REEL INJUN

A FILM BY NEIL DIAMOND
SCREENING WITH NEIL DISCOVERS THE MOON
A SHORT BY STEVEN JUDD

STUDY GUIDE

TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES

Smithsonian
National Museum of the American Indian

Proud Sponsor of Tribeca Film Institute
About the Filmmakers

Reel Injun

Reel Injun takes viewers through a chronological treatment of First Nations peoples in film and television. This feature length documentary references several well known films and features interviews with Native filmmakers, critics, and community leaders including Chris Eyre, a prolific director and John Trudell, a leader in the American Indian Movement (AIM). Through encounters with community leaders and critics, the film takes viewers on an imaginative journey through the shifting stereotypes of Native Americans in Hollywood.

Neil Discovers the Moon

Made in the USA, Neil Discovers the Moon (2011), is an imaginative one minute short that prompts a re-thinking of what we know about the process of “Discovery.”

About the Films

The Film in Context

Native Americans in Hollywood Film

Since the era of silent filmmaking in the early 1900s, First Nations peoples have been used largely as props, the enemy, and comic relief in Hollywood films. The primary idea was that Indians were in the way of “progress” and “civilization” being achieved by colonial populations who sought to own and control all land inside the borders of what we now refer to as the United States. This hostility toward the first people to occupy these lands can be clearly seen through the stereotypes produced by Hollywood which in turn produce an almost singular idea of who or what Native Americans are. These representations shift over time, shaping audience’s perceptions of the many Native histories and communities that shape the country called America.

Historical perspective:

• Early 1900s: The advent of Westerns as a genre on the radio and in silent films, producing and reinforcing stereotypes of American Indians as different, undesirable, and threatening to white colonial settlers.
• 1933: The Lone Ranger radio program premieres on WXYZ, and would run 2,956 episodes, featuring a masked cowboy hero and his trusty sidekick, Tonto.
• 1950s: Moving picture images solidify ideas and fears of Native Americans as evil that must be stamped out of America.

Stereotypes and vocabulary often associated with Native Americans:

• Savage: Native people were described as villains out to scalp, kill and rape white settlers. Some were even thought to be cannibals.
• Noble Warrior: Stereotypical Native men were vicious and effective military leaders and hunters who fought to protect their people.
• Indian Chief: The European idea that Native tribes had a single chief who acted like a President, Prime Minister, or King at the top of a hierarchy and made all decisions on behalf of the group.
• Indian “Princess”: This term elevated the social status of Native women, and was used to rationalize the desire of white men for Native women.
• Squaw: Stereotypical Native women were characterized as simple servants who cooked, cleaned, and birthed children for the men.
• Medicine Man: A romantic representation of the non-violent, land-based, “old ways” style spirituality that Native people practiced, which civilization seeks to destroy.
• Extinct: Belief that Natives, like dinosaurs, eventually died off due to disease, famine, genocide, and the inability to survive evolutionary changes.

Thinking Ahead

Q: What do you know about American Indians or Native Americans? Do you identify as Native? Do you have friends or family members who are Native American? Have you ever heard of First Nations?

Q: How would you recognize someone who is Native American? Is there a particular look, sound, or style of dress? A particular neighborhood where you might find a strong Native community? Think about how you would describe an Indian to the person next to you.

Q: Have you seen movies with characters who are Indians or Native Americans? What did you think about or remember about those movies? In what ways do you relate to those characters? In what ways do you find it difficult to relate?
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:
- Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
- Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
- Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:
- The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
- The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
- The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.

CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you’ve watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message:

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn't interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)

RESOURCES: IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

FURTHER READING

The Heart of a Chief
By Joseph Bruchac
Chosen to head a sixth grade school project about sports teams with Indian mascots, Chris becomes confused. Living on the Penacook reservation with his alcoholic father, his community disagrees about whether a casino will provide them with the support they need, or destroy their beautiful island.

Morning Girl
By Michael Dorris
Winner of the Scott O’Dell Award for historical fiction, Morning Girl and her brother Star Boy tell their story of living on a Bahamian island in 1492. Featuring the importance of family and community, the ending proves unpredictable and shocking. (For young adults)

FURTHER WATCHING

If you liked this film, you might also like some of these other films.

In Whose Honor?
A film by Jay Rosenstein
American Indian sports mascots are a largely unquestioned American cultural tradition. In Whose Honor? examines “honoring” American Indians as mascots and nicknames in sports.

Naturally Native
A film by Jennifer Wynne Farmer & Valerie Red-Horse
Three Native American sisters start a line of cosmetics called Naturally Native, based on tribal remedies, only to battle with racist business people. The film is Rad-Horse’s comment on her fight with the movie industry to get her films made. Financed by Connecticut’s Mashantucket tribe.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Discover more information on the web about this film and related topics.

Red Face: The History of Racist American Indian Stereotypes
red-face.us
This site explores various myths and stereotypes of Native Americans in sports, film, and general U.S. culture, and has counterpart sites including: brown-face.com

Video Games featuring Indians
bluecorncomics.com/navidgam.htm
Although Native people are underrepresented in Video Games, where “Indians” do appear, they tend to be one-dimensional.

GET INVOLVED

Speak out: Show/view an original Lone Ranger episode at school, or at home to peers, friends or family. Discuss the film afterward and help break down the stereotypes in the episode. Ask your friends and family how they would change the story to remove harmful and negative representations of Native Americans, women and other people represented.

Visit: Take a field trip with your classmates to the American Indian Community House (AIC), the AICh Art Gallery, or the National Museum of the American Indian. Enlist everyone in your group to bring at least one question that you/they feel is important about Native Americans that will help dispel some of the mythology around Native peoples.

Organize: Using The Lone Ranger and Tonto as a starting point, and drawing from what you’ve learned from Reel Injun organize a filmmaking workshop in your school to create a storyline that portrays First Nations peoples with dignity, sensitivity, and respect.
TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI’s youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

SMITHSONIAN’S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN INDIAN AND THE NMAI FILM + VIDEO CENTER
Chartered by an act of Congress in 1989 as the 18th museum of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of American Indian (NMAI) is dedicated to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Americas. The NMAI Film and Video Center (FVC) produces the Native American Film + Video Festival. The FVC is headquartered at the NMAI in New York, where it provides screenings of and information services about Native film, video, radio, and television in the Americas and Hawai‘i.

americanindian.si.edu
nativnetworks.si.edu (English)
redesindigenas.si.edu (Spanish)

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