

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

(Week 4)

LESSON OBJECTIVES - Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to recognize the varying presentations of Indigenous peoples within Westerns, to evaluate inter-racial relationships within Western films and to connect presentations of race to their own experience within North America.

VIDEO CLIPS: *Students can view the embedded video or press "CTRL" and left-click on the provided link to view on the host website. **NOTE:** The document may need to be viewed in "enable editing" mode to view the clips. **Note:** After viewing a clip, students may need to manually use the mouse to move the document via the right-hand scrolling bar or re-click their mouse within the document.*

Optional Reading – Week 4: *The Rough Guide to Westerns*, pp. 208-210

INTRODUCTION

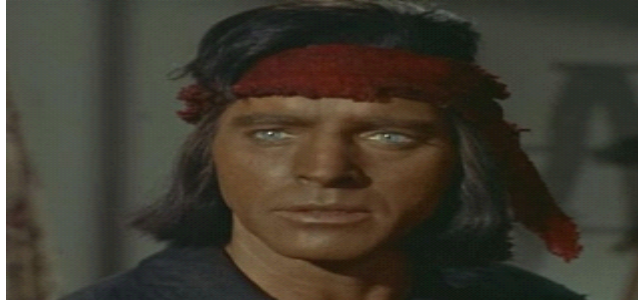
The portrayal of the Indigenous peoples of North America within Westerns was for decades that of obstacle to the expanding settler population of the West.

Racially-charged ideas of civilization would be used to justify a range of responses by the Euro-American settler society toward any perceived threat to "progress" – those responses ranged from negation of signed treaties to officially-sanctioned violence.

A framework emerged for racial stereotyping within North American public policy, cultural attitudes and eventually cinema.

The inclusion of Native American actors in films to play lead Native American parts took until the 1970s to reach regularity.

Westerns in the 1950s began to criticize the treatment of Indigenous peoples by the white settler society but lead roles in such films were still held by non-Native American actors, for example, Burt Lancaster in *Apache* (1954).



BURT LANCASTER in *APACHE* (1954)

<http://www.wearysloth.com/Gallery/ActorsL/9777-796.jpg>

It is important to consider the source of a Western film – the majority of the films have been made by non-Indigenous directors and producers.

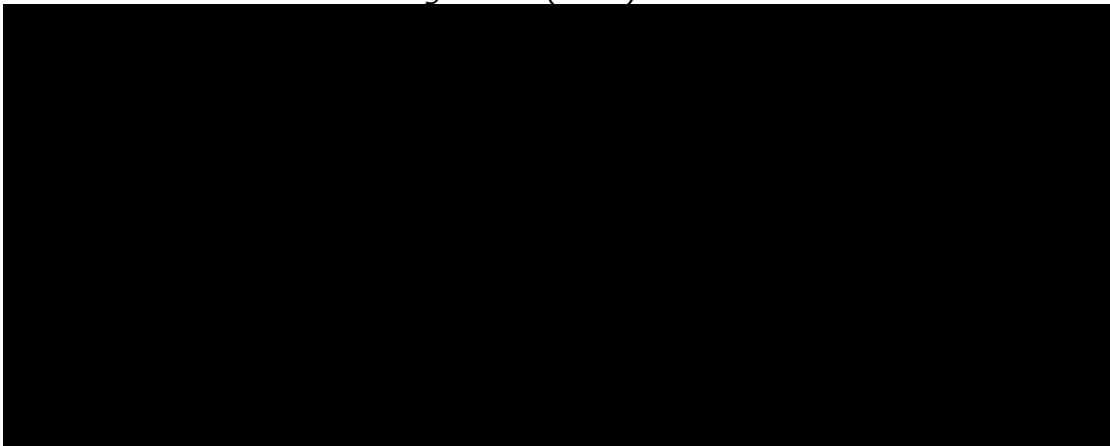
The voice of an Indigenous-produced Western would be grounded in different experiences.

PORTRAYALS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO 1950

The standard depiction of Amerindians within pre-1950 Westerns was as an anonymous collective threat to the expanding settler population.

As plot device, Indigenous groups could be used to inject action to maintain tension in a film - that tension would then be resolved with a climatic chase or battle scene as in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939).

Stagecoach (1939) trailer:



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llv0Tgwhy_c

Amerindians could be invoked by screenwriters and directors to glorify the struggles of US continental expansion regardless of the

real historical consequences or the cultural results of negative on-screen portrayals of Indigenous peoples.

The use of Amerindians in pre-1950s Westerns was primarily as plot device and as an instrument to demonstrate US nationalism.

The Indian would also be cast as an outsider in relation to the Euro-American society and culture.

In Westerns up to the 1950s there were a small number of attempts to provide a more balanced characterization of Indigenous peoples within film.

Thomas Ince in the silent era attempted to provide an Aboriginal perspective within his *The Indian Massacre* (1912).

In Ince's *The Invaders* (also 1912), he presented a sophisticated story of whites signing a treaty with the Sioux people and then breaking it. *The Invaders* had Oglala Sioux in key roles.



Screenshot – *The Invaders* (1912)

<http://s3.amazonaws.com/nfpf-videos/the-invaders-1912-image-normal.jpg?2011>

After 1910 the Amerindian was generally portrayed as a group - the individualized humanity of a specific Native American character would generally not be explored for almost 4 decades.

***Broken Arrow* (1950), directed by Delmer Daves, marked a movement by serious Westerns toward a more balanced Amerindian portrayal.**

The film is centered upon the historical figures of Apache chief, Cochise (played by non-Indigenous actor Jeff Chandler), and U.S. Army scout and Indian Agent, Tom Jeffords (James Stewart).



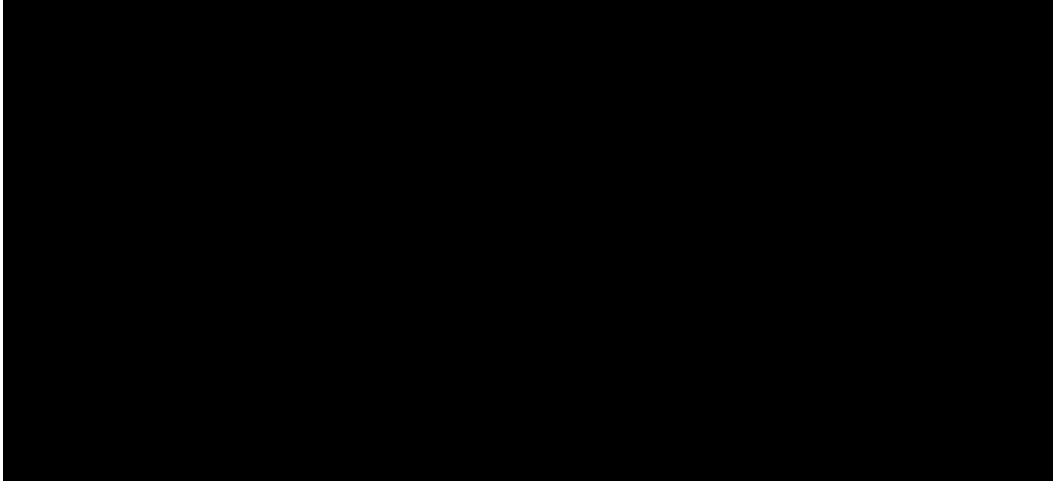
***BROKEN ARROW* (1950)**

http://www.moviepicturedb.com/pictures/10_01/1950/42286/l_42286_a76f5a50.jpg

Jeffords travels alone to Cochise's camp to ask that mail couriers in the then-Arizona Territory be allowed to pass safely through the Apache lands. Cochise is impressed by Jeffords's brave act of arrival and cements a friendship with him.

This friendship would be the basis of an actual 1872 treaty that ended a decade of hostilities between the Apache and Americans in what is modern-day New Mexico and Arizona.

Broken Arrow (1950) trailer:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLdvA9DgfBw>

The film made an immediate impact with its depiction of an Indigenous people that were not inherently “savage” and war-like as previous films had shown but would in fact seek peace.

It is important to note that in addition to the role played by Chandler, the lead female Apache role was also played by non-Indigenous actor Debra Paget.

Paul Simpson in *The Rough Guide to Westerns* contends that it was a radical idea when Westerns began to acknowledge in the 1950s that Amerindians shared a common humanity with non-Native people. (1)

NON-INDIGENOUS PORTRAYALS OF INTER-RACIAL RELATIONS



***Dances with Wolves* (1990)**

<http://cache2.allpostersimages.com/p/LRG/40/4033/UDGLF00Z/posters/dances-with-wolves-uk-movie-poster-1990.jpg>

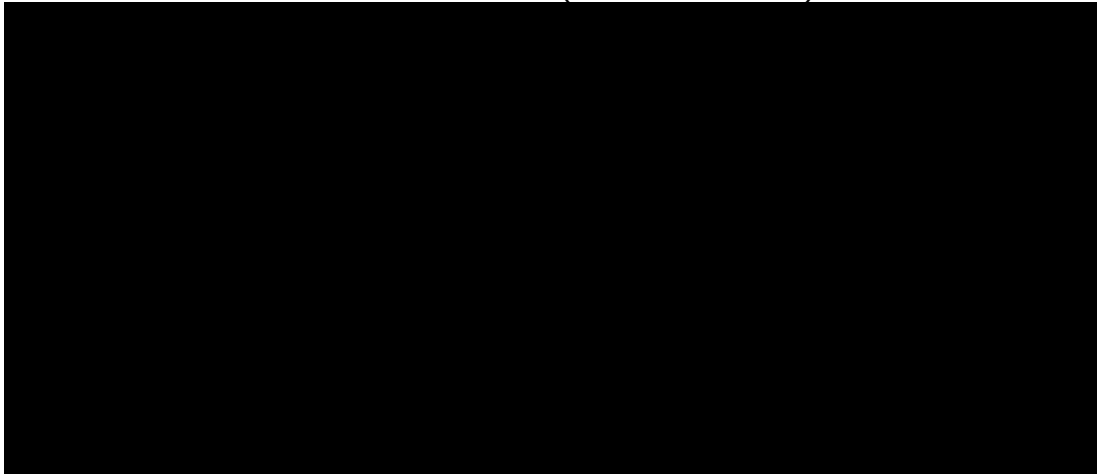
The “Going Indian” Myth

Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* (1990) offers a version of the American "going Indian" myth-story in that film's effort toward reconciliation between two cultures – Costner's character, who travels to the West in 1864, enters into an Amerindian way of life to become something neither wholly white nor wholly Indigenous. (2)

The re-naming of Lt. Dunbar (Costner) as "Dances with Wolves" is an expression of the American myth that a man can shed his European heritage and become his natural self in the Eden-like North America via his involvement with Indigenous peoples.

Costner's character is given the name after the Lakota observe him playfully chasing and being chased by a lone wolf named Two Socks that has grown curious about Costner at his US army outpost.

Dances with Wolves (Two Socks Scene):



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahW9jOS0-pY>

Native American academic Edward D. Castillo states that Indians know that no white person can become Indian - Indigenous people hope that those who have learnt of their cultures and appreciate their unique humanity will be friends and allies and work to protect the earth. (3)

The "Garden of Eden" Myth

Another approach in Westerns toward inter-racial relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups is for the white American hero to be freed from his own European history by the land of the new American continent.

The American Indian could thus represent Adam and Eve-like figures to be celebrated by immigrants while at the same time those Indigenous peoples were being displaced from their lands.

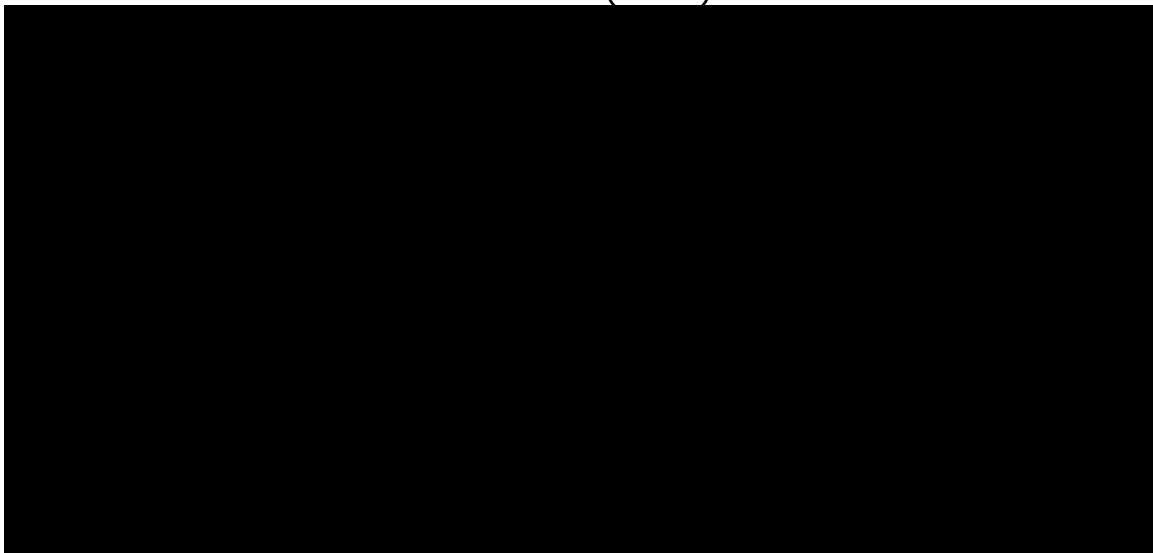
The idea of North America serving as an image of Eden for European arrivals is also shared in the 2005 film, *The New World*, directed by Terrence Malick.

While not specifically a Western, the time period it details – the early 17th century – is the necessary foundation for later Euro-American expansion westward. The film portrays the founding of the Jamestown colony in what became the state of Virginia (on the east coast of the US).

***The New World* explores the relationship of the historical figures of Captain John Smith (Colin Farrell), an Englishman, and Pocahontas (Q'orianka Kilcher), of the Powhatan people.**

There are particular scenes that depict how the non-Indigenous male enters into an Eden-like world via his relationship with an Indigenous woman in her unspoiled territory:

New World (2005) trailer:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPNLwz9JSiM>

In numerous 20th century Westerns the, inter-racial relationship (e.g. white man / Indigenous woman) will be limited. In many Westerns, the white hero cannot be with an Indigenous woman - in *Broken Arrow*, the Indigenous female partner to the Jimmy Stewart character will be killed by white settlers who do not want peace between their group and the Apache.

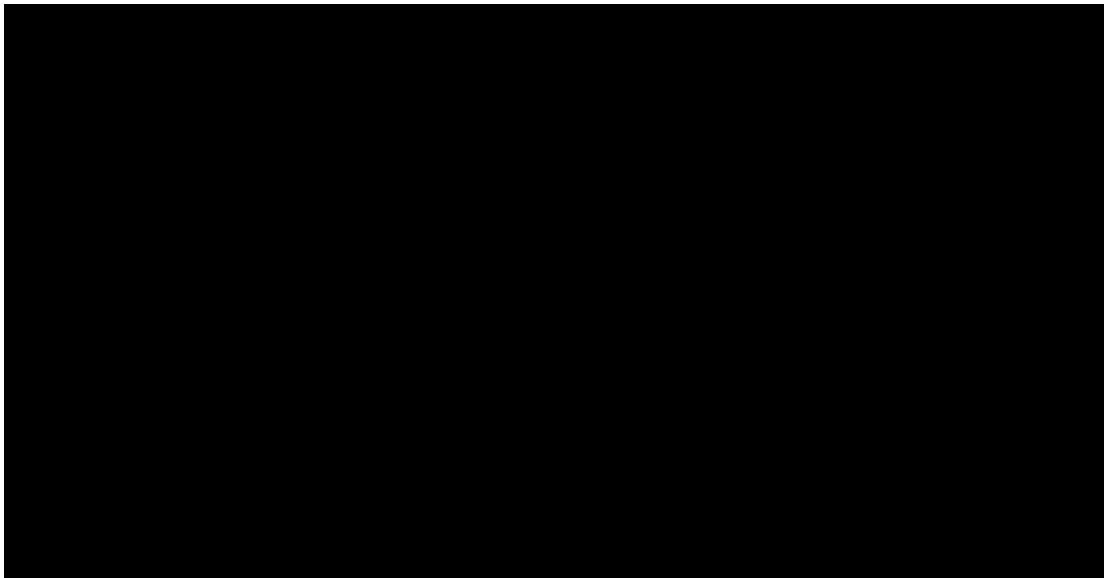
REVISIONS OF INDIGENOUS PORTAYALS IN WESTERNS – A Selected Chronology

The Outlaw Josey Wales (1976)

Directed by and starring Clint Eastwood, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* tells the story of a Missouri farmer who seeks revenge for the murder of his wife and that of his son by pro-Union guerrilla gangs during the US Civil War.

A major aspect of this Western is its attempt to respectfully represent Native American characters.

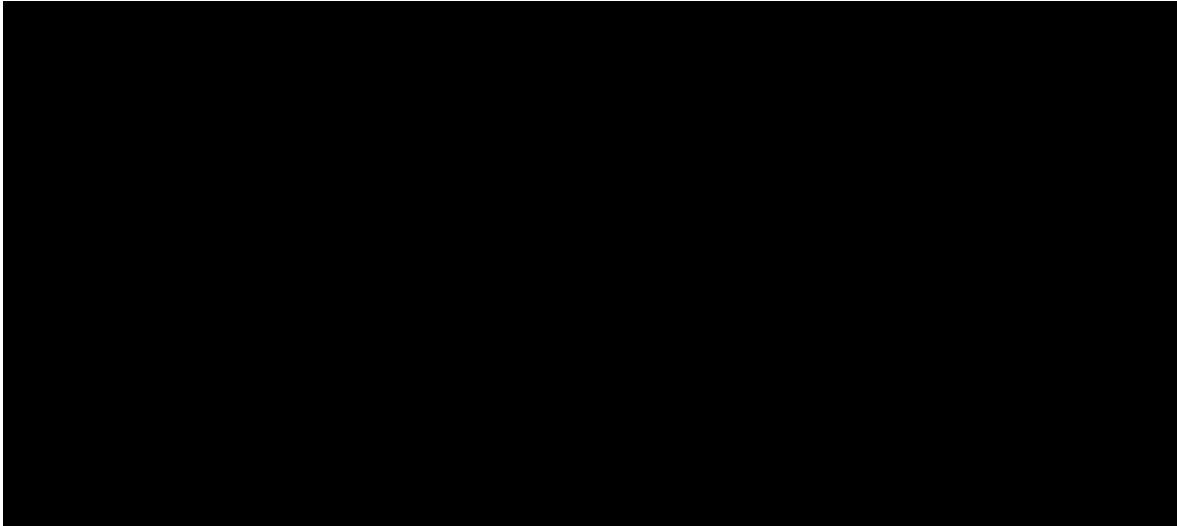
The Amerindian character of Lone Waite (Chief Dan George) offers appraisals of the Amerindian plight in the face of the expanding US. Waite references the “Trail of Tears” – the forced relocation of over 15,000 Cherokee from the eastern US in 1838 which killed 4000 en route. Josey Wales meets Lone Waite in this clip:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF8ETyOcDCE>

A key scene in the film is the meeting between Josey Wales and the Comanche chief, Ten Bears (Will Sampson). Wales rides to the camp of Ten Bears in order to establish his homestead on Comanche land through an honest parley – the exchange between the two men serves as a critique of US government policy from the perspective of each.

The Outlaw Josey Wales clip:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eg9A4k_z1Q

The agreement reached that they can indeed live together is both a statement on Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in North America and the wider issue of multicultural harmony. Additionally, the idea of only taking from the environment what is needed is also agreed upon.

The *Outlaw Josey Wales* is a progressive Western in articulating the need for the settler population to seek reconciliation with Indigenous nations.

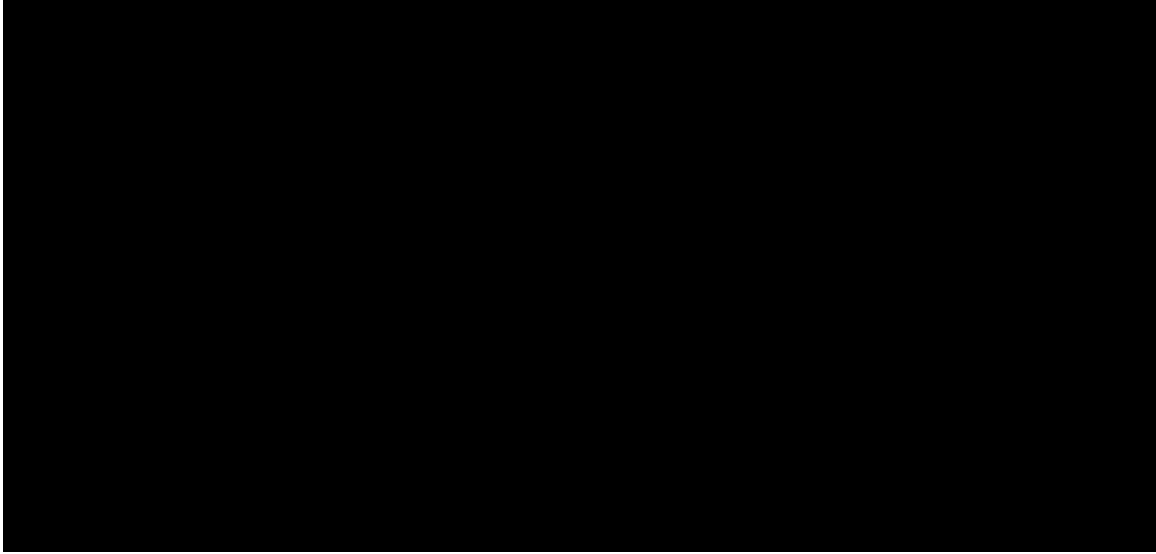
***Dances with Wolves* (1990)**

***Dances with Wolves*, directed by and starring Kevin Costner, can be viewed as an extension of the path began in the 1950s by serious Westerns to reconcile portrayals of the Old West with an Amerindian perspective.**

The story involves Union Army Lieutenant John Dunbar (played by Costner), who seeks a military post on the American frontier.

Dunbar soon meets a local Lakota Sioux tribe and establishes a level of communication with that tribe's shaman, Kicking Bird (Indigenous actor Graham Greene). In this scene, Dunbar attempts to communicate the sighting of bison/buffalo:

Dances with Wolves (Tatanka scene):

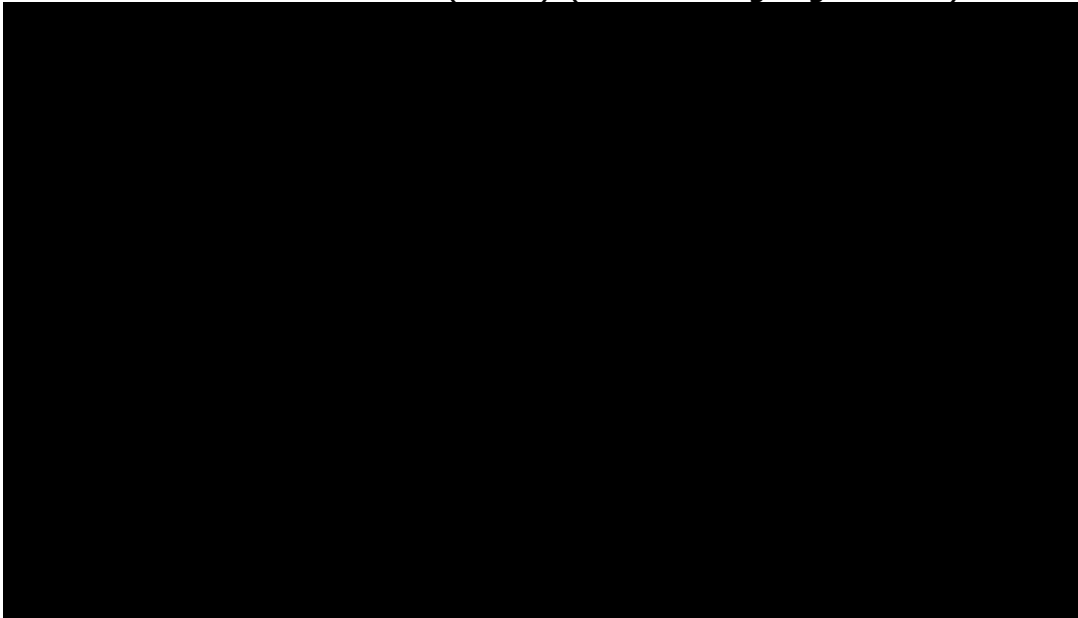


www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrGPW4O_5Cc

<http://w>

***Dance with Wolves* does seek a pro-Indigenous perspective in its use of both Native American actors and the Lakota language.**

Dances with Wolves (1990) (Lakota language scene):



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fdaG7ULqAo>

Paul Simpson (author of the optional course text) notes that the character of Dunbar is viewed by some as out-of-step with the historical era – Clint Eastwood enjoyed the film but saw Dunbar as “*kind of a contemporary guy out West who was interested in ecology and women’s rights and Indian rights.*” (4)

Some have critiqued the film for using the point-of-view of a Euro-American protagonist to share the Indigenous perspective – i.e. that the overall creative voice in the film is still not Indigenous.

REEL INJUN (2009)

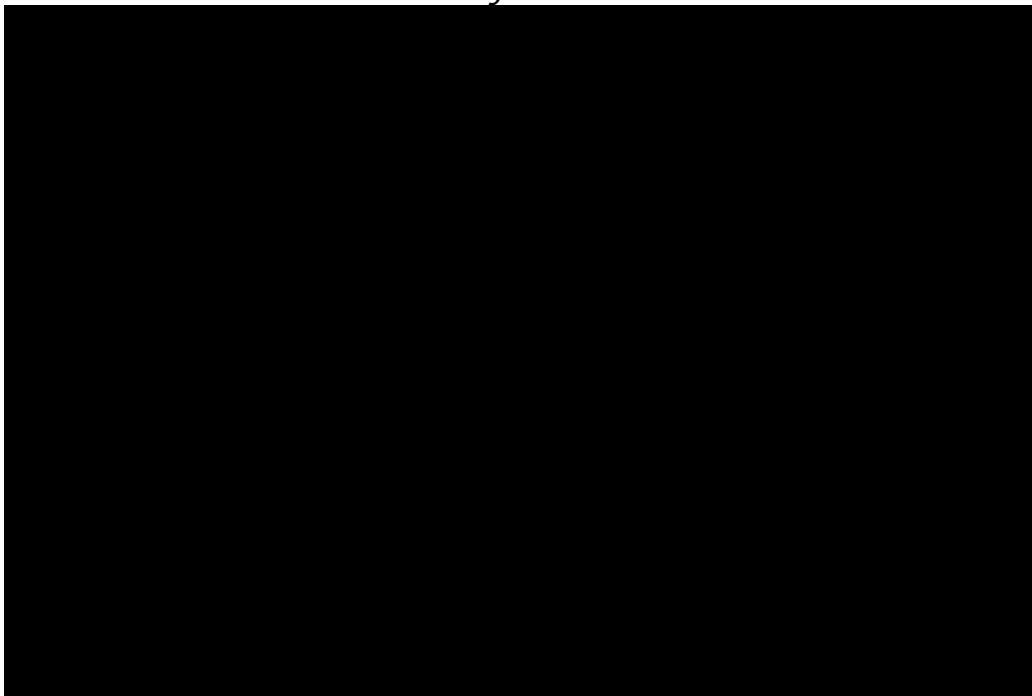
The documentary *Reel Injun* is a 2009 film directed by Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond, who is from the community of Waskaganish in northern Quebec.

The film provides an Indigenous perspective on the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in cinema.

***Reel Injun* includes clips from both classic and more contemporary film portrayals of Indigenous peoples and also examines the previous practice of using non-Native actors in Indigenous roles.**

***Reel Injun* has won a number of awards since its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2009.**

Reel Injun trailer:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htyEJSEZYNU>

SUMMARY

The standard depiction of Amerindians within pre-1950 Westerns was as an anonymous and collective threat to the expanding settler population in North America.

Inter-racial relationships in numerous Westerns were not tolerated by the Euro-American society - the Indigenous female character in relationships with white men could be killed off in such films.

The release of *Broken Arrow* in 1950 marked a movement by serious Westerns to present a more complete picture of Amerindian humanity.

***Dances with Wolves* (1990) built on that movement to definitely end the stereotype of Indigenous peoples as simply "savage" or "uncivilized".**

Documentaries such as *Reel Injun* provide the perspectives of Indigenous peoples toward their portrayals in Westerns.

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ASSIGNMENT#3

Some Westerns have explored inter-racial relationships between, for example, white men and Indigenous women. Many Westerns, however, did not allow those unions to last or be endorsed by white American society within the film.

Draw on your experience – from news media, recent film or personal knowledge – to comment on the following:

Does there still exist pressure for individuals to marry someone of their own background (be it from the same race, culture or religion)?

Which of the video clips in the Week 4 lecture did you find interesting? Why?

Provide examples as appropriate.

Tip: If a specific media source (e.g. online newspaper article) is used to complete this journal, please ensure that you properly footnote that source (see the Reflective Journal and Citation Guide info-sheets for further guidance).

Entry to be 1-2 pages (250 to 300 words).

DUE: Week 5

Notes:

1. Paul Simpson, *Rough Guide to Westerns*, First Edition (New York: Rough Guides Ltd., 2006), 208.
2. Robert Baird, "Going Indian: Discovery, Adoption and Renaming Toward a 'True American'," *The Western Reader* (1998): 278.
3. Baird, "Going Indian: Discovery, Adoption and Renaming Toward a 'True American'," 287-288.
4. Paul Simpson, *Rough Guide to Westerns*, First Edition (New York: Rough Guides Ltd., 2006), 61.