

#13 Annotated Bibliography of DVD's, Videos, Media Literacy Strategies and Reviews

(Compiled by Dorothea M. Susag dotsusag42@gmail.com)

American Indian Tribal Histories Project - Northern Cheyenne; American Indian Tribal Histories Project - Crow
Educational DVD Sets, Western Heritage Center (www.ywhc.org)

Apted, Michael, dir. **Incident at Oglala - The Leonard Peltier Story**. Perf. Robert Redford. 1992. Film.
Available to rent from Netflix or purchase on Amazon.

Bigcrane, Roy, prod. **The Place of the Falling Waters**. Writ. Thompson Smith. Montana Public Television,
Bozeman, MT, 1990. Film. 90 minutes DVD Available at Salish Kootenai College Bookstore - \$33.00
a history of tribal society and culture before the Kerr Dam's construction
the construction of the Kerr Dam in the 1930's and its impact on the reservation
the hopes and dilemmas of the Salish and Kootenai people as they prepare to take over the Kerr Dam
during the next three decades

Borden, John, dir. **The Native Americans Series**. VHS. Dir. George Burdeau. IMDbPro/TBS Productions, 1994.
Film. 48 min. each: Tribal People of the Northwest; The Nations of the Northeast; The People of the Great Plains
Part I; The People of the Great Plains Part II; The Natives of the Southwest: The Tribes of the Southeast.
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0215431/>

Carney, Ismana , dir. **The Chief Mountain Hot Shots: Firefighters of the Blackfeet Nation**. Photographer Jim
Kinsey. 2001. Film. 60 minutes <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HYe6niZarA> Excerpt and contact information

Days of the Blackfeet: An overview of the Blackfoot Tribe in Montana. 2008. Film. Blackfeet Tribal History, BCC.
45 minutes.

Diamond, Neil (Cree) and Catherine Bainbridge., dir. **Reel Injun**. Prod. Fon Christina. Rezolution Pictures of
Canada and National Film Board of Canada, 2009. Film. ISBN: 6 2915904381 4. Perf. Graham Greene, Adam
Beach, John Trudell, Russell Means, Clint Eastwood, Jim Jarmusch. 86 minutes. Filmmakers explore the
portrayal North American Indians over 100 years of cinema using clips from hundreds of films and interviews
with directors. "Diamond looks at how the myth of "the Injun" has influenced the world's understanding – and
misunderstanding – of Natives." <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1484114/>

Eyre, Chris, dir. **Skins**. First Look Media, 2002. Film. With Graham Greene, Winner of Best Actor at Tokyo Film
Festival and Independent Feature Project Nomination Best Male Lead, and Eric Schweig. 87 minutes. ISBN: 1-
59241-070-7 www.imdb.com/title/tt0284494/

Eyre, Chris, dir. **Smoke Signals**. Writ. Sherman Alexie. Miramax Classics and Shadowcatcher Entertainment,
1998. Film. Much of this video is based on Alexie's *Lone Ranger and Tonto, Fistfight in Heaven*. 89 minutes.
"Though Victor and Thomas have lived their entire young lives in the same tiny town, they couldn't have less in

common. But when Victor is urgently called away, it's Thomas who comes up with the money to pay for his trip. There's just one thing Victor has to do : take Thomas along for the ride." "One of the best films of the year" said *Rolling Stone*.

Eyre, Chris, dir. ***We Shall Remain: America Through Native Eyes***. Dir. Ric Burns. American Experience/PBS, 2009. Film. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/>

"After the Mayflower" and Bonus Features 90 minutes

Featuring Marcos Akiaten, Nicholas Irons and Annawon Weedon

"Tecumseh's Vision"

Featuring Billy Merasty, Michael Greyeyes and Dwier Brown

"Trail of Tears" Featuring Wes Studi, Josh Blaylock, Will Finley, Wesley French, Carla-Rae Holland and Emily Podleski 180 minutes

"Geronimo"

Written, Produced and Directed by Dustinn Craig and Sarah Colt

"Wounded Knee"

Produced and Directed by Stanley Nelson 180 minutes

Fire On the Land: An Interactive Educational DVD. Beaver Steals Fire. Polson, MT: The Native People and Fire in the Northern Rockies project, 2006. http://www.cskt.org/tr/fire_firehistoryproject.htm

Florio, Maria, dir. ***Broken Rainbow***. Dir. Mudd Victoria. Earthwork Films and docuramafilms, 2006. Film. *There is no word for Relocation in the Navajo Language; to Relocate is to Disappear and to Never be seen Again*. Academy Award Winner for Best Documentary Feature. "The heartbreaking tale of the forced relocation of 12,000 Navajos from their ancestral homeland in Arizona that began in the 1970s and continues to this day." 70 minutes ISBN: 0-7670-8776-3

Hawes-Davis, Doug, dir. ***Facing the Storm: Story of the American Bison***. Prod. Rita Pastore. High Plains Films and ITVS & Montana PBS, 2012. Film. 78 minutes. ISBN: 13964-34511

Heape, Steven R., prod. ***The Trail of Tears: Cherokee Legacy***. Dir. Daniel Blake Smith. Rich-Heape Films, Inc., 2006. Film. "America's darkest period: Jackson's Indian Removal Act and the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation to Indian Territory in 1838." Endorsed by the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. 115 minutes www.richheape.com 1-888-600-2022

Heape, Steven, prod. ***Black Indians: An American Story***. Dir. Richie Chip. Rich-heape Films, Inc., 2000. Film. Narrated by James Earl Jones DVD "Circle of Life" Series. www.richheape.com 60 minutes. The story of the "cultural and racial fusion of Native and African Americans." ISBN: 6-52645 65003-6

Helland, Mary, prod. ***In the Land of the Assiniboine***. Dir. Warriner Gary. Camera One, Seattle and National Park Service: Valley County Historical Society, 2009. Film. 55 minutes ISBN 1-56057-128-4 The story of the Nakoda People, or the Assiniboine, from before contact with the Europeans to the present.

Jaeger, Lisa, dir. ***Tribal Nations: The Story of Federal Indian Law***. Tanana Chiefs, Fairbanks, AK, Film.. in collaboration with Fox Valley Technical College Criminal Justice Center for innovation, Appleton, WI, 2006.

www.tanachiefs.org/vgs 60 minutes Grade 11 Free teaching guides to accompany this DVD are available.
<http://www.tanachiefs.org/pdf/Tribal%20Nations%20Paper%20Final.pdf>

King, Thomas, writ. *I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind*. Big Soul Productions Inc. in Association with Bravo/Fact, 2007. Film. www.bigsoul.net 1-888-767-6076 5 minutes *I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind* explores the stereotypical portrayal of our First Nations Peoples in the media. Thomas King, Lorne Cardinal, and Tara Beagan narrate this spoken word short that offers an insight of how First nations people today are changing old ideas and empowering themselves in the greater community. The actors, in business suits, jeans, and typical urban attire are juxtaposed against the loin-cloth-wearing, tomahawk-wielding natives of yesterday's spaghetti westerns."

Kunuk, Zacharias, dir. *The Fast Runner (Atanarjuat)*. Columbia/TriStar Home Entertainment/IMDbPro, 2002. Film. 161 minutes. Winner of Camera Dor Cannes Film Festival. "Set amongst the Inuit people of the arctic, the film is the thrilling and passionate story exploring the universal themes of love, revenge, and survival." ISBN: 1-4049-2303-9

Makepeace, Anne, dir. *We Still Live Here As Nutayuneân*. www.makepeaceproductions.com 56 minutes. Film and DVD. www.Bullfrogfilms.com This is the story of Jessie who researches hundreds of documents to reclaim her ancestral Wampanoag language.

Margolin, Stuart, dir. *Medicine River*. Writ. Thomas King. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107539/>, 1993. Film 94 minutes. An Academy Entertainment release based on the novel by Thomas King. The story of Will, an international photo-journalist, who returns to Medicine River when he hears that his mother has died. "Harlen Bigbear draws him into a series of hilarious situations." Will struggles with the past and learns to appreciate what matters most.

Media Education Foundation, prod. *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power*. www.medlaed.org, 2001. Film. 53 minutes ISBN: 1-893521-54-0 *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* takes a close and critical look at the world these films create (in terms of the stories told about race, gender and class) and reaches disturbing conclusions about the values propagated under the guise of innocence and fun.

Morgan, W.T., dir. *500 Nations Series*. Dir. John Pohl. IMDbPro/PBS, 1995. Film. 8 Part Series: Ancestors, Mexico, Clash of Cultures, Invasion of the Coast, Cauldron of War, Removal, Roads Across the Plains, Attack on Culture. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111868/>

Morse, Richard, prod. And dir. *House Made of Dawn*. Writ. N. Scott Momaday. New Line Home Video, Turner Home Entertainment, 1987. 90 minutes. Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by N. Scott Momaday, it is the story of a modern Native American and his struggle to honor and reconnect with his past. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmMcghz_XnA

Pierson, Frank, dir. *Lakota Woman - Seige at Wounded Knee*. Writ. Crow Dog Mary. IMDbPro, 1994. Film. 100 minutes. The Story of Mary Crow Dog. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110297/plotsummary>

Pittman, Bruce, dir. *Where the Spirit Lives*. Writ. Keith Ross Leckie. IMDbPro, 1989. Film. In 1937, a young Indian girl is kidnapped along with several others from a village as part of a deliberate Canadian policy to force

Indian children to go to a boarding school where they brutally try to break her spirit. However, Ashtecome is determined to hold on to her identity.

Poten, Connie, dir. ***Contrary Warriors: A Film of the Crow Tribe*** (1985). Available IMD Movie Database <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182930/> "It weaves the Crow tribe's turbulent past with modern-day accounts from Robert Yellow-tail." 60 minutes

Reyna, Diane, dir. ***Surviving Columbus: The Story of the Pueblo People***. Writ. Larry Walsh. PBS/KNME-TV/Production Company (Albuquerque), Institute Of American Indian Arts, 1992. Film. 115 minutes "Using stories from Pueblo elders, interviews with Pueblo scholars and leaders, archival photographs, and historical accounts, this program explores the Pueblo Indians' 450-year struggle to preserve their culture, land, and religion despite European contact." <http://www.lib.muohio.edu/multifacet/record/mu3ugb1803140>

Rosenstein, Jay, writ.and prod. ***In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports***. Smoking Munchkin Video and PBS, 1997. Film. 47 minutes. This follows the story of Charlene Teters (Spokane), a graduate student at the University of Illinois and her role as leader in the national movement against American Indians as mascots. <http://jayrosenstein.com/pages/honorfilm.html>

Saedi, Gita, prod. ***Montana Mosaic***. Montana Historical Society and West of Kin, 2006. Film. An educational series from the Montana Historical Society. www.montanahistoricalsociety.org/Education/MontanaMosaic.asp

Scott, Michael J.F., dir. ***Spirit Rider***. Dir. David Young. Allumination Filmworks, 1998. Film.. 90 minutes. ISBN: 8429640801. With Graham Greene and Adam Beech, a social worker brings a troubled teenager, Johnny Three Bears, from the only home he's known—the city—to his grandfather's rural home on the Ojibwe reservation after the boy's mother dies. There he learns to face and survive his own demons and conflicts with his grandfather as they set out to capture and tame a wild stallion. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108204/>

Slocomb, Steve, dir. ***The Story of the Bitterroot – A Cross Cultural Odyssey of Discovery***. Looking Glass Films and Montana Historical Society, 2004. Film. video@bitterroot.tv, funded in part by the Montana Committee for the Humanities and shown on PBS. This is the story of a fascinating plant and its relationship to the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the State of Montana and the Native Americans.

Smith, Alex and Andrew, dirs. ***Winter in the Blood***. Produced by Sherman Alexie. 2013. Based on the novel *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch. 98 minutes, now available on Netflix, streaming.

Smith, Charles Martin, dir. ***The Snow Walker***. First Look Media, 2004. Film. 90 minutes. The story based on a novel by Farley Mowat takes place in northernmost Canada. A pilot who brings supplies to local tribes is bringing a young Inuit woman with tuberculosis to a hospital for treatment. When the plane crashes, the pilot must depend on the girl's expertise in living on the tundra, and they both find ways to overcome the cultural and language barriers that would separate them. ISBN: 1-59241-410-9

Stekler, Paul, prod. ***Last Stand At Little Big Horn: Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse Battle Custer***. Writ. James Welch. American Experience PBS, 2004. Film. 60 min. with narration by N. Scott Momaday. ISBN: 1-59375-

171-0 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/TheLastStandAtLittleBigHorn/> This documentary examines the Battle of the Little Big Horn from differing accounts—Lakota Sioux, Cheyenne and Crow, using journals, oral accounts, Indian ledger drawings, archival and feature films.

Taken From My Home: Indian Boarding Schools in Perspective, Told by Teenagers Who Lived Through the Unthinkable. DVD. Fascinating Learning Factory. 2009, 2010 release. ISBN 978-1-4507-3930-6.

Thompson, Sally, prod. ***Native Homelands along the Lewis and Clark Trail*** . Videographer Ken Furrow. Montana Regional Learning Project, 2007. Film.

http://www.ndstudies.org/media/native_homelands_along_the_lewis_and_clark_trail_introduction

Twiggs, John prod. ***Playing for the World: The 1904 Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School Girls Basketball Team.*** Montana PBS, KUFM-TV, The University of Montana, 2009. Film. ISBN: 8140800021 60 minutes. “In 1902, a unique combination of native women came together at a boarding school in Montana. They used the new sport of basketball to help them adjust to a rapidly changing world. Their travels and experiences led them to places they never imagined. Ultimately, they played for something much larger than themselves. Narrated by critically acclaimed actress Tantoo Cardinal.”

Valley County Historical Society, prod. ***Assiniboine Chief Rosebud Remembers Lewis and Clark.*** Executive Productions, 2004. Film. Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society. (montanahistoricalociety.org and www.sethbynum.com) In 1805, Lewis and Clark spent 29 days in Nakoda and Assiniboine territory.

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

Wacks, Jonathan, dir. ***Pow Wow Highway.*** www.anchorbayentertainment.com. Handmade Films, 1989. Film. 87 minutes. Winner of the Best Director, Best Picture and Best Actor—Native American Film Festival. “‘64 Buick For the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Lame Deer, Montana, the American Dream has taken a grim detour. Here, Buddy Red Bow (A. Martinez) is a committed activist battling a suspicious land grab. Philbert Bono (Gary Farmer) is a serene spiritual warrior guided by sacred visions. But when Buddy’s estranged sister is framed and jailed in New Mexico, the two men take Philbert’s rust-wrecked ‘war pony’ on a road trip that makes some very unexpected stops on the way.”

Wagner, Curly Bear, writ. ***Two Worlds at Two-Medicine.*** Prod. Dennis Neary. Going-to-the-Sun Institute, 2004. Film. In 1806, the Lewis and Clark Expedition encountered a party of Blackfeet.

Weidlinger, Tom, prod. ***Jim Thorpe: The World's Greatest Athlete.*** Prod. Joseph Bruchac. Moira Productions Film & DVD, 2009. Film. 56 minutes A biography of the Native American Athlete who became a sports icon in the first half of the 20th century. www.jimthorpefilm.com

Indian Education for All

DVD’s distributed by the Montana Office of Public Instruction—Indian Education

Assiniboine Chief Rosebud Remembers Lewis and Clark, DVD: Lewis and Clark spent 29 days traveling through Assiniboine (Nakoda) hunting territory.

Days of the Blackfeet (Book, DVD, and five posters), 2010

Fire on the Land/Beaver Steals Fire, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, 2005: an interactive DVD that includes information on Salish tribal history, the history of Salish fire use, fire ecology, fire management activities on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and other resources on the topic of Indian fire use (also in 2007)

Long Ago in Montana, Regional Learning Project, DVD and Guide: OPI, 2006 and 2010: how people lived before modern conveniences. Topics include food and water, shelter, staying warm, transportation, money (currency), and communication in the context of the "natural community."

Playing for the World DVD (2009) and Study Guide (2010): the story of how young American Indian women at the Ft. Shaw boarding school become world champions in the newly created sport of basketball at the 1904 World's Fair in Chicago.

The Story of the Bitterroot, Looking Glass Films DVD, 2004: Lesson Plan for: The Story of the Bitterroot, Office of Public Instruction, 2007

Talking Without Words, and Guide -- Regional Learning Project, OPI 2006 and 2010: focuses on ways native peoples of Montana communicated with each other and with non-Indians.

Tribal Nations and Guide: The Story of Federal Indian Law, Tanan Chiefs Conference, DVD, 2006 the impacts federal policies have had on American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Tribes of Montana and How They Got Their Names, DVD and Guide, Regional Learning Project, OPI, 2006 and 2010: the tribes of Montana and miscommunication errors occurring in translation of sign language.

Two Worlds at Two-Medicine, Going-to-the-Sun Institute and Native View Pictures, DVD: summer of 1806 Meriwether Lewis had a life-or-death encounter with a party of Blackfeet.

View from the Shore, Black Dog Films: DVD of Native American perspectives on Lewis and Clark.

Finding Common Ground: Guiding Growth on the Flathead Indian Reservation, Salish & Kootenai Tribes, Kootenai Culture Committee, DVD with guide. 2007 Treaty, reservation, map application, population growth, government, current issues, and community collaboration.

Oceti Sakowin: The People of the Seven Council Fires and Bridging the Gap: Native American Education, DVD, South Dakota Public Broadcasting, 2008

In the Land of the Assiniboine DVD -- Over 60 Fort Peck and Fort Belknap Assiniboine tribal members sharing their stories and perspectives.

"Sherman Alexie's Favorite Films About Native Americans," June 3, 2013

<http://billmoyers.com/content/sherman-alexies-favorite-films-about-native-americans/>

Reading the Media Strategy

1. While you watch the film, take notes on what **music and instruments** play in the background in each scene.
 - **What do you see happening** and what kind of instruments and music do you hear?
 - **What does it mean?** What is the effect of the choice of music on you as a viewer? What might it make you believe or feel as you watch and listen?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? **Why does it matter?**
2. While you watch the film, take notes on where the camera might be located and what does it focus on? Look at the **camera angles** (above or below, close ups, etc).
 - **What do you see happening?** – identify the camera angle or perspective as you describe this.
 - **What does it mean?** Who is in control or who has the power?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? **Why does it matter?**
3. While you watch the film, take notes on what kind of **weather or lighting** accompanies specific aspects of the narrative.
 - **What do you see happening?**
 - **What does it mean?** What do the producers want you to feel or think because of the weather and lighting?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? **Why does it matter?**
4. While you watch the film, take notes on how the director might create **sympathy** for the **characters** featured in the film.
 - **What do you see happening or hear people say?**
 - **What does it mean?** What do the producers want you to feel or think about the character because of the ways the Indians or whites are portrayed and what the director has the characters saying?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? **Why does it matter?**
5. While you watch the film, take notes on who you think are the **good people? The bad?** What makes you think this?
 - **What do you see happening or hear people say?**
 - **What does it mean?** What do the producers want you to feel or think about what's good or what's evil?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? **Why does it matter?**
6. While you watch the film, take notes on what you think the **individuals** featured in the film want?
 - What do you see happening or what do you hear people say?
 - What does it mean? What do the producers want you believe about Indians and military?
 - Why do we pay attention to what it means? Why does it matter?

Reviews

Native Reviews of the film, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

Native Currents

By Raymond Wilson June 1, 2007

The portrayal of Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman

Dr. Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa), an Eastern or Santee Sioux, was the most well-known educated Native American living in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Eastman lived a long life (1858 – 1939) and achieved status as a successful author and Indian reform advocate. He became the “poster child” of Eastern, white Indian reformers who believed that Indians should abandon their ways and become white Christian farmers. What these reformers failed to realize was that Eastman was an acculturated, rather than an assimilated, Indian. He did not abandon his Indian heritage; instead, Eastman selected aspects of the dominant culture that enabled him to function in white society. For example, he adopted Christianity, but retained many of his Indian religious beliefs, observing that the true teachings of both religions were essentially the same. This religious syncretism worked for him. In addition, Eastman believed that by obtaining an education and U.S. citizenship, Indians would be better able to compete in mainstream America.

The HBO movie of Dee Brown’s classic book, “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,” has Eastman playing a major role in the film, **although he is not mentioned in the book**. Several articles appeared on the movie before its HBO premiere May 27, including ones in *Cowboys & Indians*, *The New York Times* and *Indian Country Today*. With the exception of the article in *The New York Times*, which criticized the extreme manner in which the movie applied poetic license and fabricated history, the articles contained praiseworthy and positive comments on the HBO production. The overall message of these pro-HBO movie articles was that the movie would provide the general public with a depiction of how the 1887 Dawes Severalty Act broke up reservation lands, forced Indians to accept land allotments and resulted in Indians losing tens of millions of acres of land and would, moreover, generally educate non-Indians about major Indian issues in late 19th century America.

Having Eastman as a main character in the film is not a major issue; having him working with Henry Dawes in formulating the Dawes Act is unconscionable. In fact, the repeated appearances in many scenes of Eastman and Dawes, and even Elaine Goodale on several occasions, who would become Eastman’s wife, takes poetic license too far and distorts history too much. The film version of Dawes arranging the meeting of Charles and Elaine, with her approving mother present, never happened. In fact, Elaine’s mother was a racist who did not want her daughter to marry him and even threatened not to attend their wedding. Yes, Eastman did initially support aspects of the Dawes Act, particularly the granting of citizenship to Indians, but he later

denounced the legislation. Additionally, Dawes never was the mentor of Eastman and did not help him secure the position of renaming the Indians after Eastman resigned as a government physician.

Other major distortions include having Eastman at the Little Bighorn and killing an Indian scout in 1876; he was finishing his studies at the Santee Normal School in Nebraska and preparing to go to Beloit College in Wisconsin in 1876. Eastman did go to Canada as a child, but it was during the early 1860s and concerned the Santee Sioux uprising in Minnesota. Finally, Eastman's father, Many Lightnings, who was involved in the 1860s uprising, did become a Christian and did convince his son to return with him to the United States. However, depicting him as a "Jesus freak" is again a major distortion.

Eastman's attempts to help provide better medical care to the Indians at Pine Ridge and to treat the Indian victims of the Wounded Knee massacre are accurately portrayed as is his torment as an Indian operating in two worlds in the film. However, Sioux leader Red Cloud and Elaine Goodale did not accompany Eastman to the battle site in an attempt to find any survivors.

Finally, Adam Beach did a superb job as Charles Eastman (as did Anna Paquin as Elaine Goodale). It is too bad that Beach did not or perhaps could not demand a more accurate portrayal of this fascinating, controversial and significant man. Several of my colleagues who teach Indian history have expressed similar views about the inaccuracies of Eastman's life in the film as well as many other historical fabrications. If the main purpose of the film is to educate non-Indians about Indian history, **why include so many historical inaccuracies that were not needed?** Does this not weaken the main objective? This writer realizes that Hollywood needs to apply poetic license to its films to make them more "attractive" and entertaining. I would argue, however, that a more accurate portrayal of the life of Charles Eastman would have made the film better and would still have the entertainment qualities required.

Raymond Wilson is professor of history at Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kan., and has researched and written about Eastman for over three decades.

Read more:<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/ictarchives/2007/06/01/native-currents-20-90874>
<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/ictarchives/2007/06/01/native-currents-20-90874#ixzz1pEEQfngY>

Harjo: Burying the history of Wounded Knee

By **Suzan Shown Harjo**, June 14, 2007

Someone owes Sam Eaglestaff an apology. The venerated Cheyenne River leader of the Wounded Knee Survivors Association left this life thinking we set the record straight on the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 when the United States apologized for it a century later.

There's something in the American psyche that needs to record that massacre as a battle. A battle designation must make someone feel better about those 7th Cavalry soldiers winning Medals of Honor and about non-Indians continuing to occupy and reap gold riches from the Black Hills.

Alas, the latest public recounting of that history by HBO's "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee" puts us back to pre-1990 – back to a battle that no one can be blamed for. HBO gets points for humanizing some Native figures and for attempting to depict the Dawes allotment policies, but it missed the drama, conspiracies, contradictions and tensions of the time.

But it doesn't show that the Sioux people were disarmed the night before the massacre or that the U.S. soldiers, still mad about Little Bighorn, then got drunk on rum. It doesn't show that many of the soldiers were still drunk and hung over when they killed more than 300 Hunkpapa and Minneconjou people in less than an

hour with rifles and Hotchkiss revolving cannons. It doesn't show that the 25 Army soldiers who died were killed by friendly fire.

There are many reasons why making a movie about atrocities against Americans Indians is difficult.

First, the history of covering up those atrocities is encrusted with time and deception and many Americans – historians, politicians and filmmakers among them – still deny that official exterminations ever took place.

Second, a simple folk narrative has evolved around mass executions, with themes that any school kid or president can understand, and the onus is on those who tell the tale a different way to prove it. The narrative goes like this: Europeans were led by the hand of God to this bountiful land and the Indians wouldn't share and weren't grateful for the land we gave them, so we had to move them and, yes, some bad white men did bad things and we're sorry about that; and then there were the Indian wars, but the Indians started them.

Third, part of the cover-up was a federally mandated and implemented campaign of propaganda, undertaken officially and punitively in the name of civilization. That campaign was so successful that its targets –

Native peoples' complex religions, sciences, medicines, governments, laws and lifeways – continue to be referred to in popular culture and historical, educational and scientific literature as myths and primitivism.

Fourth, the remaining Native people were so traumatized by the attempted genocide and dislocation, and were so fearful it would happen again, that most passed along the rage and sorrow and helplessness, but with little or no detail about what actually happened. When complete oral histories were passed on, they often carried stern warnings against seeking redress, challenging white people or even letting on that they knew the secret history.

Fifth, Native people were educated and socialized to believe the worst about their collective past and many had their histories, along with their languages and religions, beaten out of them in government programs.

Writers who take on this history must peel back layers and generations of prejudice, denial, propaganda and self-editing before they get to the core of truth. Then the problem becomes one of weight of evidence – hundreds of thousands of books and records as opposed to memories, most of which are not written anywhere.

Great respect must be paid to Dee Brown, who wrote "Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee" with a historian's skill and a good heart. I asked his permission in 1970 to have Native people in New York City read his book aloud, a chapter a day, over WBAI-FM. He was enthusiastic about listeners hearing his work read by descendants of peoples he wrote about and sending the subliminal message, "Indians are still here." He later supported many Indian efforts for new laws, including the U.S. apology for the Wounded Knee Massacre.

In 1990, Oglala Attorney Mario Gonzalez and I worked on behalf of Eaglestaff and the Survivors Association to secure an apology for the massacre. We tried to convince the Defense Department to get its defenders to withdraw objections to an apology, but officials rejected our theory that the 1890 killings resulted from a 7th Cavalry grudge over Little Bighorn.

They understood that U.S. citizens and officials were still so afraid in 1890 that Native people weren't allowed to leave reservations without written permission and weren't allowed to pray or dance in their traditional ways or places. They accepted that federal Indian agents accused Chief Sitting Bull and Chief Big Foot of planning outbreaks and their names were given to the Army and Indian Police as "fomenters of dissent," and

that participation in the "Ghost Dance" or "Messiah craze," as it was known after the "careful propaganda against the Dance," was the official excuse and legal cause of action under the Civilization Regulations and Sitting Bull was killed when he resisted arrest.

They agreed that the two-day fight June 25 – 26, 1876, was really a battle with several fronts near the Little Bighorn River, and that it was incorrect to call it a massacre. They also admitted that the single hour of carnage of Dec. 29, 1890, along Wounded Knee Creek was a massacre, not a battle.

But Wounded Knee was 14 years after Little Bighorn. Would the soldiers have held a grudge that long and why would they take it out on Big Foot? They blamed Custer's defeat on Sitting Bull, who was killed two weeks before Wounded Knee. The Survivors Association members had the answer: "Because Big Foot was Sitting Bull's half-brother. That's why Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa people sought sanctuary in Big Foot's Minneconjou camp."

We got the apology for the massacre, but South Dakota Sens. Larry Pressler and Thomas Daschle would not permit the actual word "apology" to be used.

So, it seems to me that someone between 1890 and today owes Sam Eaglestaff's family an apology, and maybe Dee Brown's family would appreciate one, too.

Suzan Shown Harjo, Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee, is president of the Morning Star Institute in Washington, D.C., and a columnist for Indian Country Today.

Read more: <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/ictarchives/2007/06/14/harjo-burying-the-history-of-wounded-knee-90957> and <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/ictarchives/2007/06/14/harjo-burying-the-history-of-wounded-knee-90957#ixzz1pECTg4rW>

Dances With Wolves, Kevin Costner, 1990

<http://www.nativeamerican.co.uk> Chris Smallbone

In 1990 when I saw Dances with Wolves I felt uplifted. For the first time the West was shown as it really was, the corny, unrealistic films which you could often see on television were shown up for what they were, good stories which used the west as a setting for the story to take place. Dances with Wolves was accurate where the old John Wayne films like Stagecoach and Fort Apache made the native Americans out to be mindless savages. They had always been happy to ride around a group of soldiers in large numbers, yelling and whooping against a backdrop of ever accelerating music; being skillfully shot from their ponies, rolling over in the dirt and lying stock still. Now their life was shown sympathetically and accurately. Even to the extent of the Lakota (Sioux) speaking their own language, subtitles giving us the translation below. When the Kevin Costner character, John Dunbar, encounters soldiers after living among the Indians, he finds them to be repulsive, clearly **they** are savages compared to his adopted friends. Looking back I realize that I accepted the film as accurate because it reflected the attitudes and values of its time as much as any other film. This was one reason why it was successful, because I, like the many others who flooded to see it, wanted to see the Native Americans portrayed as people. Although the film is seen through the eyes of John Dunbar, his preconceptions are often challenged and the Sioux or Lakota perspective is shown as very human, in many cases sensitive and generous. It is their humanity and culture which shine through. The script, direction, and acting achieve this excellently.

This was what we wanted in the nineties. We needed an antidote to the racism engendered by the years of Empire. Other cultures were seen as not **different** but **inferior**, their religion was incorrect, dangerous, to be feared. *Dances with Wolves* was as much a film of its time as any other film. Why should it be any different? It was an accurate piece of History in showing our values at the time, we, or at least some of us, wanted to recognize the value of other cultures, and accept the value of a multicultural world in which we found ourselves. It was also a questioning of the values of today's society, and a plea for the simple, natural life. As an accurate portrayal or history of what happened in the west it was no better or worse than any other film. It contained inaccurate details as well as biased perspectives. Although John Dunbar is sent onto the Great Plains to convalesce after being wounded in the American Civil War (1861-5) he takes part in a Buffalo Hunt with his Lakota friends. Together they witness the freshly skinned bodies of a large herd of buffaloes. In the context of the film the purpose is to show what barbarians the 'whites' are. John Dunbar sleeps away from the others that night as he is ashamed of what his fellow 'whites' have done. Historically, there is a problem with this. While the buffalo were hunted in fairly large numbers in the 1860s this was specifically for **meat**, and not for the skins. Indeed Buffalo Bill gained his nickname by being especially successful in doing precisely this in order to feed railroad workers. These workers were busy fulfilling the post Civil war commitment to unifying the country for the new Americans while splitting it into two for the Native Americans and their staple diet, the buffalo. It was not until 1871 that buffalo were hunted for their skins, for it was the discovery of new tanning techniques which enabled the buffalo hides to be exploited commercially for the first time. It was this which would lead to the decimation of the southern buffalo herds in such a short space of time which resulted in the demise of the southern Plains native American peoples.

Such specific chronological misplacement as having buffalo being skinned in large numbers five years before it was possible, may be put down to poetic license, and on the plus side *Dances with Wolves* is based on sound historical sources. The pictures of the artist George Catlin and the photographs of Edward Curtis have clearly inspired some of the specific depictions of the Lakota in the film itself and, in general the way their life is shown is helpful to historical imagination. Less forgivable historically is the way the Lakota not only occupy center stage but become the good guys where they might have expected, in former films to have been the bad. In *Dances with Wolves* it is the Pawnee who are demonized and it falls to Wes Studi to reprise his role of Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans* as their heartless, savage leader. However savage the Pawnee may have been, it is ironic that **they** are seen as the aggressors against the Lakota since historically the opposite was the case. The Lakota had not dwelt upon the Plains until they moved in from the north east in the late eighteenth century. Indeed the very reason which takes them into the centre stage in *Dances with Wolves*: they were good at fighting, (so good they actually beat the new Americans on occasions, which is why we know about them) also made them successful at taking a large chunk of the plains away from those such as the Arikara and the Crow who had lived there previously. This was why the Arikara and Crow fought as scouts for the U.S. Army against the Lakota.

Of course, to work as a film of a story on a simple level, we must know which is the good and which is the evil. Also of concern, however, is the way Dunbar has to fall in love with a *white* woman. *Stands with a Fist* (Mary McDonnell), is a character seemingly created so that the audience's expectations are met by a boy meets girl section of the plot which does not involve any mixing of the races. In defense of *Dances with Wolves*, at least the subject is validly based on the facts that Plains Indians peoples stole children to replenish their numbers and ensure their survival as a group, and that in such instances the children seem to have been fully assimilated on an equal footing. That Dunbar, himself, should manage this transition does require the

suspension of disbelief, but then if the production eases us into it is that not theatre at its best? It is worth adding, as Philip French points out, that *Dances With Wolves* also offers an opportunity to see the effects of the cutting room on a film. Two scenes which have been reinserted into the Director's Cut, Dunbar's journey with Kicking Bird and the killing of the white hunters serve to reduce the film's tendency to be rather simplistic and sentimental. (*Westerns*, Philip French, pages 196-8).

Overall *Dances with Wolves* does stand the test of time, it is a romanticized and sentimental myth that is portrayed. 'How we want the West to have been'. The action scenes, especially the buffalo hunt do not readily transfer to the small screen. But the panoramic scene shots are immense, Australian cinematographer Dean Semler has us discover the wonderful scenery as if we are there. The story unfolds simply in stages, often told through Dunbar recording his experiences and feelings in his journal. We are privileged to accompany him in his journey of self discovery. The intensity of the drama is lightened by a gentle touch of humor which often indicates that family relationships and bodily functions are universal, no matter what class or culture one is from. The music is evocative, a well gauged backdrop which heightens the emotions. The film is optimistic in that even the initially hostile 'Wind in his Hair' comes to glow with fondness and respect for the Wasichu who is ultimately assimilated into the Lakota way of life. I can feel the goose pimples as I write this, thinking about his final words to *Dances With Wolves* from the top of the ridge. I can still remember the warm glow I felt as I left the cinema as *Stands with a Fist* and *Dances with Wolves* went off to make their home in the prairies. My imagination had been well and truly high jacked for a three hour stretch and my emotions had been stretched and tightened and stretched yet again. It was only a couple of days later I realized what they'd had me believe: that two white people from the time had been assimilated into Native American life so well that they were to continue a life in the natural wilderness. It is powerful art that stretches credulity so close to breaking point.