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UNIVERZITY KARLOVY
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Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

B.A. THESIS

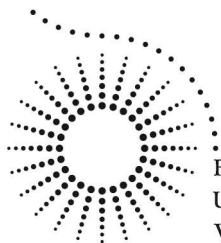
AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION

Portrayal of the Indian in American Cinematography

Andrea Knotková

The objective of Andrea Knotková's thesis is ambitious: to track the stereotypes in the portrayal of Native Americans in American film. Her analysis begins in the 1930s and ends with the discussion of *DreamKeeper*, directed by Steven Barron and released in 2003; the underlying argument is that "Native Americans in film have been presented through the lens of persistently inaccurate stereotypes throughout the 20th century" (54) and that progress "has been made only lately—from the 1990s on—and it seems very likely that this trend is going to continue to develop in the future" (54).

On the whole, the thesis is reasonably informed and engaging. Hours must have gone into researching the issue. Nevertheless, the text addresses many films in a sketchy manner and the discussion at times resembles encyclopedic entries rather than in-depth analyses (e.g. in the section titled "Specific Films" that starts on p. 22). Such a large historical scope also inevitably leads to omissions and generalizations that do not reflect the diversity of American (and especially Native-American) cinematography. Already in the interwar period, which the thesis represents primarily by the films of John Ford ("John Ford as a director is used as an icon of this time period" [9]), there were films critical of the treatment of Native Americans, such as *Massacre* (Warner Bros, 1933); there were also some Native-American actors as well as directors (Will Rogers, James Young Deer). The 1990s in general, and Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) in particular, are praised for having challenged prevailing stereotypes: "Considering the fact that until then there had not been a single film made by Native Americans, their contributions to American cinema were great" (46). Again, does not this claim disregard the work of Native-American directors who presented their work already in



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the 1970s at such events as the American Indian Film Festival in SF and the Native American Film and Video Festival in NYC?

Addressing more diverse films could have also prompted the student to elaborate about the question of “challenging stereotypes.” It is argued that *Smoke Signals* “corrects stereotypes” by making fun of them—but (how) does it step out of them? Also—following up on the intriguing argument that the thesis makes regarding 1960s-70s attempts to shoot “pro-Indian” films, in which nevertheless Native Americans “serve as a sympathetic platform for the national issues of contemporary Americans much more than they give us any reflection on the specific Indian culture they claim to discuss” (31)—could any contemporary “well-intended” movies be accused of the same projection?

Regardless of the above criticism, I believe that at the BA level, the thesis may be graded as velmi dobře or výborně, depending on the defense.

Pavla Veselá, PhD.

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