

Appendix - Interviews with Native Americans

1. Michelene Pesantube - 19.4.2011

1. How do you as a Native American view commercial films about Native Americans in general?

It depends upon the film. If they are done well and don't reinforce stereotypes, then I enjoy seeing my culture represented in a popular format for the public.

2. How do you identify with Native Americans from any/all of the following films: *Searchers, Stagecoach, They Died With Their Boots On, Broken Arrow, Cheyenne Autumn, Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here, Little Big Man, A Man Called Horse, Dances With Wolves, Powwow Highway, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, Smoke Signals, Dream Keeper?*

They are not of the same genre or time period, which makes it difficult to answer your question. I liked Powwow Highway and Smoke Signals because I could relate to the humor and the conditions in Indian country. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest was interesting and entertaining, but it reinforced some stereotypes. The rest of the movies I did not like because of their portrayal of Native Americans.

3. What qualities would you connect with a portrayal of “stereotypical Indian” and what qualities would you connect to a “real Indian”? What does “Indianness” mean for you?

Anything that depicts Native Americans as ignorant (broken English, making foolish mistakes, superstitious behavior, etc.), as unclean, violent, patriarchal, abusive, alcoholic or simple are all stereotypes. Stereotypical portrayals include using plains images (headdresses, braids, tipis, etc.). When the subject is not about historical plains Indians and even when it is, there can be problems with using those elements. An average Native American is like everyone else. They diverse, they have different likes and dislikes, they speak English as well as anyone else, they are family and community oriented etc. “Indianness” doesn't mean anything. It is a word that essentializes all of the 500 distinct tribal nations in the country and even more expressions of indigenous cultural experiences.

4. How do you feel about Native Americans being acted by white people (*Broken Arrow* etc.)?

The depictions are offensive not because they are white actors, but because the movie industry assumes Native Americans are not capable actors and because movies like

Broken Arrow create caricatures (poor imitations) of what they think represents Native Americans to entertain their audiences.

5. How do you as a Native American person view your own identity and connection to your Native tribe? Is there any film that captures this connection for you?

I identify as Choctaw only, although I am mixed blood. I grew up around a large extended family and participated in Native American sports and religious activities. My friends were mainly Native Americans of different tribal nations. There are films I can relate to because they depict social issues that are prevalent in Native American country. None of the films really capture my sense of Choctaw identity because they are not about Choctaws. They are about a generic Native American created in Hollywood. Even the best films are about another Native American tribe and not about my tribe.

2. Steven Williams - 24.4.2011

1. How do you as a Native American view commercial films about Native Americans in general?

The sheer volume of movies that have been made is pretty staggering. They range from horrid to better ones (by Native directors). Up till the 1970s, the ideas from the past about how Native Americans should look like were just being recycled back and forth. The image these films give is not very flattering.

2. Which film about Native Americans is your favorite, captures the Native American spirit for you?

My favorite contemporary film is Dance Me Outside because it captures a lot of the things that Native Americans see as important. It works with humor well and it shows things that have been ignored. From older films, I liked Little Big Man. Native American people like this film

because it looks at everything with humor just like we do. Also the fact that Native Americans are portrayed as "human beings" is very important to me.

A film that I really despise is A Man Called Horse because it doesn't show much respect for Native American culture, although it was sold as being authentic. The way this film portrays sacred rituals such a Sun Dance is caricature put completely out of context. Also, the end is just the same old story - the white Indian shows up and rectifies everything.

I also liked Smoke Signals but I am not a big fan of Alexie. I think his plots are depressing and negativistic. I don't think this film deals with the Native American issues in as compelling a way as Dance Me Outside, but it was certainly an important break through.

The worst film of all times is probably Pocanhontas - the message it delivers about female Native American stereotype is cruel and so far from the truth. And this is what we teach our children.

3. How do you feel about Native Americans being acted by white people (*Broken Arrow* etc.)?

In one word: ridiculous!... Interestingly enough, if you think about it, for some American actors it became a pre-requisite for being big in Hollywood to play a "Native American". People like Marlon Brando or Jeff Chandler. To really get into Hollywood they had to play Native Americans. This, I think, created really negative political implications and the Native voice didn't have a chance. This strenghtened the perpetuation of white images of Native people.