

Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Filozofická fakulta

Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Bakalářská práce

Andrea Knotková

Zobrazení Indiána v americké kinematografii

Portrayal of the Indian in American Cinematography

Praha 2011

vedoucí práce: Erik Sherman Roraback, D. Phil (Oxon)

With acknowledgements to Mr. Erik Roraback,
for his kind guidance of my thesis and seeing to its development;
to Mr. Frank Klobucar,
for his patience with my grammar and flaws;
to Mr. Steven Williams,
for opening the world of Native American culture to me.

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a že jsem uvedla všechny použité prameny a literaturu. Souhlasím s tím, aby moje bakalářská práce byla půjčována ke studijním účelům. V Praze dne 21. 5. 2001.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned. I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with the phenomenon of stereotype. It uses Walter Lippman's theory that human beings use stereotypes to form ideas in their heads before they see the actual things or people. The way we see things is determined by individual experience as well as the collective experiences from which we form the so-called stereotypes. The thesis more specifically deals with the stereotype of the Indian in American Cinematography and lists the most profane and more typical stereotypes, which can be observed in film. The following analysis is divided into four sections. Each section concentrates on a certain time period, examines the historical context and its cinematic counterpart. The first section explores the Cowboy Westerns of 1930s, 40s and 50s. This section focuses on The Indian Citizenship Act and The Wheeler-Howard Act and discusses the influence of WWII. It also shows the importance of the invention of sound to movies and addresses the frequent recurrence of themes connected to Native Americans such as the frontier. The film analysis concentrates around the director John Ford and films *They Died With Their Boots On*, *Stage Coach*, *Broken Arrow* and *The Searchers*. The second section deals with the period of the 1960s and shows the influence of the hippie era on contemporary film. It focuses in detail on films *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*. The next section discusses the situation in the 1970s and 1980s and speaks mainly about the stereotype of 'White Indian' – a white man who "out-Indians" the Indian himself. This phenomenon appears in *Little Big Man* and *A Man Called Horse*. This section further questions the influence of media on public opinion about Native Americans. In connection to this, the films *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Powwow Highway* are mentioned in this chapter. The last section analyzes the situation in film from the 1990s until now. It discusses the present attempt to demythologize Native Americans and free them from the burden of stereotype. Here, films *Dances With Wolves*, *Smoke Signals* and *Dream Keeper* are used as examples of such endeavor.

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá fenoménem stereotypu. Je zde použita teorie Waltra Lippmana o tom, že lidé mají tendenci vytvářet si v hlavě domněnky před tím než se vůbec s danou věcí nebo člověkem potkají. To, jak vidíme věci, je určováno osobními stejně jako kolektivními zkušenostmi na základě nichž vytváříme tzv. stereotypy. Tato práce se dále soustřeďuje na stereotyp Indiána v americké kinematografii a jmenuje nejtypičtější stereotypy, které můžeme pozorovat ve filmu. Následná analýza je rozdělená do čtyřech sekcí a každá z těchto sekcí se soustřeďuje na historické pozadí a jeho filmový protějšek v konkrétním časovém úseku. První sekce zkoumá kovbojské westerny 30., 40. a 50. let minulého století. V této sekci je jako historické pozadí zmíněno Usnesení o občanství pro Indiány a Wheeler-Howardovo usnesení stejně jako vliv 2. Světové války. Tato sekce také poukazuje na důležitost vynálezu zvuku ve filmu a častý výskyt témat spojených s Indiány jako je pohraničí. Analýza filmu se soustřeďuje kolem režiséra Johna Forda a filmů *They Died With Their Boots On*, *Stage Coach*, *Broken Arrow* a *The Searchers*. Druhá sekce se zabývá obdobím 60. let a vlivem éry hippies na tehdejší filmovou scénu, detailně se zabývá filmy *Cheyenne Autumn* a *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*. Další sekce diskutuje o situaci v 70. a 80. letech a hovoří především o stereotypu tzv. Bílého Indiána – o bílém muži který je lepším Indiánem než samotný Indián. Tento fenomén se objevuje ve filmech *Little Big Man* a *A Man Called Horse*. Tato sekce dále zkoumá vliv médií na veřejné mínění o Indiánech. V souvislosti s tím jsou v této kapitole zmíněny filmy *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* a *Powwow Highway*. Poslední sekce analyzuje situaci filmu od 90. let do současnosti a diskutuje o současném záměru demytologizovat Indiány a osvobodit je od tíže stereotypů. Filmy *Dances With Wolves*, *Smoke Signals* a *Dream Keeper* jsou zde zmíněny jako příklady této snahy.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	5
1. Preface	8
2. General Stereotypes	10
2.1 The Term and Its Origin	10
2.1.1 The Term	10
2.1.2 Origin.....	10
2.2 The Indian - Stereotype and Invention	12
2.2.1 Indian Stereotype.....	12
2.2.2 The Invention of Indian Stereotype	12
2.3 Typical Indian Stereotypes and Characters	12
2.3.1 Typical Stereotypes	13
2.3.1.1 The Bloodthirsty Savage.....	13
2.3.1.2 The Noble Savage.....	13
2.3.1.3 The White Indian	13
2.3.1.4 Tonto Talk	14
2.3.2 Typical Characters and Forces.....	14
2.3.2.1 The Coyote or Trickster.....	14
2.3.2.2 The Warrior	15
2.3.2.3 The Medicine Man.....	15
2.3.2.4 The Heemaneh or Berdache.....	15
2.3.2.5 The Chief	16
2.3.2.6 Wakantanka – The Great Spirit	16
3. The Cowboy Westerns – 30s, 40s and 50s	17
3.1 The Historical Background.....	17
3.1.1 The Indian Citizenship Act and The Wheeler-Howard Act	17
3.1.2 Indians in World War II – 1939-1945	18

3.1.3 Indians in the 1950s	19
3.2 Indian Cinematography in 1930s, 40s and 50s.....	19
3.2.1 General Approach toward Indians in Film	19
3.2.1.1 Sound, Language, Frontier and Typical Native American Characters.....	19
3.2.1.2 Indians and John Ford.....	21
3.2.2 Specific Films	22
3.2.2.1 They Died With Their Boots On	22
3.2.2.2 Stagecoach	23
3.2.2.3 Broken Arrow	24
3.2.2.4 The Searchers.....	25
4. Win and Lose – 60s	27
4.1 Historical background.....	27
4.1.1 The Two Contrastive Worlds.....	27
4.1.2 The Native American Party	28
4.2 Films	28
4.2.1 Cheyenne Autumn (1964).....	29
4.2.2 Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here	30
5. Who Is The Real Savage – 1970s and 1980s.....	32
5.1 The Mood of the Time.....	32
5.1.1 The General Background	32
5.1.2 Alcatraz.....	32
5.2 “White Indian” Entertaining Films	32
5.2.1. A Man Called Horse	32
5.2.2 Little Big Man.....	34
5.3 The Crazy Noble Indian.....	36
5.3.1 Media Confusion	36
5.3.1.1 One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest	37
5.3.1.2 Powwow Highway.....	38
6. Who Is The True Indian – 90s until now	41

6.1 Historical Background	41
6.1.1 Media Expansion	41
6.2 Deconstructing the Myth	42
6.2.1 Dances with Wolves	42
6.3 Indians Making Films About Indians	46
6.3.1 Background of the 90s Cinematography	46
6.3.1.1 Smoke Signals	46
6.3.1.2 Dream Keeper	51
7. Conclusion	53
Bibliography	56
Sources	58
Czech Résumé	59
1. Michelene Pesantube - 19.4.2011	62
2. Steven Williams - 24.4.2011	63

1. Preface

*“We are shape-shifters in the national consciousness, accidental survivors, unwanted reminders of disagreeable events. Indians have to be explained and accounted for, and somehow fit into the creation myth of the most powerful, benevolent nation ever, the last best hope of man on earth....
We’re trapped in history. No escape.”¹*

Many years passed since Christopher Columbus firstly landed on the American continent in 1492 believing he reached India and started to call the local inhabitants *Indians*. Many events have occurred and passed away in North America since then and the Indians have been a part of its history. Who are Indians, though and how did they help to shape the today’s worldviews? How have Native Americans influenced culture? How were Native Americans included in American culture?

American cinematography seems to imply interesting points of view on these questions, for films mirror as well as influence and help to build our cultural consciousness. Nowadays, people watch more films than they read books; and information, however inaccurate or twisted, travels very fast that way. The present bachelor’s thesis follows the track of some of this information connected to the portrayal of Indians in order to convey some view of their culture and its depiction in film and stereotypes. This thesis is also focused on stereotypes and the ways these are formed. The main interest of this thesis is to separate myth from reality and find out what is left of "the Indian" when we remove the long-established stereotypes observable in films.

Chapter 2, General Stereotypes, concentrates on showing the most expressive stereotypes and phenomena connected to the portrayal on Native Americans, above all the Bloodthirsty Savage and Noble Savage. This chapter serves to clear all terms, which are used to describe typical stereotypes connected to Native Americans and which are used throughout this thesis.

¹ Paul Chaat Smith, "Ghost in the Machine", *Aperture* 139 (1995): 6.

Chapter 3, The Cowboy Westerns, uses Indian Citizenship Act and Wheeler-Howard Act as its starting point and as historical background for the 30s, 40s and 50s. This chapter also deals with Native American contribution during WWII and the theme of the “frontier” as an important part of Native American history. John Ford as a director is used as an icon of this time period. Many of John Ford’s films are considered to be typical western b-movies, namely *Searchers* and *Stagecoach*. Other than that, this chapter also analyzes films *They Died With Their Boots On* and *Broken Arrow*.

Chapter 4, Win and Lose, renders the influence of the 1960s and hippie era on American cinematography and the incidental changes happening to depiction of Indians. In the beginning, this chapter analyzes the contrastive worlds of the Indians and general public and shows how Native Americans were used as a symbol of “oppressed minorities” and “peace, love and freedom” in this time period. As an example of the “hippie Indian” influenced films, this chapter talks about two: *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*.

Chapter 5, Who is the Real Savage, addresses the question of the more and more ‘pro-Indian’ production in which Indian serves as a symbol of mysticism and Noble Savage stereotype is often shown in full bloom. The films *A Man Called Horse* and *Little Big Man* are used as examples of the depiction the stereotype called “White Indian”. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Powwow Highway* are both mentioned in the subchapter about “crazy Noble Savages”.

Chapter 6, Who Is the True Indian, shows new ways of portraying Native American life, especially independent productions in which Native Americans are actively involved. It uses motion pictures *Smoke Signals* and *The Dream Keeper*.

All chapters close with the final Conclusion.

2. General Stereotypes

2.1 The Term and Its Origin

2.1.1 The Term

As the following film analysis is greatly concerned with stereotypes, it is appropriate to explain the meaning of the term more closely. The etymology of the term stereotype comes from the Greek words *stereos*, meaning solid and *typos*, meaning impression – hence stereotype means solid impression. This is especially true when we talk of social stereotypes, which are often built upon nothing more than impressions that are perceived as valuable and are taken for granted.

Wikipedia states, “American journalist Walter Lippmann coined the metaphor, calling a stereotype a "picture in our heads, " saying "Whether right or wrong (...) imagination is shaped by the pictures seen; (...) originally printers' words, and their literal printers' meanings were synonymous.

Specifically, cliché was a French word for the printing surface of a stereotype. The first reference to "stereotype" in its modern English use was in 1850, in the noun meaning "image perpetuated without change."²

Stereotypes obviously can have both positive and negative connotations. In general, people tend to build on stereotypes because life and its contents are more complex than they can bear; it is plain enough, therefore, to overcome this by simplification and arrange a vast amount of information into organized blocks. Stereotypes, though, can easily turn into prejudice, especially when connected to social groups.

2.1.2 Origin

As the previous chapter states, the word stereotype comes from Latin. However, it was introduced into social vocabulary by the abovementioned American – Walter Lippmann. In his 1922 study, *Public*

² "Stereotype". *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 22 July 2004. Web. 20 April 2011.

Opinion, he introduced stereotypes as a natural part of human consciousness. According to his theory, stereotypes are produced by the culture that surrounds us and form a map that helps us to orient ourselves in the world. People tend to define their surroundings and only then can they start to process them. As popular media started to spread, dialog without real communication was flaring and helped to strengthen the value and impact of stereotypes on common people's lives.

As stereotypes gain more importance, more people can share them. Therefore, with the invention of moving pictures at the turn of 20th century, stereotypes gained a new, more powerful sphere of influence. Mirroring reality more closely than other types of media, films are capable of creating big emotional reactions and this is often closely bound to their success. These reactions are often enhanced by the use of a stereotype, which therefore became an important feature of Hollywood film.

“In the whole experience of the race there has been no aid to visualization comparable to the cinema. ...[Movies] seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable. Any description in words, or even any inert picture, requires an effort of memory before a picture exists in the mind.

But on the screen the whole process of observing, describing, reporting, and then imagining, has been accomplished for you. Without more trouble than is needed to stay awake, the result, which your imagination is always aiming at, is reeled off on the screen.”³

Here the process of forming stereotypes, of creating and identifying with certain characters, good and evil etc., was standardized much more completely than in the theatre, radio or newspaper. People began to be manipulated more easily and stereotypes became simpler and simpler while emerging from the screen.

³ Elizabeth and Stuart Even. "Emerson College." *Liberal Arts*. 20 April 2011Emerson College. 20 April 2011 < http://institute.emerson.edu/Ewen/ewen_Stereotype.pdf >.

2.2 The Indian - Stereotype and Invention

2.2.1 Indian Stereotype

The stereotyped Indian is a typical example of a simplified version of the truth considering a social group. Moreover, this stereotype is especially empowered by the film industry, as most people are not aware of the real historical Native American background. The Indian as we know him, therefore, seems to be created in our minds as we see him on the screen and absorb information about “his lifestyle.” As most of us do not have a lot of other knowledge of Native Americans, we tend to rely on the simple information we receive. Who is the real Indian, then?

2.2.2 The Invention of Indian Stereotype

The process of forming a stereotype is interesting, especially in cases such as with the Native American, in which very little objective information is present. The original American inhabitants never thought of themselves as a collective society. The whole idea of “Indian”, therefore, seems to be a conception of whites. Native Americans were real people of course, but the image of Indian is mostly a white stereotype. North America of the early 16th century provided a home for more than two thousand different cultures and societies who spoke multiple languages, held differing beliefs and habits, and did not consider themselves a single nation. By simplifying this cultural diversity, white people created a stereotype called “Indian“, which ignores the singularity of diverse native tribes. This stereotypical conception has since taken on a life of its own.

As Berkhofer states, “If the term *Indian* and the images and conceptual categories that go along with that collective designation for Native Americans are White inventions, then the first question becomes one already old in 1646, when an unnamed tribesman asked the Massachusetts missionary John Eliot: ‘Why do you call us Indians?’...[and] the second major question [is]: Why has the idea of *Indian* persisted for so many centuries?”⁴

2.3 Typical Indian Stereotypes and Characters

⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian* (New York, Vintage Books: 1978) 4.

2.3.1 Typical Stereotypes

The following paragraphs refer to the most common stereotypes that have developed over the decades and are often applied to Native Americans in films, books, etc. Naturally, there are many more stereotypes and some of these will also be analyzed in the following chapters when considering specific films. Stereotypes, here, do not match actual tribal roles among Native Americans but were invented and therefore are artificial.

2.3.1.1 The Bloodthirsty Savage

The bloodthirsty savage is one of the earliest and most typical stereotypes connected with Native Americans. It shows Indians as very primitive animal-like creatures that are only interested in brutally killing their enemies, scalps and hunting. Bloodthirsty savages communicate by making noises, do not seem to honor other people, behave capriciously and ride off screaming into the sunset. The bloodthirsty savage is typical for many of Ford's films.

2.3.1.2 The Noble Savage

The Noble Savage seems to be the alter ego of the bloodthirsty savage and his eager follower. The term comes from as early as 17th century England, where it was understood as the concept of a Christian prince disguised as a Spanish Muslim (from John Dryden: *The Conquest of Granada*). Referring to Native Americas, the noble savage is the embodiment of inner strength, a balanced mind, good-hearted strictness and wise judgment. Moreover, he is a man who lives in true contact with nature, in meaningful tribal societies, following noble rules that form the essence of the universe. The noble savage always acts with the best intentions and kindly toward others and society but is not easily manipulated. A typical Noble Savage is the character of Cochise from *Broken Arrow* directed by Delmer Daves.

2.3.1.3 The White Indian

The White Indian is a more sophisticated stereotype, which depicts a white man consciously influenced by the Native American culture. This man typically mirrors the noble savage, only he is

white. In fact, he appears to be better at being an Indian than Indian people themselves. He learned many useful things from the Native Americans but he outwits them in every sense, because he possesses the presumed superior intelligence and abilities of a white man. Usually, he is well respected by the Natives, at least by the noble ones. He is usually a social refugee who lives on the border of society and belongs nowhere; however, he usually has a distinguished position within the native tribe. The white Indian often represents an equal partner to the Indian chief. A typical white Indian is the character of Hawkeye from *The Last of the Mohicans* by Michael Mann.

2.3.1.4 Tonto Talk

Tonto Talk is logically connected to the bloodthirsty savage stereotype. The use of unintelligible pidgin speech works as an effective method to show the primitiveness and stupidity of the Indians. This simplistic way of speaking is usually connected to the use of the syllable ‘um’ at the end of every other uttered word, which becomes very stigmatizing. In general, Tonto talkers speak as follows:

“In *Nick of the Woods*, Nathan Slaughter meets Wenonga, a villainous Shawnee. ‘Me Injuman!’ said the chief, addressing the prisoner...’Me kill all white-man! Me Wenonga: me drink white man’s blood: me no heart!’”⁵

2.3.2 Typical Characters and Forces

Native Americans are also connected with some common characters and forces that often appear in films. These characters and forces are a necessary part of legitimate Indian communities and have certain specific features in reality as well as in cinematography. Typical characters and forces do not necessarily correspond to stereotypes; however, they can easily become stereotypical if they are simplified or misused. Typical characters refer to real tribal roles and forces to actual mythological superior forces.

2.3.2.1 The Coyote or Trickster

⁵ Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 8.

The Coyote in Native American tradition is an anthropomorphic god, man or animal, who is sometimes seen as the creator himself. He is also a messenger and a fool and has the ability to transform. The Trickster has the power to trick you into doing “the right thing” and completely change your life, often furtively. The Trickster can work in the form of a superior power as well as in the form of a real human being.

As Mr Gibbens stated: "Many native traditions held clowns and tricksters as essential to any contact with the sacred. People could not pray until they had laughed, because laughter opens and frees from rigid preconception. Humans had to have tricksters within the most sacred ceremonies for fear that they forget the sacred comes through upset, reversal, surprise. The trickster in most native traditions is essential to creation, to birth".⁶

2.3.2.2 The Warrior

The warrior is a common and rather general Indian character who fights for his people, goes hunting and takes care of the tribe in all ways that require male power strength. This character is rather undistinguished and can also be found in many other cultures' stereotypes. Usually, there is more than one man who carries the warrior role within the tribe.

2.3.2.3 The Medicine Man

The medicine man or shaman is the healer or/and spiritual leader of the tribe. His primary goal is to cooperate with the spiritual world and communicate with the Great Spirit. This character is highly honored and respected; he is able to cure physical as well as psychological diseases.

2.3.2.4 The Heemaneh or Berdache

The word *berdache* comes from the Persian ‘bardaj,’ referring to a homosexual or ‘a young man who is shamefully abused’; this is what Americans use to refer to the so-called he-man-ehs (Cheyenne language). The androgynous character of heemaneh is also known as *nadle* in Navaho language or

⁶ Gibbens Byrd, Professor of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock; quoted epigraph in *Napalm and Silly Putty* by George Carlin, 2001.

winkte in Lakota language. Heemaneh among the Native Americans is a respected and powerful shaman who simultaneously exercises feminine and masculine powers and dresses and behaves in a way that mixes male and female manners. In traditional societies, the character of heemaneh was believed to have special powers such as healing, future foretelling, matchmaking, nursing or conferring lucky names.

2.3.2.5 The Chief

The chief is the leader of a tribal society; he is often combined with the character of medicine man. He is chosen due to his bravery, sense of justice and great abilities. Cochise, Sitting Bull and Geronimo belong to the well-known Indian Chiefs of the past.

2.3.2.6 Wakantanka – The Great Spirit

Wakantanka is the sacred life force, the power that resides in all existing things. The Great Spirit, also called the Great Mystery, symbolizes the creator. He is usually worshipped by honoring the West, the South, the East, the North, the Earth and the Sky. This religious attitude typical of Indians is similar to many animistic and pantheistic beliefs

3. The Cowboy Westerns – 30s, 40s and 50s

3.1 The Historical Background

3.1.1 The Indian Citizenship Act and The Wheeler-Howard Act

“I tell the bus driver but he doesn’t hear, ‘Keep to the hills and avoid America if you can. I’m a fugitive from bad, futureless dream in Southern California.’”⁷ Simon J. Ortiz

The film analysis in this thesis begins from the 1930s because that is when some of the most well-known and public opinion forming films started to appear. Each section of film analysis is preceded by historical background of the analyzed time period.

The early 20th century brought a series of changes to Native American life in the USA. The federal policy was changing its attitudes toward all American citizens. In 1924, the Indian Citizenship Act provided citizenship to every resident born in the USA including Native Americans. In general, Indians and their inherited rights began to be seen as logically historically consequential and started being respected by liberal white people.

During Roosevelt’s presidency, Collier, the commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, developed the Wheeler-Howard Act, which was passed in 1934. This was a document that supported cooperation between tribal governments and federal government and weakened the allotment system, which deprived Native Americans of a vast amount of land. The Wheeler-Howard Act passed partly on account of the rise of sympathy for people in economic crisis during the Great Depression. The ideals of industry and consumerism started to appear false and therefore the inclination toward the ideals symbolized by the Noble Savage started to make more sense to common people. On the other hand, there was still a lot of controversy reflected in public opinion, as this event was reported rather negatively by the media. As Mary Ann Weston comments on a contemporary article in *Time*: “three hundred years of suspicion stared from his copper-skinned listeners’ eyes’ as Collier urged the Indians

⁷ Kilpatrick 36.

to support the New Deal. Collier was quoted at length, but the Indians were not.”⁸ Indians at this time, whether sympathized with or not, were generally seen as relics of the past.

Even though the Indian Citizenship act was successfully passed, the real estate matters had not yet been settled during the first half of the 20th century. The white Americans understood land as something they should inhabit and claim, and the right to possess one’s own land became one of the most important - the whole social system was basically built upon it. Native Americans, on the other hand, were in fact nomadic tribes who moved their camps according to natural conditions - mainly weather, occurrence of buffalo etc. This is one of the reasons why the whites never understood American land as Indians’ possessions and from the very beginning they felt they had a right to occupy it for themselves. As Wexman states in her book: “If Hollywood wanted to capture the emotional center of Western history, its movies would be about real estate. John Wayne would have been neither a gunfighter nor a sheriff, but a surveyor, speculator, or claims lawyer.”⁹

3.1.2 Indians in World War II – 1939-1945

WWII was definitely one of the most important influences on the relationship between whites and Native Americans. Along with white people and African Americans, Native Americans served in the US army during World War II. Indian soldiers were usually held in high esteem, since their history was filled with tales of heroism and great skills at war, and were usually addressed as “chief” by their comrades in the army. Some of these misconceptions about Indians seem very far-fetched; naturally, they were brave and skillful fighters but some of their described qualities turned into myths.

According to *Reader’s Digest* from 1943, Native Americans were able to move silently and accurately even during the night and were peerless “at ambushing, scouting, signaling, sniping... Some can smell a snake yards away and hear the faintest movement; all endure thirst and lack of food better than the average white man.”¹⁰ As Kilpatrick rightly points out in her book, “These descriptions might have

⁸ Mary Ann Weston, *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century* Press (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1996), 57.

⁹ Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and the Hollywood Performance* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 71.

¹⁰ Weston 87.

been humorous to Native Americans, especially those from Chicago or Los Angeles, unless of course they found themselves in combat under the command of an officer who believed they had *inherited* the ability to smell snakes or see in the dark.”¹¹

Although a great number of Indian lives were lost, they fought bravely during WWII beside other American citizens until the end. Upon returning to home they were respected as well as the others, but the destruction that awaited them on their reservations was greater than anywhere else. In principle, it was so great that no short-term national approval might have consoled them.

3.1.3 Indians in the 1950s

At first, the situation of the Native Americans seemed to better in the early 1950s, but their position fell rapidly with passing of the House Concurrent Resolution in 1953. This resolution was partly meant to free the Indians from federal control; on the other hand, as it considered Indians fully responsible American citizens, it ended the support of many federal organizations which had helped Indians with many practical matters. In fact, the House Concurrent Resolution deprived Native Americans of vast amounts of land because of high taxation and resulted in the defeat of tribal government because it was disconnected from the state government. In addition, these shifts in policy harmful to Native Americans were aggravated by the so-called Public Law 280, which disrupted autonomy of the tribes. Also the policy of relocation, which pushed Indians from the reservations to the cities, intensified the distance between Native Americans themselves and their original ways of life.

3.2 Indian Cinematography in 1930s, 40s and 50s

3.2.1 General Approach toward Indians in Film

3.2.1.1 Sound, Language, Frontier and Typical Native American Characters

¹¹ Kilpatrick 50.

Considering the ways the film industry has changed during the early 20th century, one of the most important developments was sound. This new feature gave films a very different quality, which became important in the view of the audience. Silent films could no longer compete. Words and language gained more weight due to both the sound coming from the scene and the voice-over. The language of the cinematic Indians of the silent film era was shown by their postures, movement and body language. Indians used to be represented as rigid, devoid of humor and tough with unfriendly facial expressions.

Unlike other film characters, Indians did not benefit from the invention of sound in films, as their language was usually limited to grunts, simplistic phrases, indistinguishable utterances or any alien-sounding speech that had nothing to do with actual Native American language. According to Jacqueline Kilpatrick “Hollywood had its own idea of what an Indian sounded like, and the industry went to fairly extreme lengths to get the “authentic” sound. In *Scouts to the Rescue* (1939), for instance, the Indians were given a Hollywood Indian dialect by running their normal English dialect backwards. By printing the picture in reverse, a perfect lip sync was maintained, and a new “Indian” language was born.”¹² The “new films” usually were not subtitled, as subtitles were perceived as a relic from the silent era; therefore, Indians remained practically silent even though they gained their physical voices along with other characters during this new era of film.

Indians were also connected with the motive of the frontier, which represented an area important to all American citizens who wanted to earn a superior position within the society. The frontier was considered the no-man’s land where everything was possible. The frontier was the supposed homeland of Indians and was represented in many films as such. The Indian was the savage occupying the frontier – a part of the wilderness that shall be tamed. The frontier, therefore, often became the point of culture clash and only much later were people reminded that: “one culture’s frontier may be another culture’s backwater or backyard.”¹³ The portrayal of "frontier Indians" tended to be misinterpreted for

¹² Kilpatrick 37.

¹³ Alfonso Ortiz, “*Indian/White Relations: A View From the Other Side of the ‘Frontier’*”, *Indians in American History*, ed. Frederick W. Hoxie (Wheeling III: Harlan Davidson, 1988) 3.

that reason. The depiction of “The American myth and the development of the all-American hero”¹⁴ was of more importance at that time.

In general, Native Americans were played by non-native actors, usually whites or African Americans. The reason behind this was nothing more than that directors simply assumed they could not find a good Native actor. A typical film representation of an Indian of that time was a homogenized mish-mash of all the features that were considered distinctive about different native tribes. Most of the features were real at least in some Indian tribes but it was only in Hollywood cinematography that they came together in the form of an *Eintopf*. To quote Kilpatrick: “The typical Hollywood Indian man of the forties and fifties wore a long, flowing, feathered headdress, a breech cloth (with swimming trunks underneath, of course), and moccasins, and he wielded a fierce-looking tomahawk. His sister the Indian Princess wore a long, beaded and fringed buckskin dress and a beaded headband with one feather sticking straight up in the back. They lived in a tipi, and he hunted buffalo...she picked berries...or fashioned pottery.”¹⁵ These stereotypical depictions may seem humorous; on the other hand, they influenced the general consciousness’ view of Native American life greatly.

3.2.1.2 Indians and John Ford

*“Perhaps it is my Irish atavism, my sense of reality, of the beauty of clans, in contrast to the modern world, the masses, the collective irresponsibility. Who better than an Irishman could understand the Indians, while still being stirred by the tales of the U.S. Cavalry? We were on both sides of the epic.”*¹⁶

John Ford

Speaking of John Ford, his contribution to the development of Native American stereotype seems to be great. During the first half of the 20th century, he directed the films *Stagecoach* (1939), *The Searchers* (1956), and in the early 60s, *Two Rode Together* and *Cheyenne Autumn*. All of these films involved the portrayal of Native Americans. Ford's depiction of Indians became a canonized Hollywood myth of Western culture. Richard Maltby and William Darby, two of the main critics of

¹⁴ Kilpatrick 40.

¹⁵ Kilpatrick 51.

¹⁶ Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: The Man and His Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 36.

John Ford, mention that his depiction of Native Americans was “racist and sexist at the core”; even though Darby views Ford's treatment as fair toward Indian values at the same time. The most widely discussed theme considering Ford’s films is probably the relationship between history and myth, as his films are usually based upon real historical events (although rather loosely), dressed up in a complete myth and they involve the pre-fabricated Hollywood Indian. Frank Nugent, who was one of the main script writers cooperating with John Ford, said the following about the genesis of *Fort Apache*: “He [Ford] gave me list of about fifty books to read – memoirs, novels, anything about the period. Later he sent me down into the old Apache country to nose around, get the smell and the feel of the land... When I got back Ford asked me if I thought I had enough research. I said yes. ‘Good,’ he said, ‘Now just forget everything you’ve read, and we’ll start writing a movie.’”¹⁷

To expand on Ford's influence on the creation of Native American stereotypes, he often combines historical personalities with made up characters (as the character of Cochise in *Fort Apache*) and exposes uneducated audiences to his pseudo-historical plots and, as Rollins and O'Connor state, “if fictional representations are taken as history, they have real historical consequences.”¹⁸ As for violence in Ford’s films, it is usually exercised in its most brutal form by Indians; and we can often perceive the stereotype of the bloodthirsty savage in his films. In this sense, Ford confirms the Hollywood Western pattern, as he contrasts Indian savages against advanced American civilization.

On the other hand, Ford’s natural sympathy can be seen in his films as well as the fact that he generally does not degrade the core of Native American culture (unlike for example George Seitz in *The Vanishing American*). However, Ford’s main interest as a filmmaker remains in creating dramatic myths at the expense of poor representation of the Indian.

3.2.2 Specific Films

3.2.2.1 They Died With Their Boots On

¹⁷ Lindsay Anderson, *About John Ford* (London: Plexus, 1981) 75.

¹⁸ Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor, *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003) 77.

Shot in 1941 and directed by Raoul Walsh, *They Died With Their Boots On* became a well-known film about the brave General Custer and his Seventh Cavalry righteously fighting against the dangerous bloodthirsty Sioux Savages. The Indians here represent an evil force that endangers all white farmers and their families living nearby. They are depicted as simple and rather impersonal creatures; the only personality is Crazy Horse who is played by Anthony Quinn, a man with actual Native American Tarahumara ancestry. General Custer, on the other hand, is the ideal real American hero who stands for his whole nation. As Kilpatrick mentions, “The point...was not to tell a new story; it was to reaffirm the righteousness of the nineteenth century American hero and showcase his heroism against an obvious evil. “The evil” was conveniently represented by the American Indian, because the question of who would win had been definitely answered. It was ‘history.’”¹⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that when we witness a scene of Indians attacking a white man, we basically see a killing machine cruelly hastening to dispose of the fearless true American, inhabitant of the New World. These are the scenes from which stem some of the most powerful stereotypes about Native Americans.

3.2.2.2 Stagecoach

Stagecoach, a motion picture directed by John Ford and released in 1941 works with stereotypes in a similar way that *They Died With Their Boots On* does. The film starred the western film star John Wayne in his breakthrough role as The Ringo Kid and it was the first sound Western and Ford’s first film using sound. The basic plot follows a group of people going through dangerous Apache territory. The scene is shot from a high angle so that the people seem to be in great danger and as the viewer approaches destroyed homes of the whites, he is told that “You are all going to be scalped and massacred by that old butcher, Geronimo.” The attack scene was filmed by a special camera that was carried along the stagecoach to capture the movement. This adds a lot of action to the scene, thereby exaggerating reality. The point is to show an enclosed and safe civilized stagecoach in contradiction to the threatening bloodthirsty savage. As Kilpatrick mentions, “Ford noted that it would not have done

¹⁹ Kilpatrick 52.

for the Indians to shoot the lead horses instead of firing madly into the air because, ‘it would have been the end of the picture,’ and that’s a hard argument to refute.”²⁰

The result of the fight itself is already sealed when John Wayne comes to exercise justice. He is the ultimate white superhero whom none can beat as he jumps onto the ridging between galloping horses, killing every Indian he touches and knocking their horses to the ground. The Indians, however, usually tend to miss their goal and score merely by accident. After the battle is over, Indians simply disappear and the wild frontier is tamed along with them. Considering the pros of this film, it did in fact employ many Apaches as extras. Otherwise, it seems to be overtly stereotypical.

3.2.2.3 Broken Arrow

Broken Arrow is a Technicolor film released in 1950 directed by Delmer Daves. It won a Golden Globe Award for best Promoting International Understanding and is considered to be the first American film since WWII to portray Indians sympathetically. This film tried to reinvestigate the old Hollywood stereotypes through the lens of resistance to McCarthyism and questioning the current state of society.

One of the two main heroes of this film is Cochise, who is represented as an ideal, righteous and all-knowing Indian chief – the Noble Savage. He is said to be able to look right into your heart and know all of your intentions. The only way to deal with Cochise is to be honest. Ironically enough, the character of Cochise is played by a white actor Jeff Chandler and so is the Indian princess Sonseeahray, who is played by Debra Paget.

The other superhero of the film is Tom Jeffords played by James Stewart, who turns into a typical White Indian. A scapegoat to his own people, he is the only one who gets on with Indians and makes friends with their Chief. Tom Jeffords also engages in voice-overs, which introduce us to the situation historically and ideologically. The discourse between the two main characters is pseudo-polyphonic because, as told in the very beginning of the film along with the fact that the story is completely true,

²⁰ Kilpatrick 54.

Indians speak English in this film. This results in quite a strange language situation because the film lacks the linguistic cultural difference from both sides. At least, though, Indians have their voice.

The villains of this film are greedy, mean and blunt white people who do not understand Native American culture and are unable to keep their word and who think “the only good Indian is a dead Indian”. Geronimo is not shown in a very good light either when he fights against Cochise, but his anger seems to at least be righteous. In reality, though, Geronimo was never Cochise’s rival or antagonist.

Even though the plot is corny and the description of life in the reservation is very idealistic in terms of well-being and plenitude, the film’s effort to depict the relationship between Chiricahua Apaches and Euro-Americans during the post-Civil war era is quite successful. This all except for the facts that Rollins and O’Connor state: “The film’s treatment of the Chiricahua Apache culture minimizes the importance of land to their lives; ignores the diseases, devastation and disruption brought by Euro-Americans to Native American society; and legitimates the treaty signed between Cochise and the U.S. government... the relationship between Cochise and Jeffords grossly distorts the experiences of both men”²¹. The image of white men is simplified and fraught with stereotype as well as the depiction of the army.

Undoubtedly, this film tries to be truthful and is as such in contrast with other films of that time. Still, disfigurement of historical events present in *Broken Arrow* must have had a very disturbing effect and to think that films do not influence the historical beliefs of common people is pure escapism.

3.2.2.4 The Searchers

The Searchers is a 1956 Western film from John Ford starring the ultimate western hero John Wayne. This film is considered to be one of Ford’s most publicly influential motion pictures. The plot is simple, although the theme is not very common, for it involves Indians who kidnap two white girls. These Indians are viewed as murderers and John Wayne is there to rectify everything. He searches for

²¹ Rollins & O’Connor 101.

the girls, however not in order to bring them back but to kill them and spare them from being dishonored.

One of the girls grows up in the tribe, marries Chief Scar and lives a content life when the searchers come to get her. The Chief is killed. As Kilpatrick writes, “Unfortunately, Wayne’s character is acting according to the general mores of the day. Some film critics think this was Ford’s point, that the audience is supposed to find Wayne’s attitude reprehensible and that the film is actually a revisionist western that shows the negative effects of racism.”²² No matter what Ford's intentions were, his Indians in *The Searchers* function as stereotypical bloodthirsty savages presented against the evergreen white hero John Wayne.

²² Kilpatrick 61.

4. Win and Lose – 60s

4.1 Historical background

*“When Indians speak of the continent yielded, they are not referring only to the loss of some millions of acres of real estate. They have in mind that the land supported a universe of things they knew, valued, and loved... What we ask of America is not charity, not paternalism, even when benevolent. We ask only that the nature of our situation be recognized and made the basis of policy and action.”*²³

Declaration of Indian Purpose

4.1.1 The Two Contrastive Worlds

The 1960s continued to build an environment fruitful for further formation of Native American stereotypes. During this time period society was being influenced by a new wave: the hippie era. The young generation whose ideals were “peace, love and harmony” tended to build interest in the Native Americans and their "mystical" ways of life: ways that respected nature, involved living in communities and being overall very much the opposite of American Establishment. Considering this issue, the 1961 Task Force on Indian Affairs continued the shift away from tribal policy and dealt with the situation of the Indian population in the 1960s, helping to draw more attention to it. The Indian value system is described in "A Program for Indian Citizens" as follows: “Indians believe they have values worth preserving. These are sometimes stated in mystical terms and if related to the Supreme Being, are sometimes kept secret. Nonetheless they exist. Two examples out of many involve their idea of unity and their reverence for Mother Earth.”²⁴

This sympathy toward Native Americans grew even stronger during the Vietnam War because many young people did not approve of it, and saw the situation’s opposite in their perceptions of Native American lifestyles. Groups of people following Indian ways started to appear and spread all over the USA. As Kilpatrick states, “Not that this was necessarily a bad thing for the people who were trying a

²³ "Declaration of Indian Purpose," *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 246.

²⁴ "A Program for Indian Citizens," *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 242.

new way of thinking and living. It was, however, a nostalgic appropriation of homogenized Indian identity, generally that of a hundred years earlier, and it did little to help the causes of contemporary Native peoples.”²⁵ Again, common people were divided into two parts – the ones fascinated by Native culture mysticism and the ones disgusted by the old-fashioned paganism that went hand in hand with it. Even the 1960s, therefore, did not see a great departure from the Bloodthirsty versus Noble savage concepts in the end.

4.1.2 The Native American Party

Native Americans themselves experienced hard times during the 60s. Many were dying in the Vietnam War overseas, and those at home had their own reservation battles with the state. On account of their population commonly moving to urban areas, tribal policy was endangered and slowly deteriorating. Thanks to the fact that the media were expanding their national reach, the Native American situation was now discussed more broadly and Indians began to be considered one of the “oppressed minorities”.

In June 1961, seventy-one Native American tribes held a meeting at the University of Chicago, put together a declaration and spoke for themselves. They determined what was important for them and what they wanted considering human rights, health and land restrictions, law and development, etc.

The relocation policy created Indians that were more urbanized, independent and politically active. It was in the 60s that Red Power started to rise beside the more well-known Black Power. During The War on Poverty, reservations gained a lot of money because they were some of the poorest places in the USA. This helped Indians to live more comfortably and gain some land and capital but, on the other hand, did not help to improve their relationship with the federal government. Still, people in the 60s were rather well-disposed toward Native Americans, as the general public was emotional due to war and Kennedy’s assassination and preparing for changes to come.

4.2 Films

²⁵ Kilpatrick 66.

4.2.1 Cheyenne Autumn (1964)

Cheyenne Autumn is one of the films produced in this decade that mirrors the political situation almost perfectly. It is John Ford's last western based on a novel by Mari Sandoz, and had been viewed as an elegy for the abused Indians as they were used as representatives of "the oppressed". Ford himself had the feeling he had done some harm to their reputation and needed to fix his misinterpretations. In general, the film was not a box office hit and did not earn any profit for Warner Bros.

This film has more accurate history than other films by Ford, specifically an account of 286 Cheyenne in the Oklahoma reservation who tried to return to their original hunting land and were suppressed by soldiers. As Perkins writes, "Ford centered the film on the moral development of a hero too human to be heroic... Thus betrayed, Warner Bros set about bringing the film in line with every philistine's image of what a blockbuster ought to be."²⁶ Warner Bros wanted to deliver a typical western that would guarantee them profit. As a result, the film suffers from unskillfully mixing the endeavor to capture the viewers' attention and Ford's will to show the real Indians.

The Cheyenne in prison mirror the WWII concentration camps and the massive killing addresses the War in Vietnam. Kilpatrick comments on this, "Although dramatically overdone...the relationship between the events was quite real, and while *Cheyenne Autumn* loses some veracity in the nod to drama, the developing cultural awareness in the film is positive, whatever the motivations might have been behind its making and remaking."²⁷

The film attempts to portray Indians as a real people and to use Cheyenne language, which was a very unique and respectable experiment for cinematography of the 1960s. The interaction between Indians and the authorities, however, is intended to take the viewer's major attention. Most of the white characters are stereotypically prejudiced against Indians and most Indians are stereotypical Noble Savages. To conclude, the film is a nice attempt that turns out to be rather "a travelling circus of

²⁶ V. F. Perkins, Review of *Cheyenne Autumn*, "Movie 12 (Spring 1965): 36.

²⁷ Kilpatrick 69.

cowboys and Indians”²⁸, which shows that the priority points in a film of the 1960s were still primarily simple entertainment.

4.2.2 Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here

Another attempt at a pro-Indian film of the 60s is *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*. This movie was released in 1969 directed by Abraham Polonsky based on a supposedly true story of a Native American named Willie Boy. This film brings us all the way back to 1909 and criticizes the limits considering personal outfits, lifestyle and religion cast upon Native Americans of that time. As Kilpatrick states, “in *Willie Boy* even the female Indian lead has a short hairstyle, although the white Indian agent’s hair is fashionably long.”²⁹ Willie Boy is a young Paiute man who escapes from a Southern California reservation with his girlfriend Lola, kills her father in self-defense and runs away without fear because “No one cares what Indians do. No one.”³⁰ This is related to the fact that crimes committed against Native people at that time often went unpunished. One of the main characters of this film is the Indian agent, a highly educated white woman who tries to support the Indians. She symbolizes the stereotype of white people who know “what is good and bad” and do the best for the poor “Bloodthirsty Savages”. She teaches Indians to be “better Indians”; that is, a bit more like white people. There is a certain aspect of “White Indianness” about her. To show the disputability of her character, she is very emotionally unstable in her personal life.

The Paiutes are definitely sympathized with, but they become a rather general group of “oppressed people” as a result of the Vietnam War critique and the contemporary issues connected to African Americans. This results in them losing their specific Native American identity in the film. As for Willie Boy, he is a very stereotypical representation of a character himself; he is a rebel, a person fighting for his rights and opinions – he stands for the alternative youth of the 1960s. He is more of a universal hero, and does not reflect on Native people of his time that much. He cannot beat his enemies but he keeps fighting against them anyway because: “Maybe [I cannot beat the whites]. But

²⁸ Kilpatrick 70.

²⁹ Kilpatrick 72.

³⁰ Kilpatrick 72.

they'll know I was here."³¹ – this is not a very likely comment coming from the mouth of an early 20th century Indian.

Also the stereotypical white man who forms a counterpart to the Indian hero and who out-Indians the Indian is present in the character of Coop. In his final fight with Willie, he is the superior one and shoots Willie dead. As Rollins and O'Connor comment on the plot: "Coop shoots him and kills him, then checks the rifle. Willie Boy had no more bullets...Willie Boy dies Indian and Coop lives, having killed his alter ego, standing alone in the twilight of a frontier that has gone."³²

The destruction of the Indian nation, here, stands for the destruction in Vietnam. The love between Willie Boy and Lola forms a stereotyped ideal of a "Noble Savage" quality – an image mirroring the 1960s desire for natural goodness and harmony. To conclude, the characters of this film 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 Kilpatrick 75.

³² Rollins & O'Connor 111-112.

5. Who Is The Real Savage – 1970s and 1980s

5.1 The Mood of the Time

5.1.1 The General Background

Starting off with the 1970s, a new era began for the USA as a result of all that had happened during the intense time period of the 1960s, and what came before that. People were looking for answers to questions even more intensely, and so began to be more interested in realistic depictions of people and events. One example of this effort was exploring more about who Native Americans really are. While “Indianness” often continued to be used as a metaphor; film makers reached for new perspectives and narrative. A lot of new motion pictures were produced in a short time period, such as *Soldier Blue*, *A Man Called Horse* and *Little Big Man*. All of these films somehow searched for true Indian versus American identity.

5.1.2 Alcatraz

It is often mentioned that the Native American occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971 was connected with the strengthened film production of that time. This take over was partly seen as a remedy for all the land that was taken away from the Indians and it was meant to serve as a cultural center for them. In this time period, the common audience was inclined to view Native Americans as symbols of “mysticism and nature” and emphasize the role of the “Noble Savage” and the “Warrior” as a model for an inspirational and healthy life perspective. The film production therefore moved further toward the “western” model, but while expressing sympathy for oppressed people. Still, though, films were mostly for entertainment.

5.2 “White Indian” Entertaining Films

5.2.1. A Man Called Horse

Shot in 1970, one of the major films directed by Elliot Silverstein, based on a short story by Dorothy M. Johnson, *A Man Called Horse* is one of the Western films that had been claimed to be very authentic to the Native American culture. As entertaining as the motion picture supposedly is, it unfortunately did not serve to show the original Indian experience accurately for the most part.

First of all, it is not clear which Native tribe the film is trying to show – the village is supposedly Sioux, so we assume that the people are Lakota but most of the “Native events” and behavior seem to be a strange mix of different tribes if not just total fabrication. The base line of the plot concentrates on the white hero John Morgan, an English aristocrat who is captured by a rather primitively behaving tribe the “Yellow Hand”. John is treated like an animal – naked, he is tied down to a horse and ridiculed by the tribe. Even after he is brought to the village, he seems to serve as a person to be made fun of and to be mocked. This is an element that definitely builds up the entertaining side of the film but is totally contradictory to the real views and values of the Sioux tradition. In fact, as Kilpatrick mentions: “It would seem like very bad manners for the Sioux to treat a man like an animal, the entire band standing around laughing while he is tortured; and leaving an old woman out in the snow would have been an abomination – but both of these things happen in this celluloid village.”³³ When the Indian widow’s son is killed in a battle, she is forced to give away all her belongings and assumed to die during the following winter; she is deserted by the whole tribe and only John seems to feel sympathy for her. This simply would never happen according to Sioux tradition because “the elderly held one special place of honor and never, never, never were deserted”³⁴.

Similarly, the sacred ritual of Sun Dance is being put out of place in this film in a rather harsh manner. This ceremony is originally seen as very spiritual event, a highly religious ritual in which a man undergoes an intense purification in order to prove his humbleness to the spiritual world and gain a vision, which he then shares with the whole tribe. Contradictory to that, John who receives an Indian name “Horse”, has a quite self-centered motivation to undergo the Sun Dance because he needs to

³³ Kilpatrick 79-80.

³⁴ Kilpatrick 80.

show his “manliness” and “get the woman of his heart” so the whole ritual shrinks to his macho showing of – as Churchill notes, “Just bloody up your chest and no further questions will be asked”³⁵.

As for the language of the film, the Native Americans are mostly limited to squeals, grunts and a lot of screaming. In order to communicate with them, Horse has an “interpreter” – Batise, the French Sioux who pretends to be crazy so he would be left alone by the Indians. He is very fond of the idea of escaping to England because he detests both of his original identities. He is a character who enables us to see how some things get “lost in translation” and mirrors the troubles between native and English languages and experience. On the other hand, Batise also causes more of the “entertainment distractions” of the film, the audience cannot be sure whether he really is crazy or not and sometimes he changes Horse’s proclamations to the way he thinks they should be.

Some of the film’s images are still quite truthful to reality. We can see prayers to Wakantanka or honoring the dead. Most of the action is a comedy, though, and its main goal is to entertain. Therefore, most of the people’s portrayal is exaggerated and stereotypical: the “good Indians” are closer to the whites in their looks; on the other hand, Shoshons – the “bad Indians” have darker skin and more animal-like faces. Additionally, the white man–Indian woman relationship ends dramatically and, naturally for a film like this, the white Indian out-Indians the real Indian. All in all, *A Man Called Horse* is a film made to entertain and it ignores some of the most basic facts about the lives of Native Americans.

5.2.2 Little Big Man

Little Big Man is a typical western movie shot in 1970 and directed by Arthur Penn. It takes place right after the Civil War and portrays the conflicts among white Americans as well as Native Americans.

This film adds a new perspective to American Cinematography because it tries to show Native Americans as actual human beings and show their culture as complex. For once, the main Indian tribe, the Cheyenne, is portrayed as not the attackers but the victims. As Rollins and O’Connor suggest, this film differs from most of the contemporary westerns because “whereas classic Westerns portray the

³⁵ Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Monroe ME: Common Courage, 1992), 237.

whites as representatives of civilization and the Indians as barbarians, this one suggests the opposite.”³⁶ Cheyenne themselves talk about each other as “the human beings” as if they were the representatives of the true human spirit unlike the whites.

Similarly to other westerns of that time (e.g. *Dances With Wolves*), the main protagonist of *Little Big Man*, a white man Jack Crabb, undergoes a transformation while being exposed to both white and Native American culture. In this film, his story serves to demythologize well-known personalities: legendary whites and Indians. It is a comedy that makes fun of most of the white and Native American stereotypes. One of the ways of doing this is brought through the Chief of the tribe and the ways he perceives the world around him, especially white people. Speaking of race, he calls African Americans “the black white people”, which somehow turns all the race questions into absurdities. The film also casts some light on the question of religion, namely Christianity. Jack is baptized in the water and is adopted by a white couple; when he finds out his “mother” is a prostitute he claims that it has been the end of his “religious period” and all that he has been taught about religion he can now safely abandon.

The Chief Old Lodge Skins has witty insights throughout the film and foresees the end of the Cheyenne with the commentary: “Sometimes the magic works; sometimes it doesn’t.”³⁷ Jack becomes his “son” and eager companion and realizes that the world of Native Americans is very open-minded, honest and tolerant; even to people who are called “Contrary” and do everything backwards, and to the heemaneh, who is a male behaving as a female. The whites are portrayed as people “who don’t know where the center of the Earth is”, as Old Lodge Skin claims. While breaking the stereotype of “Bloodthirsty Savage”, the film creates a new stereotype of “noble romanticized Indian culture” and “empty, superficial white culture”. It serves well the humorous tone of the film, but also creates more questions about who the Indians really are. This is shown, for example, by the way whites and Indians treat the buffalo. Indians only hunt buffalo for food and skin and the actual hunt is sort of a sacred event, whereas the whites just shoot buffalo for fun, leaving a trail of worthless death behind them. Also, it is the Indians who are brutally and without mercy massacred by the whites in this film.

³⁶ Rollins & O’Connor 121.

³⁷ Rollins & O’Connor 128.

Although this film pictures the Native American culture more accurately than any other western of this time did, it still does not pay major attention to a specific Indian culture but rather shows the contemporary strife of the 60s – counterculture, “sex, drugs and rock & roll”. This is probably most visible in the scene where Jack’s wife Sunshine pushes him to make love to all of her sisters in her teepee. In reality, Indians were strictly monogamous and Indian women strictly chaste. Moreover, the tone of the film offers more sarcasm and irony than true identity of characters, such as the berdache who, according to Kilpatrick, is “a caricature of drag queen who bats his eyes and dances coyly away”³⁸ or even the Chief, who is the stereotypical noble Indian in a way but, at the same time, also a comic figure.

All in all, although the result of the movie is rather comical and one of the main themes is portrayal of the nature of the 60s, it still helps to portray Indians in a more positive and truthful way, untypically making a true hero of an Indian Chief, and most importantly questioning the stereotypes which were taken for granted in cinematography for decades.

5.3 The Crazy Noble Indian

5.3.1 Media Confusion

During the second half of the 20th century, various Native tribes started to form the AIM (American Indian Movement) to protect Native Americans. Some ostensibly pro-Indian progress was made such as the 1972 Indian Education Act, but these were merely to show Senator Kennedy’s “concern” with the Native Americans and were not truly functional. Also, based on the contemporary popularity of the book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, a group of AIM members took over a piece of land where the conflict took place. This act was meant to draw the attention of the media. The response of the media was originally positive and supportive toward the “Noble Savages”, who were admired for being simply armed with 22-caliber rifles, knives, screwdrivers etc. Later, though, they shifted their position and were critical of the Indians for the very same reasons and started to call them “radicals” and the Bloodthirsty Savage was again part of the narrative. As Kilpatrick states “...the old movies and the

³⁸ Kilpatrick 92.

reports from Wounded Knee [were] even spelled out at the time by notable publications like U.S. News and World Report, which described the takeover as a ‘replay’ of a ‘wild West’ conflict”³⁹. Soon after this, it came to light that the media themselves were prolonging the conflict. As a result, Hollywood cinematography began to be just as confused as the media themselves and common people started to realize that there was probably much more to Native Americans than the simplicity of Warrior, Noble or Bloodthirsty stereotypes. So according to Kilpatrick, “by the mid-1970s, the major producers...decided that in the case of American Indians, less was definitely more.”⁴⁰

5.3.1.1 One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest

The film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is a good example of minimalizing the Native American character. It was based on an eponymous novel by Ken Kesey, directed by Milos Forman and shot in 1975. The Indian “Chief” (this is what Mr. McMurphy calls him) Bromden is not as developed a character as he is in the novel. His presence is made powerful by silence mostly – an ideal reflection of the contemporary sympathy for Native Americans but also unwillingness to learn more. At first, he is shown as a “deaf and dumb” Indian incapable of any action. Later on, though, it is he who scores in basketball and he who changes the vote so that a football game would be shown on TV in the mental institution. He speaks for the first time somewhere in the middle of the film when McMurphy gives him a piece of chewing gum and says “Thank you”. McMurphy wants to make sure he heard correctly and gives him another one just to hear another “thank you”. Then they both start laughing and McMurphy exclaims: “You sly son of a bitch. They all think you’re deaf and dumb. You fooled them all.” This conversation shows the Chief’s actual superiority to all the people around him and also his strength to keep this superiority to himself. When he talks, it is only about his father, who was a drunkard – “the bottle sucked him, worked on him the way they are working on you [here]”. This somehow supports the ever-mentioned alcohol problem stereotype connected to reservations but also shows the Chief’s distance from that.

³⁹ Kilpatrick 97.

⁴⁰ Kilpatrick 98.

Apparently, the Chief believes in Mr. McMurphy and when Mr. McMurphy returns from the “medical treatment” lobotomy and Bromden finds that he was deprived of his wits by it, he kills him so that he would not be left alone to be ridiculed. Then the Chief goes to the bathroom and holds up the marble water station (just as McMurphy tried before unsuccessfully), throws it through the window and runs away to the forests. As Kilpatrick says, “the audience can’t help but feel a resurgence of power and autonomy”⁴¹. This is an ultimate proof of the Indian inner strength and gives away a feeling of a man returning to his roots, which can only be exercised by a Native American who “belongs in the nature”. To conclude, Bromden is not quite a fully developed character but, as Kilpatrick mentions, he is “a fitting portrait of all the ‘Indian’ that Hollywood assumed a mainstream audience could handle after the tumultuous events of the sixties and seventies.”⁴²

5.3.1.2 Powwow Highway

One of the less well-known films about Native Americans is *Powwow Highway*, directed by Jonathan Wacks, released in 1989, and based on a novel by David Seals. This film shows some typical problems of Indian reservations and it seems to be one of the more successful ones in taking apart some of the stereotypes about Native Americans.

Most of the film takes place in poverty-stricken reservations – as Kilpatrick writes, “one reason this film was so well received by American Indians is that they recognized it all”⁴³ – and all the scenes there are portrayed very realistically. The film is basically about Buddy Red Bow who is trying to persuade the reservation council to vote for a strip-mining contract and is set on a long journey on which he wants to find his medicine and omens. His friend Philbert joins him on this roadtrip and they face all the unexpected twists together as the film shows the lives of two Cheyennes in the world of the modern USA driving down the Powwow Highway. The plot of this movie is not the major point,

⁴¹ Kilpatrick 99-100.

⁴² Kilpatrick 100.

⁴³ Kilpatrick 114.

as Erbert states, “what ‘Powwow Highway’ does best is to create two unforgettable characters and give them some time together”⁴⁴

The way Native Americans approach history and storytelling is perfectly captured in a scene when Philbert speaks to a truck driver about his name “Light Cloud” which is also the name of a prophet. The truck driver is amazed that Philbert knows about this connection because he has noticed that people do not care about history so much lately. As an explanation of why Phil knows that story, he talks about *Bonanza* in which the Indian Chief is played by a white man and to which the trucker says: “*Bonanza*? That’s not where you learned about Light Cloud.” and Phil answers: “No my Uncle Fred told me about Light Cloud.” This whole scene basically mocks the stereotype of Indians being played by white people in films and on television. Also, it shows that Native Americans prefer oral history and repeating stories through generations than on what is written down on paper or made into films, as long as it still contains the message. Also, Phil, apparently, plays the part of the Trickster figure in this film and that is why he initiates these unexpected conversations and situations.

The powwow in this film is held in a high school gymnasium, which would probably happen in real life too, considering wintertime. It is interesting that Buddy and Phil are not specially dressed for this event, which seems to be more unlikely in reality because Native Americans care about their powwow looks a lot.

The chief of the Cheyenne tribe is depicted as the stereotypical wise Noble Savage, which is one of the possibly disturbing elements of this otherwise very non-stereotypical film. Also, Buddy himself, despite being a major character in a film that deals with identity a lot, is played by a white man, which probably could have been avoided. Maybe this happens because, as Rollins and O’Connor quote: “At least women in Westerns are not played by men. At least horses are not played by dogs, or cattle by goats. ... (still) An Indian in a Western who is supposed to be a real person has to be played by a white man.”⁴⁵ Most of the good Native Americans actors in this film have rather minor roles. Also, the

⁴⁴ Roger Erbert, “Powwow Highway”, *Chicago Sun Times*, 28 April 1989: 17.

⁴⁵ Rollins & O’Connor 141.

character of Rabbit seems to be a little too stereotypically interested in Buddy because he is “a sexy Indian boy” – this fact throws some of the old Hollywood back into this movie.

Otherwise, the film does a good job at showing some realistic characters and situations from Native American life in the modern time period, especially showing life in reservations and the significance of the powwow to Indians.

6. Who Is The True Indian – 90s until now

6.1 Historical Background

6.1.1 Media Expansion

“Very few Indians live here anymore. They left for parts west long ago, but some of their teachings remain. Many of those in the East who follow the Red Road of spiritual practice of one tribe, the Lakota Sioux, are white people...”⁴⁶

As Native Americans became more and more frequently involved in politics, art and business, they also started to appear more frequently on TV and in newspapers during the last decade of 20th century. Native American rights began to be respected more widely, some of the old conflicts were revisited (such as Wounded Knee) and some of the complaints Indians voiced were satisfied. New native biographies were written and documentaries were shot about the lives of Indians. If Indians tended to be depicted stereotypically in the media for some reason, they objected loudly. When, for example, fans of Atlanta Braves started bringing tomahawks to games and using war whoops for cheers, Native Americans let themselves be heard: “Please, Georgians, leave your tomahawks, chants and headdresses at home. It’s simply wrong to mock another people, to use their cultural symbols crudely, to resurrect hurtful old stereotypes.”⁴⁷ Even some demonstrations were held so that the college teams would stop using Native American symbols. There still remain many team mascots based on Native American stereotypes throughout the US, though.

Also newspapers and magazines tried to curtail biased and sensationalist reporting. Some still escaped the generally well-meant intentions such as the Associated Press dispatch about the Thingit boys who were sued for murder. Without taking into account the fact that the Thingits were fighting for their survival as a nation at the same time, the headline simply said: “There were no lawyers, no oaths, no

⁴⁶ Annie C. Fullam, “Prayer Group in Patterson Follows Rituals of Indian Purifying”, *The Washington Post*, 10 August 1997: 5.

⁴⁷ Andrew Bagnato, “Battle Lines Forming for the Tomahawk Chop War”, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1991: 11.

objections. The twelve judges drank the juice of a thorny plant, wore deerskin tunics and had the courtroom cleansed of evil spirits. This was justice, Thingit style.”⁴⁸

The views that common Americans hold of Indian people vary, some still see them as mystical respectful “Noble Savages”, some maintain with the concept of “Bloodthirsty Savages” (such as Senator Gorton who is known as a classical “Indian-fighter”), but, all in all, opinions started to be less dramatic. The film industry remained rather quiet for several years, but the early 90s saw the production of a new series of films that try to depict Native Americans the way they really are. As is going to be mentioned, not all of them were quite successful in this sense.

6.2 Deconstructing the Myth

6.2.1 Dances with Wolves

*“...According to their customs we shall likewise receive names from them, by which we shall always be known. My youngest children shall learn to swim, and to shoot with the bow, that they may acquire such talents as will necessarily raise them into some degree of esteem among the Indian lads of their own age; the rest of us must hunt with the hunters.”*⁴⁹

J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur

Just as well as Crèvecoeur states in his letters, Costner in *Dances With Wolves* is a man whose history is somehow forgotten as if he had been deprived of everything (family, real estate, home etc.). We never get to know how his life had been before he joined the army. He is a man without a past who takes on a journey to find his new home and identity among Native Americans.

Dances with Wolves is an epic film shot in 1990 based on a book of the same name, and was directed by Kevin Costner. It tells the story of an army lieutenant and the frontier which is to diminish soon. Frontier here works as a synecdoche for "the real Native Americans" who disappear with the frontier. The movie received a lot of credit for forming a new depiction of the Western genre and won seven

⁴⁸ Weston 160.

⁴⁹ M. G. J. de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1793) 375.

Academy Awards including Best Picture. *Dances With Wolves* definitely made big progress depicting Native Americans as complex human beings and moreover, all the Native characters are played by actual Indians, who were actually chosen for being good actors. Also, the film does a great job at using the actual Lakota language instead of English or just gibberish.

The Lakotas altogether are presented as very full, likeable and sympathetic characters, having small traces of the “Noble Savage” stereotype. On the other hand, their natural enemies, the Pawnees, are very much reduced to “Bloodthirsty Savages”. It seems that some of the stereotypical images still infiltrate this motion picture. Most of the white characters in this film seem to be dumb, vicious or even crazy and are portrayed as having the very opposite of Indian qualities; except for the main character John Dunbar, of course, who can be seen as an example of “White Indian” and who in many aspects learns how to be equal to the Natives or even out-Indians them in certain aspects.

The film begins by John Dunbar showing his exceptional courage when he realizes he is going to lose his leg; he jumps on a horse and runs in front of the Confederate sharp-shooters, all of whom fail to shoot him dead. The Union soldiers are strongly encouraged by his deed and they take the field and win the battle. As a result, Dunbar is taken care of and honored and he chooses to go to the frontier to see it “before it is gone”. As Owens suggests: “Frontier in this context – and in most American contexts – clearly means ‘Indian’”⁵⁰ The first white man Dunbar encounters at the Frontier is Major Fambrough, who is obviously mad, maybe because he was never able to adopt the identity of the Frontier and become one with the Indians as Dunbar is later. His last proclamation is: “I have just pissed in my pants and nobody can do anything about it,” as he shoots himself dead. The next white man, Timmons, is even more disgusting a character than the Major. He is a stereotype of a stupid and dirty “white savage”, who, in the end, is only concerned about his mules when the Indians come to kill him.

After that, the major exchange between white men and the Lakota people takes place through John Dunbar. Their first meeting carries an important message – Dunbar is swimming in the lake naked while Kicking Bird approaches him in a fancy dress. As Owens notes: “Millions of people around the

⁵⁰ Louis Owens, “D’une disparition à l’autre.”, *Revue d’études Palestiniennes*, n.s. 3 (1995): 47.

world had a good laugh over this scene...The very proper “civilized” Indian meets the naked white savage. Close beneath this comic veneer, however, lies a more disturbing reading, for this scene illuminates the crucial Euroamerican fantasy of being inseminated with Indianness, of absorbing and appropriating everything of value...and replacing the actual Native... It is, in fact, the very nakedness of Dunbar that frightens the Indian warrior, as it well should, for Dunbar will soon be clothed in Kicking Bird’s Indianness.”⁵¹ Naturally, the Indians are able to tell that there is a white man around them long before Dunbar notices their presence, because “only a white man lights a fire so that everybody can see it”. Immediately after the first meeting, Dunbar writes down “The man I encountered was a magnificent looking fellow”; on the other hand, in the beginning Native Americans think of Dunbar as inferior, simply because he is not Sioux.

This, however, is soon to change because John Dunbar, from the very beginning, shows concern for things around him. For instance, he befriends the wolf, which is carelessly shot at the end of the film by other white people, and names him “Two socks”. Also, when he comes to the Indian camp for the first time (because he is “through waiting to meet them”), he brings the wounded woman, Stands With A Fist. This is one of the scenes that supposedly mock American nationalism, because Dunbar rides the horse with an American flag that blocks his face as he approaches the woman, and then he has to use it to cover up her hand to stop the bleeding. By the time he reaches the camp, he can no longer hold the flag up and show his national pride. Lakota people, on the other hand, do not need to show their national pride in this film by holding up a flag, because we can see their courage and self-confidence in the way they move and speak.

As the Lakota and Dunbar get to know each other better, they spent some time drinking coffee at the fortress and the Indians taste sugar for the first time and exchange the first words with Dunbar, the most important of those being “tatanka” (bison). On account of that, Dunbar receives a buffalo skin from the Indians and he writes in his diary: “Nothing I’ve been taught about these people is true.” As Stands With A Fist, who was adopted as a small white child, tries to remember English, she interprets the conversation between the Chief and Dunbar pronouncing his name as “Dump Bear” unconsciously

⁵¹ Owens 47.

lampooning his American identity, which is soon to be replaced by Dunbar's Indian name "Dances With Wolves" and only then he knows "for the first time who I really was".

The love story is similar to the love story from *A Man Called Horse*, except for it has a happy ending - the lovers get married and leave the camp together. However, the barrier between Native American and white is not crossed, because both of them are, in fact, white. As Black Shawl remarks in the film: "They [people] like the idea [of them being together]. It makes sense because they are both white."

There is also a similar story about Dunbar being captured by the whites; however, unlike Horse, he never gives up and he fights his "enemies". When they become loathsome to him and treat him as a deserter worse than an animal, he only speaks Lakota to them and shouts: "I am Dances with Wolves!"

Two main flaws of this film seem to lie mainly in the fact that it is again a white narrator telling a story about Native Americans so the identity problem remains. This means that once again the Indians are not given a full voice. The other flaw is the fact that in this film, white people are the flat characters, the savages and villains. It seems that this film somehow did not fully reach beyond the comfort zone of the time period with movies influenced by Wild West Shows. As Elliott states:

"Indians are the only minority group that the Indian lovers won't let out of the 19th century. They love Indians as long as they can picture them riding around on ponies wearing beads and feathers, living in picturesque tee-pee villages and making long profound speeches. Whites still expect, even now, to see Indians as they once were, living in the forest or performing in the Wild West shows rather than working on the farm or living in urban areas."⁵² This description seems to fit the Native Americans of *Dances with Wolves* pretty well but they are still rather a myth than reality.

Moreover, the ending also fits the cliché of stating that the Native Americans, as we knew them, vanished and moved to reservations and the fairy tale ended for good. In Kilpatrick's words the "sad, unavoidable 'truth' that real Americans are gone, and it's just a damn shame."⁵³ This final message simply completely ignores the fact that Native Americans continue to live and are real people.

⁵² Jace Weaver, "Ethnic Cleansing, Homestyle," *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 91 (spring 1994): 27.

⁵³ Kilpatrick 130.

However imperfect, I would still give the film credit for trying to fight decades-long stereotypes and depicting Indians as complex characters, using Lakota language and juxtaposing it with English, trying to maintain an Indian point of view and presenting their sense of humor.

6.3 Indians Making Films About Indians

6.3.1 Background of the 90s Cinematography

“All in all, it appears that another cycle of Indian sympathy films will have to wane before Native America can claim its “own” Hollywood imagery. In reality, very little of what has transpired over this century is groundbreaking. Such invention can only come when a bona fide Native director or producer breaks into the ranks of Hollywood, hopefully to challenge the conventional credos of the industry from within.”⁵⁴ Ted Jojola

As Ted Jojola foretold, the early 90s noted the rise of Native American film directors. Considering the fact that until then there had not been a single film made by Native Americans, their contributions to American cinema were great. Even more significant were their indirect contributions to the way common people could view Native American culture, even if most of those films were low budget.

6.3.1.1 Smoke Signals

Smoke signals is an independent film shot in 1998 directed by Chris Eyre and it is based on a short story “This is what it means to say Phoenix, Arizona” from Sherman Alexie’s book *Lone Ranger and Tonto: Fistfight in Heaven*. It is the first film in the history of Hollywood that was written, directed, acted and co-produced by Native Americans alone. This fact is of utmost importance because, as Beverly Singer claims, “until very recently whites – to the exclusion of Native people – have been the only people given the necessary support and recognition by society to tell Native stories in the medium of film”⁵⁵ and because, as it was mentioned in the first chapter, films are a valuable shape-shifter of

⁵⁴ Rollins & O’Connor 206.

⁵⁵ Beverly Singer. *Wiping the War Paint of the Lens: Native Americans in Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 54.

our consciousness and knowledge. This film then, by all means, provides us with a completely different view of Indians – and that is Indians seeing themselves through their own eyes.

First and foremost, storytelling is very important for Native American culture because it basically functions in the way that written history functions for Euro-American culture. Native Americans making their story telling into films is another step forward in sharing their culture with the rest of the world, and as Singer says: “Native American filmmaking transmits beliefs and feelings that help revive storytelling and restore the old foundation.”⁵⁶ *Smoke Signals*, in this sense, is quite a revolutionary enterprise because it tries to correct stereotypes about Indians in the very way they were created in the first place. As Rollins & O’Connor state “Eyre and Alexie... challenge popular culture by creating popular culture, using the very medium that has arguably threatened Native American sovereignty the most – Hollywood film”⁵⁷.

It is clear from the very beginning of *Smoke Signals* that this film is going to reflect “Indianness” light-heartedly and self-confidently from within. The film starts with a snapshot of the man who works at the radio station for the Couer D’Alene reservation and he says: “Good morning! ...Today is a good a day to be indigenous.” He is followed by his colleague who does weather forecast and says: “Big truck just went by. Now it’s gone.” In this scene, we can trace humor that is present in the way Native Americans see themselves and their life in the reservation.

Smoke Signals work with various Indian stereotypes and perceive them by the means of humor or enlightenment. One of the main characters, Victor, may be seen as a representative of the “warrior” stereotype but the way he teaches Thomas how to be a “real Indian” has mockery undertones: “You got to look mean or people won’t respect you. White people will run all over you if you don’t look mean. You got to look mean. You got to look like a warrior. You got to look like you just came back from killing a buffalo...This ain’t Dances With Salmon, you know?” Thomas then changes his dress and tries to be a “real Indian” and remain stoic but this only works until he breaks into his characteristic laughter. Also, just after that, Victor and Thomas find out that their seats on the bus were

⁵⁶ Singer 55.

⁵⁷ Rollins & O’Connor 207-208.

taken by some typical “redneck” cowboys, who would not move, so Thomas tells Victor: “Jeez, Victor, I guess your warrior look doesn’t work every time,” and they sit in the back of the bus. They are “defeated”, because, as Thomas suggests “cowboys always win... What about John Wayne? Man, he was the toughest cowboy of them all, enit?” However, they do not keep silent and sing a song pounding a powwow rhythm on the seat: “John Wayne’s teeth, hey... Are they false, are they real? Are they plastic, are they steel? Hey!” So, even though they have to move, they keep their dignity and show who they are. As Rollins & O’Connor state: “the humorous, often poignant script, penned by Alexie – known for his controversial, edgy-style and razor-sharp wit – is one of the *Smoke Signal*’s greatest strengths.”⁵⁸

Also, Victor attacks the very fact of Thomas acting like a “Medicine Man” Hollywood stereotype and being a constant story teller by asking him: “How many times have you seen *Dances with Wolves*? A hundred? Two hundred? [Thomas has a thoughtful expression on his face] Oh, jeez, you have seen it that many times, haven’t you?” Here, however, Victor only wants to exchange the “Medicine Man” stereotype for the “Warrior” stereotype – these are the most well-known and popular stereotypes that people associate with Indians and usually think there is something wrong with Native Americans if they do not apply to them. Through this, the film is making fun of the very industry of which it is a part and of the stereotype of the ideal Noble Savage, which has been presented in motion pictures over decades.

This film also shows even the effect that stereotypes might have on people from whom the stereotypes are derived. As a great example of that, when sitting together with Suzie and Victor, Thomas says: “You know the only thing more pathetic than Indians on TV? Indians watching Indians on TV!” This is a meta-reflection of Native American culture – watching a film within watching a film – and the way it is reflected with humor makes it very powerful.

Speaking of stereotypes that might be strengthened by this motion picture, Victor’s parents have a very friendly relationship with alcohol and we see a lot of partying and drinking in the reservation throughout the film. Also, the main entanglement of the film (setting a house with people inside on

⁵⁸ Rollins & O’Connor 212.

fire) is caused by Victor's father who is drunk and accidentally starts the fire. On the other hand, his son Victor claims he "has never had a drop of alcohol in his life" when he is being cross-questioned by the police officer after the car crash. He has made the decision of becoming a teetotaler on the basis of his father's life story. We may see this as way to portray how younger generation learns better from their parents within Native American communities. Moreover, in the scene with Velma and Lucy driving the car backwards, Lucy says: "Jeez, I'm thirsty, get me a beer!" to which Velma replies: "Hey girl, we don't drink no more, remember?" This is followed by Lucy's stoic statement: "Ah, give me a Coke, then." So, we can see the film deals with alcohol a lot and as Rollins & O'Connor state "sends a positive message about alcohol and a message of hope for younger and future generations of Native Americans. Significantly, however, some viewers...may only remember the alcohol."⁵⁹

In this film we can also see that Native Americans from different tribes might have very different lives and various life experience. It is obvious that *Smoke Signals* created a picture of one specific Indian reservation and not some homogenized general picture of who Indians are that we have seen in most of the above mentioned motion pictures. As Rollins and O'Connor state: "The more difficult task was showing the audience what is real... Eyre and Alexie had to create a world that was at once recognizable as pan-Indian and tribally specific for Native viewers...and succeeded."⁶⁰ Also, the film creates a picture of Indians who are actually proud Americans as, generally speaking, Indians nowadays are. The 4th of July is passionately celebrated in the reservation and people hang American flags on their houses. As Rollins & O'Connor say: "They also ride a Greyhound bus, wear Levi's, listen to rock music, play plenty of basketball, and drink Coca-Cola."⁶¹ Naturally, they also make fun of being Indians within the USA. When Victor and Thomas are leaving the reservation, Velma asks them: "You guys got your passports?" Thomas is perplexed by her question, saying they are going to stay in the USA to which Lucy replies: "That's as foreign as it gets. Hope you two have your vaccinations!" Neither Thomas nor Victor have ever left the reservation before; and this humorous

⁵⁹ Rollins & O'Connor 218.

⁶⁰ Rollins & O'Connor 219.

⁶¹ Rollins & O'Connor 220.

scene helps to show the feeling of foreignness one culture might have toward another within the same country. Like most of the scenes addressing stereotypes in this film, this one is also very light-hearted.

The most important fact, though, is that Native Americans presented in this film are simply people. While they are clearly Indians, they do normal things that all people usually do and are portrayed as complex, human characters rather than some mythological relics from the past. As Rollins & O'Connor state, "these contemporary people are not trapped in nineteenth-century teepees – these Coeur d'Alene people have their own land, community, accent, names, radio station, and even their own meteorologist."⁶²

To expand on the topic of "Indianness" in this celluloid enterprise, Alex and Erie also added what they call "Indian trapdoors" to their film. As they mention in an interview with Dennis and Joan West: "an Indian will walk all over them and fall in, but a non-Indian will keep on walking not realizing he or she has missed anything."⁶³ These trapdoors include a car that can only drive backwards, basketball as a typical Indian sport, powwow culture, fry bread and many allusions to what Indians are really like. Velma, for instance, asks something in exchange for giving a ride to Victor and Thomas because "Indians barter". When Victor is leaving for Phoenix his mother wants him to promise he will come back and he says: "Jeez. You want to sign a paper or something?" to which she replies: "No way. You know how Indians feel about signing papers." In another scene, when Victor is asked who is the best basketball player ever, he says it is clear that it is Geronimo to which Junior Polatkin replies: "Geronimo? He couldn't play basketball, man. He was Apache, man. Those suckers are about three feet tall."; and Victor says: "It's Geronimo, man. He was lean, mean and bloody. Would have dunked on your flat Indian ass and then cut it off." All of these small witty moments refer to pan-Indian culture that is shared within the tribes but also perceived differently by every individual. The way humor is used here is very specific for Native American culture and shows that Indians are still here and able to make fun of their past both in general and on a personal level. Alexie's comments on "pan-Indianness" and individuality even further: "I am not trying to speak for everybody. I'm one individual

⁶² Rollins & O'Connor 221.

⁶³ Dennis West, and Joan M. West, "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie." *Cineaste* 23, no. 4 (fall 1998): 3.

heavily influenced by tribe. And good art doesn't come out of assimilation – it comes out of tribalism.”⁶⁴

To conclude, *Smoke Signals* tell a story of real contemporary Native American world and people, and it comments on some of the decades old political and cultural stereotypes by the kind means of humor. The plot along with the characters, actors and soundtrack of the film create a realistic picture of a modern Indian community existing both outside and within the American society.

6.3.1.2 Dream Keeper

Dream Keeper is a motion picture released in 2003 directed by Steven Barron and written by John Fusco. Neither of them are of Native American origin but the film still pays a lot of attention to being authentic and does so quite successfully by starring Native Americans from many various tribes such as Lakota, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Pawnee, Blackfeet, Mohawk or Crow.

This film honors the traditional Native American storytelling because it consists of many short stories from different tribes that are passed on from one generation to another. It also shows the value of powwow – a place where all the tribes gather to share their dancing, their power and mutuality. The main character of the story is Shane Chasing Horse from Lakota Pine Ridge reservation. He is a 17-year old man who accompanies his grandfather to the powwow. On the road, the grandfather tells Shane all the stories he knows; he is a typical Native American “storyteller”. Shane is at first irritated by this but then he gets involved in the stories. In the end, when his grandfather passes away and Shane makes it to the powwow, he embraces the role of the storyteller himself.

In *Dream Keeper* we can see variety of tribes and people who perceive themselves as Native Americans; we do not get any homogenized image of Indians in general. What adds to the objectivity of the depiction is the image of contemporary lifestyles of Native Americans in reservations and at powwows, which is all very realistic.

⁶⁴ Mary Elizabeth Williams, “Movie Interview: Without Reservations: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie.” *Salon.com*, July, 1998.

We can say that *Dream Keeper* has a lot in common with the films *Smoke Signals* as well as *Powwow Highway*. It also tells a story of father issues, most of the plot takes place on the road, and much of the story involves a powwow. The image of powwow here, however, is taken farther – it is the ultimate goal of the journey. It shows the meaning of the title of one of the powwow TV series from 1983 called “I’d Rather Be Powwowing”. Powwow is a place and time when so many good things for Native Americans happen at once and every person has his or her own benefit from it. The picture of powwow this movie creates is very accurate because it shows the importance of the drum and traditional dances within Native American communities.

All in all, *Dream Keeper* is a quite successful film considering plausibility. It portrays contemporary life within Native American communities and reservations and shows Indians as individual beings of different backgrounds and personalities. Also, it mirrors the importance of storytelling and powwow culture for Native communities.

7. Conclusion

As stated in chapter one and two, it is clear that American cinema that deals with Native Americans contains many stereotypical depictions. The influence of stereotypes seems to be greater when they are used in film because they are more easily consumed by the general public and can therefore spread quite quickly. This effect of stereotyping is even stronger with Native Americans because most of their history had not been written down, because Indians prefer the so-called oral tradition, leaving little contradictory information for the audience. As mentioned in chapter two, most of the information about Native Americans that we have comes from white people. A survey of the film industry's products confirms this fact as the majority of the films featuring Indians have been made by white people.

Looking at chapters three to six, it becomes obvious that the image of the Indian in film changes in response to each new time period. Indians always seem to serve more as a vehicle for carrying contemporary messages than to represent their culture in its own right.

In chapter three, we proved that films from the first half of the 20th century typically rely on the pervasive stereotype of the bloodthirsty savage because in the 30s, 40s and 50s the image of the Native American enemy was still quite prevalent in public opinion. Also, the film industry was not yet very developed technologically, so some of the films were silent and it was very easy to create largely simplified depictions. The motion pictures *They Died With Their Boots On*, *Stage Coach*, *Broken Arrow* and *The Searchers* all show images of stereotyped Bloodthirsty or Noble Savages. The director John Ford has created very influential movies that determined much of the public view of Indians as well as future film production.

As the political environment changed during the 1940s, so did the portrayal of Indians in film. In this period, the theme of hippie culture prevailed and was mirrored by the film production of the time. Both of the films *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* show examples of Native Americans embodying hippie ideals. Also, the environments chosen for these films often related to contemporary issues such as war in Vietnam more than to Native American issues themselves.

In chapter five we can see the Indian image changing again. This time we can see the influence of the media and the endeavor to depict Native Americans more positively, as they served as a cinematographic example of oppressed minorities. Also, the stereotype of the White Indian arises, continuing the trend of Native American stories shown from the white perspective. Namely, from the perspective of a white man who learns to be a better Indian than Indians themselves. This phenomenon was seen in films *Little Big Man* and *A Man Called Horse*.

Chapter five also shows the influence of media on the portrayal of Indians. The media in the 1970s and 1980s tried to be more truthful in depicting Native Americans. Also Indians themselves became more involved and actively opposed biased representation in the media. As filmmakers became more and more confused as to what a truthful and accurate representation of Native Americans should look like, they tended to minimize the Indian. Films created under the influence of this wave are *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Powwow Highway*. By making the Indian hero of the film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* a minor background character, this film shows that the image of Indians was modified mostly in response to changes in the greater cultural climate of the time.

In chapter six, we can see the recent endeavors to debunk the stereotypes that were reiterated throughout the previous decades. This, as shown, is not an easy job and the film industry is just taking its first steps in this direction. As Native Americans get involved in making films about themselves, they seem to be very successful at demythologizing their portrayal, especially by the means of humor as in *Smoke Signals*. *Dream Keeper* is another contemporary film that proves to be quite faithful to the true Native American heritage and culture.

To conclude, Native Americans in film have been presented through the lens of persistently inaccurate stereotypes throughout the 20th century. Progress in this area 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. It is important to try to remove stereotypical depiction and prejudice from our view of different cultures and people because otherwise we can never get a full and honest image. When we look at the contemporary Indian, ignoring the stereotypes, we can see that he is first and foremost a human being

just like all other people. Naturally, Native Americans have their own historical heritage, but modern Indians lead lives just the way we do: they go to school, to work, they have families. Most importantly, Native Americans are not an extinct species. They are very much alive and they use their historical past to learn and adapt to the present time period. They view their past and the stereotypes that white people have created of them with humor. Native Americans are people of rich cultural heritage, of their own beliefs, of their own ways of life, but most importantly, they are human beings with original personalities who should not be reduced to simplified images or stereotypes.

Bibliography

Anderson, Lindsay. *About John Ford*. London: Plexus, 1981.

"A Program for Indian Citizens," *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 242.

Bagnato, Andrew. "Battle Lines Forming for the Tomahawk Chop War". *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1991: 9-11.

Berkhofer, Robert F. *The White Man's Indian*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.

Byrd, Gibbens, Professor of English at University of Arkansas at Little Rock; quoted epigraph in *Napalm and Silly Putty* by George Carlin, 2001.

Churchill, Ward. *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes. Monroe ME: Common Courage, 1992.

Crèvecoeur, M. G. J. de. *Letters from an American Farmer*. Philadelphia: Matthew Carey, 1793.

"Declaration of Indian Purpose," *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 246.

Erbert, Roger. "Powwow Highway". *Chicago Sun Times*, 28 April 1989: 17-19.

Fullam, Annie C. "Prayer Group in Patterson Follows Rituals of Indian Purifying". *The Washington Post*. 10 August 1997: 5-7.

Gallagher, Tag. *John Ford: The Man and His Films*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Kilpatrick Jacquelyn, *Celluloid Indians*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Ortiz Alfonso. "*Indian/White Relations: A View From the Other Side of the 'Frontier'*". *Indians in American History*. ed. Frederick W. Hoxie. Wheeling III: Harlan Davidson, 1988.

Owens, Louis. "D'une disparition a l'autre." *Revue d'etudes Palestiniennes*, n.s. 3 (1995): 47.

Perkins, V. F. Review of *Cheyenne Autumn*. *Movie 12*. Spring 1965.

Rollins, Peter C., and John E. O'Connor. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003.

Singer, Beverly. *Wiping the War Paint of the Lens: Native Americans in Film and Video*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Smith, Paul Chat. "Ghost in the Machine." *Aperture* 139 (1995): 6-9.

"Stereotype". *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 22 July 2004. Web. 20 April 2011.

Elizabeth and Stuart Even. "Emerson College." *Liberal Arts*. 20 April 2011 Emerson College. 20 April 2011 < http://institute.emerson.edu/Ewen/ewen_Stereotype.pdf >.

Weaver, Jace. "Ethnic Cleansing, Homestyle," *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 91 (spring 1994): 27.

West, Dennis, and Joan M. West. "Sending Cinematic Smoke Signals: An Interview with Sherman Alexie." *Cineaste* 23, no. 4 (fall 1998): 3.

Weston, Mary Ann. *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press*. Westport CT: Greenwood, 1996.

Wexman, Virginia Wright. *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage, and the Hollywood Performance*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Williams, Mary Elizabeth. "Movie Interview: Without Reservations: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie." *Salon.com*, July, 1998.

Sources

A Man Called Horse. Dir. Elliot Silverstein. Perf. Richard Harris, Judith Anderson, Jean Gascon. 1970. DVD. Paramount, 2003.

Broken Arrow. Dir. Delmer Daves. Perf. James Stewart, Jeff Chandler and Debra Paget. 1950. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1998.

Cheyenne Autumn. Dir. John Ford. Perf. Richard Widmark, Carroll Baker and Karl Malden. 1964. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1997.

Dances With Wolves. Dir. Kevin Costner. Perf. Kevin Costner, Mary McDonnell and Graham Greene. 1990. DVD. MGM, 2003.

Dream Keeper. Dir. Steve Barron. Perf. Victoria Aberdeen, George Aguilar and Nathaniel Arcand. 2003. DVD. Lions Gate, 2004.

Little Big Man. Dir. Arthur Penn. Perf. Dustin Hoffman, Faye Dunaway and Chief Dan George. 1970. DVD. Paramount, 2003.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Dir. Milos Forman. Perf. Jack Nicholson, Louise Fletcher and Danny DeVito. 1975. DVD. Warner Home Video, 1997.

Powwow Highway. Dir. Jonathan Wacks. Perf. Gary Farmer, A Martinez and Joannelle Nadin Romero. 1989. DVD. Starz / Anchor Bay, 2004.

Smoke Signals. Dir. Chris Eyre. Perf. Adam Beach, Evan Adams and Irene Bedard. 1998. DVD. Miramax Films, 1999.

Stagecoach. Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Claire Trevor and Andy Devine. 1939. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1998.

Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here. Dir. Abraham Polonsky. Perf. Robert Redford, Katharine Ross and Robert Blake. 1969. VHS. Warner Home Video 1999.

The Searchers. Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter and Vera Miles. 1956. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1997.

They Died With Their Boots On. Dir. Raoul Walsh. Perf. Errol Flynn, Olivia de Havilland and Arthur Kennedy. 1941. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1999.

Czech Résumé

1. Úvod

V 1. kapitole bakalářské práce se hovoří o původu pojmu Indián a o tom, jaký způsobem ovlivnil Indiány pohled bílých lidí na ně. Mnoho z toho, co je dnes o Indiánech všeobecně známo nepochází od Indiánů samotných, včetně toho, že jim říkáme Indiáni. Tento fakt přináší otázku, kdo vlastně tito „Indiáni” jsou. Úvod také stručně seznamuje čtenáře s obsahem všech kapitol.

2. Stereotypy obecně

Druhá kapitola hovoří o pojmu stereotyp obecně a o tom, jakým způsobem stereotypy vznikají. Užívá k tomu teorie Waltra Lippmana podle níž lidé vytváří stereotypy, aby se lépe orientovali v realitě, která je plná podnětů. První část zdůrazňuje fakt, že filmový průmysl je ideálním podložím pro uplatnění stereotypů, jelikož se divák nemusí namáhat přílišným přemýšlením.

Druhá část hovoří o tom, jakým způsobem jsou se stereotypy spojeni Indiáni a jak vzniklo podhoubí pro to, aby se ujaly a zůstaly v povědomí běžných občanů až dodnes.

Třetí část jmenuje a vysvětluje jednotlivé stereotypy spojené s Indiány, které se objevují ve filmu. Zde jsou zmíněny stereotypy a typické role: Krvežíznivý divoch, Vznešený Divoch, Bílý Indián, Řeč „tonto“, Kojot neboli Šprýmař, Bojovník, Medicinman, Heemaneh nebo Berdache, Šaman a Wakantanka nebo-li Velký duch.

3. Kovbojské westerny – 30., 40. a 50. léta

Třetí kapitola se dělí na dvě části - část historickou a část týkající se konkrétních filmů.

Část historická hovoří a vlivu historického klimatu na kinematografii a především o Usnesení o občanství pro Indiány, Wheeler-Howardovu usnesení a důsledcích 2. Světové války. Druhá část potom rozebírá konkrétní filmy z tohoto období, jmenovitě *They Died With Their Boots On*, *Stage Coach*, *Broken Arrow* a *The Searchers*. Klíčovou postavou tohoto období je režisér John Ford, který je znám

tím, že značně přispěl k zjednodušení obrazu Indiána a vytvoření známých stereotypů v povědomí publika.

4. Vyhrát a prohrát - léta 60.

Čtvrtá kapitola má opět dvě podkapitoly - historickou a filmovou.

Podkapitola o historii hovoří o vlivu éry hippie na filmový průmysl 60. let a dokládá fakt, že ani obdiv postavení Indiánů ve společnosti příliš nesvědčí.

Druhá podkapitola poté ukazuje obraz Indiána ve filmech *Cheyenne Autumn* a *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here*.

5. Kdo je opravdový divoch - 70. a 80. léta

Pátá kapitola má tři podkapitoly.

První podkapitola se zabývá náladou doby a odkazuje na problematiku obsazení Alcatrazu Indiány a zobrazení této události v médiích.

Hlavním tématem druhé podkapitoly je Bílý Indián, který se objevuje ve filmech *Little Big Man* a *Man Called Horse*, aby se stal lepší v "bytí Indiánem" než samotný Indián.

Třetí podkapitola rozebírá vliv médií a reprezentaci Indiánů v nich a dokládá, že i média samotná jsou zobrazením Indiánů zmatená. Část věnovaná filmům dokládá, že méně je zde považováno za více.

Jako příklad jsou uvedeny filmy *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* a *Powwow Highway*.

6. Kdo je opravdový Indián - 90. léta a dále

Kapitola šestá pojednává o soudobé kinematografii soustředěné kolem Indiánů a je rozdělena na tři části.

První část tvoří pozadí kapitoly a hovoří o všeobecném rozmachu médií. Také se zmiňuje o tom, že se Indiáni již nebojí ozvat, pokud je jejich prezentace v médiích zavádějící.

Druhá podkapitola rozebírá snahu zbavit zobrazení Indiána oblaků mýtů. Jako jednu z prvních filmových snah tohoto typu potom hovoří o filmu *Dances With Wolves*.

Ve třetí části se Indiáni dívají skrz kameru samy na sebe a točí o sobě snímek humorně se vypořádající s různými stereotypy, *Smoke Signals*. Tato podkapitola též zmiňuje film *Dream Keeper*, který drží v úctě indiánskou tradici vyprávění příběhů a powwow.

7. Závěr

V závěru jsou shrnuty výsledky pozorování zobrazení Indiána ve filmu. Je zde zhodnoceno, že po odhození hávu stereotypů se z Indiána stává plnohodnotný komplexní člověk, jehož obraz je založen na vlastní jedinečné osobnosti a nikoli na zobrazení všeplatné představy o tom, co to znamená být Indián.

Bakalářská práce dále obsahuje bibliografii a seznam užitých zdrojů a přílohu.

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.