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Satirical Analysis on Museum of the Plains White Person

In the 1900's, the United States and most prominently museums in the United States had little to no respect for the Native Americans. This was demonstrated through their collection of Native American bones and sacred artifacts, with little regard for the Natives opinion. Rayna Green was a Cherokee woman, and to highlight this issue, she delivered the "Modest Proposal for the Museum of the Plains White Person" speech in 1981 at a conference for educational equality in Oklahoma. In "Museum of the Plains White Person" by Rayna Green, a variety of rhetorical devices are used throughout the piece in an extended metaphor to undermine museum practices in the United States regarding the lack of consideration and respect for Native American culture.

In the first two paragraphs of her satire, Green utilizes allusion, understatements, hyperboles, specific diction, and reversal to introduce the position swap of Native Americans and the average white American, emphasizing the lack of control Native Ameircans actually have. The reversal is first evident at the second sentence of the first paragraph, "we will be building the museum over an abandoned ceremonial ballcourt, called a 'football field'". The word "football field" serves as the first indication that the white people of America and Native Americans have swapped positions. In this sentence, football fields are also mocked, representing the lack of respect and understanding shown to that aspect of culture. The comedy and irony in the introductory paragraphs are intertwined with the use of language and different rhetorical devices. The third sentence of the first paragraph provides a clear demonstration of this, "Our Indian

archeologists made, as you know, the great discovery of an ancient white ceremonial cult called the Cornhuskers...was the site of their annual rites for that once great religion". Green not only mocks soccer, but she is also utilizing an allusion to the University of Nebraska's soccer team, something white Americans would likely take pride in, building emphasis on her mocking of white Americans. Using reversal, specific diction, and other rhetorical devices have all contributed to making white Americans look silly and quaint in Green's satire.

Throughout the second paragraph especially, specific diction is used to build a sense of "us" vs. "them". Examples of these words used throughout the text are "we", "our", "their", and "they". This can be seen in the second sentence of the paragraph, "accepting their notions of reverence and exhibition of the dead". Once again, the use of "their" aids the sentence in its irony and overall purpose of calling out the fact that museums take the bones of famous natives, but wouldn't dare desecrate the graves of famous white Americans. To further this goal, Green alludes to the pop culture figure John Wayne in the following line, "an important and moving find, the bones of John Wayne", proceeding to mock him in the next sentence. Green employs a hyperbole, calling him one of the "most important American of mythological characters". This is a clear exaggeration, meant to be a source of irony and comedy, building the white American persona.

The last three paragraphs take advantage of an abundance of allusion, diction and hyperboles to satirize American culture. This is first shown when Green describes white culture food, "the great and holy foods of the quintessential white culture-mayonnaise, white bread, iceberg lettuce, peanut butter, lime Jell-O and little marshmallows". First, there is the obvious allusion to pop culture in the form of the different American foods listed. However, in doing so Green also places Americans under the typical "dumb american" stereotype/personna. This

persona she creates also relates to her specific diction, taking a tone of belittlement, evident by the use of the words “holy foods” and “quintessential white culture”. In paragraph four, Green makes allusions about music and dances in American culture. She alludes to “the waltz, the fox-trot, the Texas Two-Step, the discord, frug, bop, and polka”. Her use of the word “quaint” before describing these dances once again supports her overall attitude in this satire, revolving around white Americans being insignificant, and unequal to natives in this case. This is further seen when she describes the lyrics to some songs as “meaningless”, and when she claims talk shows are “a kind of symbolic warfare”. Through her diction Green makes white Americans seem like unsophisticated savages that live primitive lives, and through her allusions, Green is able to better connect her persona of white Americans to popular American culture. This is an effective strategy, as it puts the Native Americans situation in perspective in a more relatable way for white Americans, namely a way that involves them being looked on as inferior. Therefore, these rhetorical devices aid in achieving the overall purpose of writing this satire, which is a change in museum policies regarding Native American exhibits.

In Rayna Green’s “Museum of the Plains White Person”, different rhetorical devices and specific diction are used in a reversal to satirize white Americans, particularly museums in the United States to call attention to the injustices towards Native Americans allowing for changes in museum policies. Through “Museum of the Plains White Person”, Green was able to construct the white American persona using burlesque through her comedy and irony, which takes the place of the common persona given to Native Americans. In doing so, she was able to display the situation of Native Americans in a way that is relatable to the average American.