

TONTO AND TONTO SPEAK:
AN INDIGENOUS BASED FILM THEORY

by

Heather Anne Miller

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts

in

Native American Studies

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
Bozeman, Montana

April 2006

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Dr. Lisa Aldred

Approved for the Department of Native American Studies

Dr. Walter Fleming

Approved for the Division of Graduate Education

Dr. Joseph Fedock

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ABSTRACT

Although there are works on Indian stereotypes in Hollywood films, there has been no work critiquing these misrepresentations from an indigenous based perspective and theory. Moreover there is almost no significant work on films written, directed and produced by Native Americans. I fill this void by constructing a Native American film theory that addresses the issues raised in American Indian film from an Indian perspective. The main inspiration for this project stems from Native American literature. After reading Native American literary theory and taking a Native American literature class, I found many similarities between literature and film. However, unlike literature, Hollywood film is lacking in critique and discussion. One can find various sources that discuss issues raised by Indian film; however, no real theories have been developed by these projects, much less a critical film theory from an indigenous perspective. My methods are drawn from Native American literary theory. Craig Womack in his book *Red on Red*, creates an Indian literary theory from his own tribal stories and heritage. It is impossible for me to write a film theory focusing on a Wyandotte perspective simply due to the lack of Wyandotte films. I rely upon Creation Stories from several Indian tribes to illustrate elements of community, American Indian thought, Indian semiotics and history and politics as they relate to my theory. It might be noted that there has been a recent turn toward indigenous based theory in Native American studies; many of these theories are more pan-Indian, rather than tribally specific. However, none have addressed Native American identity issues in film. This study is designed to start a new dialogue within the field of Native American Studies as well as other disciplines such as film. Hollywood has silenced Indians for a long period of time. As shown by Native produced, directed and acted films, Indians are yearning to have their voices heard. This research acknowledges and applauds these individuals. This research being unique to the field will also inspire others to explore this topic and continue the discussion of the issues presented in the research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“You guys are heroes. You’re like the Lone Ranger and Tonto.”- Holly “No, we’re like

Tonto and Tonto.”- Thomas Builds-The-Fire

–Smoke Signals

From the first moments of watching “Smoke Signals”, I had a feeling this film would bring about an important change to both me personally and the representation of Indians in film generally. I grew up watching Indians¹ on TV and until this film, had never seen a celluloid Indian I could relate to or proudly show off to non-Indians. The above quote from “Smoke Signals” is representative of this change. Often when one thinks of Indians in film, the image of “Tonto” using monosyllabic words and choppy sentences comes to mind. Indigenous theories, Indigenous films and the characters in this film all challenge this idea.

Thomas and Victor, the two main characters in the film, have just saved the life of a young woman and are leaving her room to continue on their trip back home. One of the young women says to Thomas how these two Indian men are heroes and thanks them for their help. The two Indian characters in the film challenge stereotypes and present a new celluloid hero for American Indian audience members. These characters are humorous,

¹ Due to the fact that Indian people use the terms Native American, American Indian and the various combinations of those terms interchangeably to describe themselves and members of Indigenous nations, I too use these terms interchangeably. The term Indigenous, as used in this paper, refers to native tribal members from all over the world.

three-dimensional, characters both of whom change and grow emotionally in the film. By challenging stereotypes and presenting a new image for Hollywood, these two characters are Tonto and Tonto speaking. Also representative of Tonto and Tonto, are the various Indian directors and writers acknowledged in my work and finally, I too as a Native scholar speaking to this Indian perspective am a Tonto. Indigenous theories challenge ideas of “Tonto speak” in that they prove Indian people are capable of expressing themselves within the academy and allowing their voices to be heard.

There is a long history of misrepresentation of Native Americans in film. Many works have critiqued these stereotypes and have discussed the representations of Native Americans in film. One can find various sources that discuss issues raised by Indian film; however, no real theories have been developed by these projects, much less a critical film theory from an indigenous perspective. For example, books like Jacquelyn Kilpatrick’s *Celluloid Indians*, Peter Rollins and John O’Connor’s *Hollywood’s Indians* and even Beverly Singer’s *Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens* all fall in this category of simply discussing issues and not presenting theory. Although interesting and informative, these works merely deconstruct and critique Indian images and identity in Hollywood produced films. Steven Leuthold’s *Indigenous Aesthetics* is a step in the right direction for Indigenous theory. His work is similar to my ideas of a Native film theory; however, he is not writing from an Indian perspective and moreover, he focuses his efforts on art and Indian documentaries rather than Hollywood films. These works, however, do not present readers with ideas for change or theoretical discussions of American Indian film.

In the past several decades, Hollywood has been challenged and expanded as it

has seen an increase in the number of films written, directed and produced by Indian people. Filmmakers are expressing themselves through their work. Now is the time to support their efforts through scholarly research and perspectives. A Native voiced theory and analytical framework is needed to interpret these films. As Native American studies grows and matures as a discipline, the old works on stereotypes in Hollywood films also must grow and mature. These works are still relevant and important in the field; however, we must recognize that there is a need for more interpretive study. Mainstream Hollywood film theory is also unsuccessful in terms of interpretation. These theories focus on the interpretation of the mechanics of film production or the analysis of all minorities in film. Once again these theories were similar to the works previously mentioned regarding the interpretation of Indians in film. Ultimately, these theories are lacking a Native American voice and perspective. In addition, Hollywood film theory is not rooted in Native American Studies. This work is not a film theory nor does it strive to be a film theory. This work is rooted in Native American Studies and is a Native American Studies theory about film.

In examining Hollywood film theories, I came to the conclusion that this would not be the focus of my work. In response to this new direction, I turned to Native American literary theory for inspiration and influence. Reading Craig Womack's *Red on Red: A Native American Literary Separatism*, I found my inspiration. Womack creates a literary theory from his own tribal perspective and history that includes cultural stories and cultural interpretation. His theory underscores the importance of literature authored by American Indians. He also proves that cultural based theory is much more effective in theorizing, interpreting and understanding works from the culture under study. Universal

symbolism, mainstream hermeneutics and author intent approaches do not work when viewed from one cultural perspective. Womack is saying here that a cultural worldview is an acceptable frame of reference for interpretation and analysis.

Film theories focusing on minorities in film do not speak from this cultural worldview and therefore, fall short of complete understanding of the films they intend to interpret. An Indigenous based film theory recognizes the differences in aesthetics, time and symbols used in Native American film. An Indigenous based film theory addresses the political concerns and agendas seen in film and underscores the value of storytelling while interpreting thematic and symbolic elements of Native film.

Recent developments in American Indian Studies and Native American Studies programs recognize the need for the transmission of traditional knowledge. In order to accomplish this, Indigenous based theories are rising up as an appropriate method of scholarly work. They recognize the importance of Native American beliefs while applying traditional knowledge to the modern world. To my knowledge, work has not been done on the creation of an Indigenous based film theory. With this in mind, I draw on Womack's idea of literary separatism and construct film separatism. This theory first explains why these ideas are needed within the academic community followed by the importance of Indigenous based theories. I rely on Creation stories from four different tribes to illustrate the main points of my theory these being the importance of community, American Indian thought, Indian semiotics and Indian history and politics. Finally, I conclude with some recommendations for filmmakers, all which allows for everyone to hear Tonto speaking.

Importance of Indigenous Theory

Indigenous based theories are important because it allows for a different voice to be heard in the academic world. Whether admitted freely or not, there is still a colonial mindset in the world of academia. Colonialism is based upon the idea of domination and superiority. Those with a colonial mindset assume that they are chosen, directed or simply naturally needed to take over other because, in this view an “other” is anyone who does not think, look, talk or act like the colonizer. The “other” is at the mercy of the colonizer in that; it is the colonizer that decides the differences of the other. For Native Americans, the early European discoverers accomplished this authority of determination. Robert Berkhofer’s book, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* discusses how Christopher Columbus originally wrote about religious and economic practices of the Carib without even speaking their language or making any effort to obtain the true meaning of the various practices of the tribe. The same was true of a German picture painted in 1505 depicting the Carib Indians. In the picture, the Indians were shown naked and feasting on human flesh, while a sailor is hanging in pieces in the background. Through these two presentations, the image of Indians was turned into something less than human. In creating this image of inferiority, it was much easier to justify the occupation of the New World and the removal of these savages. Robert Yazzie, a Navajo scholar says that, “colonialism is structured. It is a triangle of power in which the people at the top claim they have the right to control the people at the bottom” (Battiste 2000). By depicting the bottom or the others in a negative manner, the colonized are subjected to control. In this situation, the colonized are never given an opportunity to express their identity in any way. The colonizers will do all in

their power to make sure this does not happen. As seen in Indian history, this includes everything from genocide, removal, termination and silencing. In the eyes of the colonizer, Indians are seen as less intelligent or unable to maintain positions equivalent to those in the majority of the academic world. Many of these ideas and beliefs stem out of stereotypes portrayed in film and literature. Furthermore, movies and novels depicting Indians as ignorant and uneducated manifest themselves into the world of academia.

Since their inception, Native American studies programs have challenged the colonizer and the ideas of inferiority of American Indian people. Suddenly, ideas regarding the cognitive powers and abilities of American Indians were seen as something of value. Indians were encouraged to study within the academic walls. Tribal knowledge was also coming to the forefront of academic study. With the introduction of these ideas, indigenous representations and voices were brought to the front of this debate. Ultimately these ideas are about the expression of the Native voice. This theory and other Native American theories uphold the ideas that the Indian perspective is important and needs to be heard. Craig Womack, a Creek scholar, in his book *Red on Red*, asserts this as well when he says,

there is such a thing as a Native perspective and that seeking it out is a worthwhile endeavor. I feel that Native perspectives have to do with allowing Indian people to speak for themselves, that is to say, with prioritizing Native voices. These voices may vary in quality, but they raise out of a historical reality wherein Native people have been excluded from discourse concerning their own cultures, and Indian people must be, ultimately will be, heard. (Womack 1999).

Mainstream Hollywood films are still in the business of speaking for the Indian, which generally results in stereotypes and distorted representations of Indian identity. These films do not allow an Indian perspective or voice to be heard.

Radical Indigenism

I believe it is important to introduce the concept of Radical Indigenism at this point. *Real Indians* author, Eva Marie Garroutte, a Cherokee scholar defines Radical Indigenism as a new form of theoretical knowledge born out of traditional Indian knowledge. She states that, “Radical Indigenism illuminates the differences in assumptions about knowledge that are at the root of the dominant culture’s misunderstanding and subordination of indigenous knowledge. It argues for the reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles” (Garroutte 2003). Radical Indigenism requires respect, upholding community values and equal exchanges between the American Indian community and the academy. It is an expression of sovereignty in that it signifies the importance of Native American thought and provides it with a sense of value and worth. Native American theories imply that Indian knowledge has a place in the academic world as well as a right to be studied and evaluated. In addition, American Indian theories help validate traditional knowledge.

As Devon Mihesuah argues in her work, *Indigenizing The Academy*, the academic gatekeepers are intent on keeping the educational area closed and locked. One possible way to break through these barriers is to present these gatekeepers with the concepts of Radical Indigenism. If academics pride themselves on their knowledge, then the time has come to show them that minorities also have the power to write theory that has applications to the current state of our society. If the gatekeepers are presented with Indigenous theories, it can open up lines of communication and discussion. Scholars can engage each other in theoretical debates that expand and broaden their worldviews and positions within their respected disciplines. As American Indians find Indigenous theory

being adopted into more academic disciplines, I believe Indian scholars will also become more prevalent in educational institutions. Once the gates have been breached, then theories and ideas can change. We can focus our attention on creating areas of study that are more tribally specific or culturally relevant and that uphold the importance of traditional knowledge in the academy.

All tribes have their own belief and value systems. Stories illustrate the principles that guide the tribe. Stories also provide tribal concepts of truth, existence, knowledge, and reality. In other words, tribal stories are theoretical. I believe it is important for Natives to use their own tribal philosophies to engage with the academic community at large. Stories, however, are not given their proper respect within academia. In my experience, tribal stories are considered tall tales, fables or myths. Historical, teaching, and learning values are not placed upon stories. Until Western perceptions of stories change, I believe that Natives wanting to incorporate tribal philosophies will have problems. Western academia does not seem eager to change or open its doors to outsiders. However, as Native theories and Native knowledge builds in the scholarly literature, scholars will have to take notice and begin listening.

Ultimately, the importance of Radical Indigenism lies in its political nature. Traditional Indian stories acknowledge ideas of sovereignty and assert the belief that Indian people have claims to America. These stories are the historical records of Indian nations that provide evidence to the beginning of their existence. Indians today recognize the importance of traditional knowledge and many tribes are beginning to return to these ideas. Traditional knowledge explains where we came from and who we are as various cultures. Applying ideas about Indian identity, values and beliefs to contemporary

society shows that Indian people are no longer in need of an academic advocate. The many years of scholars speaking for tribes are over. As more Indian voices are heard within the field, other Native Americans will also join in scholarly discussions and join educational institutions. Whether it is a pan-Indian or individual tribal theory, I believe Native American Studies will prosper as a discipline itself. Many Native American scholars describe the hardships they have faced in the academic world. Many talk about how Native American studies is not seen as a legitimate field of study. The writing of Indigenous theory is key to changing these beliefs.

CHAPTER 2

NATIVE AMERICAN FILM THEORY

Introduction

My experiences in studying various theories has convinced me that it is important to critically analyze the various functions underlying the theory. Creation of a theory is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural context of the theorist, as well as his or her ethnicity, economic status and political agenda. In many ways, this Native American film theory too, stems out of the world around me. As a child, I was always watching Indians on television and wondering why they were portrayed in such negative ways. As I learned more about my own culture and my own history I began to see connections between the negative images of Hollywood Indians to history, politics and current events. These negative images are a call to action. As an Indian scholar, I must use my knowledge to affect change and begin theoretical discussions on these issues.

The Native American film theory I have created is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the world around us, as well as, various historical problems, stereotypes, cultural beliefs and values. With this theory, I am presenting an alternative view of understanding the world and providing one more perspective to answer the question of why things are they way they are.

The structure of this theory reveals the various influences that have lead up to its creation. Most influential in this process was Native American literary theory. With this idea in mind, each element in my indigenous bases film theory is explained using a

Native American creation story from a various culture. A creation story was picked because it just like theory, is an explanation of why things are they way they are. Thus. It follows that native based theories would be built from tribal creation stories. As film effects tribes and nations all across the country, I chose stories from tribes all across the country, representative of the pan-tribal scope of this theory. Each of the stories used were told to me by friends, family, or read in books, emphasizing the importance of Native American literature. Indigenous film theory stems from the idea that Native American traditional knowledge is important and influential in understanding the world. Through elements in creation stories, ideas of community, American Indian thought and circular time, Indian semiotics, and Indian views of history and politics define my Indigenous film theory.

Wyandotte Creation Story

Although intended for use within the academy, this theory is personal in nature. Therefore, I begin my theory with the Wyandotte creation story. Being a Wyandotte tribal member, I am honoring my tribe and my heritage through the telling and application of this story. A long time ago, the people lived in the sky. Below the sky was the water and on the water lived the animals. One day the Great Chief's daughter got very sick and nothing that was tried could cure her. The wisest elder said that all the strong men in the village should dig up the large tree near the longhouse. On the roots of this tree would be the medicine needed to cure the woman. The men started digging and the wise elder suggested that the woman sit near to the tree in order to grab the medicine as soon as the roots were exposed. Suddenly, the sky opened up and the tree started to fall through the opening of the sky. On its way down, the branches caught hold of the

woman and she fell through the crack. Two swans were swimming below when they noticed the woman falling quickly towards the water. They thought fast and decided to swim side by side and make a nice place for the woman to land on. The swans caught the woman and she rested on their backs until all the animals came to see what had happened. The animals held a meeting to discuss what they should do with the woman. They all agreed that she could not stay atop the swan's backs forever. Big Turtle spoke up and said that she had a plan. If one of the animals could dive down to the bottom of the water and retrieve some earth, she could use this to form a world for the woman. The animals agreed and each took their turn diving down to the bottom. None of them knew how deep the water was and many of the animals gave up or died trying. It looked like nobody was going to succeed until Frog decided to try. She dove down and was gone for a very long time. All the animals began to believe that she was not coming back. They were just about to give up completely when they saw something rising to the surface. It was Frog, dead, but with a little tiny bit of earth in her mouth. Everyone was sad because it looked like this would not be enough dirt. Little Turtle, however, took the earth and mounded it on Big Turtle's back. The earth spread out over the water and created the land. After the earth had dried out the swans helped the woman off their backs and onto the newly created land.

Community

As one reads through the Wyandotte creation story one of the most important themes that comes to mind is the idea of community and the ability of community to help those in need. The first implication of community involvement is seen in the very first part of the story. The woman's own relatives and community members are asked to help

in her healing process. The community gathers together to dig up the tree that contains the healing medicine. Although this coming together does not produce the intended results, it does lead to yet another example of community support. The animals in the next part of the story are brought together to help the woman as well. The swans begun this process of coming together and each one of the animals in the water finish this community effort as they each try to retrieve earth from underwater. The world would not have come together had it not been for the entire community rallying around this event.

In the same way Native American film is incomplete without a focus on community. Ultimately, community defines an Indian film. At this point we must take a moment to define a few terms. According to this study, what is considered an Indian film? The most basic response to this inquiry is that a Native American film is any film involving Indians or one that focuses on Native American issues. This simplistic definition is not satisfactory in regards to the complete understanding of Native American films. For the purpose of this study, films will be defined more specifically by who is involved in the filmmaking process. The first type of film that will be discussed is that of the “Indigenous” American Indian film, which is a film made by a majority of Indian producers, directors and writers. The second type of film to be discussed is the “non-Indigenous” American Indian film; or the film made by a majority of non-Indian producers, directors and writers. My experiences of watching, studying and writing about Native American films leads me to believe there is a significant difference between these two types of films. This significant difference is found first, in the importance of community. Community is important because of its intrinsic value to culture. Since

Indian communities pass their culture orally through various stories, storytelling itself defines Indian communities and culture. For many centuries, Indian culture survived and thrived without the use of written records. With the arrival of Europeans and the adoption of written records, Indian stories adopted a new written form and yet still continued to survive. Indian film is very symbolic of this same history as it incorporates storytelling into new technological forms. A film begins its life as an imagined story, then written down and finally told visually and orally on the big screen. As the film is shown on screen audience members gather together to hear and see this story. People who may not have come together before this film are now physically gathered together experiencing this story. The film as a story therefore, becomes a new and modern way of telling stories, assembling and creating community.

Gerald Vizenor explores this idea of traditional culture embracing new technological forms in his discussion of the “post-Indian”. He explains how Indians must change and adopt new elements into their culture to survive. A “post-Indian” is the Indian man who wears his hair in braids while wearing a t-shirt, shorts and Birkenstocks. This is not a devaluing of traditional culture, as it is acknowledgement of important elements and a creative understanding of how to maintain them while living in a modern and changing world. Many others like Eva Marie Garrouette, Louis Owens, Devon Mihesuah, and Craig Womack, to name a few, underscore the idea that many non-natives see change within Indian culture as a sign of “the vanishing Indian” swept up by assimilation. According to Womack, “[An Indian] reading Thoreau does not- any more than an American’s reading Shakespeare- constitute a loss of identity. This is an argument that is only applied to Indians who, once they defy the stereotypes prevalent in

popular imaginings, become suddenly less Indian” (Womack 1999). I believe there are important political reasons for these ideas; however, they will be discussed in another section. For the moment, a need to focus on cultural change is important. A living culture must change and develop to survive in an evolving world. Film is the extension of this needed change. Indian film relies on the use of highly traditional elements of Native culture but also relies on the modern development of film technology to create a community. Film is not the loss of storytelling or community, but the ultimate creative response to maintaining, preserving and forming culture.

Hopi Emergence

The second story used in the creation of this film theory is the Hopi Emergence story. Dawa, the Sun Spirit gathered the elements of Tokpella and added some of his own substance to create the First World. There were no people then, merely insect-like creatures who lived in a dark cave deep in the earth. Dawa watched them, but was deeply disappointed because they did not understand the meaning of life. Spider Grandmother was told to go down and prepare the creatures for a change. She went to them and said, “Dawa, who made you, is unhappy because you do not understand the meaning of life. He will make a new world and perfect all living things. Prepare to leave for the Second World.” Spider Grandmother led them on a long journey to another great cave far above the first one. When they emerged into the Second World they found that Dawa had changed them into animals. They were happy at first, but because they did not have any understanding, they grew bitter and battled one another. Dawa saw that the creatures of his Second World did not grasp the meaning of life. Again he sent Spider Grandmother to

lead them on another journey. While they traveled, Dawa created the Third World. When the creatures arrived in the Third World they discovered that their bodies were again changed. Spider Grandmother said to them: "Now you are people. Remember that Dawa created this place for you to live in harmony and forget all evil. Try to understand the meaning of things." Then she left them. Things were not perfect. It was the powakas, or sorcerers, who brought disruption and conflict. Dawa saw what was happening to the world he made. He sent Spider Grandmother to tell the people: "Dawa is displeased with what he created. The powakas made you forget what you should have remembered. All people of good heart should go away and leave the evil ones behind." The people did not know of another place and asked where they could go. An old man said he heard footsteps in the sky and it was agreed the people should investigate. The catbird flew up. He came to a place of sand and mesas and saw large fires burning alongside gardens of squash, melons and corn. Beyond the gardens was a single house made of stone. A person sat there with his head down, sleeping. The catbird explained where he had come from and asked if the people below could come up. The catbird returned and told the people what he saw and they agreed to go. The people had to figure out a way to gain access to the doorway in the sky. The chipmunk planted a bamboo. The people sang hard and made the bamboo grow straight and tall. The road to the upper world was finished, and the people rested. The people then began their climb. They moved slowly upward, and in time the entire bamboo stalk was covered with human bodies. As the first climbers emerged through the sipapuni and stepped into the Upper World, Yawpa, the mockingbird, sorted the people. He assigned every person to a tribe and a language, and to each tribe he gave a direction to go in its migrations (Hopi Tribe 2006).

American Indian Thought and Time

According to Hopi belief, people began life as we know it in a significantly different time and space. In fact, the entire story illustrates a different way of imagining time and space. Within this story are four worlds that affect the way life manifests itself currently. The story presents the idea that many contemporary events occur because of events from the previous worlds and experiences. Instead of the idea that events occur in a linear timeline, we get the idea that events occur in a circular fashion and present time is very much connected to the past. Donald Fixico, for example, makes it extremely clear in his writings that there is a difference between European and Indian thinking. He says that Native thinking occurs in this circular manner. It focuses on the relationships between humans, animals and plants. It is a way of understanding the whole of the universe in a way different from that of mainstream white society.

According to Fixico, "Indian Thinking is 'seeing' things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and cycles are central to the world and that all things are related within the universe"(Fixico 2003). As Fixico says, the Indian mind, in general, is different from that of the Euro-American mind in that the Western linear mind thinks of time and space as having a definite beginning and ending, whereas the American Indian circular mind sees time and space in a circular fashion with no defined beginning or end. Fixico as well as many other scholars agree that generally speaking, Indians view the world with non-linear eyes. In addition, this affects the way time and space are perceived and experienced by Native Americans. To explain this concept, I turn to one of my favorite childhood toys, a slinky. A slinky is made up of interconnecting concentric

rings. If one of the rings is twisted or completely destroyed, the slinky will cease to function and perform. A slinky is a spiral for some Native cultures represents ideas and conceptions of infinite time. A circular way of thought works in the same way. Each idea and thought is represented by one ring of the slinky. Thoughts and ideas work in conjunction with each other and often are built upon one another. Memories then, become important in the understanding of the present time. Collapse the slinky and suddenly, the toy is just one large circle. The past, the present and the future are all one giant circle and are seen as the same event. Within this framework, time and space are also one and the same.

This idea and way of thinking is presented in Indian film many times through various film techniques. These ideas are not only found in Indian film. Many Western films make use of these following elements as well. The use of flashbacks and non-linear storylines are examples of this idea in film. The use of these techniques in Indian film underscores the value of circular thought. In addition, these techniques provide another example of important cultural change. Indian film seizes upon elements of modern culture and in turn uses these elements to uphold and transmit important ways of conceptualizing the world.

Zuni Trickster Story

The third story is from the Zuni Pueblo and is used to illustrate a new language within film. Coyote is a bad hunter who never kills anything. Once he watched Eagle hunting rabbits, catching one after another-more rabbits than he could eat. Coyote thought it would be a good idea to team up with Eagle. Coyote is always up to

something. After talking to Eagle, Coyote convinced him that the two hunting together would be a good idea.

At this time the world was still dark; the sun and moon had not yet been put in the sky. Coyote was a bad hunter and blamed his bad luck on the lack of light. The pair decided to look for the sun and moon. At last they came to a pueblo, where the Kachinas happened to be dancing. The people invited Eagle and Coyote to sit down and have something to eat while they watched the sacred dances. Seeing the power of the Kachinas, Eagle decided these were the people with the light. Coyote, who had been looking all around, pointed out two boxes, one large and one small that the people opened whenever they wanted light. To produce a lot of light, they opened the lid of the big box, which held the moon. Coyote decided they should steal the box. Eagle was hesitant about stealing, but Coyote convinced him that this would be the best idea. After a while the Kachinas went home to sleep, and Eagle scooped up the large box and flew off. Coyote ran along trying to keep up, panting, his tongue hanging out. Soon he yelled up to Eagle and asked that he too take a turn carrying the box. Eagle said no because he knew Coyote always messed things up. Finally Coyote begged for the fourth time. Eagle could not stand any more pestering. Also, Coyote has asked him four times, and if someone asks four times in Zuni culture, you better give him what he wants. Eagle agreed, but made Coyote promise that he would keep the lid closed. They went on as before, but now Coyote had the box. Soon, Eagle couldn't see him. Coyote decided to take a peek inside the box. And Coyote opened the lid, now, not only was the sun inside, but the moon also. Eagle had put them both together, thinking that it would be easier to carry one box than two. As soon as Coyote opened the lid, the moon escaped, flying high

into the sky. At once all the plants shriveled up and turned brown. Just as quickly, all the leaves fell off the trees, and it was winter. Trying to catch the moon and put it back in the box, Coyote ran in pursuit as it skipped away from him. Meanwhile the sun flew out and rose into the sky. It drifted far away, and the peaches, squashes, and melons shriveled up with cold. Eagle turned and flew back to see what had delayed Coyote. Thus, if it were not for Coyote's curiosity and mischief making, we would not have winter; we could enjoy summer all the time (Erdoes 1984).

Indian Semiotics

A trickster story is the ultimate example of Indian humor. Within the context of this story an infamous trickster, Coyote creates the seasons because of his greediness. This story is intended to be humorous as well as teach lessons like many trickster stories. The beginning of this story makes reference to the fact that Coyote is an awful hunter and as readers we can laugh at his misfortunes. Many times in trickster stories, Coyote is a symbol of humor and therefore his actions require a comedic response. Being a symbol in the minds of Indian people, one knows to laugh and learn from the figure within the story. Coyote is more than a coyote, his actions require a response, thus leading to the idea of a new type of Indian "language" or Indian semiotics in Indigenous film.

In the same way, Indian film relies on certain symbols, images and themes to transmit humor to audience members. I would like to briefly discuss ideas of semiotics as well as how they relate to these issues and to this particular story. Semiotics is a language that is used to transmit cultural knowledge. This occurs through the use of codes, signs, icons and oppositions. One must define these terms because within Indian

film these ideas are present as well; however, Indian films often assign different meanings to the codes, signs, icons and oppositions within a film. According to Arthur Asa Berger, “Codes are highly complex patterns of associations that all members of a given society and culture learn” (Berger 1998). They are responsible for how people interpret objects presented by the media; moreover, they are created from one’s social class, geographical location, gender, ethnicity, educational level and even religious affiliation. Codes in this context are the stereotypes one holds of a minority group; they are the way we expect a certain group of people to behave, dress or even talk. Signs are combination of an image and a value. Name brands are examples of signs with certain name brands evoking images of money or affluence. Icons are signs that bear a physical resemblance to the item that is being portrayed. This could be in the form of a cartoon, model, metaphor or even a certain sound. Oppositions are the relationship between two opposing objects. For example, Indian film becomes something to study once it is placed side by side a non-Indian film. It is in the relationship of other that oppositions are significant. Indian film creates a language all its own based on stereotypes, symbols from tribal culture, traditional values, historical events and current problems Indians face. While discussing literature, Womack too, discusses this type of Indigenous semiotics by interpreting stories to their full potential.

When we consider the story of Turtle’s broken shell and his concomitant recovery through singing a medicine song, might this story illustrate not only the power of chant but a critique of colonialism and a comment on Native resurgence and recovery? If so, this opens up a new/ old way to teach the stories to Creeks, as a body of symbols that deal with Indian pride, Indian activism, Indian resistance. When one considers the vast body of motifs dealing with tricks- encounters with opponents, disguises, transformations; little guys facing off with more powerful enemies and winning through ingenuity; rapacious tricksters and their victims;

stories of flight and dispossession- how can we overlook the fact that these stories may also function as postcolonial critique of the spiritual and material origins of the culture (Womack 1999)?

Womack implies that traditional Indian stories use an entirely different language, one built on the importance of Native culture. It relies on the experiences of its Native American audience members to grasp the humor or stereotypes that are being presented as well as expecting Native audience members to take pride in their heritage. Indian film should require a response from audience members as Womack suggests. With the use of stories in Native film, it requires a certain amount of activism on the part of Indian audience members. I believe this politicization present in Indian stories is seen in film too. This Indian semiotics is ultimately about power and action. A quality Indian film should incite change in its Native American viewers because of the “language” of the codes, signs, icons and oppositions in the film. The symbol of the trickster provides the audience with information about how to or not to act. In the same way, characters, symbols and other visual elements within film inform audience members how to or not to act.

Another important point about Indian semiotics, is that it is accessible to other cultures. Non-Indians can enjoy Indigenous film as much as Indians can, simply because the genius of Indian semiotics is in its ability to mend cultural barriers. Humor and symbols in regards to cultural traditions are presented in ways others can comprehend. Although important to Indian cultures, in particular Indian film also seeks to connect to other cultures whether it occurs through experience or education.

Blackfeet Creation Story

The final story is a selection from the Blackfeet story of NAPI also known as Old Man. Old Man came from the south, making the mountains, the prairies, and the forests as he passed along, making the birds and the animals also. He traveled northward making things as he went, putting red paint in the ground here and there --arranging the world as we see it today. He made the Milk River and crossed it; being tired, he went up on a little hill and lay down to rest. As he lay on his back, stretched out on the grass with his arms extended, he marked his figure with stones. You can see those rocks today; they show the shape of his body, legs, arms and hair. Going on north after he had rested, he stumbled over a knoll and fell down on his knees. Then he rose up two large buttes there and named them the Knees. They are called the Knees to this day. He went on farther north, and with some of the rocks he carried with him he built the Sweet Grass Hills. Old Man covered the plains with grass for the animals to feed on. He marked off a piece of ground and in it made all kinds of roots and berries to grow: camas, carrots, turnips, bitterroot, sarvisberries, bull-berries, cherries, plums, and rosebuds. He planted trees, and he put all kinds of animals on the ground. One day, Old Man decided that he would make a woman and a child. So he formed them both of clay, the woman and the child, her son.

After he had molded the clay in human shape, he said to it, that they would be people. And then he covered it up and went away. The next morning he went to the place, took off the covering, looked at the images, and told them to arise. They did so. They walked down to the river with their maker, and then he told them that his name was NAPI, Old Man. This is how the Blackfeet came to be people. It is he who made them (Index of Native American Lore 2006).

History and Political Implications

As this selection from the Blackfeet creation story illustrates, Indians know where they come from and have a sense of historical events. Within the story, Old Man creates many contemporary landmarks that are important to the Blackfeet today. Old Man also creates the Blackfeet and places the people in the area He created. According to this story, Blackfeet as well as other Indian tribes, know where they were created and have a historical connection to the land. Significant to this story is the idea that Indian people know their own history and can speak on their own to this history.

When discussing history, one must mention the difference between oral and printed sources. Words and printed texts are viewed as truth in American and Western society. There is power and value in the written word. For example, consider a poem or novel that you have read and enjoyed. In reading this work your ideas and perceptions changed. You could even say perhaps that your worldview was changed. In order to change your views these words have to have some sort of power. In the case of a poem for instance, the paper, black and white words, spaces, each one can have its significance to the meaning of the poem. History is also like a poem; as it is written down, it has power and meaning; it influences a reader's worldviews and beliefs. Oral traditions do not have this same power according to Western thought. History passed down through word of mouth lacks credibility in the Western mind. In my estimation, this idea makes little sense. Oral sources, just like written sources can be taken apart and studied. Consider a lecture within a college course. As the professor speaks students process these words. Once spoken, words are fair game for deconstructing as well. The majority

of students within the classroom do not transcribe a professor's lecture word for word. They take what they hear and write down their understanding of these spoken words. The important points of a lecture for one student may be completely different for another student. In the same way an oral Native American creation story can have a completely different effect on various listeners. Stories and philosophies are meant to teach different lessons for various individuals. I would also argue that a storyteller, or professor, or Native American philosopher can vary. In other words one storyteller can tell a story in one way and another storyteller can tell the story in a completely different way, stressing different points and highlighting different aspects of the story. Two professors can give the same lecture in completely different ways. There is no superior method of recording history. The only correct method is the most accurate and unbiased historical account, whether it is through oral or written documents.

Indian communities have a sense of belonging and knowledge of where they originated. Yet, the first Hollywood films about Indians did not contain the Indian voice much less convey the sense of identity connected to place as evidenced in the Blackfeet story. These films authored their own version of history and created their own images of Native Americans, which resulted in a loss of academic and intellectual sovereignty. The manipulation of history leads to the loss of intellectual sovereignty. History is often written from the viewpoint of those in power. With this in mind, historical events are easily changed to justify the actions of those in power. Those who know the truth behind various events are silenced or oppressed. Those in the minority are told their methods of recording history are invalid or inaccurate thereby underscoring this idea of intellectual inferiority. In terms of films, this is accomplished by ignoring the Indian voice, relying

upon stereotypes, and the devaluing of correct gender roles. Use of these techniques allows the majority to maintain control. This does not quell stereotypes or challenge others to expand their knowledge of Indian history.

There is much to be said for the construction of an Indigenous based theory. However, without application, this theory is not fulfilling its intended purpose. Indigenous based theory requires action and purpose. The political nature of traditional knowledge as discussed in previous sections requires a certain response to the ideas presented. I envision the application presented here as an open forum of ideas. It is through these ideas that discussion is encouraged and expected. As with any issue in Native American studies there are bound to be multiple opinions due to the interdisciplinary nature of the program. These various perspectives lead to the furthering of knowledge, and development of Indian studies programs.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL APPLICATION

Community and Cultural Applications

Community and the ideas of storytelling are central to this Native American film theory as I perceive it. Issues of cultural change and identity are the ultimate focus in regards to Indian film. Native American film requires a physical application of community values and ideas as well as intellectual and philosophical application.

From a thematic perspective, community functions as a significant structural element. Indigenous films cannot escape the importance of community within their plot lines and many establish community as a character within the context of the film. Shots of the reservation are incorporated early and frequently in Indigenous films. The audience sees houses, streets, people, cars- each one helping to define the characteristics of the community within the film. Most of these films are filmed on location with the community in the plot used as the actual film location. With each scene depicting community life, the audience gains a sense of what living in the location is like. Important in illustrating this fact is the Indigenous film "Smoke Signals". Although much of the film takes place on the road, the Spokane Indian Reservation plays a significant role. The characters describe the reservation as home, thereby creating its personality. Victor's displaced and disrespected father Arnold, is always envisioning himself returning to the reservation to reconnect with his family and with his culture. Those living on the reservation, within the film, are highly connected as evidenced through the various character interactions. In the beginning of the film the community

comes together for the house party of 1976. The narrator tells the audience that the whole community came together for this party. The local KREZ radio station also shows the connections between community members. The local DJs, Randy and Lester, know everyone and everything that is happening. Randy congratulates a local woman who wins five hundred dollars playing bingo, while Lester announces that a couple were arguing on their way to work in his traffic report. The reservation is home. The film begins with the death of Arnold. Victor, his son, decides he must retrieve his father's ashes and hesitantly accepts the help of his former childhood friend Thomas. The film follows their journey from Spokane, to Phoenix and finally back to Spokane. As Thomas and Victor return from their road trip, one of the first images the audience sees is the "Now Entering the Spokane Indian Reservation" sign implying that they are back home, back in their community.

This film also speaks to the idea of cultural change and the "post-Indian" warrior through the use of its main characters Thomas and Victor. Thomas and Victor are presented as symbols of two Indian stereotypes. Victor is presented as the warrior figure while Thomas is presented as the wise storyteller. Both these characters are examples of these figures; however, as the film progresses we see that they defy these stereotypes. As audience members we see their emotional growth and intellectual development through the film. These two figures would not develop emotionally or change intellectually in Hollywood film stereotypes. These characters show us that Indians can still maintain traditional cultural elements while living in modern time. Thomas as the storyteller, uses the traditional art of storytelling to tell modern stories. Each of his stories requires certain actions and change. Although intended to educate Victor, the stories educate the

audience and show members that culture changes and yet still retains important connections to the past. In case, we miss this subtle reference, Thomas also changes physically. He unbraids his hair and changes from a suit to a t-shirt. Thomas has become a “post-Indian”, maintaining his traditions, while still creatively living in the modern world. It is through the emotional change that Victor’s “post-Indian” transformation occurs. Because he is presented as the warrior within the film, as audience members, we gain a sense of his lack of emotional connection to the past and his father. Through Thomas’ stories, the road trip and Arnold’s mementos, Victor realizes his connection to his father and the past. He grows emotionally in the film. His character has transformed his beliefs and attitudes to reflect living in the modern world.

The physical manifestation of community involvement occurs in two examples of Indian film. Chris Eyre and First Look Cinema recognized a problem with the making of the 2002 film “Skins”. Chris Eyre, Cheyenne-Arapaho director, who found success in the 1998 film “Smoke Signals”, realized that his production of “Skins”, should be screened first to the community that the film was based on and that had helped with the filming. According to *Indian Country Today*, a newspaper with a focus on current Native American issues, “With that comes responsibility to show the work to the people first,” Eyre explained to the whirr of reporters' rolling tapes. “If the movie went into general release without that protocol, it certainly would have been disrespectful. I wanted to take it into Pine Ridge and screen it there, but there is no economy and certainly no movie theater” (Siestreem 2006).

In response to this problem, Eyre and First Look Cinema created a mobile theater that seats 100 with a state of the art projection system, snack bar and restrooms, all

offered to the community for free. Eyre made it clear that the “Rolling Rez” tour was created because of the lack of a movie theatre in Pine Ridge and that he was determined to screen the film to the community that was so influential in its production. Included on the “Skins” DVD is a mini-documentary about the Rolling Rez tour. Throughout the film Eyre stresses the importance of the tour because of the many people he encounters. From the documentary, one gains a sense of how important these personal screenings were to the communities as well. The Indian community was seen as an important force in determining the success of the film.

Another example of community respect and involvement can be seen in the Native film “Atanarjuat” or “The Fast Runner”. Information on this film is limited and I turned to the film’s website and production diary for information regarding the use of community within this film. “The FastRunner” relied on an all Native cast and crew. The story was written using “a unique process of cultural authenticity. First we recorded eight elders telling versions of the legend as it had been passed down to them orally by their ancestors. Isuma's team of five writers then combined these into a single detailed treatment in Inuktitut and English, consulting with elders for cultural accuracy and with our Toronto-based story consultant, Anne Frank. This same bi-cultural, bilingual process continued through the first and final draft scripts” (Atanarjuat Production Diary 2001). Another example of community involvement was that of training the crew. The film was shot in the village of Igloolik and many villagers were trained specifically to help with the production. According to the production diary, the film employed about 60 community members, pumped \$1.5 million into the local economy and is now the beginning of the Nunavut film industry, an Inuit-owned production company. Where

there is a need, community comes together.

This same connection to culture is either not recorded or simply not seen in non-Native films. One does not hear about Euro-American directors giving back to the Indian communities that help with the production of their films. Except for a few community members cast as extras, the respect and support of community is not of importance to most directors. The one non-Indigenous film that challenges these ideas is “The Whale Rider”. Niki Caro, writer and director of the film explains,

I was not prepared to make this unless it was made completely collaboratively, with the Maori community. All my work was looked at very carefully by the elders of the community and blessed before we started work. I had a Maori advisor from the tribe with me at all times. And I think they felt very satisfied that the film, their film, was in the hands of a filmmaker, somebody who could actually get it up on the screen. Somebody who was absolutely there to serve their story (Mottesheard 2006).

In this interview Caro also talks about how she learned the Maori language in order to also connect to the people she was working with in this process. Recognition of the importance of language, community and elders seen in these examples are the first steps to changing Hollywood and presenting new ideas surrounding Indian film.

American Indian Thought

Circular time and circular thought are easily conveyed in film through the use of flashbacks and non-linear plots. Examples of these elements can be seen in the film “Smoke Signals”. This film is about the Spokane Indian Reservation and specifically three important characters on that reservation, Victor, Thomas and Arnold. Arnold is the father of Victor and Thomas is a childhood friend of Victor. The majority of the action

occurs on the road to Phoenix, where Victor must go to collect the ashes of his father. One important element within this film is fire and how it weaves its way throughout the film. As evidenced from the title of the film, fire will play an important role; you cannot have smoke signals without a fire. As the film begins, the audience is immediately confronted with flames and smoke. Unbeknown to audience members, these flames are representative of three fires within the film. The first fire is the 1976 house fire that introduces us to the main characters, Thomas, Victor and Arnold. The third fire occurs at the end of the film when Suzie Song burns down Arnold's trailer while the second fire is never actually seen but inferred when as audience members we realize Arnold has been cremated. As the rings of a slinky are connected, each one of the fires in the film is connected in the same manner and each influences the other. Arnold is responsible for each of the fires within the film. He begins the first, which creates the barrier between himself and Victor. The second fire occurs because of his death and requires Victor to examine these created barriers. The third fire is the conclusion of all the fires and a symbolic resolution of the previous two fires. The final fire is also a symbolic forgiveness of the previous two fires. It is through this fire that the community has been set right and Arnold can now return home, although in the form of ashes, he is coming back to his community. Each fire is important and illustrates the importance of connections between time and space. Because the film begins and ends with a fire, we do not travel the course of this film in a straight line, however in a circle that connects the beginning to the end. Flashbacks within this film also serve to illustrate the importance of time and its connection to a circular mindset. Each flashback in the film returns the

audience to Victor and Thomas's childhood, emphasizing once again how the past influences the future.

The "Fastrunner" is another example of circular time and the use of flashbacks. As audience members, we are never actually given reference to the particular time this story is occurring. In other words, the characters could be set in 1998 as easily as they could be set in 1938. The film records their life and particularly how a story from within their culture influences their life through many generations. Once again think of the slinky, each ring interconnecting and influencing each other. The story begins with the parents of the main characters showing how they are affected by an evil spirit within the village, and how they must deal with its consequences. Viewers then travel in time a few decades with the children, who are our main characters, now grown. The evil spirit has once again manifested itself in the village and these children are dealing with the same problems of their parents. The story uses flashbacks to emphasize exactly how much these two generations are connected and how circular time is so important to this community. Time is interconnected and the various generations must learn how everything is interconnected.

In examining non-Indigenous films, elements of circular time are finally being utilized to their full potential. The film "Dreamkeeper" is an example of how ideas of circular time and flashbacks can be used in a revolutionary manner. This film is set in modern time yet manages to underscore the importance of Native storytelling and presents the audience with a contemporary application of these stories. "Dreamkeeper" is a story about a troubled Native youth who refuses to respect his grandfather and dismisses the importance of traditional knowledge. The teenager is ultimately forced to

chauffer his grandfather to the Gathering of Nations Pow-Wow and listen to Native stories. It is in the telling of these stories that ideas of circular thought are portrayed. In the film, an event occurs, which reminds the grandfather of a story and the lesson it contains. The story that is told also holds an important modern lesson that the grandfather is trying to teach his grandson. The most creative aspect of this occurs when the story is acted out on the screen. The actors involved in the modern lesson transform and act out the traditional story. For example, as the pair is traveling down the road, they pick up a white hitchhiking young man. This young man tells the pair that he is going to the Pow-Wow because he wants to celebrate his Indian heritage. This man has red hair and fair skin, which leads the Native teenage to question the young man's identity claims. The grandfather then tells a story about a fair-skinned boy who was adopted into the Comanche tribe. As the grandfather tells this story, the hitchhiker becomes the central character in the enactment of the story. With these characters able to transcend time and space, both the story and the film directly refer to the importance of non-linear thought. This film shows how events in the past directly influence events in the contemporary and even into the future. This is only one example of these ideas working successfully in non-Indigenous film. The lack of these elements in other non-Indigenous films is that non-Indigenous films are often already set in the past. Writers and directors do not place American Indians in contemporary time so the use of flashbacks is not needed. There is no need to show examples of Indian thought and circular time when time is conceived of in different manners.

Indian Semiotics

The use of an Indian “language” that focuses on cultural symbols and cultural meanings is another important point in this theory. Indian film has the power to transcend cultural boundaries. Again to illustrate this point, I use examples from the film “Smoke Signals”. The film won the audience choice award when it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 1998. Winning this award implies that the audience, probably composed of many different races of people, understood the humor, character development, plots and images presented. Although about Native Americans, this film has the power to engage its audience no matter one’s skin color. Yet at the same time, the film manages to speak to Native American issues and identity. As a Native audience member, the characters reminded me of family and friends, the reservation reminded me of home; I was a part of the film and the film was a part of me. Indian audience members who have lived on a reservation have a different understanding of the meaning behind a symbol of a reservation in the film. It is more than just land- symbolically it represents ideas of home, destruction, family, politics and history- to name a few. It is not just a place. The idea of Indian semiotics understands that Native peoples have a different reaction and understanding of elements in film. Interpretations of these elements are different for various cultures. For example, according to my tribal belief, a turtle is symbolic of creation, life and government. A non-Wyandotte seeing a turtle on film may not place these various meanings on this image. With this in mind, Indigenous film requires a certain amount of effort to watch. To truly understand what is being said in the film, one must have a certain understanding of the culture represented on screen. The use

of certain images on film call for an interpretation that can possibly only be understood through understanding the culture on the screen.

Non-Indigenous directors, producers and screenwriters, are unaware of these symbols and signs. When making Indian films, they fail to recognize the importance of the Indian cultural signs and symbols used in their film or else these Indian cultural signs and symbols are used incorrectly. In order to gain control of film interpretation, culturally connected Indians should provide critical responses to Indian films. Within these critical responses, analysis of signs and symbols from a cultural perspective should be voiced. This response to Indian film is one way to stress the importance of the Native voice and encourage the Native voice in Hollywood.

History and Politics

It is often through the control of history that the Indian voice is silenced and oppressed. The telling and retelling of the Pocahontas myth is the ultimate form of control and silencing in terms of film. Hollywood loves this legend. According to film, Pocahontas was a friend to the European settlers. As she befriends them she falls in love with Captain John Smith; yet her tribe nor her family approves of Smith and it is decided that he will be killed. Moments before his death, Pocahontas, out of her undying love and affection for Smith, throws herself onto him, saving his life and thereby acknowledging a romantic relationship. This distorted view of reality is problematic in two ways. First, it ignores the true history of Pocahontas and her people. Second, it trivializes her and fails to accurately portray the historical gender roles of Indian women. I want to begin with the 1995 Walt Disney animated version of Pocahontas. Pocahontas

was significantly younger than John Smith at the time of their suggested meeting. If there really was a meeting between the two, Pocahontas would have been between the ages of ten and twelve while Smith was in his late twenties. Pocahontas did marry an English settler later in her life, John Rolfe, but there is little to no evidence that she had a relationship with Smith. She helped maintain relationships between the settlers and her tribe, eventually traveling to England where she was presented as a diplomat before the King and Queen. She was highly respected among both cultures, but tragically died of smallpox on her trip back home.

One fact overlooked by those who hold the power of representing this story is Smith's diary. An apparent liar with the flair for the dramatic, Smith manages to end up in life threatening situations more than once. Surprisingly enough, in each of these situations, a beautiful young girl, expressing her undying love and affection throws herself upon him, saving his life. These diary entries sound a little too coincidental and yet the story of Pocahontas and John Smith is taken for fact. On the other hand, the Powhatans have limited evidence of encounters between Pocahontas and John Smith, especially nothing that mentions her saving his life. It is in this manipulation of history and the repeating of inaccurate events that Indians begin to lose sovereignty, in this case, the power to determine their own history. Ignoring important details regarding the life of Pocahontas devalues the beliefs of the Powhatans. This mainstream myth as it is perpetuated, silences Indians and refuses to accept alternative views of history. Considering that Disney marketed this film to children, how many children will learn the correct story of Pocahontas in school, through their textbooks or from their parents? Judging from my experience in school, textbooks were never a source of correct history

for me. I always challenged my teachers to provide the class with the correct information regarding the Indian people we studied or did not study. This distortion is a monopoly as well a manipulation of Indian perspectives on history by those in power! Similarly, those in control of Hollywood are using distorted facts to make a profit. And yet, the stereotype continues, unchallenged.

Recently released in theaters and nominated for an Academy Award is Terrance Malik's "The New World". Billed as a historical romance, we have yet another version of the same negative Pocahontas story presented to the public. Although this film does portray Pocahontas as a young girl, possibly of 14 or 15, she is still defined by her relationship with Smith. The film acknowledges that she marries Rolfe and travels to England, it still purports that all the time she is pining away for her lost love, John Smith. The resolution of the film occurs in England when she receives a visit from Smith who says he will always love her too. The film closes with her death, but now she knows that Smith was her one true love. Why is this romanticized, inaccurate myth of Pocahontas necessary, why must this continue? When as Indian people are we going to stand up and say no more? With each new version of the tall tale, Indian nations are losing their ability to speak to and for their history and their connections to this land. These films require discussion and debate. It is time that other voices be heard and expressed.

Pocahontas presents yet another problem specifically for Indian women. Knowing what history I do about my tribe, I know that we were a matrilineal society. Relationships were defined according to the women of the tribe and often power and politics were in the hands of the women. Pocahontas and the various cinematic representations of Indian women undermine this power and authority, creating

inappropriate views of gender roles. Pocahontas is powerful, strong and defiant according to an Indian view of history. Film, however, turns her into a sexual object only capable of focusing on her affections for Smith. Disney creates this character to bring a message of peace and racial harmony to the settlers. And perhaps also, dilute the real power conflicts in this history through a 1990s romanticized lens of multiculturalism. As the film progresses, her relationship to John Smith becomes her defining characteristic. Her message of peace and harmony is forgotten as audience members we focus on whether or not she and Smith will live happily together. "The New World" presents the same view. As Pocahontas helps the settlers, she is really only thinking about Smith as is evidenced by her searching him out on her visit to the fort in the middle of winter. She is never happy in her life with Rolfe in that she is continually thinking about Smith. Her relationship defines her and audience members do not gain an understanding of her diplomatic power.

For a more appropriate cinematic view of women, one can turn to the Indigenous film "Naturally Native". This film is about three sisters who search for their identity as Indian women, while starting up an all-natural cosmetic company. Each of the sisters are independent and strong and are not defined by their romantic relationships to men. Relationships with men are important to the plot; however, the true story lies in the founding and success of the cosmetic company. The sisters are defined by their tenacity to explore their heritage and become successful businesswomen. These sisters are yet another example of the "post-Indian" in that they understand historical gender roles and are incorporating them into their modern lives.

In opposition to the Pocahontas myth is the film *Skins*. I would like to underscore the political nature of this film and the comments it makes in regards to history. History is actually a theme within the film. The characters within the film, make many references to the fact that they too know where they came from. They understand that the Black Hills are their sacred space and the place where the Sioux originated. Ironically, the faces of four presidents are carved into the Black Hills. Mogie always talks about how in a cruel twist of fate, he would like to destroy the monument in the same manner the monument destroyed this sacred space. He talks about how someone should blow the noses of the presidents. After his death, Rudy, his brother takes ten gallons of red paint and defaces Washington. The final scene of the film shows the monument and it looks like Washington has been shot in the face with a line of red blood dripping down his nose. This is action; this is the response that Indians should have to film and the control of history. I am not advocating the defacing of National monuments, I am simply saying that these films require a certain political response and these characters and this film underscore this belief as well. It is time for the Indian voice to be heard, even if it is seen through red paint.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In 1969 a group of young Native Americans from all across the country gathered together and occupied Alcatraz Island. This group of Indians called for recognition of their cultures, ideas and beliefs. Their actions were influential in exposing the public to American Indian beliefs and ideas. In this era, protests and occupations are often disregarded or ignored. The call for change and action must come from another source. This is why Indigenous based theories are so significant to the field of Native American Studies. Indigenous based theories are activist occupations within the academia. Each Native scholar within their University is occupying their own Alcatraz. Indigenous based theories are allowing the public to hear a Native perspective and gain insight into the lives of Indian people. There were political ramifications of the occupation of Alcatraz as well. The Indians that occupied the island expressed their beliefs regarding Indian sovereignty. Indigenous theories are also political in that they too express academic sovereignty. With this theory, I call Native scholars and our non-Native allies to join and make their voices heard in the academic world. This theory is also a call to action for others interested in Indigenous film. The ideas presented should serve as inspiration and as a reference to those in Hollywood.

The ideas and applications of this theory should be used as recommendations for those in the business of producing Indian films. Through my discussion of community I show how writers and directors incorporate this element into film. The practical

application of the theory shows how Indigenous films uphold culture and community through their productions. I call on Hollywood to get creative in terms of how they use community and culture when producing future films about Indians. Imagine if other film companies equipped certain reservations with the power to begin their own film companies. Many jobs and economic opportunities would come about with this type of action. Instead of solely using community members as extras, film companies need and must give back. With each Indian film, Indian critics must stand and interpret the film from their cultural perspective. These critics and scholars must explain to the public why various cultural elements are presented in the film and what these elements mean to the Indian community presented in the film. New ideas regarding the use of Indian time and space should be incorporated into film production and techniques. As our society becomes more technologically advanced, let us envision new and creative ways to tell traditional stories. As these stories are told, Native based interpretation and critique must also be included and encouraged. Finally, I call upon filmmakers to produce Indian films that occur in a modern setting and that deal with contemporary issues. As audiences see Indians in a modern time, stereotypes regarding historical Indians will begin to fade away. In addition, all Indian filmmakers need to consider the political implications and impacts of their films. This theory calls all Native filmmakers to consider the types of stories that are being told to improve the lives and situations of Indian people.

I believe Native American studies and theories are still in their infancy. Now is the time to encourage their growth and maturity. A Native based film theory is crucial to this growth. Native scholars must breach the academic strongholds using their traditional knowledge and beliefs. As Indian people, our voice must be heard to maintain our

history, culture and lives. Non-Indian scholars must engage in debate and open communication with Indian scholars. With these activities, learning and knowledge occurs. Stereotypical representations will no longer define Indian nations and cultures will continue to evolve in this changing world.

As more Indigenous based theories are written and more Indigenous films are produced, Tonto and Tonto will continue to speak. In addition, the Lone Ranger can learn something new in this process.

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