

UW American Indian Studies 325: American Indians in Film
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:15 120 Elvehjem Building

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30 to 4:30 and by appointment

Course description: This course critically examines the portrayal of American Indians in film, including documentaries and films made by Native filmmakers. Topics addressed are: early ethnographic film, political documentary, reflexivity, the portrayal of Native women, environmental degradation, the urban experience, indigenous aesthetics, silence, parody, re-appropriation and conventional representations. Case studies include: The Navajo Nation (Diné), Abanaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, Cayuga actor Gary Farmer, Mohawk filmmaker Shelley Niro, Inuit film company Isuma Productions, and historic photographer and filmmaker Edward Curtis. The construction of conventional American Indian representations will be critically analyzed and alternative imaging strategies explored.

Required text:

Singer, Beverly R. *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). ISBN: 0-8166-3161

Required articles:

The course reader is available through Bob's Copy Shop, 1401 University Avenue (608) 251-2936.

Assessment: Group Student Presentation (15%); Four Film Review Response Papers (3-4 pages @ 15% each); Final Research Paper (20% final submission, 5% draft). Guidelines for written assignments will be distributed. Style guidelines may be found in *A Short Guide to Writing about Art* by Sylvan Barnet (New Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2008).

The course may be taken for graduate credit with approval of the instructor. In general, graduate students will be responsible for required and recommended readings as well as extended course assignments.

*Each student will be expected to attend all classes and participate in class discussions. **Two or more absences will be grounds for subtracting points from your overall average.** As a rule, I do not accept late work. In the rare and extenuating instance in which I may accept late work, the paper will be marked down accordingly. Extra credit is not offered.*

Teaching philosophy and strategies: I strive to create a participatory classroom discussion setting, utilizing group work, short in-class written responses and student-led presentations. Individualized student research opportunities are encouraged and made available via papers and oral presentations. Active learning is sought, meaning honest self-reflection, questioning and real-world application grounded in careful reading and examination of the required texts.

Web resources:

Visible Evidence:

<http://www.visibleevidence.org/index.php>

National Museum of the American Indian Film and Video Festival:

http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/blue/nafvf_06.htm

Sundance Film Festival Native Forum:

http://www.sundance.org/festival/film_events/native_forum.asp

American Indian Film Festival:

<http://www.aifisf.com/>

ImagineNative Film + Media Arts Festival:

<http://www.imagenative.org/>

Week 1: January 22 and 24: What is Indigenous Cinema?

§ **Film:** *Tree*. Shelley Niro (2006).

• **Required reading:**

Singer, Beverly. Foreword, Introduction "Thinking Indian Thoughts," and Chapter One "Bringing Home Film and Video Making." In *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*, vii-13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

§ **Web resources:** Keep America Beautiful:
http://www.kab.org/site/PageServer?pagename=media_multimedia
Dave Chappelle: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kJzF-jemVg>

Week 2: January 29 and 31: What is Indigenous Cinema? continued...

- **Films:** *Suite: INDIAN*. Shelley Niro (2005).
A Thousand Roads. National Museum of the American Indian (2005).
- **Required readings:**
Singer, Beverly. Chapter Two "The War-Painted Years," and Chapter Three "Toward Independence." In *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*, 14-32 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
"September 21, 2004: A Native Universe Opens." In *American is Indian Country*, eds. José Barriero and Tim Johnson, 278-281 (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2005).
King, Frank J. III and Lise Balk King. "Director Chris Eyre Inspired by Filmmaking: Journey on A Thousand Roads." Press packet info. (Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. n.d.).

§ **Web resources:** Shelley Niro:
<http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/makers/fm274.shtml>

Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian:
<http://www.nmai.si.edu/>

Week 3: February 5 and 7: Historical Precedents: In the Land of War Canoes (1914)

- **Film:** *In the Land of War Canoes*. Edward S. Curtis (1914).
- **Required readings:**

Griffiths, Alison. "Science and Spectacle: Native American Representation in Early Cinema." In *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird, 79-95. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

Holm Bill and George Irving Quimby. "Introduction." In *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes: A Pioneer Cinematographer in the Pacific Northwest*, 13-17 and 26-30 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980).

- **Web resource:** "Shadow Catcher" by George Horse Capture: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/curtis_e.html

"Coming to Light" *The Photography of Edward S. Curtis*. Anne Makepeace (2000).

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

<http://www.makepeaceproductions.com/coming-to-light.html>

- **Recommended resources:**

Lyman, Christopher M. *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (New York: Pantheon Books, in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982).

Vizenor, Gerald. "Edward Curtis: Pictorialist and Ethnographic Adventurist." 2000:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/essay3.html>

Week 4: February 12 and 14: Historical Precedents: Nanook of the North (1922)

Response paper #1 due in class February 12

- **Films:** *Nanook of the North*. Robert Flaherty (1922). *Nanook Revisited*. Claude Massot (2005).
- **Required readings:**
Griffith, Richard. "Hudson Bay." In *The World of Robert Flaherty*, 3-43. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953).

- **Web Resource:** How I Filmed *Nanook of the North*:
http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/23_rf1_2.htm

Week 5: February 19 No class February 21st, Instructor attending College Art Association meetings: **Pocahontas: Representations of Native Women**

- **Film:** *The New World*. Terrence Malick (2006).
- **Required readings:**

Kidwell, Clara Sue. "Indian Women as Cultural Mediators." *Ethnohistory* 39, no.2 (Spring 1992):97-107.

Medicine, Beatrice. "North American Indigenous Women and Cultural Domination." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. 17, no. 3 (1993):121-130.

"Erasing Native American Stereotypes." Anthropology Outreach Office Smithsonian Institution Pamphlet. n.d.
<http://anthropology.si.edu/outreach/Indbibl/sterotyp.html>

- **Web resource:**
Indian Women as Sex Objects
<http://www.bluecorncomics.com/princess.htm>

Week 6: February 26 and 28: Pocahontas: Representations of Native Women, continued

- **Films:** *Pocahontas*. Disney (1995).
<http://disney.go.com/disneyvideos/animatedfilms/pocahontas/>

Umbilicus. Gabe Shaw (2001).

- **Required readings:**
Strong, Pauline Turner. "Animated Indians: Critique and Contradiction in Commodified Children's Culture." *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3(1996): 405-424.

Amnesty International Report. "Violence Against Women is Unabated." *Indian Country Today* April 27, 2007.
<http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1096414933>

Young, Philip. "The Mother of Us All: Pocahontas." In *American Fiction, American Myth*, 25-46 (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

- **Web resource:** Andrea Smith: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide (March, 2006):
<http://www.mediamouse.org/video/>

**Week 7: March 4 and 6: The Politics of Representation -
The Environment**

Response paper #2 due in class March 4

- **Film:** *Return of Navajo Boy*. Jeff Spitz (2000).
- **Required readings:**
Peck, Sam. "Constructing 'The Navajo': Visual and Literary Representation From Inside and Out." *Wicazo Sa Review*, 15, no. 1, *The Secular Past, the Mythic Past, and the Impending Future*. (Spring, 2000): 137-156.

Spieldoch, Rachel L. "Uranium Is in My Body." In *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues*, ed. Duane Champagne, 307-316 (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press. 1999).

- **Web resources:**
<http://www.navajo.org/history.htm>

<http://www.navajoboy.com/>

**Week 8: March 11 and 13: The Politics of Representation -
The Land**

- **Film:** *Kanehsatake: 270 Tears of Resistance*. Alanis Obomsawin (1993)
- **Required readings:**
Lewis, Randolph. "Documentary on The Middle Ground." In *Alanis Obomsawin: The Vision of a Native Filmmaker*, 88-121(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).
- **Web resource: National Film Board of Canada:**

<http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=29368>

[http://www.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/visau/index.php?mode=h
ome&language=english](http://www.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/visau/index.php?mode=h
ome&language=english)

[http://www.dontshootthemessengers.com/talktome/kanehsatak
e.html](http://www.dontshootthemessengers.com/talktome/kanehsatak
e.html)

Week 9: March 18 and 20: Spring Break

Week 10: March 25 and 27: Self-Representations - Identity

- **Film:** *Navajo Talking Picture*. Arlene Bowman (1986).
- **Readings:**
Singer, Beverly. Chapter Four "Native Filmmakers, Programs, and Institutions, Chapter Five "On the Road to Smoke Signals," and Conclusion, 33-99. In *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Jackson, Deborah Davis. "'This Hole in Our Heart': The Urban-Raised Generation and the Legacy of Silence." *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, eds. Susan Lobo and Kurt Peters, 189-206. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001).

Ruby, Jay. "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology and Film." *Semiotica* 30-1/2 (1980): 153-179.

Week 11: April 1 and 3: Self-Representations - Identity continued

Response paper #3 due in class April 1st

- **Film:** *Intrepid Shadows*. Alfred Clah (1966).
- **Required readings:**
Mead, Margaret. "Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration of Film Communication and Anthropology, A Review." *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 2, no. 2(Fall 1975):122-124.

Worth, Sol and John Adair. Chapter 14 "Intrepid Shadows and the Outsider." In *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration of Film Communication and Anthropology*. 208-227 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997). Available on the internet at:
<http://isc.temple.edu/TNE/PDFs/TNEChapter14.pdf>

Week 12: April 8 and 10 Actor Gary Farmer

- **Films:** *Pow Wow Highway*. Jonathan Wacks (1989).
Dead Man. Jim Jarmusch (1996).
Smoke Signals. Chris Eyre 1998).
- **Required Reading:**
Ryan, Allan J. "Postmodern Parody: A Political Strategy in Contemporary Canadian Art." *Art Journal* 51, no.3 (Autumn 1992): 59-92.

Medicine, Bea. "The Anthropologist as the Indian's Image-Maker." *The Indian Historian*. 4, no.3 (Fall 1971):27-29.
- **Web resource:**
Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian:
http://www.nativenetworks.si.edu/eng/rose/farmer_g.htm

Week 13: April 15 and 17 Indigenous Productions

Response paper #4 due in class April 15

- **Film:** Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner
- **Required reading:**

Kunuk, Zacharias and Puhipau. "Dialogue: Pumipau in Conversation with Zacharias Kunuk." In *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Narrative New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, eds. Melanie Townsend, Dana Claxton, Steve Loft, 43-59 (Hamilton, Ontario: Art Gallery of Hamilton and the Indigenous Media Arts Group, 2005).

- **Web resources:** Isuma Productions:

<http://www.atanarjuat.com/>

<http://www.isuma.ca/home#>

Week 14: April 22 and 24: Shelley Niro

- **Film:** *The Shirt*. Shelley Niro (2003).
- **Required reading:**
Mithlo, Nancy. "Re-appropriating Redskins - Pellerossasogna (Red Skin Dream): Shelley Niro at the 50th La Biennale di Venezia." *Visual Anthropology Review* 20 no.2 (2005):22-35.

Week 15: April 29, May 1: Student Presentations

Attendance will be taken.

Week 16: May 6 and May 8: Student Presentations

Attendance will be taken.

Final Papers are due on the day of your scheduled presentation. No extensions are granted.