their racism or avoid developing it nearly as much, which could in turn lead them to help combat racism in various ways in their lives. Yet negative representation can hinder these same movements and even reverse some of their progress by reinforcing racism or creating new problematic stereotypes. If negative representation ends up upholding race hierarchies and colonialist viewpoints, then the harms abound even more.

There is little representation of Latinx and Native American characters in fantasy and science fiction TV. Nevertheless, some of these shows do occasionally depict these cultural traditions in their monster-of-the-week format (that is, when the show presents one episode on a particular monster or set of monsters). This practice raises a question of whether a TV show can mitigate its failure to have a racially inclusive cast by at least dedicating some episodes to underrepresented

cultural traditions. The answer is yes in theory, yet in practice, it is, of course, very complicated.

A show can provide a positive representation of a culture by providing greater understanding of and respect for that culture. This task, however, is made more difficult when the representation is of a monster. If a show is only depicting a culture through a monster, it will be difficult to provide a faithful and respectful representation of the culture. To examine whether fantasy TV shows can provide positive representations of cultural monsters, this paper concentrates on some Latin American and Native American traditions as they are depicted in specific episodes of *Angel*, *Grimm*, and *Supernatural*. While it is possible to positively depict a culture while concentrating on a monster, it rarely happens on fantasy TV because there is a lack of racial inclusion even on these specific episodes, the traditions are not respected to the point where they are centered around the TV show's main narrative, and the show does not do enough work to find ways to otherwise positively portray the culture in question. However, different TV shows have different levels of success and failure in these regards.

The White Savior Vampire

Airing in 2003, "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco" is part of Season 5 of *Angel*. Created by Joss Whedon in collaboration with David Greenwalt, *Angel* follows a group of friends Angel, Fred, Wesley, Gunn, Cordelia, Lorne, and others united in a fight against evil in Los Angeles.[6] The episode in question opens on Dia de Muertos (the Day of the Dead), when the main protagonist, Angel, meets the sole surviving member of a family of famous *luchadores* (Mexican professional wrestlers), who goes

by the alias Numero Cinco. Through Angel's help, Numero Cinco, who is Mexican by nationality, finds his true self and is redeemed, right before death, thus ensuring a proper afterlife. Not only does this episode's storyline rely on the problematic white savior trope, it also makes liberal use of negative stereotypes against the Aztecs, as the big bad of the episode is an Aztec warrior/demon, Tezcatcatl (who does not exist in actual Aztec folklore).

Described by Wesley as a "predatory bird meets demonic gladiator,"[7] in the *Angel* universe, Tezcatcatl was a powerful warrior who long ago harnessed the power of the sun god. Eventually, he was found out and punished by a shaman on the Day of the Dead, and now returns every 50 years to feast on hearts that he carves out with his ceremonial dagger. This motif — the carving out of hearts — fits both with the colonialist, conquistador recounting of Aztec religion and with discredited interpretations that depict the Aztecs as practicing cannibalism — a view that is not based in solid evidence. After all, as one scholar points out, the belief in the extraordinary violence of Aztec culture or religion comes directly from "general assertions from early colonial texts about the nature of [Aztec] society and the annual ritual calendar [...] which can only ever be highly speculative."[8] Another scholar warns against "the popular stereotype [that] portrays the Aztecs as a death-obsessed militaristic culture mostly known for mass human sacrifice," stating that "history is written by the victors."[9] In other words, a positive representation of Aztecs would not overly rely on the negative depiction of Aztecs provided by the Europeans who were attempting to rationalize their own atrocities in wiping out entire cultures. Instead, a positive representation would attempt to acknowledge that even if *some*

Aztecs may have done some bad things, the Aztec people were still humans with dignity who deserved moral respect.

In the episode, the well-educated, white Wesley exclaims, after examining the "Xiochimayan Codex" (while Aztec codices do exist, this one is made up for the show) that, "I'd forgotten that Aztec culture was so violent."[10] Luckily, Gunn (the only person of color in the main cast of *Angel*, obviously not counting Lorne, who happens to be green) responds with "Yeah, 'cause our culture's so at peace."[11] Unfortunately, Gunn's corrective attitude is then overtaken by Wesley's pronouncement that, "All right, but by and large, we don't eat our victims."[12] Notice the dynamic here: a white man who presents as civilized and well educated is describing another culture as inferior, upholding the colonialist viewpoint that indigenous cultures are substandard and in need of taming or educating. In this exchange, Gunn's voice is also erased; as a man of color, Gunn's voice is subsumed under the white voice, replicating the colonialist dynamic once again.

Additionally, while some scholars have problematically theorized that the Aztecs practiced widespread cannibalism,[13] these theorists have been refuted, and scholars have pointed out that the Aztecs had advanced and extensive agricultural practices, which furnished a plentiful food supply that did not need to be supplemented through cannibalism.[14] Moreover, no shortage of large domesticated herbivores has been documented in Aztec culture these animals being a ready source of protein for the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico leading to more "strenuous objections and frequent dismissals from specialists in the study of Mesoamerica" of the controversial cannibalism claims.[15]

Further, as mentioned, the evidence for Aztec cannibalism was based in the claims of the very people who

conquered the Aztec population and wished to rationalize their own slaughter of the people whom they were denigrating. As scholar Izabela Wilkosz points out, all these cannibalism accounts "come from the post-Conquest period; in fact, they have been written exclusively by Spaniards often the same people who participated in Hernán Cortés' expedition to Mexico and who fought against the Aztecs during the Conquest of the Aztec Empire."[16] Some of the authors of these accounts were also missionaries interested in othering the Aztecs as part of their evangelizing, thus contributing to a bias against the Aztecs. Additionally, some of these authors "needed to justify [the] cruel and brutal means to which the Spaniards resorted during their campaign in Mexico,"[17] and portraying the Aztecs as brutal and eating human flesh would certainly legitimize colonialist interference. When further considering that "there are no references to cannibalism predating the Spanish Conquest," Wilkosz concludes that overall, "the stories they [colonialist authors] wrote were far from objective."[18]

Unfortunately, Fred and Angel double down on this problematic colonialist view, which would mean that *Angel* is engaging in negative representation by presenting a culture in a way that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to respect. They provide such a heavily negative representation by holding that Tezcatcatl feeds on the hearts he carves out of heroes' chests, and that this diet is a "supercharged fuel" and "what keeps it alive."[19] In other words, the presentation of the made-up for TV monster, Tezcatcatl (and thereby the Aztecs as a whole), is still upheld in a fashion that in no way seeks balance and respect for the representation of an ancient people. As scholar Caroline Dodds Pennock writes, "although the Aztecs were highly sophisticated and expressive creators of great architecture, poetry and art," they are nevertheless reduced to their violence

and "are the culture most associated with human sacrifice in the popular imagination."[20] This phenomenon is clearly seen here.

Perhaps we can somewhat ignore this over-the-top treatment since the show is, after all, meant to create over-the-top evil entities and cannibalism would rank as a frightening thing but then again, the responsible thing to do when using indigenous traditions or cultural artifacts is to try to be accurate, balanced, and fair in one's rendering. This episode's emphasis on a discredited theory of cannibalism is thus highly problematic and consequently counts as negative representation.

Another further worrisome issue in this episode of *Angel* is the dynamic between Angel and Numero Cinco, the Mexican wrestler. Numero Cinco, as previously mentioned, is the sole survivor member of a wrestling group made up of five brothers, Los Hermanos Numeros. When Numero Cinco introduces the name of the group, Angel jokes that the name does not make much sense. "The number brothers?" Angel asks dismissively.[21] Of course, this is a television show and the group is not real. Yet the writers of the show are mocking the stupidity of the name of the fictional Mexican characters, which they themselves came up with. Their deficient naming skills are also on display in the fact that the leading guest character is simply named "Numero Cinco." Instead of granting the group a name that represented them as strong, positive Mexican heroes, the writers chose to merely assign them numbers, which can be seen as dehumanizing. It is even more poignant that this exchange comes right after Numero Cinco states, "Never disrespect the memory of my brothers [...] ."[22] This juxtaposition illustrates the lack of respect all the more, reinforcing a negative representation.

Together, Los Hermanos Numeros fought crime, saved the weak, and also protected the Mexican community. As Numero Cinco puts it, "We were more than just luchadores. No one else cared about Mexicans or Chicanos, so we protected our own. The five of us were always joined, always connected. And when necessary, we came together as a fist. We fought monsters and gangsters. Vampiros. We were heroes. We protected the weak […] and we helped the helpless."[23] After an encounter with the same demon, however, four of the brothers were killed, and only Numero Cinco escaped. Every Dia de Muertos thereafter, Numero Cinco has set up an altar – an *ofrenda* – in their honor, hoping that they will be able to cross over from the underworld to the realm of the living to visit with him. Unfortunately, the brothers never grace Numero Cinco with an appearance. As he mournfully tells Angel,

> Numero Cinco: Every year on El Dia de los Muertos, I prepare this altar for them. And every year, they never come, never visit. Because I am not worthy. But it doesn't matter anymore…I should've died with my brothers.
> Angel: But you didn't. You got stuck with the hard part, the carrying-on. No wonder your brothers' spirits never come to visit. Listen to yourself. You've quit. Tell me: why'd you stop caring?[24]

Notice that in this exchange, Angel adopts a somewhat judgmental attitude: his brothers do not visit because he has stopped caring. Angel is trying to 'snap' Numero Cinco out of feeling sorry for himself. Angel is the knowledgeable interventionist, guiding a poor, disillusioned Mexican, replicating the problematic structure/stereotype of a white, knowledgeable man managing an uncivilized other. When

Numero Cinco explains that he stopped caring because he is disillusioned with how his brothers' legacy is disrespected in the present, Angel chides Numero Cinco further, admonishing him that he "expects too much from people" and that he should still be a hero because "it was the right thing to do."[25] As Angel puts it, "Nobody asks us to go out and fight, put our lives on the line. We do it because we can, 'cause we know how. We do it whether people remember us or not, in spite of the fact that there's no shiny reward at the end of the day […] other than the work itself."[26] While this statement is accurate in that one should do the right thing because it simply *is* the right thing whatever that is, helping others, fighting for justice, etc. the framework here is problematic. Angel is squarely placed in the white savior trope and as such, he directs and saves Numero Cinco, who comes across as lacking self-confidence, discouraged, and inferior. This dynamic implies problematic racial dynamics that hold that whites are superior to people of color, and that if only white men could educate and mold people of color, then those people of color could become more than what they currently are. In other words, this type of representation is far from positive in that it does nothing to build respect for the Latinx character or others like him.

The rest of the episode does not fare much better. Numero Cinco becomes so motivated after Angel's little speech that he successfully takes on the demon Tezcatcatl. In the process, Numero Cinco dies from his injuries, but right before death, he is reunited with his brothers, as they finally come through to this realm in recognition of their brother's heroism (thus giving credence to Angel's earlier judgment of Numero Cinco). Notice again that it is through a white man that Numero Cinco finds his strength, courage, and purpose.

Ultimately, this construction of Numero Cinco robs people of color of agency and autonomy, giving credit to white influencers for the advancement of marginalized people.[27] As such, this episode of *Angel* is highly problematic in its negative representation. Furthermore, this episode of *Angel* also made liberal use of Aztec stereotypes in its composition of the Aztec demon, culturally appropriating Aztec customs and beliefs and misrepresenting them for the purpose of entertainment with no attempt to provide positive representation to balance out the episode.

La Llorona

In this section, we will compare and contrast how two fantasy TV shows, *Supernatural* and *Grimm*, which both provide similar monsters-of-the-week formats as some of Joss Whedon's shows, present the La Llorona (crying or weeping woman) story. The Mexican traditional legend influenced by an even earlier Aztec legend usually holds that the weeping woman is dressed in white, has long hair, appears at night (usually next to bodies of water), is in distress, and is searching for her children. [28] *Supernatural* fares poorly when it comes to presenting the story in a respectful and positive fashion, while *Grimm* does a good bit better, albeit with its own shortcomings elsewhere.

While *Angel* provided negative representations, the TV show S*upernatural* at times engages in cultural appropriation with hardly any representation of the peoples whose traditions they use. Defined as "the appropriation of something of cultural value, usually a symbol or a practice, to others," [29] cultural appropriation functions along hierarchies of power, with dominant cultures "borrowing" from marginalized peoples,

usually by trivializing traditions for entertainment, profiting from that act, promoting harmful stereotypes, and getting recognition and acclaim for the appropriated tradition.[30]

The concepts of negative representation and cultural appropriation overlap, and so it is useful to keep them conceptually separate. As noted, a representation is negative if it either lacks a fair and reasonable faithfulness to the represented persons and/or cultures, or shows disrespect for the characters as if they were not deserving of human dignity. Cultural appropriation concerns the seizing of some item from another culture and the presenting of that item in a way that is not faithful to that culture, and that attempts to steal credit for that item. Not all cultural appropriation involves representation, as a professional dancer could appropriate a cultural dance for profit. And negative representation does not always involve the appropriation of a cultural item, as the representation of a Latinx character need not take anything out of Latinx culture. Yet in representing Latinx cultural traditions and monsters, there can be both negative representation (say if the representation is disrespectful) and cultural appropriation (say if the monster is seized and presented with no attempt to give credit to the culture).

In the show's pilot episode, *Supernatural* gives a negative representation and also culturally appropriates the story of La Llorona. In the episode, the characters never refer to her as "La Llorona," but instead use "woman in white" and "weeping woman," which are both terms used to describe La Llorona, who is associated with a white dress that is drenched from her constant tears. Furthermore Sam (one of the two main characters) says that different weeping women have been sighted in "Hawaii, Mexico, lately Arizona, Indiana," suggesting that they are probably discussing La Llorona of Mexican

folklore.[31] Yet the show does not give any credit to the original cultural tradition, and it twists the story in a fashion that loses any of the story's intended lessons. Hence, we will see why this episode provides a case of cultural appropriation as well as a negative representation of Latinx culture.

First, let's expand on the traditional story. In various versions, La Llorona is associated with either physical or cultural death. For example, an account given by Vicente Riva Palacio explains that the weeping woman is someone who killed her three children after being abandoned by her lover, but "repented immediately" and is crying due to the "agony of her sin."[32] Another account from 1550 Mexico City holds that the weeping woman is really La Malinche or Doña Marina, a Nahua woman who cooperated with the Conquistador Hernán Cortés. In this version, her crying signals the repenting of her sin of aiding and abetting the enemy in bringing down the Aztec empire.[33]

The commonality for the woman in white/La Llorona is that she is either guilty of physically harming her children — an act she regrets that leaves her eternally searching for her children, as she needs them to enter the gates of Heaven[34] — or she is guilty of the demise of her people as a whole due to her collaboration with the Spaniards. Widespread throughout South America and the Southern United States, this legend therefore functions as cautionary tales: first, the lesson is that one should be careful of walking next to bodies of water and children especially ought to be aware of the dangers of drowning,[35] and second, that one should not fall prey to the influences colonizers pose, as their corruptive influence wreaks destruction on a grand scale, endangering nationhood and national identity. Of course, a third potential lesson is the idea that colonizers enact violence on indigenous women, perhaps

by robbing them of their children and their national heritage and by placing them in coercive situations.

Unfortunately, none of these elements come through in the usage of the La Llorona tradition in *Supernatural*. In fact, the only time that Sam and Dean (the other main character) discuss the La Llorona motif, they simply refer to her as "a woman in white."[36] Sam adds of these women in white,

> [...] their husbands were unfaithful to them. [...] And these women, suffering from temporary insanity, murdered their children. [...] Then once they realized what they had done, they took their own lives. So now their spirits are cursed, walking back roads, waterways. And if they find an unfaithful man, they kill him.[37]

In *Supernatural*'s retelling, La Llorona is never specifically identified as such. The elements of the story are there, however, and they match up closely: the wailing, the locales for her appearances waterways, roads all fit. The "woman in white"[38] and "weeping woman" labels used in the pilot also fit, as La Llorona is usually depicted as wearing white and crying. But there is never a clear crediting here to a Mexican legend or folklore, just an allusion to this phenomenon occurring in Mexico …or Indiana.

We do, however, know that when the episode was written, Eric Kripke purposefully used a mix of the urban legend of the vanishing hitchhiker [39] with that of La Llorona, so as to dramatize the La Llorona character and give her "more motivation." [40] Kripke further states that "the Vanishing Hitchhiker may have been inspired by La Llorona, so there's actually a cultural connection between them."[41] Therefore, the La Llorona legend is foundational to the episode under

discussion, even though it appears to be mixed with at least one other tale.

Unfortunately, *Supernatural* culturally appropriates the La Llorona story as it is never openly credited on screen. Rather, the story is used to launch a supernatural series where two brothers Sam and Dean travel across America in their quest to slay demons and free the world from evil. Instead of doing something to credit the Latinx heritage from whence the story originates, the woman in white is presented as if the character and tale could have been created and developed by the writers of *Supernatural*. La Llorona is used for the show's own purposes with no attempt to grant credit, even in passing, to the Latinx traditions.

It is worth noting that the La Llorona legend may have undergone some changes with time and is no longer thought of solely as being about a villain, as represented in the show. As scholar Betty Leddy notes, seeing La Llorona or having contact with her was once thought to be dangerous, but was no longer thought to result in one's demise; as a result, La Llorona is not always seen as a harbinger of death.[42] In fact, now some individuals even recognize her as signifying something positive: "she appeared at least twice to indicate buried treasure."[43] As Leddy notes, "Present-day adults do not expect immediate death from contact with the Weeping Woman; but that part of the legend no doubt was stronger in days gone by."[44] After conducting a study on the various La Llorona traditions, Leddy concludes, "La Llorona is losing, if she hasn't already lost, her power for evil."[45]

Nevertheless, *Supernatural* does not recognize these changes, and instead focuses on the tradition's violent and lethal elements exaggerating them to the extreme, as their version of La Llorona kills unfaithful men. In the pilot, she even

attacks Sam, who tells her mid-attack that it does not make sense for her to do so since he is faithful to his girlfriend. In the scene, however, La Llorona assures Sam that he will be unfaithful, and proceeds to kiss him against his will: thusly, she is presented not only as a killer and a sexual predator, but she also does not seem to even adhere faithfully to her own alleged code of only attacking unfaithful men. The idea of making La Llorona into a sexual aggressor and attempted rapist goes contrary to Mexican tradition in a highly disrespectful fashion, although it certainly dramatizes the story line. Further, an earlier scene also hinted that she was seducing another one of her victims before murdering him which clearly reverses in a highly problematic fashion the stories associated with the La Llorona tradition, where usually she has been a victim of men's sexual appetites.[46] Thus, this newly created sexual predator version of La Llorona would constitute a negative representation, even though it is in fact a cultural monster that is being depicted.

Supernatural's treatment of the cultural tale also trivializes and problematically ignores the overlap between the legend of La Llorona and the historical story of La Malinche, the Nahua woman who cooperated with the Conquistador Hernán Cortés. La Malinche herself was placed in an untenable situation, where, to ensure her own survival, she had to cooperate with the much more powerful Spanish Conquistadores who were decimating indigenous communities; she eventually gave birth to a child by Cortés.[47] So her portrayal in *Supernatural* as a sexual aggressor ignores everything that the La Malinche story stands for: the sexual subjugation of native women at the hands of Spanish Conquistadors, the loss of their freedom and children to colonialism, [48] and according to at least one interpretation, La Malinche's own possible fate as a sex slave to

Hernán Cortés.[49] In this fashion, it is as if *Supernatural* is indirectly supporting the colonialist agenda through its insensitive revision of the legend, by placing La Llorona as the sexual predator and monster.

Some people may be concerned with our critique of the *Supernatural* pilot as we are concentrating on only one tradition that relates to the woman in white where it is quite possible that the show writers were using elements from multiple traditions.[50] Kripke himself mentioned both La Llorona and the vanishing hitchhiker as inspirations.[51] There could be other inspirations as well. Perhaps the elements that run contrary to the La Llorona tradition, such as the woman in white being a sexual abuser, could come from distinct traditions, which could in theory mitigate or even remove the cultural appropriation or even the negative representation.

These responses though cannot alleviate the charges leveled here against *Supernatural*'s pilot. First, there are multiple clear indicators that they are depicting the La Llorona tradition. Even if they added elements from other traditions, the writers have provided the appearance that they are depicting La Llorona. So when they depart from that primary depiction, they are attributing the additional elements to the La Llorona story and thus providing a negative representation of it.

Further, it remains cultural appropriation in spite of adding extra elements because there was no clear credit given. When a professional dancer takes dance moves from one cultural tradition and passes them off as their own (simply by not giving appropriate credit), we would not forgive the dancer because they also mixed in other dance moves from other cultures that they also did not credit. This dancer is a worse cultural appropriator, and does not deserve any praise for

multiple thefts. Further, as noted, since the additional elements make La Llorona look worse, this depiction is both a negative representation and cultural appropriation. They have taken from multiple cultures and created a worse overall picture of a Latinx tradition.

Clearly, this rendering of the La Llorona legend is problematic. Perhaps *Supernatural* could have improved things by refraining from making La Llorona into a sexual aggressor. Another corrective approach perhaps would have been to incorporate some positive Latinx characters into this episode (while the pilot has a black policeman, he is not associated with the story in any significant fashion, nor is he a recurring character). Positive Latinx characters could have been used to openly credit and acknowledge the cultural heritage and significance of the story. At the very minimum, presenting positive Latinx characters in the episode could have served as a balance to the negative portrayal of a Latinx monster and could have reminded the viewers of the importance of respecting Latinx persons and their culture. Moreover, the character that represents La Llorona is named Constance Welch, which, in a sense, further whitewashes the myth (a Latinx name might have given a subtle crediting of some sort). As such, this episode of *Supernatural* lacks cultural sensitivity for the Mexican legend, solely focusing on it to scare and tantalize its audiences.

Switching to *Grimm,* their "La Llorona" episode provides a more respectful treatment, especially when compared to *Supernatural*. *Grimm* revolves around a pair of detectives, Nick Burkhardt and Hank Griffin, who fight supernatural monsters; Nick also happens to be the Grimm, meaning that he is imbued with special powers for the purpose of fighting supernatural creatures called Wesen. That *Grimm* is able to provide a more respectful treatment is due to the fact that it clearly connects La

Llorona to her Mexican heritage and also depicts Mexican characters other than La Llorona in positive lights, which allows the show to evade the potentially racist traps of negative representation and cultural appropriation.

Grimm's "La Llorona" episode opens on a nice, sunny scene. A father and son are on a deck with a beautiful lake next to it. They are getting ready for a day of fishing; the father is doting and indulgent toward his little boy. Suddenly, they hear sobs coming from a woman, wearing white and walking along the shore. They watch horrified as she walks into the lake, for all intents and purposes appearing to drown herself. The father rushes into action, running to reach her and then searching for her in the churning waters. The son, alarmed, yells, "Papa!" over and over again. When the father emerges from the waters, sans the woman, he realizes his son is gone. Panicked, he yells his son's name over and over again "Rafael!" and searches in vain for his child. A few moments later, the police arrive to deal with the kidnapping.[52]

Two things evidence a refreshing change of pace in terms of adding much needed diversity to fantasy television: the father and the son are people of color who speak Spanish and are neither presented as villains nor in an overly stereotypical role. When the police arrive Detectives Nick and Hank, as well as Sergeant Drew Wu at the scene, they as a matter of course without judgment offer translation services to the father, Luis Alvarez. There is no bigotry about failures to assimilate here instead, just an apology that the translator will be delayed. As a result, Juliette, Nick's girlfriend, fills in the role and begins to translate. The early depiction of these two minor characters brings *Grimm* halfway to positive representation as the characters are treated respectfully in the episode.

Further, the show goes some way to making the characters three-dimensional, which would be the second requirement of a positive representation. As the investigation continues, the character of the father is fleshed out a bit more: the audience gets the sense that he is a hard-working man, loving father, and a devoted widower — his yearning face as he glances at a picture of the family in happier times evokes his everlasting love for his wife. This positive portrayal depicts a man of color without any problematic stereotypes, and helps in the project of affirming a positive representation. Perhaps most importantly, the father is not put at a distance and presented as the other or disrespectfully. There is no attempt to look at him as different and needing to be examined, but instead he is just a father who happens to be Latinx. His race is not, that is, presented as exotic, different, and unfamiliar as if he were other-ized. While this father is only a minor character (and so a full three-dimensional presentation would be unlikely), it would nevertheless definitely qualify as a positive representation.

As the episode develops, a concerned neighbor by the name of Pilar, who is a local wise woman who likewise speaks only Spanish, offers information on the kidnapping. As Juliette translates, Pilar explains that it is La Llorona who took the child. Not only is the legend that the episode is built around openly named and credited — and the opening epigraph for the episode likewise used a direct quote from the legend itself — but this accreditation is voiced through the voice of a woman of color, someone who is shown as believing in the Mexican ghost story, who respects the tradition it comes from, and who then explains it clearly to the main characters. Hence, the direction of knowledge moves from the people whom the tradition belongs to towards the main cast, and not the other way around.

As such, it is the white hero of the show and his partner who are cast as learners, and a woman of color is cast as the possessor of knowledge. And in a related fashion, Nick and Hank, as learners, are open to the explanation. Luis, the Latinx father, is presented as too rational to accept the explanation. This too can be seen as positive as one Latinx character (Pilar) is presented as holding culture knowledge[53] while another Latinx character (Luis) is presented as rational and scientific, showing diversity of thought within the population and not saving these positive epistemic roles for the white heroes of the show as many other shows would do. Understandably, Luis wants them to talk less and take more action to find his son. The fact that the legend is taken seriously, especially by the non-Mexican detectives, though, is important: the tradition is respected and not ridiculed by those in the dominant culture, thus inverting problematic colonial dynamics of power.

Another character is introduced next: she is a detective from Albuquerque, Valentina Espinoza. Valentina also happens to be a jaguar Wesen (Wesen are the supernatural beings whose secret natures are visible to the Grimm/Nick in the *Grimm* universe). She explains that the kidnapper will repeat her crime soon: There will be two more abductions. In other words, Valentina explains that the wailing woman is a serial kidnapper/killer. Not only is the addition of this character once again fruitful in terms of diversity and proper representation, but the kind of Wesen she is whether this choice was purposeful or not we do not know is very appropriate: she is identified as a jaguar or *balam*, a creature from Mexican folklore which is seen as a guardian and has its roots in the Incan, Aztec, and Mayan religions.[54] This choice is appropriate not only because Valentina's character acts as a guardian who eventually helps rescue the abducted children,

but also because this link to the jaguar gives recognition to the possible pre-Spanish conquest origins of the La Llorona story. Both the Florentine Codex and the Durán Codex works depicting the Nahua people in the 16th century, with a focus on their culture, religion, and cosmology depict two Aztec goddesses who can be linked to La Llorona. Both of these goddesses weep for their children, wear white, and walk alone at night.[55] Thus, it is possible that the La Llorona motif from Mexican folklore is rooted in the pre-Spanish conquest cultural milieu of Central and South America. As such, Valentina's character as a *balam* acknowledges that connection openly, therefore once again giving recognition to the legend's indigenous origins.

When it comes to La Llorona, *Grimm* does a fairly good job overall: the legend is properly credited, the legend is given credence and not taken lightly, Latinx characters are centered in the story, and overall, characters of color are abundant and not shown in any stereotypical fashion.[56] *Grimm* is succeeding at doing positive representation well (at least in this episode), is helping to break down destructive stereotypes, and is not engaging in cultural appropriation. *Grimm* hence exhibits the capability of providing respectful and faithful treatment of a monster from another tradition.

Wendigo

So far, we have discussed how various fantasy TV shows deal with Latin American traditions. Let's now explore another myth, that of the Wendigo[57] found in Native American/First Nations traditions. Again, both *Supernatural* and *Grimm* make use of this legend, and we should analyze whether these TV

shows are culturally respectful when it comes to this Native tradition.

The Wendigo is a monster from Algonquian-speaking North American and First Nations traditions. It is often depicted as a "giant monster with an insatiable appetite for human flesh"[58] with "great spiritual and physical power."[59] It is a monster that usually appears in the freezing temperatures of harsh winters: "the approach of a Wendigo is preceded by shrieking winds and a cold so fierce that it would cause the trees to crack."[60] Another characteristic is that a Wendigo's "appetite increases in proportion to how much [human] flesh it eats, ensuring it is never satiated."[61] It has a "heart of ice"[62] and is said to discount the suffering of others.[63] Wendigos are unsurprisingly seen as dangerous, and are associated with death.

Importantly, Wendigo stories transmit important lessons and serve as cautionary tales for the community. Wendigos can be understood as a warning about the dangers of starvation in a harsh, winter climate and can also function as reminders that one should be circumspect about food — non-gluttonous — during such times when scarcity could translate into starvation and subsequent death. After all, over-depleting winter supplies in harsh winters could mean disaster; not sharing resources within a community (maintaining a heart of ice and disregarding the plight of others) could bring death to other starving community members. As scholar Brady DeSanti puts it, "the windigo's appearance can in part be seen as a symbolic projection at the prospect of, and, at times, instances of, famine cannibalism that took place as a result of food shortages"[64] in such harsh circumstances. Thus, the Wendigo's ravenous, immoderate behavior serves as an example of what not to do — carelessly deplete food stocks in winter — and as a warning of

what could happen: starvation or cannibalism. This monster is ultimately a guide for ethical behavior toward the community as a Wendigo is someone who unethically embraces selfishness and greed.

Fitting with the above reading, there is also a tradition that a Wendigo might, at one time, have been a human being, who was transformed into this ravenous monster.[65] This transformation happens through being cursed or becoming "possessed or infected with the spirit of the wendigo."[66] Infected individuals lose touch with their unique sense of self and abrogate responsibility toward the community; they are outsiders and unrecognizable through their potential for destruction. Interestingly, this understanding functions not only as a cautionary tale in terms of policing community members' behavior, but also as a response to colonization. As Michelle Lietz explains, "the wendigo figure evolved within indigenous cultures to represent the white man and the unrelenting greed of colonization[;] it became most often represented as spiritual disease and sickness of the mind."[67] Thus, the Wendigo stories can be interpreted as cautionary tales about colonization and resistance to colonization: the colonizer is the toxic entity the Wendigo that devours and corrupts the indigenous way of life.

When the Wendigo appears in *Supernatural*, however, these understandings are neither explored nor alluded to. In the episode, the two brothers Sam and Dean are battling the monster of the week, this time in Colorado where they join a group of hikers searching for a missing friend. When the brothers come upon the Wendigo, they explicate its existence to these hikers. Now, it is true that on the surface, the general explanation Sam and Dean provide of the monster fits with some of the elements of the Native American/First Nations

traditions. For example, Sam explains that "Wendigo" is a Cree word, thus partly sourcing the tradition.[68] Next, Dean says of the creature,

> Dean: They're hundreds of years old each one was once a man, sometimes an Indian, or other times a frontiersman or a miner of a hunter…During some harsh winter, some guy finds himself starving and cut off from supplies or help. Becomes a cannibal to survive, eating other members of his tribe or camp.
> Ben: Like the Donner Party.
> Sam: That's right.[69]

In this fashion, some elements are accurately transmitted: the association of the Wendigo with the cold, the idea of survival cannibalism, and the association of the monster with the Cree language or the Cree peoples. So, perhaps we can see improvement here over *Supernatural*'s treatment of the La Llorona story. This is not a case of cultural appropriation as we saw in the pilot episode.

However, in terms of negative representation, there are some problematic issues that arise. When Sam explains that "Wendigo is a Cree word," he reduces all of the other Algonquin speaking peoples to a single entity, ignoring the Ojibwe, the Saulteaux, the Naskapi, the Innu, and others. Sure, the Cree are Algonquin speakers, but the Wendigo story belongs to all of these tribes and peoples.[70] To show full respect to the various groups that the story belongs to, it would be fairer to name them or at least to acknowledge that it is a story that derives from numerous indigenous traditions.

Another issue that appears in the episode occurs when Sam and Dean attempt to explain to the group why the

Wendigo is so long-lived; as mentioned above, they attributed "hundreds of years" to the creature's lifespan. As Dean puts it, "More than anything, a wendigo knows how to last long winters without food. It hibernates for years at a time, but when it's awake, it keeps its victims alive. It stores them, so it can feed whenever it wants."[71] This depiction of the Wendigo does not at all fit with the creature the First Nations/Native Americans describe as immoderate, unrestrained, and insatiable. The entire point of the indigenous tradition is that the Wendigo does not know how to store food supplies: it decimates them immediately, failing to ration food. Consequently, *Supernatural*'s rendering of the Wendigo goes against the First Nations/Native American descriptions, and also thereby erases any understandings of the moral of the story that the Wendigo is insatiable and not careful in its consumption, leading to widespread destruction. Hence, in a sense the show is whitewashing the story.[72] Insofar as the show is not being faithful, it is surely not doing enough to count as a positive representation.

Further, there are no Native American characters in *Supernatural*'s Wendigo story. The monsters and most of the rest of the cast appear to be white. There is no attempt in this episode to represent Native Americans in a positive light. The directionality and power differential of the harm is likewise non-existent: The Wendigo is not being used faithfully to represent a more powerful entity (the colonizer or the supernatural monster) harming someone with less power or influence (the indigenous communal spirit/culture or the person suffering from scarcity). Hence, the lesson of the story, which teaches about the difficulties faced by the indigenous peoples, is lost, again showing disrespect for the story's intended purpose. In other words, there are many reasons why

Supernatural's representation when taking on the Wendigo tradition is lacking. While we do not see it as cultural appropriation since some credit was given, it is a negative representation because it is not faithful and is somewhat disrespectful to the tradition.

Grimm likewise makes use of the Wendigo motif. In the episode "To Protect and Serve Man," we find Hank and Nick reinvestigating a case: As a rookie uniformed officer, Hank had arrested a man, Craig Ferren, accused of murdering a man after a terrible fight. On the scene, right before being arrested, Craig had screamed that there were monsters after him; he maintained that the victims, the Kreski brothers one of whom he had killed in self defense were the actual instigators. According to Craig's story, the Kreskis attacked him and "were animals […] they looked like monsters,"[73] planning to have him for dinner. Since Hank knows about the existence of Wesen and that the supernatural world is real, he wonders if perhaps Craig was telling the truth all along. And as Craig is now on death row and due to be executed soon, it is of vital importance to look into the case once more.

Hank and Nick therefore consult Craig's former girlfriend. She explains that Craig had suffered from PTSD after returning from a tour of duty in Iraq and was trying to fit back into society and rebuild his life. She unsurprisingly maintains his innocence, showing the detectives a drawing of the monsters Craig had sent to her. Armed with the drawing, Nick and Hank consult Nick's Grimm diaries, finding a 1759 entry written by one of Nick's Grimm ancestors, identifying the monster as a "Wendigo." The entry reads:

> I tracked what I believed to be a Wildermann through Starksboro into the Camel's Hump forest [present-day

> Green Mountains in Vermont]. It was there that I first heard of the mythical Wendigo from the Chieftain of the Algonquin tribe that had provided me refuge for the night. I soon learned these terrifying beasts are no myth. I came upon the cave of the Wendigo, rife with human remains, having been the scene of a many murders and cannibalistic acts.[74]

Notice that here the Wendigo is clearly identified as a cannibalistic monster; significantly, the tradition is firmly sourced as belonging to the Algonquin nation, too. And the locale further fits the indigenous tradition: the Green Mountains in Vermont were the home of Native American/First Nations Algonquian tribes and peoples, such as the Abenaki.[75] Furthermore, the episode's descriptions of the monster as ferocious and having "breath [that] was hideous with the stench of burned flesh"[76] also fits with the indigenous tradition that the monster "carried with it the stench of death and decay."[77]

Moreover, later in the episode as the remaining Wendigo is captured, the audience is shown the evidence of the Wendigo's monstrous appetite: its house sits atop a massive pit of human remains, serving as confirmation for its insatiable hunger. This monster is not a careful rationer of foodstuff as in the *Supernatural* episode, but rather a ferocious and voracious devourer of flesh. Consequently, the *Grimm* depiction is much more faithful, which makes it have more potential for being a positive representation.

Adding to this faithfulness, the *Grimm* episode also retains the directionality of the wrongdoing and power dynamic that is at the basis of the Native American/First Nations morality lessons around of the Wendigo story: in the episode, the monster attacked a downtrodden, suffering man who was trying

to put his life together after dealing with PTSD, thus clearly paralleling the power dynamics and framework of the colonizer, with power, devouring the marginalized, powerless indigenous community. While it is true that the episode could have been better in its representation for example, it would have been helpful to have Craig's character be a person of color or it would have been preferable to have Native American/First Nations characters involved in the presentation of the story in some fashion at least *Grimm* succeeded in relaying the moral of the story accurately (replicating the correct power dynamics, if not the racial dynamics) and in remaining true to the other details of the Wendigo tradition, unlike *Supernatural*. For these reasons, we want to consider this episode to be a partially positive representation: it is faithful to the tradition and provides credit, but it does not do much to show respect for the peoples from which the tradition was borrowed. While the Wendigo representation is not fully positive, *Grimm* fares better in both traditions considered here.

Conclusion

We take no satisfaction in the fact that *Grimm* could be said to be somewhat better at representing Native American/First Nation traditions than *Supernatural* in one instance (Wendigo) and Latinx traditions in another instance (La Llorona). Further, *Angel* could have done a better job while covering a story (of Numero Cinco) that they made up themselves. The lesson we derive from these mixed results is that the need for more positive representation is just as pressing as ever. When incorporating Native American/First Nations traditions or when making use of Latinx traditions, TV shows, especially in the fantasy genre, need to do a better job. They

need to work harder at representation to sensitively and accurately portray folkloric elements from indigenous cultures, preferably through indigenous voices that are centered in the episodes dealing with such matters.

Thus, while Whedon helped pave the way for other showrunners to embrace the supernatural and to use indigenous traditions as recurring plot elements in their shows and while that technique could be interpreted as a step forward in that indigenous culture can find itself represented on television in this fashion, nevertheless, much more needs to be done in terms of making these shows become culturally sensitive and diverse when employing these traditions. We saw that *Grimm* was capable of doing a commendable job in its retelling of the La Llorona story, while *Supernatural* was not up to the same task in its pilot episode. We saw, as well, how *Angel* deployed problematic stereotypes in its representation of a Mexican luchadora. Unfortunately, we also saw that *Grimm* could have done better in its treatment of the Wendigo story by incorporating indigenous characters. So, the conclusion emerges that one positive representation in a hay-stack of otherwise lackluster ones does not create meaningful change. Instead, what is needed is systemic change toward more diversity and representation in television. Doing any less is lazy, falling prey to cultural appropriation and negative representation, both of which can be actually harmful.

Notes

[1] For scholars critiquing race in Joss Whedon's work, see, for example, Cynthia Fuchs, "'Did Anyone Ever Explain to You What "Secret Identity" Means?': Race and Displacement in *Buffy* and *Dark Angel*," *Slayage* 6.4 [24], Summer

2007, available at https://www.whedonstudies.tv/volume-61.html (accessed 13 January 2021), courtesy of Duke University Press, from *Undead TV: Essays on* Buffy the Vampire Slayer, edited by Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Duke UP, 2007), 96-115; Ewan Kirkland, "The Caucasian Persuasion of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*," *Slayage* 5.1 [17], June 2005, available at https://www.whedonstudies.tv/volume-61.html (accessed 13 January 2021); Jeffrey Middents, "A Sweet Vamp: Critiquing the Treatment of Race in *Buffy* and the American Musical Once More (with Feeling)," *Slayage* 5.1 [17], June 2005, available at https://www.whedonstudies.tv/volume-61.html (accessed 13 January 2021); also see Tereza Szeghi and Wesley Dempster, "'Why Don't You Just Go Back Where You Came From?' or 'Slight Yams': 'Pangs' of Regret and Unresolved Ambivalence in Joss Whedon's California," in *Slayage* 15.1 [45], Winter/Spring 2017, available at https://www.whedonstudies.tv/volume-15.html (accessed 4 November 2021).

[2] For example, see Andray Domise, "Game of Thrones and the Fantasy Genre has a Diversity Problem," 4 August 2017, *Maclean's*, available at https://www.macleans.ca/culture/television/game-of-thrones-and-the-fantasy-genre-has-a-diversity-problem/ (accessed 13 January 2021); Ashley Nkadi, "Why is Society Intent on Erasing Black People in Fantasy and Sci-Fi's Imaginary Worlds?," 9 November 2017, *The Root*, available at https://www.macleans.ca/culture/television/game-of-thrones-and-the-fantasy-genre-has-a-diversity-problem/ (accessed 13 January 2021); KristenD, "Diversity in Sci-Fi: Why Representation Matters," 24 May 2019, *Boston Public Library Blog*, available at https://www.bpl.org/blogs/post/diversity-in-sci-fi-why-representation-matters/ (accessed 13 January 2021).

[3] Eric Kripke has publically professed the influence *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had on his work and has even said "that he owes Buffy creator Joss Whedon a beer." See Jamie Gerber, "Every Buffyverse Actor Who Also Appeared on Supernatural," 21 June 2020, Screen Rant, available at https://screenrant.com/buffy-vampire-slayer-actors-supernatural-show/ (accessed 27 January 2021).

[4] For example, see Ryan Parker, "Charisma Carpenter Accuses Joss Whedon of 'Traumatizing' Her on Set; 'Buffy' Costars Offer Support," 10 February 2021, *The Hollywood Reporter*, available at https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/charisma-carpenter-accuses-joss-whedon-of-traumatizing-her-during-buffy-and-angel-4131004/ (accessed 1 October 2021).

[5] Virginia McLaurin, "Why the Myth of the 'Savage Indian' Persists," 27 February 2019, *Sapiens: Anthropology Magazine*, available at

https://www.sapiens.org/culture/native-american-stereotypes/ (accessed 29 September 2021).

[6] For more on *Angel*, see Stacey Abbott, *Angel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009); Stacey Abbott, ed., *Reading Angel: The TV Spin-Off With a Soul* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); James Rocha and Mona Rocha, *Joss Whedon, Anarchist? A Unified Theory of the Films and Television Series* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2019).

[7] "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco," *Angel*, Season 5, Episode 6, Mutant Enemy, written by Jeffrey Bell, directed by Jeffrey Bell, Twentieth Century Fox, Aired 5 November, 2003. Time stamp 00:13:25-28. Transcript available at https://transcripts.foreverdreaming.org/viewtopic.php?f=154&t=9535 (accessed 13 January 2021).

[8] Caroline Dodds Pennock, "Mass Murder or Religious Homicide? Rethinking Human Sacrifice and Interpersonal Violence in Aztec Society," *Historical Social Research*, 37.3 [141], Controversies around the Digital Humanities (2012), 279.

[9] Izabela Wilkosz, "Guilty Until Proven Innocent the Curious Case of Aztec Cannibalism," in *Kannibalismus, Eine Anthropologische Konstante?*, edited by Friedrich Pohl and Sebastian Fink (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 169.

[10] "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco," *Angel*, 5.6. Time stamp: 00:26:06-07.

[11] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:26:07-09.

[12] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:26:11-13.

[13] For example, anthropologist Michael Harner argued that cannibalism was practiced by the Aztecs to provide protein in their diet. For more on this refuted theory, see Michael Harner, "The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice," *American Ethnologist* 4.1 (1977): 117-135.

[14] For example, see Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, *Aztec Medicine, Health, and Nutrition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

[15] Herbert Burhenn, "Understanding Aztec Cannibalism," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 26 (2004), 9.

[16] Wilkosz, 169.

[17] Ibid, 171.

[18] Ibid., 169.

[19] "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco," *Angel*, 5.6. Time stamp: 00:31:21-22 and 00:31:26-28.

[20] Dodds Pennock, 276-277.

[21] "The Cautionary Tale of Numero Cinco," *Angel*, 5.6. Time stamp: 00:19:01-04.

[22] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:18:45-48.

[23] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:21:09-36.

[24] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:23:55-00:22:31.

[25] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:24:56-57 and 00:25:25-27.

[26] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:25:27-47.

[27] Even if it could be argued that Angel learned something about himself and his duty and responsibility to keep on fighting from this encounter, his role as white savior is still firmly in place in the episode.

[28] Betty Leddy, "La Llorona In Southern Arizona," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 1 (1948), 9-16; Ana Maria Carbonell, "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros," *Melus* 24.2 (Summer 1999), 53-54. Also see Robert A. Barakat, "Wailing Women of Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 82.325 (Jul-Sept 1969), 271. Barakat explains that the La Llorona appears wailing by rivers or other bodies of water. The Aztec goddesses associated with La Llorona are the goddess Cihuacoatl (who searches for her son at crossroads), the goddess Coatlicue (who is a mother goddess, with the power to create and take life, and created Cihuacoatl), and The Jade-Skirted One/Chalchiuhtliycue, who, as a water goddess, was the elder sister of the rain gods and killed men in water. In particular, the goddess Coatlicue wears white and wanders at night; Cihuacoatl covers herself, dresses in white, and wanders the streets wailing at night, carrying a cradle. See Carbonell, 53-54 and see Barakat, especially 272. Also see Robert Barakat, "Aztec Motifs in 'La Llorona,'" *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 29.4 (1965), 290-291. Also see A. Anderson and C. Bibble, trans. *Florentine Codex* by Fray Bernardino de Sahagun (Santa Fe, 1950), Book 1, 3-4. The Florentine Codex also describes a wailing woman in Book 12, where her wailing is an omen of the destruction brought about by Spaniards onto the local population; specifically, a wailing woman is heard lamenting at night "Oh, my children, where am I to take you?" and "Oh, my children, we are about to go forever." See the James Lockart translation of Bk. 12, Ch. 1, at: James Lockhart, ed. and trans. *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), available at Early Nahuatl Library https://enl.uoregon.edu/fcbk12ch01 (accessed 25 September 2021). For more on Coatlicue, see Domino Renee Perez, "Words, Worlds in Our Heads: Reclaiming La Llorona's Aztecan Antecedents in Gloria Anzaldua's 'My Black Angelos'" *Studies in American Indian Literature* 15.3/4 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004), 53-54.

[29] Patti Tamara Lenard and Peter Balint, "What is the (Wrong of) Cultural Appropriation," *Ethnicities* 20.2 (2020), 331.

[30] Maisha Z. Johnson, "What's Wrong with Cultural Appropriation? These 9 Answers Reveal Its Harm," 14 June 2015, *Every Day Feminism*, available at https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/06/cultural-appropriation-wrong/ (accessed 14 January 2021).

[31] "Supernatural Pilot," *Supernatural*, Season 1, Episode 1, Kripke Enterprises, written by Eric Kripke, directed by David Nutter, Warner Bros. Television, Aired 13 September 2005. Time stamp: 00:31:47-51. Transcript available at

http://www.supernaturalwiki.com/1.01_Pilot_(transcript) (accessed 14 January 2021).

[32] Leddy, 10. Also see Ed Walraven, "Evidence for a Developing Variant of 'La Llorona,'" *Western Folklore* 50.2 (April 1991), 208-209. In the new version, La Llorona discards children by city dumpsters, but is still guilty of disposing of her children.

[33] Leddy, 10. La Llorona is associated or combined with La Malinche. See Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (University of Texas Press, 1991), Kindle Edition.

[34] Christine Delsol, "Mexico's Legend of La Llorona Continues to Terrify," 9 October 2012, *SF Gate*, available at https://www.sfgate.com/mexico/mexcomix/article/Mexico-s-legend-of-La-Llorona-continues-to-3933072.php (accessed 14 January 2021). Also note that in some versions, La Llorona cries because she misses her spouse, a sailor lost a sea, or because her children disobey and ignore her admonishments. See Benjamin Radford, *Mysterious New Mexico: Miracles, Magic, and Monsters in the Land of Enchantment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 236.

[35] In another retelling of the La Llorona story, the moral is for children to not be out late, or they might be encountered by La Llorona and she might take them as her own, instead of her own. See Jeannie Banks Thomas, "Gender and Ghosts," in *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*, edited by Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Ann Grider and Jeannie Banks Thomas (University Press of Colorado, 2007), 93.

[36] "Supernatural Pilot," *Supernatural*, 1.1. Time Stamp: 00:31:33-37. He also adds "weeping woman" as a descriptor.

[37] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:32:01-22.

[38] Interestingly, other women in white exist in other folklore. For example, in German folklore there are the White Women, who are elf-like spirits (described as beautiful and dressed in white, usually bathing by a river), possibly inspired by Norse mythology. As we cannot find a reference to German mythology or folklore within this episode, we will not address this tradition in this essay. For more on White Women in German folklore, see Jacob Grimm, *German Mythology*, 1835. Available at Northvegr.org, 2007. Also see Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (New York: Pantheon, 1980). There is also "Die Weisse Frau" who is referred to as a woman in white who kills her children (see Bacil Kirtley, "La Llorona and Related Themes," *Western Folklore* 19.3 (1960), 157-158, 168). Robert Barakat however notes that a European/German basis to the La Llorona story is "only a vague possibility" as the Aztec motifs (similarity to Aztec deities, water locales, etc.) are so prevalent in the La Llorona legend and many things do not match up in the two stories. Barakat further notes that European motifs "are not as distinct as the native ones," noting that European

additions to the original legend could have been made post-Spanish conquest, through Church influence. See Barakat, "Aztec Motifs," 292, 295-296.

[39] The vanishing hitchhiker story is considered an urban legend or part of North American folklore, where a hitchhiker of either sex asks for a ride to a specific locale and then the driver realizes that the hitchhiker was either a ghost or a local divinity. When the ghost is a woman, she often is found on the anniversary of her death and leaves a token behind in the car. See Richard Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," *California Folklore Quarterly* 1.4 (October 1942): 303-335. Also see Ernest Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (Indiana University, 1966), 148. Elements of this legend are part of the episode: the person Sam gives a ride to turns out to be a ghost on the anniversary of her death.

[40] Nicholas Knight, *Supernatural: The Official Companion Season 1* (Titan Books, 2007), 26.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Leddy, 14.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 11.

[45] Ibid., 14.

[46] Men's wrongdoing includes their seducing her and impregnating her and then abandoning her for other women, sometimes due to class considerations, otherwise due to sexual desire they do not resist. It is due to these wrongdoings that she kills her children, in one version doing so to save them from being separated from her and being raised by another woman. See Leddy, 9-14. As others also note, La Llorona "is a victim of a misogynistic, patriarchal society." See Radford, 239.

[47] For more on Malinche, see Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

[48] Sandra Messinger Cypess, Chapter 1. Also see chapter 5.

[49] Thomas Hugh, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortes, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 171-172.

[50] We are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers from this journal for pointing out this critique. One reviewer felt this was a problem for our analysis, while the other was less concerned.

[51] Knight, *Supernatural,* 26.

[52] "La Llorona," *Grimm*, Season 2, Episode 9, written by Akela Cooper, directed by Holly Dale, Universal Television, aired 26 October 2012. Time stamp: 00:02:08-00:03:08.

[53] Scholar Angela Tenga notes that the character of Pilar serves as a connection to ancestry and the past. See Angela Tenga, "Wandering Wesen: Immigration as Adaptation in Grimm," *Supernatural Studies* 2.1 (2015), 34-36.
[54] The balam was worshipped by the Aztecs, Incas, and the Mayans. The word means jaguar but also refers to the Mayan priests who were in charge of the cult of the jaguar. For more on this topic, see "Ek Balam, A Mayan God Represented by the Black Jaguar," 20 August 2019, *The Yucatan Times*; George J. Bey et al., "The Ceramic Chronology of Ek Balam, Yucatan, Mexico," 10 October 2008, Cambridge University Press, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ancient-mesoamerica/article/abs/ceramic-chronology-of-ek-balam-yucatan-mexico/6964275FAB6865FACB09D2F6319AA956 (accessed 15 January 2021).
[55] Amy Fuller, "The Wailing Woman," 31 October 2017, available at *History Today* https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/wailing-woman (accessed 15 January 2021). The possible Aztec goddesses that were associated with La Llorona were mentioned above, in note 28. Of these, in particular Coatlicue and Cihuacoatl wail and search, with Cihuaacoatl dressed in white and crying. See Carbonell, 53-54 and see Barakat, "Wailing Women," especially 272; Barakat, "Aztec Motifs," 290-291. Additionally, both Cihuacoatl and Chalchiuhtliycue are associated with water.
[56] Grimm's cast is quite good at having diversity: the main cast has a black man (the character's name is Hank Griffin) as the best friend of the main hero, Nick Burkhardt. Both are detectives on the Portland police force. There is also Sergeant Drew Wu, another man of color. The cast is diverse, and a needed improvement over primarily white casts on earlier fantasy TV shows.
[57] Wendigo is also spelled windigo, wetiko, weendigo. See Michelle Lietz, "Cannibalism in Contact Narratives and the Evolution of the Wendigo" (MA Thesis, Eastern Michigan University: 2016), 21.
[58] Brady DeSanti, "The Cannibal Talking Head: The Portrayal of the Windigo 'Monster' in Popular Culture and Ojibwe Traditions," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27.3 (2015), 188.
[59] Robert A. Brightman, "The Windigo in the Material World," *Ethnohistory* 35.4 (1988), 337.
[60] Lietz, 21.
[61] DeSanti, 188.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Supernatural World of the Ojubway* (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001) 222.
[64] DeSanti, 188.
[65] Brightman, 337.

[66] Lietz, 23.
[67] Ibid., 41.
[68] "Wendigo," *Supernatural*, Season 1, Episode 2, Kripke Enterprises, written by Erik Kripke, directed by David Nutter, Warner Bros. Television, aired 20 September 2005. Time stamp: 00:30:02-03.
[69] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:30:05-28.
[70] For more on the Algonquin peoples, see Daniel Clement, *The Algonquins* (Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996).
[71] "Wendigo," *Supernatural*, 1.2. Time stamp: 00:30:53-00:31:06.
[72] See Lietz, who also brings up this point, 54.
[73] "To Protect and Serve Man," *Grimm*, Season 2, Episode 11, written by Dan E. Fesman, directed by Omar Madha, Universal Television, aired 9 November, 2012. Time stamp: 00:01:45-0:01:52.
[74] Ibid. Time stamp: 00:10:37-00:11:01.
[75] For more on the Abenaki, see Colin G. Calloway, *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).
[76] Ibid.
[77] Lietz, 21.

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