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## White 'Alliahs:' The Creation & Perpetuation of the 'Wise Indian' Trope

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## White ‘Alliahs:’ The Creation & Perpetuation of the ‘Wise Indian’ Trope

### INTRODUCTION

Fortunately, the majority of people no longer use the term “Indian” when referring to Native Americans (Natives)—at least not in polite company. It has been exchanged with the more socially acceptable indigenous, Native American, or First Nations (when referring to Canadian Natives). But what about the words wise or wisdom? It has been married to the term “Indian” for decades, including when referring to Native Americans of North America as well as indigenous tribes and communities around the world. The word “wise” is solidly coupled with “Indian,” and used almost exclusively by white populations. I became interested in this damaging stereotype when I recently noticed an increase in acquaintances, all of whom are white and consider themselves “Native American allies,” using the word “wise” and its variances when referring to Natives. For example, one particularly outspoken “Facebook philosopher” copied and pasted an article featuring Oglala Lakota Nation protestors in South Dakota and summed up her opinion on the article with, “Let’s listen to indigenous wisdom for once!” Granted, I do not believe this comment or the many like it are consciously meant to be racist or offensive. The word “wise” is by no means inherently negative or damaging, just like the word “magic” is also (largely) not derogatory, but becomes so when used in the “magical negro” trope. The issue is that the word “wise” is not regularly paired with whiteness, professions that are deemed elite or desirable by white speakers, religions that include predominantly white parishioners, or *any other* descriptors that are principally considered owned by or appealing to white audiences. For example, you will likely not hear someone refer to “Swedish wisdom,” a “wise engineer,” “Lutheran wisdom,” or the “wise architect.” This is not, of course, to say that the Swedes are not wise, that engineers and architects are intelligent yet always white, or that Lutherans do not welcome non-whites into their fold. However, when a person, occupation, religion, or any other marker is considered “white-owned,” words besides wisdom are usually used to describe intelligence. It is much more common for someone to refer to the “knowledge” or “expertise” of a white person, while “wisdom” is reserved for Natives or other “brown” persons. A knowledgeable Swiss engineer who is an expert in their field sounds a lot more natural than a wise Swiss engineer with a lot of

wisdom in their field because the racism rooted in the words “wise” and “wisdom” have become part of our culturally accepted verbiage.

The trope of the “wise Indian” persists in the same camp as the “magical negro,” as an under-appreciated yet somehow enlightened “brown person” with the sole purpose of helping the white messiah on their journey. Just like the magical negro, the wise Indian often appears when the white savior is facing a particularly challenging situation. The wise Indian may have made a previous appearance in the white messiah’s journey, sometimes strictly for foreshadowing, and offers what is usually secret and magical tools or “wisdom” to ensure the white messiah continues on their fated hero’s journey. The information provided on *what* exactly this wisdom might be is usually missing, incorrect, a blending of cultures (which may or may not actually be representative of the Native person’s history), or completely imaginary. Perhaps the wise Indian is depending on extraordinary help themselves, such as having friendly woodland racoons plait their hair so they have more time to soak up that magical wisdom that is so frustratingly kept hidden from their white counterparts (*Pocahontas*). Increasingly, today’s white messiahs are re-branding themselves as so-called “allies” and are now sitting at an awkward intersection where they are “alliahs” at best—still firmly rooted in their messiah and savior roles, but trying to move into an arena where they are more aware of their actions (both past and present). An added benefit is, of course, shedding that now-damaging label of “messiah” and “savior.” However, even the choice of the word “ally” is of particular interest, given that the term itself comes from warfare jargon to refer to cooperating with others for military purposes. Our “white alliahs” seem unaware that alliances cannot exist in a silo, as cooperation requires an agreement on *both* sides. It is difficult to brand yourself as an “ally” without having the other side agree to such a cooperative.

#### TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

Thanks to search engine algorithms, it is now easier than ever to see exactly how prevalent the wise Indian trope is in real-time. In my business life, I own a digital content company that specializes in creating texts that follow search engine optimization (SEO) best practices. For those unfamiliar with SEO, it is the *why* behind certain websites appearing first when you query words and phrases. For example, if you Google “dog groomer Houston,” certain websites will appear first in your search results. A few might be paid, but otherwise the results

are considered “organic.” Google’s algorithm is semi-secret, and it is mirrored by every other major search engine such as Yahoo and Bing. The intricacies of SEO can run very deep and are always changing, but some basics can be used to determine exactly which words the majority of people are pairing with others. The goal of Google’s algorithm is to match people searching for words and phrases with the “best” websites available. If Google doesn’t regularly lead people to the most appropriate and timely websites, people will eventually start to use other search engines (and Google certainly does not want that). One of the most obvious ways to see SEO at work is in autofill and by looking at the first websites that appear in your searches. Another insight tool is to simply take a look at the first page of search engine results pages (SERPs) when you query a phrase like “Indian trope.” Marketing and SEO expert Neil Patel reminds website owners that 75 percent of people never look beyond the first page of Google search results pages, and most people only look at the first handful of results. Finally, there are a number of “Keyword Planner Tools,” which are inspired by Google’s own Keyword Planner Tool. However, now that Google requires an Adwords account, many SEO experts are using alternatives. These tools allow you to input words or phrases, then offers the most popular similar searches in real time. We will be using these three approaches when considering the relevancy of the wise Indian today.

#### WISE GUYS

What is the difference between calling Natives wild, untamed savages and calling them wise and enlightened beyond the capabilities of their white counterparts? Ultimately, not much, save for the more negative and overt racism of the former. As long as the white collective continues to see Natives as others, systemic racism will continue to blossom—though perhaps more covertly. Simultaneously, as some Natives seek to reclaim historically damaging words and slurs, it seems our white counterparts are doing the same. Consider the word “savage.” For generations, it was one of the most popular slurs for Natives, and was even included in Thomas Jefferson’s original Declaration of Independence wording when addressing King George: “He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare, is undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions” (Founding). However, one does not need to look farther than pop culture or social media to see that “savage” has been completely taken over by largely non-Native millennials and their younger counterparts. “Savage” is being used to

describe everyone from today's "boss bitch" to the underdog on a come-up. It is no different than the persistent mascots from the Cleveland Indians to the Washington Redskins, and these overt racial slurs are what inspire some white fans to slather their cheeks in "redface" and don costume headdresses when attending games. Another trend is the abject takeover of inner-Native colloquialisms by white populations under the guise of being an ally and "asking" permission (although the ask more often comes off as an attempt at a polite gesture before claiming what is not theirs). A personal example is the use of the word "NDN." It is an intentional misspelling of "Indian" which some Natives, myself included, use as a form of reclamation. The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC has done the same, emblazoning #ndnseverywhere throughout their exhibits. I personally experienced a "taking" with the word "ndn" on Twitter when I used it in a post directed to and about fellow Natives. A self-proclaimed "white ally" responded in the comments that she "loved" that spelling and wrote, "I hope it's ok that I start using it." Different Natives may have different opinions, but I am of the camp who believes a white person using "ndn" is no different than a white person using "nigga."

For those who are wondering at the regular comparison between racism towards Natives and racism towards blacks, the answer is sadly rather simple: Many white people can understand much better *why* they should not say or do certain things in regards to black Americans (such as using the n-word) compared to their understanding of why they should not say or do certain things in regards to Native Americans. If this were not the case, the Cleveland Indians and Washington Redskins would have had their mascots and names changed long ago. While it is relatively true that America as a whole is "less overtly racist" than it was 50 years ago, it remains difficult to accept that even "white liberals have a deep and abiding investment in certain aspects of white supremacy and, by extension, institutionalized racial inequality (Ikard 12). We are not as far removed from the more obvious racist acts of the twentieth century than we would like to believe. Re-branding as allies instead of messiahs or saviors, overcompensating by tacking on the words "wise" and "wisdom" to types of knowledge (imaginary or real) that is not widely understood by white America, and trying to increase a perceived personal cool quotient by adopting vernacular whether it's the n-word with an "a" at the end or using "ndn" instead of the inherently racist "Indian" does not elevate a white person beyond the grips of their own internalized and institutionally-supported racism. In fact, it often does the opposite, highlighting

bias instead of burying it. When Robin DiAngelo coined the term “white fragility,” she stressed that

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.

(1)

DiAngelo also states that whites who identify themselves as liberals are *more* threatened than white conservatives when black or brown people point out white privilege because their cultivated anti-racist stance is cultural currency (64). This brings us back to the wise Indian (or “ndn”) trope, which can also be perceived as fodder for cultural currency within the white liberal demographics. This trope is not actually new but rather a re-emergence thanks to the very slight veil of false empathy it embodies. It is very unlikely that the person who uses or perpetuates the wise Indian trope is doing so with any kind of consciously subversive intentions. However, the wise Indian is not new, nor does it serve to equalize or genuinely uplift society’s perceptions of Natives. The wise Indian can be found in literature, films, television, and pop culture since nearly the days of colonization, but makes especially prominent appearances in westerns. From *The Lone Ranger*’s trusty “sidekick” Tonto/Kemosabe to the embarrassingly horrific representation of Native Americans in 2000’s *Shanghai Noon*, it is clear that little has changed when it comes to the wise Indian in pop culture and entertainment. However, to fully realize the current state of the wise Indian trope in real time, one only needs to look to Google for guidance.

HEY, GOOGLE ...

As previously mentioned, we will be considering three foundational aspects of SEO—autofill, the first page of search results, and keyword tools—to gauge the different use of “wise” and “wisdom” when applied to Natives compared to other races or ethnic groups. However, it is

also worth exploring what types of websites appear first when Googling variances of the wise Indian trope such as “wisdom indigenous,” “wise Native American,” or “Indian wisdom.” The websites which appear first with these intrinsically racist key phrases (search engine terminology) are considered by Google to be the “best matches.” A lot goes into the algorithms to actually *determine* what constitutes a best match, but these websites are generally considered to be the closest matches to what people querying these key phrases want to find. They have the right content that isn’t plagiarized, the site loads quickly, there are little if any pop-ups or advertisements, and the sites have proven themselves to be safe and not likely to spread viruses. These are just a few of the considerations Google’s algorithm makes when figuring out how to rank the quality of a site. Bear in mind that the following results are unlikely to be replicated exactly because SEO is always changing. However, these 2019 results are indicative of similar results which can be expected in the coming months and (unfortunately) years.

AUTOFILL

### *Wise Indian*

Query “wise Indian” in Google, and you will garner the expected autofill results such as “wise Indian sayings,” “wise Indian quotes,” “wise Indian chief” and even “wise Indian trope.” There are clearly enough people trying to find out more about the wise Indian to result in numerous “helpful” suggestions (see fig. 1). There is nothing surprising in these results, except perhaps the “wise Indian academy digital campus,” which refers to a school in India. Actual Indians, as non-whites with their own long, rich, and varied history, are also regularly linked to the “wise Indian” trope, particularly when it comes to white audiences desiring the enlightenment of the gurus.

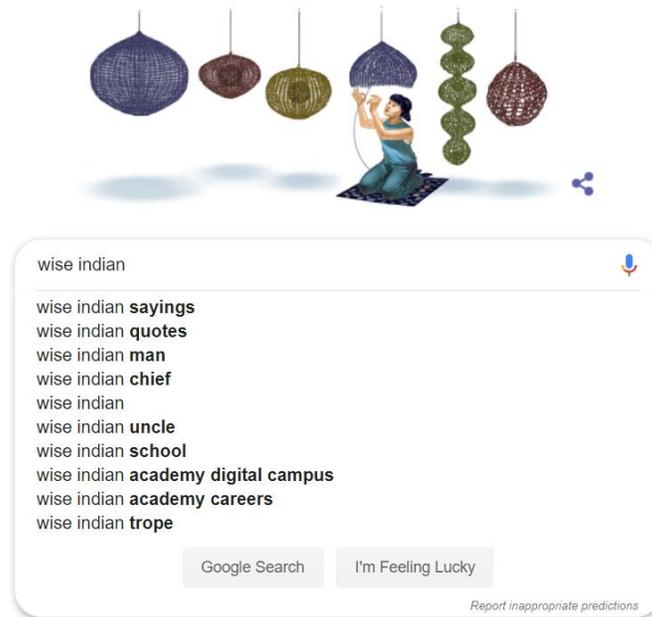


Figure 1

### *Wise white*

The autofill results for “wise white” are worlds apart from that of “wise Indian” (see fig. 2). Suggestions include “wise white cheddar popcorn” (which is a brand name) and “wise white like me” which leads queriers to Tim Wise’s book *White Like Me: Reflections on Race* which is— fittingly—a book in which Wise reflects on his own white privilege. However, this result is sheer coincidence. It may tackle white privilege, but it’s White’s surname that both inspired his book title and (likely) the Google autofill suggestion. For those who got a craving when cheddar popcorn was the first suggestion when querying “wise white,” most of the remaining top suggestions can help whether it is “wise white cheddar cheese doodles” or more information on “wise white cheddar popcorn calories” or “wise white cheddar popcorn ingredients” need to be examined. More information on the White Sox’s DeWayne Wise is also available, or queriers can shop for figurines of a “wise white owl.”

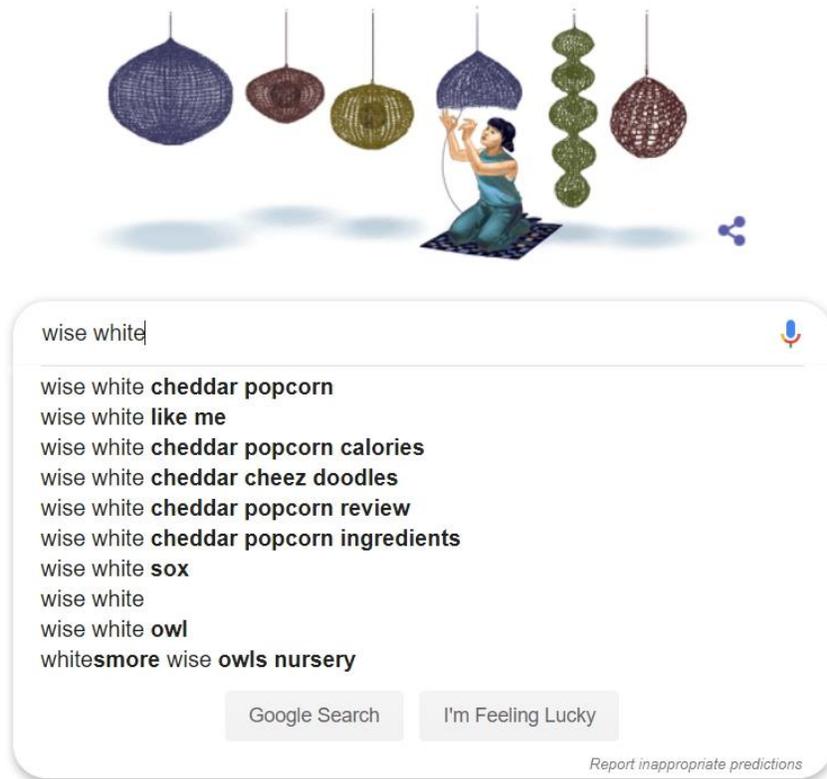


Figure 2

### *Wise European*

Perhaps “white” is simply too broad. After all, it is not an ethnicity and not nearly as specific as “Indian.” However, when querying for “white European,” the results are not much better. Of course, there are plenty of Europeans who are not white, but the stereotype of Europeans being white is arguably as prevalent as all Natives being “wise.” There are few autofill suggestions at all for the “wise European,” and none of them hint at the idea that maybe Europeans are naturally wise. The suggested results are for the “wise European commission,” which is the acronym for the Water Information System for Europe, “area wise European countries” (which simply leads to Wikipedia pages which lists countries in Europe by area), a similar result with “population wise European countries” to help queriers find out the populations of each country, and in what looks like an exhaustive effort by Google simply “European wise” with no additional suggestions (see fig. 3).



Figure 3

### *Wise Caucasian*

The term “Caucasian” to refer to a white person of European descent it falling out of favor, but still worth looking at the results when pairing it with “wise” (see fig. 4). Like the “wise European,” there are few autofill suggestions. However, what is offered is of interest. The top suggestion is the “wise Caucasian kutchie dub,” a 2014 music album from the German group Kutchie Dub. Perhaps there *is* an element of linking wise to German in this suggestion. There is also the suggested song “In the Night” by Wise Caucasian, a different musical artist whose real name is Steve O’Sullivan. He also has a song called “Darkside,” which is another suggestion. O’Sullivan encompasses the majority of this autofill result thanks to his stage name “The Wise Caucasian” and although it is clear he is linking “wise” to “Caucasian” it appears more as a means of standing out as an artist, perhaps with a twinge of sarcasm (i.e. “wise-ass”) rather than genuinely connecting the marker of “wise” to his Caucasian heritage.



Figure 4

### *Wise Swiss*

There are many countries which are perceived as primarily white, and analyzing the autofill suggestions for each would serve no great purpose. Switzerland, and its Swiss residents, were chosen at random as a country that is often viewed as primarily white. Again, this is not to say or suggest that there are not non-white Swiss people and residents (of course there are). It may be of interest for some to continue checking the autofill suggestions for a variety of countries and/or races. However, as for the “wise Swiss,” Google once again has few recommendations (see fig. 5). The first suggestion is no suggestion at all—Google is ultimately recommending that a querier just hit “enter” and see the results. Otherwise, Google suggests that maybe the querier is looking for “sweet wise swiss meringue buttercream” or “sweet wise swiss buttercream,” both of which are simply types of cakes and buttercreams. There is also a YouTuber and website called Sweet Wise who has a penchant for helping viewers with their dessert recipes, and they top Google’s autofill recommendations. Google also suggests “herbal wise swiss” and “k1 herbal

wise swiss,” which are products at a Swiss store called Herbal Wise Swiss. According to Google, it seems the Swiss are not naturally “wise” at all.



Figure 5

### *Indigenous wisdom*

In stark contrast to the minimal autofill suggestions for phrases like “wise Swiss,” the words “indigenous women” result in a number of autofill suggestions (see fig. 6). Many directly feed into the wise Indian trope, such as Google’s suggestion of “indigenous wisdom keeper,” which further cements the idea that Natives and indigenous people hold “secret wisdoms” that are not available to their white counterparts. Additional autofill suggestions for this rich term include “indigenous wisdom quotes,” “indigenous wisdom sustainability” (further suggesting that Natives have a clearer connection to the earth), and “indigenous wisdom meaning.” There are also suggestions that branch out beyond Native American stereotypes, such as the autofill suggestion of “indigenous wisdom sustainability pachamama alliance,” which drives traffic to a website showcasing the efforts of the indigenous Achuar people in Ecuador who are “fully committed to maintaining their stewardship of the rainforest” according to the Pachama Alliance.

This may not be related to Native Americans of the United States, but it is again linking “wisdom” specifically to an indigenous group.



Figure 6

### *American wisdom*

If there is such a thing as “indigenous wisdom,” surely there must be *American* wisdom. However, query this phrase and the autofill suggestions are dramatically different (see fig. 7). The first suggestion takes queriers to the “American wisdom series,” a scripture-based publisher of Christian pamphlets. The next suggestion is for the “American wisdom association,” a Buddhist non-profit. “American wisdom teeth removal” and “American wisdom teeth” both make appearances. However, it does not take long before Google’s algorithm “thinks” the querier is actually looking for Native *American* or *American* Indian quotes, wisdom, or sayings. Even without any mention of Native, Indian, or indigenous in the original query, autofill quickly estimates that—thanks to the word “wisdom”—the querier is likely looking for websites related to indigenous wisdom.

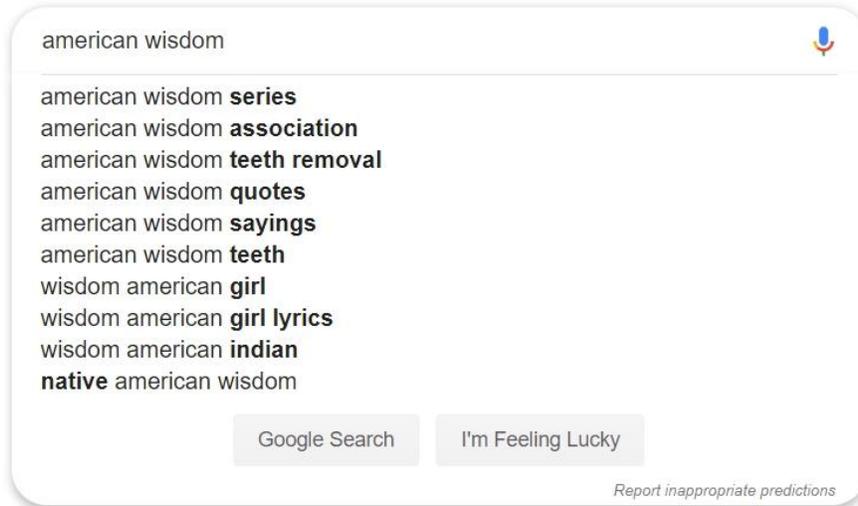


Figure 7

### *Native American wisdom*

One would think the autofill suggestions for “Native American wisdom” would be easy to predict, and in many ways this is true. There is the expected “Native American wisdom quotes,” “Native American wisdom book” (perhaps for those who hope to unearth the “secrets” of indigenous wisdom), “Native American wisdom teachings,” and “Native American wisdom on death” (see fig. 8). However, what is curious is that the *first* autofill suggestion is “Native American wisdom teeth.” This is not a mistaken autofill that leads queriers to the basics of wisdom teeth—instead, it takes queriers to a plethora of information on how Native teeth are different than other (i.e. white) teeth. The first suggested page is an article by Sarah Jackson on the Owlocation website titled “How Your Teeth Reveal Clues About Your Ancestry.” It is a personal account of how an orthodontist discovered her daughter’s “special tooth.” As Jackson recalls, the orthodontist said

“You have something I have not seen before, except in textbooks. In dental school we learned about the *talon cusp*, which is what you have. This is something that occurs more

frequently in Native American populations, among certain others, and I am guessing you have some Native American ancestry.” I nodded. The orthodontist told my daughter that she did indeed have a special tooth, and it was an honor to see it.

(Jackson)

While it is true that a talon cusp is relatively rare, it is certainly not solely prevalent in Natives. It appears the orthodontist in Jackson’s story alluded to this, but the talon cusp is also evident in Asian populations (Prabhu et al. 23). The tone of Jackson’s story suggests that she believes her daughter is “special” because of her “special tooth” which reveals her secret Native ancestry. By unfortunate chance, the talon cusp also happens to have somewhat of a stereotypical tinge to it thanks to the term “talon” and the strong connections between many Native tribes/communities and birds of prey.

The second website when querying “Native American wisdom teeth” is a dentist’s site which does not explicitly address “Native American teeth,” but the third website is yet another personal blog. The owner and author of Bonnie’s Brainstorm simply goes by her first name and the featured 2009 blog (which, bear in mind, even at a decade old *still* ranks as third for the query “Native American wisdom teeth) is titled “Chewing the Fat About Native American Teeth.” “Bonnie” recalls,

I remember when I was a little girl and my permanent front teeth came in. I had a ridge on the backs of my six front upper teeth. I thought that was the thing about permanent teeth, that there were ridges on the backs of every one's upper front teeth just to make a really secure bite. But did you know that not everyone has a ridge? They are called shovel teeth and they are a racial feature of Native American People. The backs of Bob's [her husband] front teeth are smooth thanks to his Scottish Ancestry. How can he really hold on to anything when he bites down? All of our children have the ridge. Shovel teeth must be a dominant trait. I am only 1/32nd Cherokee. My children are 1/64th and still carry this trait.

(“Bonnie”)

While it is true that shovel teeth were and are common in Native Americans, this is not a “special” trait solely held by Natives. According to Leslea Husko, shovel-shaped teeth are a

genetic mutation that may have helped children survive 20,000 years ago when journeying from Siberia to Alaska (4426). In an analysis of 5,000 ancient teeth of people from the Americas, Asia, and Europe, researchers found that almost all Natives had shoveled teeth before Europeans arrived—and today, about 40 percent of Asians have this genetic mutation (4426). Shovel teeth appeared in China 30,000 years ago, suggesting that the genetic mutation is derived from Asian (specifically Chinese) ancestry, and not randomly appearing in Natives (4426). The first page of search results for “Native American wisdom teeth” also leads to a community message board where a number of people, who do not identify as Native in the thread, share information on their own “special teeth.” Many say they have been told that it is a sign of Native ancestry. Ultimately, this first page of search results for “Native American wisdom teeth” perpetuates the idea that Natives are inherently unique, special, and even magical with tangible traits that identify them as Native. In the two personal blogs featured on page one, it appears that these “special Indian teeth” are a positive quality because it ekes a person into not being “just white.” They are special because they are 1/32<sup>nd</sup> or 1/64<sup>th</sup> Cherokee, yet presumably benefit by everything white privilege has to offer because they “pass.”



Figure 8

*Caucasian wisdom*

Google “Caucasian wisdom” and the sole autofill suggestion is to add “wisdom teeth” to the query (see fig. 9). Apparently, nobody is looking for inspiration from “Caucasian wisdom.”

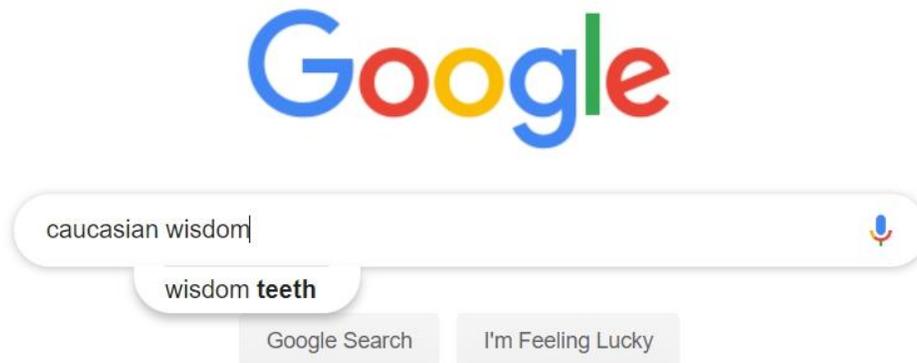


Figure 9

### *Austrian wisdom*

Like “Caucasian wisdom,” Google has virtually no autofill suggestions for those looking for Austrian wisdom. Of course, Austrians are not solely white, but for those looking for some Austrian wisdom inspiration, their only option is (again) to learn more about wisdom teeth (see fig. 10).

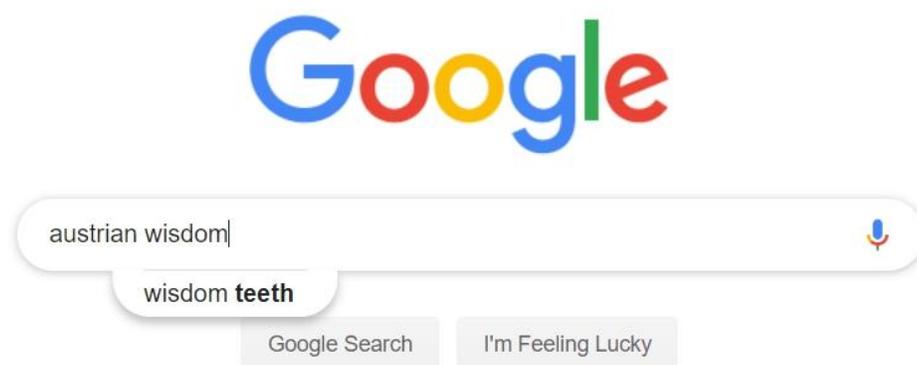


Figure 10

## *Australian wisdom*

Again, of course not all Australians are white and the country has its own aboriginal populations. However, Google’s autofill suggestions for “Australian wisdom” focus either on business or *animal* wisdom (see fig. 11). From the cost of removing wisdom teeth to leading queriers to “wisdom Australian equities” so they can better handle their finances, the term “wisdom” when querying Australia is strictly business for the first few results. However, look further down and suddenly “Australian wisdom” autofill suggestions are “Australian animal wisdom,” “Australian animal wisdom cards,” “Australian wildlife wisdom,” and “ocean wisdom Australian tour.” Tucked in the middle is the autofill suggestion of “Australian aboriginal wisdom,” which gives a nod to the fact that indigenous populations around the world are inherently linked to being “wise” when the same is not true of white demographics.

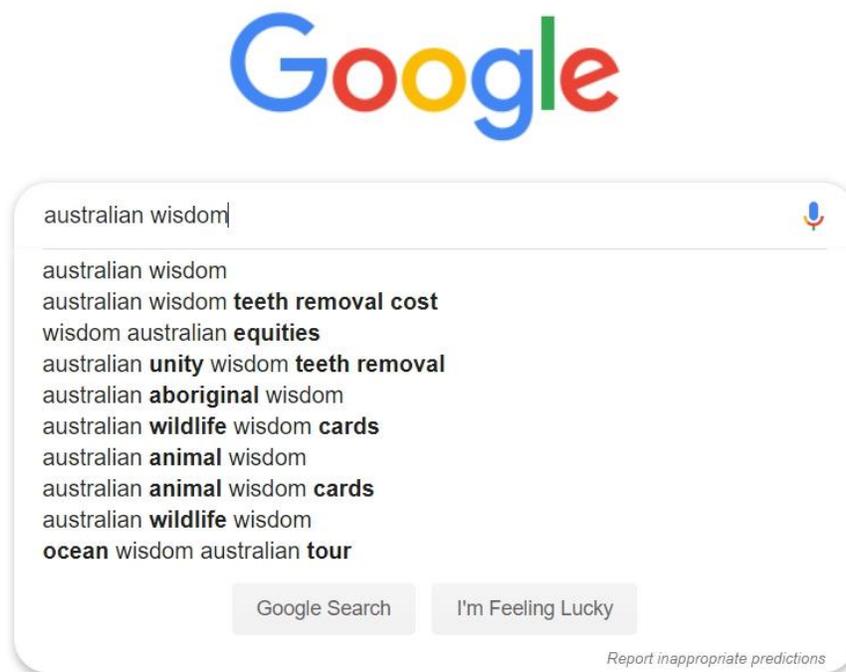


Figure 11

## THE FIRST SERP

The importance of the first page of SERPs is well-documented, as almost nobody looks beyond that first page. This means that the first page of SERPs says a lot about what people are looking

for when they query key phrases. Search engine algorithms are simply trying to match queriers to the websites that give them what they are looking for. This can speak volumes when considering the first-page SERP of Native-centric key phrases—or any key phrase. According to studies, the first result can garner anywhere from 36.4–56.36 percent of all clicks, which highlights the importance of top rankings (Selbach). For purposes of these comparisons, only the top three search results will be recorded, as the top three capture 61 percent of all clicks, and after the third result the click through rates (propensity of a person to actually click on a link for any discernible amount of time) drastically reduces (Sharp).

### *Native American wisdom*

The first Google result when querying this key phrase is a blog titled “10 Pieces of Native American Wisdom That Will Inspire the Way You Live Your Life.” The author and owner of the blog “Buddhaimonia: Meditation for Everyday Life,” Matthew Valentine, does not claim any Native ancestry in his biography, and claims he “largely stumbled upon the path [he is] on now.” The second search result is for a page titled “American Indian words of wisdom” on the site “Native Circle.” The page is largely a collection of quotes from Native notables. Fortunately, the site owner *does* claim Native ancestry, and John Two-Hawks is a Grammy- and Emmy-nominated artist. The third result is the GoodReads collection of quotes on “Native American Wisdom Quotes,” of which there are 79 as of 2 May 2019.

### *Indigenous wisdom*

Google this phrase, and the first result is the page “How Indigenous Wisdom Can Inform the Global Transformation We Need” on the site “Pachamama Alliance.” These how-tos include tapping into the healing power of plants, “sacred” rituals, shapeshifting, and ancient stories and myths. The author, Jocelyn Mercado, does not claim any indigenous ancestry in her biography, but writes that she is “currently working on her first novel, a modern myth based on actual and historical events that explores the fate of the indigenous cultures of the Americas and the ways that indigenous cultures are inextricably linked to the health of our planet.” The second search result leads queriers to “The Global Indigenous Wisdom Library,” a site offering free recordings from “indigenous leaders.” The host of these recordings is an enrolled member of the Ihantonwan Dakota and Chickasaw Nations tribes, Phil Lane, Jr. The third result is a page titled

“Indigenous Wisdom for Responsible Living” on the site “Uplift.” The author, Anneloes Smitsman, claims no indigenous ancestry in her biography. The results for both Native American wisdom and indigenous wisdom are not surprising. They are likely exactly what queriers are looking for, although it is unfortunate that the top three results in each category are not primarily content by Native and indigenous authors.

#### *Wise Native American*

The first result for this query is a page titled “Native American Proverbs and Legends” on the site “Legends of America.” The page is a collection of quotes by Natives, and the owner of the site, Kathy Weiser-Alexander, claims no Native ancestry in her biography. The second and third results are mirror images of the query Native American wisdom, featuring the pages “American Indian Wisdom” and “10 Pieces of Native American Wisdom That Will Inspire the Way You Live Your Life.”

#### *Wise American Indian*

The first two results are familiar: “American Indian Wisdom—Native American Words of Wisdom” and “Native American Proverbs and Wisdom.” However, with this search, the third result is a Wikipedia page titled “American Indian Elder.”

#### *Wise Indian*

All three top results for this search yield Facebook pages, including “Wise Indians,” “The Wise Indian,” and “The Wise Indian Uncle.” Fortunately, all of these top three results are referring to genuine Indians and not the outdated term for Natives.

#### *Wise German*

While of course not all Germans are white, judging by the top three results of this search phrase, the term “wise” is not largely connected to Germans or Germany. All three top results are related to translation including Cambridge’s dictionary result, Collins Dictionary’s result, and Vocabulix’s result for translating “wise” from English to German.

#### *Wise Dutch*

This search phrase mirrors the German result, with all three top results translating the term “wise” from English to Dutch. The first two results are from Interglot, while the third is from Wordhippo.

#### *White wisdom*

The first result for this search is telling. It is a book on Amazon titled *Native Wisdom for White Minds: Daily Reflections Inspired by Native Minds of the World*. This is suggestive that Google algorithms have discovered the majority of people searching for “Native wisdom” (even when any word related to Native Americans is not in the query) are white. The second result is a book on Amazon, but this one is titled *Wisdom from White Eagle*. White Eagle is listed as the spokesperson for White Eagle Publishing Co., and does not appear to claim any Native ancestry. Instead, White Eagle is touted as a “movement” in which “souls who have, through the experiences of many lifetimes, transcended earthly limitations” (White Eagle). The third result is a site titled “Wisdom Intense White,” which is dedicated to teeth whitening strips.

#### *Caucasian wisdom*

Perhaps it is because the word Caucasian is falling out of favor, but the first search result for this phrase is for the Caucasian Shepherd Dog on the site Wisdompanel. The second result is for the page “Proverbs and Sayings of the Caucasian Mountain Peoples” on the site Abkhazworld. Finally, the third site is a page on a dental site titled “5 Things You need to Know About Your Wisdom Teeth.”

#### *New Zealand wisdom*

Even though there is no mention of *aboriginal* New Zealanders in this query, the first search result is for a page titled “Whakatauki and Maori Wisdom: New Zealand Thoughts” on the site Medium. This is reflective of the recurring idea that only indigenous/aboriginal people have “wisdom.” The second result is a dental page for wisdom teeth information, and the third is a page called “E-wisdom Forum of New Zealand,” touted as a “large series of Chinese Forum” in New Zealand. Once again, the term “wisdom”—when not referring to teeth—is relegated to non-white demographics.

Although keyword planner tool results are always changing, as they are driven by real-time searches, it is unlikely that changes will be drastic in short-term analyses. Factors that dramatically change keyword planner tool results are usually headline-making stories and events. Keyword planner tools work by taking keywords (such as “Indian”) or key phrases (such as “Native American wisdom”) and offering real-time “variants.” These variants are the most similar queries people are searching for in addition to, or instead of, the keyword or key phrase entered into the keyword tool planner. For instance, if someone Googles “French recipes,” it is very likely a suggested variant is “recipes France” because if people are querying one key phrase, it is very likely others searching for the same results are querying the variant. For purposes of this comparison, <https://keywordtool.io/> is used, which offers the option to search keyword variants using Google.

### *Native American wisdom*

According to the suggested key phrase variants for this phrase, the top recommended options are:

- Native American wisdom quotes
- Native American wisdom book
- Native American wisdom teeth
- Native American wisdom PDF
- Native American wisdom stories
- Native American wisdom teachings
- Native American wisdom on death
- Native American wisdom amazon
- Native American wisdom sayings
- Native American wisdom about death

Marketers who are paid to create digital content on “Native American wisdom” may use these suggested variants to help boost the Google rankings on such content.

### *Indigenous wisdom*

Check the key phrase variants for “indigenous wisdom,” and there are some expected deviances from strictly Native American results:

- Indigenous wisdom keeper
- Indigenous wisdom quotes
- Indigenous wisdom definition
- Indigenous wisdom sustainability pachama alliance
- Indigenous wisdom and permaculture skills convergence
- Indigenous wisdom keepers of Egypt
- Indigenous wisdom sustainability
- Indigenous wisdom advisory panel
- Indigenous wisdom summit
- Indigenous knowledge and wisdom center

There is some overlap with India, Egypt, and of businesses and conference that incorporate “indigenous wisdom” into their practices.

### *Indian wisdom*

The results of this search yields plenty of gray areas. In most cases, it is impossible to tell if the hypothetical searcher is looking for wisdom related to Native Americans or Indians. The top ten suggestions include:

- Indian wisdom quotes
- Indian wisdom book
- Indian wisdom literature
- Indian wisdom my Monier Williams
- Indian wisdom teeth
- Indian wisdom stories
- Indian wisdom and modern management
- Indian wisdom two wolves
- Indian wisdom quotes life
- Indian ancient wisdom

The obvious nod to Natives is in the “two wolves” suggestion. This refers to the story of the two wolves fighting inside each person. Depending on the source of the story (which has been

attributed to Cherokees, though no specific Cherokee tribe or clan, but has also been considered pan-Native), the two wolves are called Hate and Love or two similarly contradictory representations. The moral of the story is the wolf who wins is the one you feed. However, the book by Monier is a nineteenth century book on Hinduism.

### *British wisdom*

Once more, there are plenty of non-white British residents and citizens. However, Britain, as a colonizer, is perceived as a quintessential white region. Query “British wisdom,” and the suggested variants do little to suggest actual British wisdom:

- British wisdom quotes
- Stella Wisdom British library
- British comedian Norman Wisdom
- British words of wisdom
- British actor Norman Wisdom
- British Dental Association wisdom teeth
- Diverse wisdom British library
- British names meaning wisdom
- Wisdom British English
- British word for wisdom

There is a touch of authentic “British wisdom” suggested in these variants, such as “British words of wisdom,” but for the most part the suggestions are to organizations with “wisdom” in the title or actors with the surname Wisdom.

### *Wise Native American*

Those querying the phrase “wise Native American” might also be looking for the following queries according to the keyword tool planner:

- Wise Native American quotes
- Wise Native American sayings
- Wise owl Native American story
- Wise in Native American language

- Wise words from Native American
- Wise one in Native American
- Native American wise woman
- Native American wise man
- Native American wives tale
- Native American wise animal

The suggestive stereotypes and racism snowballs as the queries continue to be suggested. While the first two suggestions are rather obvious, the third begins to hint at the stereotype that Natives aren't really "humans" at all, but rather wild animals. Next, the suggestions begin that "Native American" is a language in itself, similar to the idea that on the other side of the world "Indians speak Indian." With hundreds of tribes in the United States alone, there are also hundreds of Native languages and dialects. Strangely, the suggestion "Native American wives tale" is also included in the top ten, which is indicative of the algorithm "thinking" the word "wise" was a typo.

### *Wise indigenous*

Changing the words "Native American" to "indigenous" certainly takes the suggested keywords to a more global scale. The top ten suggested variants include:

- Indigenous wise sayings in Zimbabwe
- Indigenous wise sayings
- Indigenous wise sayings in Zimbabwe PDF
- Water wise indigenous plants
- Wise practices in indigenous community developments
- Wise practices in indigenous leadership
- Indigenous wise practices of Zimbabwe
- Importance of indigenous wise sayings
- Functions of indigenous wise sayings
- Indigenous water wise plants South Africa

This is the first time Zimbabwe has appeared in connection with "indigenous" and "wise," and it clearly has a strong foothold with the "wise indigenous" keyword search.

### *Wise Indian*

The suggested key phrase variant for this search appears to be a mix of Native American and Indian (from India) results:

- Wise Indian sayings
- Wise Indian man
- Wise Indian quotes
- Wise Indian chief
- Wise Indian uncle
- Wise Indian academy careers
- Wise Indian school
- Wise Indian trope
- Wise Indian academy digital campus
- Wise Indian academy

While it instills hope that one of the top ten suggestions is for the “wise Indian trope,” which suggests that others are aware and curious about this damaging stereotype, it is well below the suggestion of “wise Indian sayings” and—even more unfortunate—“wise Indian chief.”

### *Wise French*

Not all French people are white, but as a western European country it fits into the confines of what is considered a largely “white culture.” The suggested key phrase variants mimic this, with barely a hint of connecting the French to the definition of “wise:”

- Wise French onion dip
- Wise French sayings
- Wise French translation
- Wise French drains
- Wise French Brittany
- Wise French words
- Wise French meaning
- Wise French dictionary

- Frenchic wise old sage
- Daria French Wise attorney

Granted, there are two connections to the French and wisdom in “wise French sayings” and “wise French words,” but the bulk of the suggestions are either for brands, translations, or people. It is, of course, laughable that the very first suggestion is for French onion dip.

### *Wise Scandinavian*

If the results for “wise French” were wanting, the search for a “wise Scandinavian” are even more disappointing. There is not a single result. The error message reads, “Unfortunately, we could not find any keyword suggestions for your query (see fig. 12).

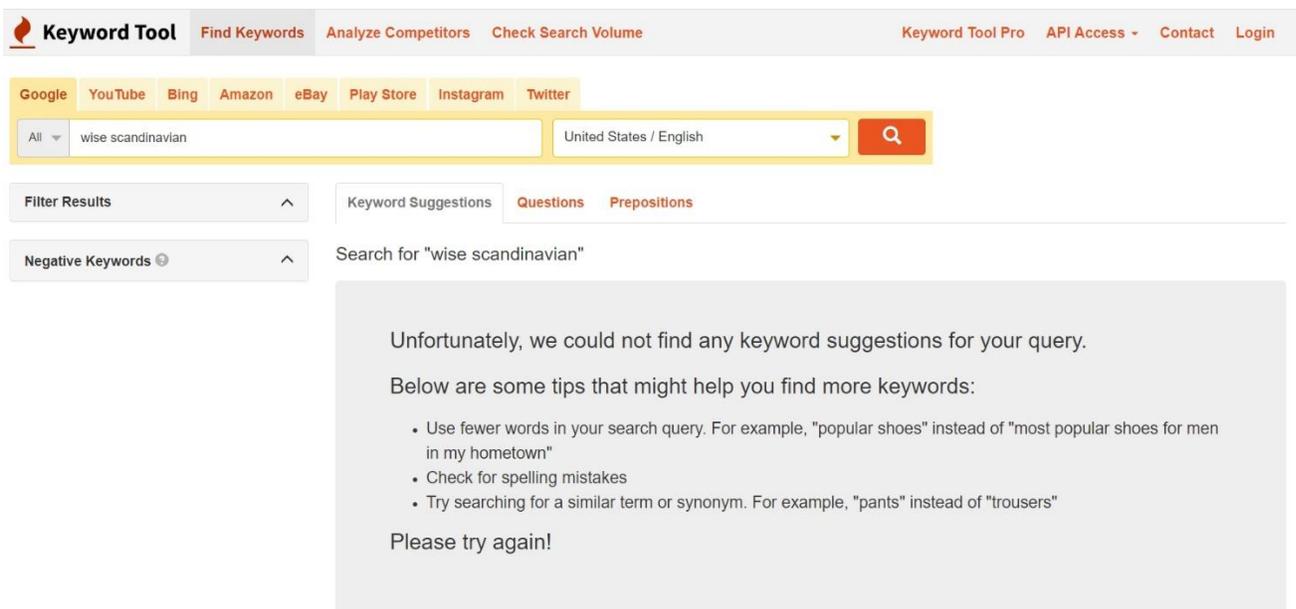


Figure 12

## CONCLUSION

It is not surprising that the “wise Indian” trope still persists today. What *is* somewhat surprising are the stances of those who so publicly revere it. Racists do not always know they are racist, as we are all products of our society, culture, and environment, which are—in turn—products of

history that is steeped in racism. This does not make their words or actions any less damaging. In her essay “I Don’t Know What to Do with Good White People,” Brit Bennett recalled

Over the past two weeks, I've seen good white people congratulate themselves for deleting racist friends or debating family members or performing small acts of kindness to Black people. Sometimes I think I'd prefer racist trolling to this grade of self-aggrandizement. A racist troll is easy to dismiss. He does not think decency is enough. Sometimes I think good white people expect to be rewarded for their decency. We are not like those other white people. See how enlightened and aware we are? See how we are good?

(Bennett)

White fragility is blanketed in the need for reassurance, which in our social media-fueled lives is often competed for and offered digitally. The “white alliahs” on my own social networks are, to me, much louder and *more* anti-racist, *more* of an ally, and *more* of a supporter than my much larger circle of Native friends, family, and colleagues—or do I, as a Native woman, simply perceive it that way? More importantly, does that even matter? According to Ikard, white people with “white goodwill and good intentions” inevitably reproduce an element of white supremacy because it demands gratitude from the very people they say and believe they are supporting. This is the issue with white alliahs. As Natives, we have our own voice. We do not require a spokesperson, and especially not a white one. What we require is some quiet, a making of places and spaces, and the ability for non-Natives to sit and genuinely *listen*. It may not be the most natural or comfortable position for the predominant colonizer, but it is the one that is needed.

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