

# **RACE, RELIGION, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN THE 1960s: THE ACTUALITY OF THOMAS BERGER AND ISHMAEL REED'S POST-WESTERNS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The New Western and/or Post-Western of the 1960s<sup>1</sup> parodied the patterns of characterization of the classic western beyond recognition to serve a double purpose. It breathed fresh air into the 'exhausted' genre by providing more intriguing western histories (lower case), on the one hand, and revitalised novel writing at a time when the novel was pronounced 'dead',<sup>2</sup> on the other hand. Likewise, Ishmael Reed's *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969) and Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964) contribute immensely to the afore-mentioned 'mission' and beyond. What's more, written at the height of the 'counter-culture revolution', they both undertake to question and uproot preconceived absolutes and media-based realities regarding race, religion, and indigenous cultures by reviving the resourcefulness of Afro-American and Indian heritage.

To serve this purpose, they respectively focus on Hoodoo aesthetics<sup>3</sup> and the Plains Indians' 'cosmology',<sup>4</sup> the Cheyenne, as the best embodiments of these two age-old cultures which are revived and analysed from the 'high ground' of 1960s which are best known for their aftermath than for what was achieved during those years. Furthermore, these particular experimental novels undermine the pre-eminence of popular culture and pave the way towards a better representation of indigenous cultures be it Afro-American or Indian. The main purpose of this paper regards the actuality of these two exemplary works at a time when the multicultural experiment initiated in the 1960s faces certain and similar challenges.

**KEYWORDS:** Hoodoo Aesthetics, Multiculturalism, 1960s, Post-Western, The Cheyenne