

English 381 - 36592
NATIVE AMERICAN FILM, HISTORY, & CULTURE

Professor Kirby Brown
Office: 523 PLC Hall
Office Hours: T 1-3pm, W 9-10am, and by appointment
kbrown@uoregon.edu

Class Meetings
T/Th: 10-11:50am
Location: STB 252

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There is perhaps no image more widely recognized yet more grossly misunderstood in American popular culture than the “Indian.” Represented as everything from irredeemable savages and impediments to progress to idealized possessors of primitive innocence and arbiters of new-age spiritualism, “the Indian” stands as an anachronistic relic of a bygone era whose sacrifice on the altars of modernity and progress, while perhaps tragic, is both inevitable and necessary to the maintenance of narratives of US exceptionalism in the Americas. Though such images have a long history in a variety of discursive forms, the emergence of cinematic technologies in the early twentieth century and the explosion of film production and distribution in the ensuing decades solidified the Noble Savage/Vanishing American as indelible, if contradictory, threads in the fabric of the US national story.



Of course, the *Reel* Indians produced by Hollywood say very little about *Real* Native peoples who not only refuse to vanish but who consistently reject their prescribed roles in the US national imaginary, insisting instead on rights to **rhetorical and representational sovereignty**.

Through a juxtaposition of literary, critical, and cinematic texts, the first third of the course will explore the construction of “Reel Indians” from early ethnographic documentaries and Hollywood Westerns to their recuperation as countercultural anti-heroes in the 60s, 70s and 80s. The

last two-thirds of the course will examine the various ways in which Native-produced films of the late 1990s to the present **contest**— if not outright **refuse!**— narrative, generic, and representational constructions of “the white man’s Indian” on the way to imagining more complex possibilities for “Real Indians” in the twenty-first century.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Read critical and cinematic texts with discernment and comprehension, paying particular attention to the intersections of race, representation, cinematic/narrative conventions and form.
2. Situate course content in its relevant historical, cultural, intellectual, and cinematic contexts in Indian Country and the US.
3. Interrogate relationships between cultural production, popular attitudes, and federal policy.
4. Examine popular and scholarly analyses of course material, and critically evaluate the ways in which cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs frame engagements with and understandings of course material.
5. Produce focused, critical, formal analyses/close readings of analytic and cinematic texts in clear, grammatical prose.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All required readings are available on Canvas. A collection of research materials and suggested readings are available on course reserve in the Knight Library.

FILMS

Diamond, Neil. *Reel Injun* (85 min). 2009.

Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu (Inuit). *Before Tomorrow* (93 mins). 2008.

Eyre, Chris (Cheyenne). *Smoke Signals* (89 min). 1998.

Harjo, Sterlin (Mvscogee/Creek), *Barking Water* (85 mins). 2009.

Barnaby, Jeff. (Mi'kmaq) *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (88 mins). 2013.
Lightning, Georgiana (Samson Cree Nation). *Older Than America* (102 min). 2008.
Soap, Charlie (Cherokee) and Tim Kelly. *The Cherokee Word for Water* (98 mins). 2013.
Frankowski, Nathan. *Te Ata* (105 mins). 2016.
Danis Goulet (Cree/Metis). "[Wakening.](#)" (9mins). 2014.
Nanobah Becker (Diné). "[The 6th World.](#)" (15 mins). 2014.

PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend class regularly, bring assigned texts to class and make substantial contributions to class discussions. This requires that you keep up with the reading assignments, make observations and take careful notes for each text, and bring thoughtful questions or concerns to class. **Always remain civil and on point in your discussion of texts and ideas.**

Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss class, **it is your responsibility entirely** to get notes for that day and catch up on any material you missed.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

This course offers a variety of assignments by which your performance is ultimately assessed so that your final grade is not dependent upon a single skill or performance. These include daily reading/viewing journals, weekly informal online blog posts/responses, and two film reviews. **Late assignments will be accepted under no circumstances.**

Class Participation

This includes consistent attendance, participation in class discussions, small group exercise, and short in-class writing assignments.

Discussion Forum (Canvas)

Discussion Posts and Responses are your opportunity to engage critically with a primary text, essay, idea or concept as well as respond thoughtfully to the thoughts, arguments and analyses of your peers. Each student will be required to submit one original post and reply to two others **three times** throughout the term.

Discussion posts should be focused and substantive (~500 words) and synthesize ideas from your reading journal, course notes, and class discussions by critically exploring a specific issue, problem or question of form elicited by the text(s) (i.e. I want to see you wrestling with the text/film). They should be cleanly written; advance a clearly-articulated, interpretive claim (i.e. thesis statement); present evidence from the text that illustrates that claim; and, **most importantly**, interpret that evidence for your readers (i.e. an explanation of how the text/illustration functions as you claim it does). **Responses** will substantively engage (~150 words) the issues, problems or questions posed in **TWO** discussion posts in an informal yet sophisticated way (i.e. I want to see you wrestling with the arguments of your peers).

Film Reviews

You are required to submit **TWO** double-spaced, formally written film reviews of selections from a list of my choosing that speak in some way to the films/critical contexts we've discussed in class. One will examine a single film in 4-5 pages with limited to no secondary sources. A second review of 8-10 pages, which can build upon your previous review, will be comparative in nature and will required that you consult a minimum of 4-5 secondary sources **not including those on the syllabus**. Explicit instructions for each are available on Canvas.

GRADING

Class Participation	10%
Discussion Posts/Responses (DP, DR)	25%
Film Review #1, single film (SFR)	30%
Film Review #2, comparative (CFR)	35%

NOTE: Meeting the minimum requirements for the course (attending consistently, regular participation, hitting deadlines, meeting minimum requirements) will typically result in an average grade (“meets expectations”), or a C on the college scale. Higher grades are awarded based upon **exceeding minimum expectations** per my discretion.

GRADE POINT DISTRIBUTION

F <59.5	C- 69.6-73.5	B- 79.6-83.5	A- 89.6-93.5
D- 59.6-63.5	C 73.6-77.5	B 83.6-87.5	A 93.6-97.5
D 63.6-67.5	C+ 77.6-79.5	B+ 87.6-89.5	A+ 97.6-100+
D+ 67.6-69.5			

COURSE CONTENT AND INTELLECTUAL DISCUSSION

Due to the **ongoing** histories/experiences of settler-colonialism, institutional racism, gender violence, state violence, dispossession, and incarceration that inform both our contemporary moment and our readings for the term, this course will openly engage these and related issues without censorship. If content makes attendance and participation impossible, please see me to make alternative arrangements.

CLASS COMMUNICATION

Get in the habit of checking your UO email account regularly (**i.e. daily**) as this will be our primary means of communication outside of class. **Please be aware that I will not respond to emails sent after 5pm or on the weekend until the next weekday.**

CONVENTIONS OF ADDRESS

Communicating with a professor, instructor, administrator, staff member, employer, manager, or colleague is different (at least initially) from speaking/texting with a friend, family member, or other familiar relation. In a professional, intellectual context like the University, it is conventional to refer to faculty, administrators, staff, GTFs and others by their titles (Doctor, Professor, Instructor, Coach, preferred gender/gender neutral titles, etc.) unless instructed otherwise. You should also get into the habit of including greetings, salutations, and language appropriate to such contexts. I will always respectfully refer to you according to your stated preferences and the appropriate context; I expect that you’ll reciprocate in kind.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the case of inclement weather, please check the UO homepage, UO Alerts Blog, and local weather stations for information on travel, closures and cancellations. If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will notify you by email about whether we are holding class. Whether or not I decide to hold class, you should use your own judgment about the safety of traveling to campus.

INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a documented need that necessitates accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible and request that a counselor at the [Accessible Education Center](#) send a letter verifying your requests.

TITLE IX POLICY AND REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. Consequently, **all UO employees are required to report** to appropriate authorities (supervisor or

Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity) when they have **reasonable cause** to believe that discrimination, harassment or abuse of any kind has taken, or is taking, place. Employees are NOT required to reveal the names of survivors, however.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The [University Student Conduct Code](#) defines [academic misconduct](#). Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available [here](#).

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COURSE SCHEDULE

UNIT 1: SETTING THE SCENE – CRITICAL AND CINEMATIC CONTEXTS

Week 1

Tuesday, April 4th

- **Discussion:** Course logistics, Central Questions, Film Viewing
- **Readings:** Phil Deloria (Dakota), “Introduction” from *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Canvas)
- **Begin Viewing:** Neil Diamond (Cree), *Reel Injun* (85 min), 2009.

Thursday, April 6th

- **Viewing and Discussion:** *Reel Injun*
- **Reading:** Michelle Raheja (Seneca), “Visual Sovereignty” from *Native Studies Keywords*. (Canvas)

Friday, April 7th

- **Assignment:** DP #1 (Groups 1 & 3, 5pm)

UNIT 2: WHOSE/WHO’S SAVAGE?: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC PRIMITIVE, FRONTIER SAVAGE, AND THE IDEA OF “THE WEST”

Week 2

Monday, April 10th

- **Assignment:** DR #1 (Groups 2 & 4, 5pm)

Tuesday, April 11th

- **Readings:** Shari Huhndorf (Yup’ik). “Nanook and His Contemporaries: Traveling with the Eskimos, 1897-1941” from *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imaginary*. (Canvas)
- **View and Discuss:** Clips from Robert Flaherty’s, *Nanook of the North: A Story of Life and Love in the Actual Arctic* (1922)
- **Begin Viewing:** Marie-Hélène Cousineau and Madeline Ivalu (Inuit), *Before Tomorrow* (93 mins). 2008.

Thursday, April 13th

- **View and Discuss:** *Before Tomorrow*
- **Reading:** Shari Huhndorf. “Colonizing Alaska: Race, Nation and the Remaking of Native America” from *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture*. (Canvas)

Friday, April 14th

- **Assignment:** DP #1 (Groups 2 & 4, 5pm)

Week 3

Monday, April 17th

- **Assignment:** DR #1 (Groups 1 & 3, 5pm)

Tuesday, April 18th

- **Reading:** Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, "The Cowboy Talkies of the 1930s, 40s and 50s" from *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*. (Canvas)
- **View and Discuss:** Clips from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956).

Thursday, April 20th

- **Reading:** Angela Aleiss, "Savagery on the Frontier" from *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*. (Canvas)
- **View and Discuss:** Clips from Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970) and Milos Foreman's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975).

Friday, April 21st

- **Assignment:** DP#2 (Groups 1 & 3, 5pm)

UNIT 3: UNMAKING "THE WEST" IN CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS ROAD FILMS

Week 4

Monday, April 23rd

- **Assignment:** DR#2 (Groups 2 & 4, 5pm)

Tuesday, April 25th

- **Reading:** Vine Deloria, Jr. (Dakota), "Indian Humor." (Canvas)
- **Begin Viewing:** Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (89 min.), 1998.

Thursday, April 27th

- **Reading:** Brian Klopotek (Choctaw), "'I Guess Your Warrior Look Doesn't Work Every Time': Challenging Indian Masculinity in the Cinema." (Canvas)
- **View and Discuss:** *Smoke Signals* (89 min), 1998.

Week 5

Monday, May 1st

- **Assignment:** SFR, 5pm (Canvas)

Tuesday, May 2nd

- **Reading:** TBD
- **Begin Viewing:** Sterlin Harjo's (Muskogee/Creek) *Barking Water* (85 mins), 2009.

Thursday, May 4th

- **View and Discuss:** *Barking Water*
- **Reading:** TBD

Friday, May 5th

- **Assignment:** DP #2 (Groups 2 & 4, 5pm)

UNIT 4: HAUNTING, HEALING, & HISTORICAL TRAUMA: REPRESENTING THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Week 6

Monday, May 8th

- **Assignment:** DR #2 (Groups 1 & 3, 5pm)

Tuesday, May 9th

- **Reading:** TBD
- **Viewing:** Georgina Lightning's (Samson Cree Nation) *Older Than America* (102 mins), 2008.

Thursday, May 11th

- **View and Discuss:** *Older than America*
- **Reading:** TBD

Friday, May 12th

- **Assignment:** SFR Revisions (Canvas, 5pm)

Week 7

Tuesday, May 16th

- **Reading:** Eve Tuck (Aleut, St. Paul Island) and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting" (Canvas)
- **Begin Viewing:** Jeff Barnaby's (Mi'kmaq) *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (88 mins). 2013.

Thursday, May 18th

- **View and Discuss:** *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*

Friday, May 19th

- **Assignment:** DP#3 (Groups 1 & 3)

UNIT 5: NOT YOUR INDIAN PRINCESS: REPRESENTING INDIGENOUS WOMANHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY BIOPICS

Week 8

Monday, May 22nd

- **Assignment:** DR#3 (Groups 2 & 4)

Tuesday, May 23rd

- **Reading:** Rayna Green's "The Pocahontas Perplex: Images of Indian Women in American Culture." (Canvas)
- **Begin Viewing:** Nathan Frankowski's *Te Ata* (105 mins), 2016.

Thursday, May 25th

- **View and Discuss:** *Te Ata*
- **Reading:** TBD

Friday, May 26th

- **Assignment:** DP #3 (Groups 2 & 4, 5pm)

Week 9

Monday, May 29th

- **Assignment:** DR#3 (Groups 1 & 3, 5pm)

Tuesday, May 30th

- **Reading:** Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee), excerpts from her autobiography, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People*. (Canvas)
- **Begin Viewing:** Charlie Soap (Cherokee) and Tim Kelly's *The Cherokee Word for Water* (98 mins), 2013.

Thursday, June 1st

- **View and Discuss:** *The Cherokee Word for Water*
- **Reading:** TBD

Friday, June 2nd

- **Assignment:** CFR (Canvas, 5pm)

UNIT 6: CULTURAL RESURGENCE AND IMAGINING INDIGENOUS FUTURES AT THE END OF DAYS IN INDIGENOUS SHORT FILMS

Week 10

Tuesday, June 6th

- **Reading:** Cutcha Risling-Baldy, "[Why I Teach the Walking Dead in my Native Studies Classes.](#)"
- **View and Discuss:** Danis Goulet (Cree/Metis). "[Wakening.](#)" (9mins). 2014.

Thursday, June 8th

- **Reading:** Salma Monani, "Science Fiction, Westerns, and the Vital Cosmo-ethics of *The 6th World.*" (Canvas)
- **View and Discuss:** Nanobah Becker (Diné), "[The 6th World.](#)" (15 mins), 2014.

Week 11

Monday, June 12th

- CFR revisions (5pm, Canvas)

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SELECTED LIST OF FILMS FOR REVIEW/RESEARCH

Non-Native Films

The Vanishing American (1925) / Could be paired with Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

The Silent Enemy (1930) / Could be paired with London short fiction, *Nanook*, and *Atarnajuat*, *The Fast Runner*

Broken Arrow (1950) / Could be paired with *Dances With Wolves* (1990) or *Avatar* (2009)

Arrowhead (1953) / Could be paired with Zitkala-Sa's *American Indian Stories* and/or *Older Than America*

Run of the Arrow (1957) / Could be paired with *Dances with Wolves* and *Avatar*

Cheyenne Autumn (1964) / Could be paired with Cooper's *Last of the Mohican* and its various film incarnations

Soldier Blue (1970) / Could be paired with *The Plainsman* (1937) or *Stagecoach* (1939)

Man Called Horse (1970s-80s) series / Could be paired with *Cheyenne Autumn*, *Dances With Wolves* or *Avatar*

Billy Jack series (1970s) / Could be paired with *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) / Could be paired with the Ken Kesey novel of the same title

Dances With Wolves (1990) / See potential pairings above

Last of the Mohicans (1992) / Could be paired with Cooper novel of the same title or any of the numerous filmic translations

The Unforgiven (1992) / Could be paired with any revisionist Westerns

Pocahontas (1995) and *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World* (1998) / Could be paired with *Run of the Arrow* (1957), *The New World* (2005), *Avatar* (2009), *Naturally Native*, *Maina*, *Empire of Dirt*
The New World (2005)
Avatar (2009) / Could be paired w/ *Dances With Wolves* or *Cowboys and Aliens*
Cowboys and Aliens (2011) / Could be paired with *Avatar* or *Dances With Wolves*
The Revenant (2015) / Could be paired w/ *Little Big Man*, *A Man Called Horse*, *Dances With Wolves*, or *Avatar*

Native Films

Powwow Highway (1989)
It Starts with a Whisper (1993)
Medicine River (1994) / Pair w/the novel by the same name by Thomas King
Grand Avenue (1996) / Pair w/*The Exiles* and *Urban Rez*, Alexie stories
Naturally Native (1998) / Pair w/Alexie romances, *Christmas in the Clouds*
Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2001) / Pair with London stories, *Nanook*
Skins (2002) / Pair w/novel of the same name by Adrian C. Louis
Imprint (2007) / Pair w/*Older Than America* or *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*
On the Ice (2011) / Pair w/*Nanook*, *Atarnajuat*
Star Wars (1977/2013), translated into Navajo (2013) / Pair w/*Atanarjuat*
Empire of Dirt (2013) / Pair w/*Naturally Native*, Alexie's short stories, *Pocahontas*
Maina (2013) / Pair w/London stories, *Atarnajuat*
The Cherokee Word for Water (2013) / Pair w/*Barking Water* or *Christmas in the Clouds*
Barking Water (2009) / Pair w/any contemporary Native text or film

SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Useful Studies on the Genealogy and Expression of Indianness in the Non-Indian Imaginary

Berkhofer, Robert F., Jr. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
Deloria, Phil. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998.
Dippie, Brian W. *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*. Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 1991.
Huhndorf, Shari. *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imaginary*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001.
Pearce, Roy Harvey. *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*. 1953, 1965. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Cinematic Studies on Indianness

Aleiss, Angela. *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*. Westport, CN: Praeger Publishers, 2005.
Gretchen M. Bataille and Charles L.P. Silet, eds. *The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies*. Ames: Iowa State UP, 1980.
Hearne, Joanna. *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western*. New York: SUNY P, 2012.
Kilpatrick, Jacquelyn. *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999.
Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2006.
Prats, Armando Jose. *Invisible Indians: Myth and Identity in the American Western*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002.
Raheja, Michelle H. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2011.
Rollins, Peter C. and John E. O'Connor, eds. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.
Singer, Beverly R. *Wiping the War Paint Off the Lens: Native American Film and Video*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.