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# The Burden of Historical Representation: The Case of/for Indigenous Film

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THE CLICHÉD and often-repeated claim that “history is written by the victors” is as true for history films as it is for the historical record. More accurately, the historical film is created (written, produced, directed, and funded) by—and for—the victors who represent the interests of the dominant culture. This is particularly true for blockbuster Hollywood films about indigenous peoples that are widely distributed throughout U.S. and world movie houses. From American Westerns to colonial and even post-colonial films set in Africa, Australia, or Asia, indigenous peoples appear on screen, but are rarely given voice or provided the opportunity to share their perspective or have their history represented. Too often, indigenous peoples are viewed as existing only in the past; the inclusion of indigenous groups in history standards and textbooks similarly reflects a virtual extinction of groups such as American Indians at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we explore the nature of film that is both *about* and now more often made *for/by* indigenous peoples and its potential as a medium for introducing and engaging students in the study of indigenous history and perspectives in secondary classrooms. As a framework for analysis, we examine to what extent these films meet the burden of historical representation,<sup>2</sup> a construct we developed from the film studies concept of a “burden of representation.”<sup>3</sup> We also examine the potential use of film

representing indigenous history with secondary students to raise questions about the common historical narratives taught in schools, to present events or perspectives that typically are marginalized or ignored in the school curriculum, and to examine how film represents the views and histories of different groups. The analysis we present here is grounded in the context in which film is produced, distributed, and viewed.

Selecting four films as case studies, we then apply the burden of historical representation framework to an exploration of what may be considered indigenous films or films about/for indigenous people, and consider the questions raised to further develop the framework. We use this analysis to illustrate how the concept of the burden of historical representation can be a useful tool both for teachers and teacher educators to select media for their classes and to prepare their respective students to become critically aware consumers and users of film. Although students are very familiar with watching film in the secondary history class, they are not necessarily taught skills in analyzing and decoding what they view.

### **Film *About* and *For/By* Indigenous People: The Problem of Definition**

There is some disagreement about what counts as indigenous film. Indigenous film can be categorized into two classes: film *about* indigenous peoples and histories, such as *Nanook of the North* (1922) or *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and film *for* or *by* indigenous peoples, such as *Smoke Signals* (1998). Additionally, any attempts to provide a conclusive and explicit definition of what constitutes an indigenous people is going to be somewhat problematic—as there is no one, clear, agreed-upon definition by international organizations. At its core, “First Nation” or “indigenous” refers to the group of people who first settles an area or country—and most definitions include some reference to the ancestors of these initial groups or first peoples.<sup>4</sup> Indigenous peoples are distinguished because of the retained customs, languages, and worldviews that have been inherited. Still others view indigenous peoples as those groups living in a particular area when encountered by a dominant foreign culture (e.g., Western, European, or Asian empires).

Because of the complex and often-tragic histories of indigenous peoples as well as historic migration patterns, it is important to recognize—and be able to discuss with students—the issues of power inherent in labeling groups. More specifically, it is important to examine who controls the label of “indigenous” and how it is applied to groups who may or may not view themselves as indigenous, or who may or may not fit particular definitions utilized by national governments or international organizations.<sup>5</sup>

In the United States, for example, indigenous American Indian groups may be privileged with particular rights and resources if they are recognized by the federal government as being indigenous, while other groups who self-identify as indigenous but who do not meet the criteria may not receive these same privileges. This is particularly true in the Southeast U.S., where the history of race laws often conflate American Indian with “colored” or white. For our purposes here, we are attempting to identify opportunities for carefully and thoughtfully raising questions related to indigenous groups’ histories and perspectives for the secondary history classroom, and are not attempting to promote a particular strict definition for who is or is not indigenous.

Rather, we would like students to recognize the rich diversity among indigenous peoples from any particular region, regardless of official status; it is easy to make generalizations about peoples who currently reside within a particular nation-state (e.g., American Indians), but it is important to remember that their affiliation and location as a people or nation may not readily map onto current notions of citizenship as defined by current boundaries of a nation-state—and that also within these larger groups, there are often many sub-groups with distinct histories and cultures. We would also like to engage students in exploring the issues of power surrounding indigenous groups, their complex histories, and their contemporary and historical perspectives, and use film or other media as a venue for engaging in these inquiries and discussions.

Film and other visual media in particular may be better able to illustrate or represent the types of indigenous knowledge or indigenous epistemologies that are often excluded from the historical canon or valued alongside more Western views of knowledge—in particular, views on the relationship between humanity and the environment.<sup>6</sup> Further, media development and use has grown within many indigenous communities. As Faye Ginsburg explains, not only are indigenous groups diverse, so is their production and use of media forms. She gives the example of the Aborigine groups in Australia and their development of media since the 1970s:

Aboriginal media productions are as various as Aboriginal life itself, ranging from low-budget videos made by community-based media associations for both traditional people in remote settlements and groups in urban centers; to regional television and radio programming for Aboriginal groups throughout Central Australia made by organizations such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA); to legal or instructional videos (often quite creative) made by land councils as well as health and other service groups; to documentaries and current affairs for national broadcasting; to independent features directed by cosmopolitan Aboriginal artists such as Tracey Moffatt whose first feature film, *Bedevil*, premiered at Cannes in 1993.<sup>7</sup>

Ginsburg examines how indigenous media are used within local communities, at the national level, and internationally, and the impact that these purposes and modes of production have on the style and content of the media—as well as the different purposes and intended audiences. The value both for indigenous peoples as well as for the rest of the world is the knowledge that can be learned and preserved from indigenous peoples, both of the past as well as scientific, environmental, agricultural, and cultural or spiritual knowledge. It is this knowledge and worldview that presents so much potential for indigenous film production to provide rich and powerful learning opportunities for the classroom.

Unfortunately, because of the cost of producing films and the desire for filmmakers to make films that appeal to the broad and largely Western audiences, few films historically have reflected this indigenous knowledge or the history of indigenous peoples from their perspectives. Starting with films such as D. W. Griffith's *The Zulu's Heart* (1908) and probably peaking during the post-colonial 1950s and 1960s with films such as John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) to Cy Endfield and Stanley Baker's *Zulu* (1964), indigenous people are historically included in Western cinema to gaze at, fear, and kill. Even at the time when *Zulu* was released, many questioned the imagery used and the role of the indigenous in the overall narrative, including one review that asked whether the “ideal of the white man's burden, which this picture tacitly presents (for all its terminal disgust with the slaughter), [is] in the contemporary spirit?”<sup>8</sup>

However, these representations of indigenous and formerly colonized peoples as fodder for Western peoples' cannons continue. This is particularly true in Western/frontier genre television series such as AMC's *Hell on Wheels* (2011) and cinematic war dramas such as *Blackhawk Down* (2001) or *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young* (2002). For example, in both *Blackhawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers Once*, masses of generic nameless and faceless “others” get gunned down as part of a narrative of a fight for freedom and as an illustration of the technological advantage of the U.S. military. We have also seen indigenous “peoples” of other worlds displayed in science fiction films, most notably the “Ewoks” of *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* fame (1983) and the “Na'vi” of *Avatar* (2009). These are films about or including indigenous characters, but they are not films *by or for* indigenous peoples. These representations are, of course, varied across films and some can be quite thoughtful and provide insights into indigenous peoples' cultures, experiences, and views.

Other films, usually smaller and independent productions or documentaries, have emerged to attempt to represent the views and histories of these “othered” or historically marginalized and colonized indigenous groups. Released just two years after *Zulu* (which does, to its

credit, make some small attempts to include respect for the Zulu tribe and its history), another film, *The Battle of Algiers*, more directly reflects the rapidly changing post-colonial world. Commissioned by the new Algerian government, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) provides an account of the Algerian fight for independence from France. Although the writer and director were Italians with Marxist leanings, the perspectives are from Algerians who were involved, and many of the actors are former revolutionaries playing themselves. This is a film *for* and largely *by* people indigenous to North Africa. It presents the perspectives of the revolutionaries who resisted and fought against French colonial rule, but it is important to note that it does not include the perspectives of all Algerians, as there were those who flourished under French rule and those who were largely separate from the conflict. *The Battle of Algiers* also illustrates the complexities surrounding the Algerian revolution and those involved on both sides, but does it reflect the histories and worldviews of groups indigenous to this region? Or is the film simply a product of the larger Cold War and post-colonial era? Regardless, the perspectives in the film are more inclusive to the history of these marginalized groups than previous films such as *Zulu*.

Of course, films including indigenous perspectives utilize many different narrative and genre forms. The film *Babakiueria* (1988), by comparison, explores the complexities of how indigenous groups are often naively (mis)represented in film and presents a subtle examination of Australian Aboriginal issues. Made by an Australian Aboriginal group, this film satirizes, and, in doing so, challenges the type of ethnographic documentary films made *about* indigenous people—the documentaries that often present simplistic explanations of the rituals and customs of the “exotic other” through the convention of pretentious “expert/scientific” sound-bites and narrative. By reversing the roles of the characters, *Babakiueria* begins with Indigenous Australians arriving by boat to “discover” a beach populated by European Australians. These “discoverers” soon learn from the inhabitants that the given name of this land is “Barbecue Area” (translated as “Babakiueria”), and so begins the discoverers’ efforts to “scientifically” describe the issues facing European Australians. Of course, their explanations of the activities and culture of the European Australians are complete misreads and, thus, challenge both the earlier documentary form and the continued stereotypes of Aboriginal life and culture. This film was made to challenge common beliefs about Aborigines and to challenge Western ethnocentrism, but is this film *for* or *about* indigenous groups? The filmmakers are Australian, but many of the actors are Aboriginal. Although these are not blockbuster-scale productions, several key factors have provided more opportunities for indigenous filmmakers or filmmakers interested in presenting indigenous perspectives in recent years.

As large Hollywood film productions now seek out international sites to produce their films, since it is often less costly to produce a film abroad, the capacity for producing indigenous films in these nations, such as Canada and Australia, has also increased. This increase in the ability to produce films has in turn aided the indigenous film industry.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, the indigenous film industry has grown as a result of advances in technology that make independent and documentary productions more attainable, as well as the emergence of prominent American Indian writers and directors who have begun to make films that are appealing both to indigenous and non-indigenous audiences alike. Chris Eyre's 1998 film *Smoke Signals* is one of the first feature films to be made by an Indian director, featuring American Indian cast members and a story that focuses on a modern story of native culture that also transcends audiences in its "coming of age" storyline of young men struggling as they grow to adulthood. After a century of stereotypes, generalizations, and historicizations, *Smoke Signals* helps to challenge film representations and historic stereotypes of American Indians while also providing a compelling narrative that is engaging for both native and non-native peoples. Contrasting portrayals of the "savage" in hundreds of films, this film attempts to provide a different perspective for American Indians. Both *The Battle of Algiers* and *Smoke Signals*, however, have a great burden placed on them. Since they are so few in number, and do not have the distribution power of the large and well-funded Hollywood production companies, the representations, narratives, and perspectives in these films hold a great weight.

Films that include indigenous histories and perspectives are extremely complex as historical texts and mediums for instruction because they cross-cinematic and cultural boundaries. It is important to recognize the importance of examining indigenous film within the historical, social, economic, and cultural context in which it is produced, and in relation to the histories of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.<sup>10</sup> Ginsburg quotes Langton to explain this relationship and the need to think about the relationship between viewer and text when engaging indigenous film:

"Aboriginality" arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue, whether in actual lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book.<sup>11</sup>

This point is particularly relevant when considering standards for examining and considering indigenous texts, as there are obvious negotiations over aesthetic, narrative, and production techniques that reflect indigenous over dominant culture values (e.g., what is considered beautiful, cosmology, ecology). This negotiation will result in different products depending on

the intended audience for any production and how it is distributed and viewed. For example, if an indigenous filmmaker is producing a film for a broad audience, he or she may include aspects of both indigenous and non-indigenous aesthetics and genre forms; likewise, if made for a specific indigenous group or to reflect a particular culture, the aesthetics may be grounded more solely in that worldview. These films can have different value for indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike, while also helping to bridge understandings and audiences, especially when it comes to films that provide different perspectives, interpretations, and missing episodes from the past. Our purpose here is not to define or typologize an indigenous genre, but to explore what characteristics of film made for and by indigenous groups may be affordances for engaging secondary history students in important and complex indigenous histories and worldviews.

### **The Burden of Historical Representation**

In order to better understand the value of, and issues that surround, film made about historically marginalized groups, we developed the concept of the burden of historical representation.<sup>12</sup> Film and cultural scholars Shohatt and Stam explain that when it comes to film representations of historically marginalized groups, there is a “burden of representation”—and that unlike filmic representations of dominant groups, there is a greater burden on films about marginalized groups in terms of the stereotypes they pervade or the role they play in social and cultural reproduction.<sup>13</sup> We furthered this conceptualization into the “burden of historical representation” as a model for examining how well films represent the pasts and perspectives of historically marginalized groups.<sup>14</sup> We found this concept to be particularly poignant and useful since history teachers often use film as a medium to teach about the history of marginalized groups, such as African Americans (e.g., *Glory*) and American Indians (e.g., *Dances With Wolves*).<sup>15</sup> Specifically, we argued that the burden of historical representation could be met “through developing complex characters and rich personal stories that challenge traditional historical and film narratives, which have generally focused on Eurocentric history and appealed to white audiences.”<sup>16</sup>

Using two films, *Glory* (1989) and *Amistad* (1997), as a case study to apply our framework for analysis, we examined how well these films met this burden of historical representation. In particular, we focused on the context of each film’s production, how each film acts as a historical source, and each film’s narrative structures, perspectives, and representations. We found that this analysis of the perspectives presented in film, essentially identifying who is telling the story and whose voice is included, was particularly useful. Each of the films used white male characters to tell



much of the story, and fictionalized important aspects of the story. Further, the narratives of the film were designed to appeal to what was likely a majority white and middle-class audience.<sup>17</sup> Also, although resistance was shown, the members of the marginalized group were only successful with the help of the white protagonists in the film.

Our use of the burden of historical representation does not imply that we believe films can be completely historically accurate or even need to be to provide an effective medium for teachers to engage in the past. However, teachers need to consider the perspectives of the films and other media they engage students with and provide students with the opportunity to analyze, interpret, and contextualize the stories that are being told. We concluded in this earlier work that films that are not largely written, produced, and acted by members of the marginalized groups face challenges in meeting this burden because of historical, financial, and institutional constraints in the film industry—and the desire, in the end, to make money. In this sense, we place the context of film production and reception at the core of our analysis, and extend this notion in the rest of this paper. As Hoechsmann and Poyntz explain, media literacy must include an analysis not only of film texts, but also of the context of the film's production, including who made the film, who financed it, the political and social context of the period of production, and how the film was received at the time of production.<sup>18</sup>

This notion of context and perspective are particularly important when examining films that include indigenous groups, especially as this body of media has grown significantly over the past few decades as a result of the changing technologies and a growing desire to capture the perspectives and histories of historically marginalized groups and indigenous peoples. Therefore, we use the framework of the burden of historical representation here as a starting point for examining the nature of indigenous films and how they may be able to meet this burden. We also explore the specific characteristics that may be indicative of indigenous film and the issues of representation and pedagogy that may help teachers include these perspectives effectively and thoughtfully.

### **Analysis of Four Films**

This study examines how film for/by indigenous groups has the potential to better meet this burden of historical representation and provide a medium for examining the perspectives, cultures, and histories of indigenous peoples in secondary history classes. Although there have been a great number of well-made documentary films focused on indigenous history and culture, such as *A Good Day to Die* (2010) and *Smokin' Fish* (2011),

and many made by indigenous peoples, such as *You are on Indian Land* (1969); *Two Laws* (1981); and *Cheiro de Pequi* [The Smell of the Pequi Fruit] (2006), we focus here on feature film because of the power that this medium holds in establishing and maintaining common historical narratives. The focus on feature film is also due to our earlier analysis of *Glory* and *Amistad* that illustrates the influence of the film industry and the industry's need to draw a larger audience than many documentary films to make up for the higher cost of production. This could be an example of what critical race theorists would call "interest convergence."<sup>19</sup> Also, in our previous survey of history teachers, we found that they are more likely to use some or all of feature films than documentaries.<sup>20</sup> Although feature films made for Hollywood profit are likely more susceptible to the homogenizing quality of the dominant media culture and forms, the vast array of aesthetic and narrative choices that go into a feature film also allows more freedom for distinctly indigenous forms. Are films featuring indigenous groups, histories, and cultures being made today, especially for/by indigenous people, meeting the burden and engaging students in a more complex understanding of the past?

We use a broad concept of "indigenous" for selecting these films, as it is difficult to label which groups should or should not be identified as being indigenous. Further, films such as *The Battle of Algiers* were made before the term became more commonplace and before the international community began defining indigenous group rights. Even when a strict definition is used, it is difficult to apply to many groups who identify as indigenous around the globe. For example, American Indian groups slowly migrated west as the European colonies and then United States expanded, so it is difficult to determine exactly the homelands of different groups. Similarly, North Africa has a long history of conquests and the mixing of various historic ethnic groups (e.g., Greeks, Phoenicians).

Given that our focus is on identifying films for use in history classes, we used the criteria that the groups and events depicted in these selected films represent those groups that lived in the area at a time of Western or dominant culture colonization or conquest, and that the group would be viewed as historically marginalized from the dominant culture. One could make the case that films such as *Michael Collins* (1996) or *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), two films that tell the story of Irish revolt against British rule, could possibly fit these criteria of indigenous. However, here, we focus on non-Western indigenous groups. We also recognize that, at times, there are issues between indigenous groups within a given geographic area, historical conflicts between indigenous and colonial powers, and hierarchies of indigenous groups in a given region, and also factored these into our analysis of the films.

We selected four films that represent different periods, purposes, and film genres, including two “historic” examples and two contemporary examples that focus on indigenous peoples from Algeria and the United States. These are also films that we felt might likely be used in a secondary history course to teach about the history or culture of these indigenous groups. These films are *La battaglia di Algeri* [The Battle of Algiers] (1966), *Indigènes* [Days of Glory] (2006), *Smoke Signals* (1998), and *The Only Good Indian* (2009).

The four films also represent particular time periods, social and political contexts, and styles. The portrayals in *The Battle of Algiers* and *Days of Glory* center on conflict and wars, while *Smoke Signals* and *The Only Good Indian* focus on personal struggles and identity within historical contexts and reflect issues in American Indian history. Although *Smoke Signals* does not purport itself to be a “history film” per se, it was made in response to the many history-focused films and stereotypes of American Indians on film, and it represents the values and issues of a particular historic and geographic context.<sup>21</sup> We are also looking at it as “historic” not in the sense that it is old, but because it represented a particular breakthrough in American Indian filmmaking. Both of these pairs of films also show a progression in filmmaking and the histories being told about the indigenous groups who are represented. These four films and their filmmakers are described briefly below, along with the steps taken to analyze them.

***Smoke Signals* (1998).** Directed by Chris Eyre, who is of Cheyenne/Arapaho descent, this feature film follows two young men from the Coeur d’Alene reservation in Idaho as they travel to retrieve the remains of one of the men’s estranged father. Victor (Adam Beach) and Thomas (Evan Adams) spend much of the film searching for themselves in this coming of age “dramedy” that challenges many stereotypes of Indian culture while also providing some self-reflection of the contemporary issues facing many native peoples (e.g., preserving culture, alcoholism, poverty). The writer of the film is Sherman Alexie, who is of Spokane/Coeur d’Alene descent and who grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. The cast is comprised almost entirely of American Indians, and the film debuted in 1998 at the Sundance Film Festival. *Smoke Signals* was produced for a budget of roughly two million dollars by Shadow Catcher Entertainment and was distributed by Miramax films.<sup>22</sup>

***The Only Good Indian* (2009).** In contrast to *Smoke Signals*, *The Only Good Indian* is set in the past and works to challenge common historical narratives of the experiences of the Western American Indian peoples and the roles of Indians in this history. The film was directed by Kevin Willmott, an African American writer, director, and film studies professor at the University of Kansas, who is probably most famous for *C.S.A.* (2004),

a poignantly cynical mockumentary that attempts to portray what the U.S. would be like if it instead became the Confederate States of America. *The Only Good Indian* is set in Kansas at the turn of the twentieth century. The story revolves around a young boy, later given the Christian name of Charlie, who is taken from his family on the reservation to a boarding school to be assimilated, to “kill the Indian, save the man.” The scenes at the boarding school provide a constructed view into the horrors that occurred in the countless number of boarding schools across the West during this period. These scenes, and later scenes at a mental asylum, are not any more graphic than a current network television program, but symbolize horrible events and actions from the past. When Charlie escapes and attempts to get back to his family, a Cherokee detective by the name of Sam (Wes Studi) is sent to catch him and bring him back to the school. Sam, who professes to “out-white man the white man” provides the film with opportunities to explore the various ways that the United States has used Indian peoples throughout its history, even against one another. *The Only Good Indian* premiered in 2009 at the Sundance Film Festival.

***La battaglia di Algeri [The Battle of Algiers] (1966).*** *The Battle of Algiers* was financed in large part by the Algerian government and was made in the wake of the Algerian’s successful revolution with, and separation from, France. The film was written and directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, an Italian of Jewish descent who had helped lead a resistance group in Italy against the Nazis during World War II. The film was commissioned to show both sides of the revolution, meaning the French government and military in Algeria and the Algerian FLN revolutionaries (there were other sides that are largely absent—including pro-French Algerians). The themes of the film illustrate some of the Marxist revolutionary ideas of the period and reflect the early post-colonial perspective. The film was described as very realistic at the time, with footage shot in the streets of Algiers, in particular, the section of the city referred to as the Casbah, and because many of the Algerian actors and extras play the roles they played in the actual revolution. The film was banned in France for five years after its release at the Venice Film Festival. It was nominated for several Academy Awards, including Best Foreign Language Film, and was even supposedly screened in the Pentagon in 2003 as an example of how not to fight a guerilla war. The themes of the film, bombings of cafes by the revolutionaries and the torture and killing of the FLN by French Paratroopers, are reminiscent of images and news footage from the battle zones of Iraq and Afghanistan.

***Indigènes [Days of Glory] (2006).*** Similar to *The Battle of Algiers*, *Days of Glory* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It also serves as a prequel of sorts for *The Battle of Algiers*,

despite being produced forty years later. It tells the story of the roughly 300,000 Maghreb soldiers who fought for Free France during World War II. These forces included ethnic Arabs and Berbers primarily from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, all former French colonies. The film was made as a remembrance and memorial for these soldiers who, although never having been to France, fought for their “homeland.” The film focuses on two primary groups of soldiers and fits for the most part within the World War II war film genre—but also goes to great lengths to highlight the discrimination faced by colonial soldiers who were treated differently from the ethnically French soldiers. It also includes some foreshadowing of the later fight for independence and the end of the French colonial era. This film, like *The Battle of Algiers*, is filmed with largely Arab actors of Algerian and Moroccan descent and includes sweeping scenes both of Algeria and the battlefields of Italy and Southern France where these forces distinguished themselves in combat. Rachid Bouchareb, a French filmmaker of Algerian descent, made the film, which premiered at the Venice Film Festival.

The four films were analyzed using the burden of historical representation framework outlined above, in particular, focusing on how well each film develops complex characters, especially indigenous characters; includes rich personal perspectives and stories; and constructs stories that challenge (or reinforce) traditional Western historical narratives and film genres. Further, because of the focus on indigenous peoples, we looked for aspects of different aesthetic choices and worldviews that may be included through narrative structures or cinematic elements. Finally, we examined the context of the films, who the directors and writers were, who the film was made for, and the context of its production. Through this analysis, we wanted to understand how and if these films meet the criteria for the burden of historical representation and what issues arise when examining film made for, by, or about indigenous groups as a representation of culture and history for classroom use, at least in the small sample represented here.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings from the analysis of the four films are presented below in four central themes: 1) narratives and genre; 2) characters and perspectives; 3) aesthetics of place and worldview; and 4) context of production and distribution. In addition, there is discussion that begins to connect the analysis of the film to the potentials for the classroom. Each section concludes with questions that emanate from the analysis, questions that will hopefully be useful in thinking about the roles of indigenous films in teaching history, and the issues that these films raise about the past and

Film	Genre Conventions	Challenges to Dominant Narratives or Histories
<i>Smoke Signals</i>	Coming of Age/ Road Trip	Challenges stereotypical representations of American Indians on film. Presents issues of identity and masculinity.
<i>The Only Good Indian</i>	Western/Frontier	Presents issues of identity and assimilation. Presents powerful images of an Indian boarding school, mental asylum, and black community in turn-of-the-century Kansas that challenge common historical narratives of the West.
<i>The Battle of Algiers</i>	War Film/ Resistance Film (Marxist)	Presents perspectives of French and FLN intended to inspire other colonial revolutions—today read as relevant to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Provides a snapshot into the historical complexities of the period and desire to justify war and oppression on both sides.
<i>Days of Glory</i>	War Film (World War II)	Tells story of indigenous colonial soldiers who made up large portions of Allied armies during World War II. Raises issues of discrimination in these armies and foretells of coming post-colonial period. Serves as a memorial of sorts to the soldiers.

**Figure 1:** Film genre conventions and narrative structures in the four selected films.

about their use in the classroom. There are also questions that teachers may use in their classes to generate dialogue and engage students in analyzing the different aspects of indigenous film that we explore.

*Narratives and Genre*

There are two major themes that emerge when analyzing the narrative structures and generic formulas of these films. First, all of the films represent resistance either explicitly in the narrative or as subtext. They also represent justice and injustice. Second, the films show a mix of using narrative and genre conventions associated with mainstream Western cinema while also incorporating indigenous themes and worldviews (see **Figure 1**). The latter

is particularly true for the two American Indian films—while the Algerian films represent more post-colonial themes of revolution (*The Battle of Algiers*) and remembrance and commemoration (*Days of Glory*).

*Smoke Signals* encapsulates the core of the coming of age, road trip comedy genre film that incorporates the issues facing contemporary Indian culture, especially regarding the experience of those peoples who are split between life on and off reservation and the identity issues that particularly impact the younger generation, as represented by Victor and Thomas. Similarly, *The Only Good Indian* utilizes the narrative framework of a Western or frontier film while also challenging traditional views of Indian identity and notions of assimilation. These films challenge stereotypes and the view of historic and modern Indian experiences through different modes in accordance to the genre conventions. *Smoke Signals* challenges stereotypes through more comedic elements, often using satire to counter the prevalent notion that Indian culture and society hasn't changed in the past 200 years. It also shows that despite challenges in reservation life, Indian culture is still maintained and natural universals of camaraderie and becoming a man translate across cultures.

*The Only Good Indian* challenges our understanding of the history of the West by showing the graphic abuse that young Indian people endured at boarding schools, including the erasing of their identity through having their hair cut, being forced to wear Western clothing, taking a Christian name (which is placed on a note card hanging from the student's neck), and having to speak only English. Charlie is shown being beaten and having his mouth washed with soap for refusing to speak English, thus being a "bad Indian" according to the teacher (equally disturbing is the scene in the mental asylum where these "bad Indians" were sent). However, the director shows us that Charlie is already literate in English and is reading *Jekyll and Hyde*, but resists being forced to give up his native language and identity. Here, Willmott shows the audience visually that Charlie and his classmates are not less civilized or of lesser backgrounds, in juxtaposition to an evolutionary chart that the teacher shows to explain how Indians will be taken "off the warpath" to become assimilated. These visuals are included to remind the audience of America's eugenicist past as well as the active resistance to assimilation on the part of Charlie and other Indian youth.

In *The Battle of Algiers* and *Days of Glory*, we also see this genre coherence as well as themes of resistance—outright revolution against the French in *The Battle of Algiers* and resistance to discrimination and the views of the French officers in *Days of Glory*. Again, scenes show the power and worth of the Indigenes on the battlefield and off. There are also common war film conventions used, including the inept officer and the tough, battle-hardened sergeant characters. In *Days of Glory*, the

indigenous forces are shown fighting bravely in France and Italy despite being used as cannon fodder for Nazi guns. They are also depicted as intelligent and having power, as the character of Corporal Abdelkader is shown studying the field manual to advance in rank and Messaoud is shown falling in love with a French woman.

These forms of power are met with stiff resistance from their French commanders, in the form of discrimination against the Maghreb soldiers. The Arab soldiers are not given the same food as the ethnically French soldiers and Messaoud's letters to his new love are censored so that he will give up his hopes of finding her again. In the end, the indigenous soldiers are shown to be both better soldiers and better people, in many ways, than their French colonial rulers. This is a theme that is a bit more ambiguous but also present in *The Battle of Algiers*, depending on the audience. In today's context, the bombings of public places, cafes, and markets, and the guerilla warfare match the nightly news all too closely—as does the French Army's use of torture against potential FLN informants. However, for the period of the mid-1960s, at the height of the colonial independence movement, those under colonial rule would have likely felt empowered by the film. Overall, this film has the feel of World War II resistance films, with the French serving in the role of the Nazis. This genre resemblance makes some sense, given the timing of the film and the experiences of Pontecorvo.

The question remains, however, as to the effect of the use of largely Western genre conventions in these films. In some ways, they are used to carry their message to a broad audience, including members of their own groups who were raised on this style of film. However, does this take some power away from the film or shape the messages that are contained? Is there enough distinction from Western genre conventions and are substantial questions raised by the film that makes the conventions effective in telling stories that run counter to common Western history? Do they present the views of the people represented in the film authentically in terms of cultural insights and historical experiences? How do the narrative and genre conventions reflect who the film is made for? And to what end or goal?

For middle and high school students, these films present common elements that will make them easily understood, but also offer elements that will challenge their understanding of the past and stereotypical or simplistic views of the histories of indigenous groups. Teachers could engage students in discussions to identify and compare what elements of the film seem similar to others that they have seen and what makes them different. Guiding questions to frame such a discussion include: Who does the film want them to root for? What questions does the film raise



about the history being presented and how might one go about finding answers? How does the film present different views of historic events or people that is new or different? What insights/perspective does the film reveal about the histories of the groups being represented? Does the film explore the nature of history or views of the world that differ from those in the textbook or the common historical narratives told in school? What does it mean to believe the account in the film (compared to previous knowledge or beliefs)?

### *Characters and Perspectives*

The perspectives of the indigenous characters in the films provide the depth to allow an audience a sense of the identity, the history, and the struggles of the characters (see **Figure 2**). The main characters often represent the diversity within any given indigenous group, which is important to challenge any kind of narrow view of a group of people. This depth, of course, is affected by the film style, with a “buddy” film like *Smoke Signals* spending more time on a character’s perspective and worldview than a film noir example like *The Battle of Algiers*.

The two themes that emerge quickly from the characters and perspectives in these films are issues of identity (*Smoke Signals* and *The Only Good Indian*) and issues of power (*The Battle of Algiers* and *Days of Glory*). In both *Smoke Signals* and *The Only Good Indian*, the main characters are shown to struggle with their identities, what it means to be Indian, what it means to be a man. In *The Only Good Indian*, Sam is used to challenge notions of assimilation as he claims that he is going to “out-white man the white man” and longs to be a Pinkerton detective, while Charlie reminds us of the attempts to steal the identity, language, and culture from so many Indian children. Even the one main white character, McCoy, who plays the evil sheriff role in the film, chastises the head of the boarding school for what they do to the children, claiming, “you might think this is godly and righteous, but it is crueller than anything I have ever done.” He says this even though we find out later in the film that he was involved in the Sand Creek Massacre of unarmed men, women, and children in 1864. Moreover, this is from the character who brings back men “good Indian style,” meaning the only good Indian is a dead Indian.

Because of the style of these two films, with pairs of actors on long journeys (Victor with Thomas; Sam with Charlie), there is more time to gain a sense of identity and what the characters stand for than in the two Algerian films. *The Battle of Algiers* and *Days of Glory* are not character studies, but war films. The focus is on the action of the French, of the Algerian soldiers fighting for their colonial homeland (in *Days of Glory*), and the Algerians as they turn into revolutionaries fighting against the

Film	Major Characters and Perspectives
<i>Smoke Signals</i>	Victor and Thomas represent young men who are coming into adulthood—they also represent the issues facing young Indians, including poverty, alcoholism, abuse, and the desire for a better future.
<i>The Only Good Indian</i>	Sam represents assimilation and futility of this concept, and also represents redemption later in the film. Charlie represents the lost generations of young Indians who resisted assimilation and the boarding schools. McCoy is an old “Indian fighter” coming to terms with his past and seeing the future of the people he respected and fought.
<i>The Battle of Algiers</i>	Col. Mathieu is a French hero who is sent to fight the revolutionaries as he did the Nazis and Vietnamese. He represents the ruthlessness of the French trying to save their crumbling empire. Ali La Pointe is a thief and troubled youth who is drawn in by the rebels to help wage a guerilla war on the French. He represents the injustices felt by Algerians and the resistance to French colonial rule.
<i>Days of Glory</i>	Messaoud is a strong soldier who falls in love with a French woman—he represents to some degree the challenges faced in a present-day multicultural French society. Abdelkader is a corporal and budding intellectual who questions the discrimination against the Arab troops and injustices at home. Sergeant Martinez is a Pied Noir and leader of the platoon who torn between advocating for his Arab soldiers and wanting the respect of his fellow Frenchman. He represents the struggles of the crumbling French Empire.

**Figure 2:** Major characters and perspectives presented in the four selected films.

colonial powers (in *The Battle of Algiers*). The characters represent the struggles and experiences of groups, with individual characters representing larger perspectives. These perspectives speak to the resistance of the Algerians to colonial rule and the disrespect and injustices that the Algerians endure.

Illustrations of discrimination and injustice shown in *Days of Glory* are clearly depicted in the prisons of colonial Algeria. In *The Battle of Algiers*, resistance is shown in the open battles in the streets and in the

hidden weddings, where the officiant carries a pistol in his briefcase. These characters reveal a complexity in the way they employ means of terrorism and guerilla fighting to an end—the expulsion of the French. The characters of Ali Lapointe and Djafar are shown to be Algerians who are discriminated against and persecuted by the French, and who see no way out of their situation other than to resist. Today, their actions may be seen as acts of terrorism, and a viewer would not likely be sympathetic toward either the French or FLN characters because of their methods. However, upon the film's release, these characters were likely viewed as heroes of the post-colonial and revolutionary period that was part of the larger Cold War as well.

Unlike the films we analyzed in previous studies, these films all use indigenous perspectives and indigenous actors to tell the story. The actors who appear in the films are not white passing for indigenous, which was a major issue in earlier periods of Hollywood; however, they are not necessarily from the indigenous group being portrayed. Adam Beach, who plays Victor in *Smoke Signals*, was later nominated for a Supporting Actor Academy Award for his portrayal of the *Flags of our Fathers* character, Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian who was one of the Marines to raise the flag on Iwo Jima in World War II. Beach is a Canadian Saulteaux who grew up on a First Nations Reserve near Manitoba. Similarly, Wes Studi, who plays Sam in *The Only Good Indian*, has played the roles of many American Indians, from Geronimo in *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993) to Magua in *Last of the Mohicans* (1992). Beach and Studi in particular are well-known actors who would attract an audience, and the writers of the films' screenplays work to provide the authenticity and connection to place. Many of the actors in *Days of Glory* are of Arab Maghreb descent, but grew up in France as part of the Diaspora. Interestingly, we also noticed that there was a real lack of strong female indigenous characters in these films. This could be a result of our film selections or could also reflect similar issues with Hollywood film, which also has a lack of focus on female characters and stories centered around women in historical films in particular. We might also expect to see more matriarchal versus patriarchal societies represented in films that better reflect indigenous worldviews, for example, but this was not present in the films analyzed here.

These films raise a number of pertinent questions about characters and perspective recognition that could be further explored in the classroom. Initial questions include: What matters when presenting indigenous peoples in historical film? What does it mean to have authentic characters—and who should be the actors playing them? To what extent is the use of actors who are not necessarily from the specific indigenous group being

portrayed the same kind of issue of when, for example, Jennifer Lopez (of Puerto Rican descent) or James Caan (of Irish descent) are cast as Italian characters? Does this take authenticity away from the roles they play? Is it the actor or how they portray the role that is important? Does the perspective come from the film, the writing, and the context, or from the person portraying the film as long as he or she is close enough? Can cosmology, culture, and indigenous epistemologies be represented regardless of actor and producer?

These films show powerful characters and the perspectives of indigenous peoples that allow for a greater depth and understanding of the experiences and views of indigenous people than most previous films, but the challenge is to understand how to engage students who are and are not members of these indigenous groups in recognizing and exploring these perspectives. The perspectives in the film may run counter to students' common understandings, and may present challenges of both presentism (e.g., viewing the actions of others using present-day values) and ethnocentrism or viewing indigenous peoples as victims or "others." One way to mitigate these issues is to help students recognize that no film can fully explain a historical perspective, especially that of entire groups and their histories. However, films can be used to help all of us to start to recognize the motivations, aspirations, and worldview of particular characters that reflect a larger group experience but that cannot necessarily be generalized. For example, for *Smoke Signals*, students could compare and contrast the views of Thomas and Victor and how they might reflect larger issues facing American Indians. This film could also be used to begin to approach the concept of cosmology and the characteristics of a worldview reflected in the film that may vary from those of different students. However, teachers need to be careful to help students also recognize the context of the story—in this case, that the two young men are from one reservation of a particular nation—and that these issues will differ between Indian groups. Similarly, teachers could engage students with *Days of Glory* by "shadowing" characters to identify who they are meant to represent, and by charting the different characters based on their ethnic groups or perceived class backgrounds and level of education. Guiding questions could include: How are the different groups discriminated against? How do their backgrounds help to explain their points of view? How do the characters' worldviews and understandings differ from their own (this will also help students to reflect upon how their own interpretation of the film and perspectives may vary from others in the room)? Who benefits from the representations of history, culture, and identity in the film? Whose perspective is missing in the film? Teachers could raise questions that help students to reflect upon how the perspectives in the film represent

not only the historical record, but also the period of production and the individual interpretations of the actors playing the characters. Given the difficulties of presenting perspectives of the past, it may be less important if the actor is of the same Indian nation of the person who he or she is playing than the work that has gone into exploring and presenting this perspective in the film.

Finally, these films also include a lot of content or introductions to aspects of history not often included in textbooks. Both *The Battle of Algiers* and *Days of Glory* provide an examination of French colonial rule, the role of colonial soldiers in World War II, and the post-colonial revolutions that resulted from the crumbling French empire and emergence of the cold war. Similarly, while *Smoke Signals* focuses more on breaking historical stereotypes of American Indians, *The Only Good Indian* provides a vivid account of Native boarding schools that existed throughout the West at the turn of the century, as well as information about the role of the Pinkerton detectives and a settlement of African Americans who migrated west to start a new life. The content of these films, therefore, provide a starting point for examining concepts and issues from these periods in addition to the analysis of the perspectives and context of the film.

### *Aesthetics, Worldview, and the Importance of Place*

In two words, place matters. In all of these films, you cannot separate the story from the physical world these films represent, nor from the cinematic context of the film. This seems to be in some small part the connections of the writers and directors to the place where they set the stories—but it also reflects the deep connection to place that indigenous peoples often hold. In *The Battle of Algiers*, the Casbah, or old fortress section of the city, is shown as a labyrinth with a FLN bomb or fighter around every corner or behind every veil. But, the architecture of the Casbah is also beautiful in black and white with its winding streets and staircases and arches; simple in style, yet complex in function. The Casbah is juxtaposed against the wealthier and European-styled French district and the sight of the coast. It is bright, white, and open as compared to the dark alleys, tight quarters, and courtyards of the Casbah.

In *The Only Good Indian*, the plains of Kansas are key to representing the desire of Charlie to return to his home and family, and the film features sweeping scenes of Charlie and Sam riding in a motorcycle through plains of grass and wheat. For the Coeur d'Alene in *Smoke Signals*, there is a contrast between the reservation—with its sub-standard housing and broken-down van that serves as the viewpoint for Lester Fallsapart's live traffic report on the reservation radio station—and the beautiful physical

surroundings. Finally, in *Days of Glory*, the geography of the soldiers' home regions in Algeria is starkly juxtaposed against first the rugged Italian mountains and later to the lush Rhone Valley where they fight. This juxtaposition goes beyond the geography, albeit with beautiful, big sweeping shots, to also show the connection of the people to place. The Algerians take on the mountains in waves to attack a Nazi position but are shown to struggle in the cold winter in France, with some soldiers still wearing their traditional Berber sandals in the snow and ice. It is this connection between people and place that is a strength and key component of all of these films.

The sense of place exhibited in these films is, of course, just one aspect of aesthetics, but because these films are largely shaped around conventional filmmaking, it is one theme that emerges strongly to illustrate the ties to place of indigenous people. For *Smoke Signals* and *The Only Good Indian*, the filmmakers used actual sites for the films; similarly, for *The Battle of Algiers*, the film was shot in the same places where the actual events took place. This theme adds a layer to the previous "burden of historical representation" framework—a focus on aesthetics of place in filmmaking of historically marginalized groups—and we think it raises for teachers and students the question of how is history tied to place. How does place shape history and history shape the place and peoples who live there? How does the film's use of place help us to better understand the perspectives of indigenous groups? What does the use of cinematography, in particular, the use of long landscape shots and rich visual description of the geography and elements, tell us about the relationship between indigenous peoples and place? This last question, of course, could be over-generalized or oversimplified, but is also helpful in getting students to think about ecology in history and the relational nature of place and the past. They could also go further to consider the different conceptions of land as property or the relationship between humans and the earth that different characters or films may hold.

### *Context of Production and Distribution*

The context of production and distribution of these films is, of course, a key to understanding the stories being told and the perspectives that are included. You cannot understand *The Battle of Algiers* outside of the political context of the period and the fact that the Algerian government commissioned the film. You also cannot think of it without the history of the colonies, the role of the indigenous in World War II, and the embarrassment the French felt after World War II and the defeat in Indochina. For *Days of Glory*, the film comes at a moment of remembrance of World War II and on the cusp of a rising new independence movement

in the Middle East. It serves as a supplement to the discourse in the U.S. and Europe of the “greatest generation” and the “good war.” *The Only Good Indian* and *Smoke Signals* arrived during a time after the civil rights and multicultural education movements in the United States, including the AIM movement of the late 1960s and 1970s and the NCAA actions to stop universities from continuing to use stereotypical Indian mascots for their athletic teams. These films provide opportunities for American Indians to tell their own histories and to show their own culture, both for other indigenous groups and for those who still view them as the other, as savages, or as somehow primitive or inferior. These films also reflect the internal struggles within indigenous communities and how they may make a better future.

Another key aspect behind each of these films is the role of the writers, producers, directors, and actors, and the particular views they bring to the set. As noted above, the writing and direction seem particularly poignant in bringing aspects of the indigenous perspective to the forefront of the story. It is a useful exercise for teachers to engage students in doing some research into the film. They could look at other films the writers and directors have worked on, what source materials were used or historians were consulted, and any interviews (often included on the DVD) that were done with any of the actors or production staff that may provide insights into the goals and perspectives of those involved. Further, they could explore reviews of the films from the period of production and from different outlets. For example, how was *The Battle of Algiers* reviewed in French news outlets? Algerian? U.S.? Many of these are now accessible online in archives and can provide great insights into how films reflected particular historical moments.

Of course, although a film may reflect a particular social and political context from which it was produced, some of these themes represent universal and persistent issues still relevant to the present. The Pentagon supposedly screened *The Battle of Algiers* in 2003 and used it as part of officer training; unfortunately the film’s many lessons regarding torture and discrimination were repeated in Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. These films, therefore, can be instructive as artifacts and evidence of the time, perspectives, and period of production, and can also be useful for exploring similar cases in the near past. The use of film to gauge and understand the views and contexts of the time and place it is produced is one aspect of analysis that is often overlooked when teachers consider what historical evidence to engage their students with—and when they think about the purposes of using film as historical evidence. The question is, what role should these films play in the middle and high school classrooms as a medium of instruction?

### **The Role and Use of Film for Teaching the History of Indigenous Groups: Implications for Teachers**

The four films analyzed here all hold elements of films made *for*, *by*, and *about* indigenous history or culture. However small these distinctions may be, they are helpful in determining how well a film may meet the burden of historical representation. Does a film like *The Battle of Algiers*, which is clearly about the quest for Algerian freedom from French colonialism, actually reflect the indigenous worldviews of the people being represented? Or is this primarily a film with the goal of influencing the world order during the early post-colonial period of production? It does provide more in-depth perspectives from the Algerian peoples and a non-Western view of the events during the period, but it falls short of providing the cultural and aesthetic perspectives and depth of indigenous epistemology that *Smoke Signals* does. *Smoke Signals*, a film both for and by American Indians, provides a richer vision of a non-Western epistemology in addition to reflecting the sense of resistance that all four of these films portray. This theme of resistance and critique of colonialism is prevalent across these four films, but does this mean the films are made for the Western audience being critiqued or for the indigenous groups being portrayed? More than anything, these films are useful to engage students and teachers, whether or not they identify as indigenous, in the analysis and discussion about issues of the histories of marginalized groups, what makes a group or perspective indigenous, and how post-colonial-themed films may differ from a more indigenous perspective in terms of the worldview portrayed in the film. From our perspective and the framework of a burden of historical representation, all of these films go much further than the usual history films shown in secondary classrooms to incorporate or portray the perspectives of those who have been traditionally misconstrued or simply missing from the history curriculum.

There appear to be four specific outcomes for this analysis that may be important for teachers to consider when selecting a film to teach about the history or culture of indigenous people, as well as thinking about how they may use these films in the classroom:

- 1) This analysis shows what may seem like common sense—that it is important to examine the source and producers of a film on indigenous history or culture—especially given the burden that these films hold for teaching about a history often marginalized or misrepresented. It seems that a film *for/by* indigenous peoples has the pedagogical potential to more accurately and powerfully engage students in the history and perspectives of indigenous peoples. However, a thoughtful film *about* an indigenous group may also be powerful, depending on the goal of the film and



whether or not it fits at least some of the criteria of the for/by film. For example, neither *The Battle of Algiers* nor *The Only Good Indian* was made by Algerian or American Indian directors or producers—however, their goal was to raise issues of historical marginalization and injustices and to counter the common Western historical narrative. Therefore, such films may still be useful so long as teachers help students reflect upon the producer and context of production. This means that teachers and students should examine who the writers, directors, and producers of these films are when indigenous peoples are the focus of the film.

2) Even films *by* indigenous peoples should not be generalized as *the* representative perspectives for these groups. Nor should they be assumed to include the types of historical context and indigenous epistemology present to have an indigenous film that also meets the burden of historical representation. Teachers need to select films for the perspectives they represent and not simply for the individual, group, or event they portray—and provide students with analysis tools and scaffolding to help them recognize and explore these perspectives. They also need to have students examine the diversity within larger indigenous populations in any given geographic region. For example, some of the issues from *The Only Good Indian* may well represent a large proportion of the experiences of different Indian groups subjected to forced assimilation at boarding schools, while other features may be specific to a particular group, time, or place. It is important for teachers and students to identify the universal or conceptual and persistent issues from the histories and viewpoints of specific indigenous groups or individuals. For example, the scenes of the boarding schools could be used as an example of the concepts of assimilation or ethnocentrism. However, because there are so few films that focus on these topics, and because there is often little time spent on these topics as part of the curriculum, it is easy to over-generalize about indigenous peoples and their histories. Our analysis here illustrates the need to maintain the complexity of the histories of indigenous groups and to not generalize.

3) Models for teaching with the burden of historical representation could have students comparing films *about* and *by* indigenous peoples that represent the same events or issues—such as with *Thunderheart* (1992) and the documentary *A Good Day to Die* (2010)—or analyzing a film within the context of its production or compared to other historical evidence (e.g., material culture, historical documents). Teachers should also select films for the issues they raise about justice, identity, resistance, and empowerment to help counter common stereotypes or misunderstandings. Historian Robert Rosenstone advocates using smaller independent films in particular, as they are not made to attract a broad audience and therefore

can take more risks in raising controversial issues or counter-perspectives.<sup>23</sup> In some ways, this may also do some of the “counter-storytelling” that is part of the critical race theory discourse.<sup>24</sup> The ideas and questions posed in the sections above represent possible starting points for discussing the rich issues raised by these films and should be transferable to some degree to other history films *for/by/about* indigenous groups, although each film will present specific issues teachers will need to identify and use to design instruction.

4) One pedagogical key for teachers is to make sure the analysis students are engaged with goes beyond the film-world, or diegesis, to also include an analysis of the context of the film’s production, the producers and purpose for the film, and the reception of the film within the particular indigenous community. In particular, the context of the film’s production as well as the setting and sense of place within these films are important keys to understanding the perspectives of the filmmaker and messages of the overall film within indigenous worldviews and history. Although it is crucial that teachers should do this as part of selecting a film, it is equally important that these same habits of mind in critical literacy are also explicitly developed in students. Such a lens helps disrupt the notion of film as a direct showing of the past and shifts toward a more nuanced understanding of film as an interpretation and story constructed by people for particular purposes and reflecting particular views. These films present an opportunity to talk about worldviews and how different people have varying explanations for phenomenon and divergent views about the nature of the past, their surroundings, and knowledge.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we utilize the concept of the burden of historical representation to unpack and analyze film *for/by/about* indigenous peoples and their histories. We make the case that films made *for/by* indigenous groups have the pedagogical potential to enhance students’ understanding of the inferential discipline of history, while providing a pedagogical portal to the histories and cultures of indigenous and marginalized groups that are so often invisible in the history curriculum. These films have affordances and constraints, as described above, but better meet the burden of representation than most of the previous films made *about* indigenous groups. There are, of course, limitations to our analysis here and our abilities to fully make the case for indigenous films—our interpretations here are our own. Also, the films we used for this paper lack the perspectives of women most notably, but are also limited to the small number of groups that could adequately be described and explored

in the length allowed for this article. We have listed a number of resources and indigenous film organization sites in the Appendix. We hope these resources will help make these films become more readily identifiable and accessible, and serve as a starting point for teachers to consider the value of incorporating indigenous film into their curriculum.

Our analysis here expands the construct of the burden of historical representation. In particular, this analysis revealed the importance of a sense of place and worldview in the aesthetics of indigenous film as well as a re-emphasis of the importance of examining the context surrounding the film and its production. The burden of historical representation may be a helpful tool and framework for teachers to use when thinking about the selection of media and evidence for their classrooms and in the design of their curriculum. The suggested discussion questions may also be used in some form as a framework for engaging students in the analysis and exploration of the history of indigenous peoples as well as the issues they face in the present or during the time of a film's production. Finally, this analysis has shown the rich historical perspectives of indigenous peoples that are often left out of U.S. and world history courses. These are stories that are engaging and are filled with themes and perspectives that not only could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of history, but could also develop critical media literacy skills and aspects of citizenship around issues of diversity, justice, and inclusion.

## Notes

1. Sarah Shear, Ryan Knowles, Gregory Soden, Catherine Canitz, and Antonio Castro, "All Indians are Dead: The Pre- vs. Post-1900 Representations of American Indians in State-Level U.S. History Standards" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 27-May 1, 2013).

2. Jeremy Stoddard and Alan Marcus, "The Burden of Historical Representation: Race, Freedom and 'Educational' Hollywood Film," *Film & History* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 26-35.

3. Ella Shohatt and Robert Stamm, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1994).

4. See, for example, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs at <<http://www.iwgia.org/>> and the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at <<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/>> to explore these definitional issues.

5. For a more thorough treatment of definitional issues of indigenous groups, indigenous knowledge, and indigenous movements, see: Trevor Purcell, "Indigenous Knowledge and Applied Anthropology: Questions of Definition and Direction," *Human*

*Organization* 57, no. 3 (1998): 258-272; and Dorothy Hodgson, "Introduction: Comparative Perspectives on the Indigenous Rights Movement in Africa and the Americas," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2002): 1037-1049.

6. Christine Stanton, "Hearing the Story: Critical Indigenous Curriculum Inquiry and Primary Source Representation in Social Studies Education," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 40, no. 4 (2012): 339-370.

7. Faye Ginsburg, "Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 366.

8. Bosley Crowther, "It's British vs. Natives in Action Filled 'Zulu'," *The New York Times* (8 July 1964), p. 38.

9. Charles Davis and Janice Kaye, "International Production Outsourcing and the Development of Indigenous Film and Television Capabilities: The Case of Canada," in *Locating Migrating Media*, ed. Greg Elmer (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

10. Ginsburg.

11. Langton (1993), as quoted in Ginsburg, p. 367.

12. Stoddard and Marcus.

13. Shohatt and Stam; Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, ed. R. Brown (London, United Kingdom: Tavistock, 1973), 71-112.

14. Stoddard and Marcus.

15. See Alan Marcus and Jeremy Stoddard, "Tinsel Town as Teacher: Hollywood Film in the High School History Classroom," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 3 (May 2007): 303-330.

16. Stoddard and Marcus, "Race, Freedom and 'Educational' Hollywood Film," 27.

17. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

18. Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart Poyntz, *Media Literacies: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011).

19. Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 97 (1995): 47-68.

20. Marcus and Stoddard, "Tinsel Town as Teacher."

21. Beverly Singer, *Wiping the Warpaint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

22. For more specific production or casting information on any of these films, see the Internet Movie Database at <<http://www.imdb.com>>.

23. Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film / Film on History* (Harlow, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited, 2006).

24. Counter-storytelling is one of the tenets of critical race theory, and was developed to challenge dominant historical and cultural narratives that are endemic in society.

## Appendix

### Indigenous Films and Film Resources

Note that some of these resources are not limited solely to indigenous films.

#### Websites

- Aboriginal Perspectives – National Film Board of Canada, <<http://www3.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/>>
- African Media Program – Michigan State University, <<http://africanmedia.msu.edu/>>
- American Indian Film Institute, <<http://aifisf.com/>>
- Creative Spirits – Australian Aboriginal Film, <<http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/>>
- Indigenous Film – Australian Government, <<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/indigenous-film>>
- Indigenous Film and Video of the Americas – City College New York, <<http://daisilla.org>>
- Movies featuring the Native Peoples of Central and South America, <<http://nativeamericanfilms.org>>
- National Museum of the American Indian – Smithsonian Institute, <<http://www.nmai.si.edu/explore/film-media/>>
- Native Film – Sundance Institute, <<http://www.sundance.org/programs/native-film/>>

#### Books

- Marcus, Alan, Scott Metzger, Richard Paxton, and Jeremy Stoddard. *Teaching History with Film: Strategies for Secondary Social Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2010). The chapters on historical empathy as perspective recognition and the case on teaching about the Hmong are particularly poignant.
- Rollins, Peter and John O'Connor. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2010) (Google eBook).