REEL INJUN Transcript

[Silence]
[Music]
^M00:00:32
>> Growing up on the reservation, the only show in town was movie night in the church basement. Raised on cowboys and Indians, we cheered for the cowboys, never realizing; we were the Indians.
^M00:00:52
[Music and sounds from movies]
^M00:02:12
I'm an Indian; a Crete who grew up in one of the most isolated native communities on Earth, close to the Arctic Circle. Up here, we don't wear feathers or ride horses. But, because of the movies, a lot of the world still thinks we do.
^M00:02:33
[Sound of airplane]
^M00:02:38
I'm on a journey to make sense of how Hollywood's fantasy about Indians influenced the world, even natives like me.
>> You've got to look like a warrior. You've got to look like you just came back from killing a buffalo.
>> But, our tribe never hunted buffalo. We were fishermen.
>> But, the myth of the fearless, stoic warrior lives on.
[Music]
We'll never be able to change the fantasy [inaudible]. That fantasy will always be there. We'll always be on the cover of novels saying, Cheyenne Warrior!
^M00:03:17
[Music]
^M00:03:36
I'm off to Hollywood; 4,000 miles through the American west in the reservation Indian's vehicle of choice, the rez car.
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[Sound of car engine]
^M00:03:51
>> A rez car is probably like a piece of luggage or something to other people, and you kind of keep it together with tape and with string. And, you know, I have all sorts of people telling me; oh, yeah, I know that story about driving backwards, because we actually did it. I had a rez car and, you know, the ignition didn't work, so we had, like a screwdriver in the ignition and, you know, all sorts of stuff. Nobody's said to me that they had a car with three wheels yet, but that would be a rez car.
^M00:04:19
[Music]
^M00:04:30
>> These are the American Great Plains, the setting for most of Hollywood's Indian stories. I'm headed west to the sacred Black Hills, once the domain of Chief Sitting Bull and the legendary [inaudible], otherwise known as Crazy Horse.
>> Tashunkewitko [assumed spelling] does not mean Crazy Horse. Tashunkewitko means his horses are spirited. He was a great horse trainer. And, all of his horses had spirit. You could just see him prancing.
>> I've always wanted to ride a horse on the open plains. I finally feel like a real Indian. This is where Crazy Horse outmaneuvered Custer, at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Ever since, Hollywood has been telling that story over and over again, turning the battle into legend, and Crazy Horse, an icon.
^M00:05:37
[Voices from old movie clip]
^M00:05:46
Legend has it, he killed Custer.
>> There's a romanticism in the glory to Little Big Horn, we defeated Custer and all this and that, all at that emotional level. But, you know, within 15 years, our leader, Crazy Horse, was dead; Sitting Bull was dead. [Inaudible], and we were herded up.
^M00:06:09
[Music]
^M00:06:19

> Pine Ridge is the poorest Indian reservation in North America. These are the descendents of Crazy Horse.
^M00:06:31
[Music]
^M00:06:37
Their Lakota chief is a direct descendent of Chief Red Cloud, who fought alongside Crazy Horse.
^M00:06:46
[Music]
^M00:06:53
> So, this is where it happened?
> This is where it happened. Right here; this is where Chief Crazy Horse was imprisoned.
> After surrendering here to troops, Crazy Horse was stabbed in the back.
> So [inaudible], sacred ground to me. It's where our ancestors used to walk, where they used to camp and live; here.
> To native people, Crazy Horse is a mystical warrior, just like in the movies.
^M00:07:33
[Music and sound effects]
^M00:07:36
> It was a continuation of the idea that natives were really great warriors; that they were just incredibly skilled at warfare, almost unstoppable, really.
^M00:07:46
[Music and sound effects]
^M00:07:52
> [Inaudible]. I'm really glad that you're doing this. For once, somebody's taking the time to tell the real story of Crazy Horse. As he says in his song; whenever you look, see the Black Hills, remember me. That is our homeland; sacred grounds.
^M00:08:14
[Music]
^M00:08:29
> Carved out of the sacred Black Hills is Crazy Horse Memorial. When complete, it will be the largest statue to a human, anywhere.
> There will be a 44-foot stone feather on the back of his head. It will be carved from 11 pieces of stone.
> An ironic tribute to a man who it is said refused to have his image captured. Most experts agree that every photo of him is a fake.
> Who was Crazy Horse? Not, who was Crazy Horse? Who is Crazy Horse? Who he is, is he's an idea. He's an embodiment of the human spirit. He's an embodiment of what can be done when you are centered and balanced within yourself as a human being, when you have a relationship to the spiritual reality that you are a part of. See, to me, he's an embodiment of that.
^M00:09:30
[Music]
^M00:09:57
[Laughter and applause]
> Good try. [Inaudible]. It's nice doing a TV shot; maybe a couple more, I'll be able to get in the movies someday. And, maybe change some of the movie cliches, you know, you see every day in the movies. Sort of, the settlers come in, get [inaudible] and wants his resources, you know.
> Hey, Injun [assumed spelling]. Which way does this road go?
> Um, road stay; you go.
^M00:10:21
[Laughter and applause]
^M00:10:26
> You don't understand. Some day, we want to live together and love one another, like brothers and sisters. We're going to love the white eyes. It is painful to [inaudible].
[Laughter and applause]
^M00:10:41
[Music]

^M00:10:54
>> Zig-zagging my way through the American heartland, I'm hoping to make sense of the world's enduring love affair with the Hollywood Indian. In the movies, we're often portrayed as spiritual, noble and free. This image has captured the world's imagination.
^M00:11:13
[Music]
^M00:11:21
This fascination with everything native begins with the very first explorers. They encountered hundreds of nations; rich and diverse cultures, languages and beliefs. The world is hooked.
>> Native Americans were among the first subjects for films Thomas Edison shot in silence about Native Americans. This was in the late 1800's.
>> Thomas Edison unveiled his kinetoscope in Times Square, and it was a penny machine that played the Laguna Pueblo ceremonies and dances. And, those were the very first movement [inaudible].
^M00:12:05
[Music]
^M00:12:10
>> There were more than a hundred silents made involving Native Americans [inaudible] very much because [inaudible]. Part of American history, of course, was really still ongoing at the time that cinema was really being born.
>> With populations dwindling, most natives are confined to reservations. Then, as film is being invented, the Seventh Calvary, in revenge for Little Big Horn, opens fire on the last free community of natives. 300 men, women and children are killed at Wounded Knee, on the Pine Ridge Reservation.
^M00:12:54
[Music]
^M00:12:59
>> That is a genocide that occurred and the culture wanted to perpetuate the idea that these people are now mythologic. You know, they don't even exist; they're like dinosaurs.
^M00:13:11
[Music]
^M00:13:17
>> The reason the Indians were projected so heavily into movies was the romance of the tragedy; Greek, Roman tragedy. The western, as a form, is a very open form. It's a very pure kind of American metaphor, a kind of frame within which you can write or say all kinds of things.
>> I think that the cinema was created to film first nations. At the beginning, they were really pioneers when they went west with the first movie camera. If you look at the iron horse; [inaudible] from that film. They are telling you that the crew was living like the pioneers, you know? That they were going through the same experience.
>> I read that in early cinema, they used to get extras in the cowboy movies that were real Indians, and they'd pay them with tobacco and fire water, and they even used to have armed guards to make sure these people didn't get up to any treachery on the set, you know?
^M00:14:32
[Music]
[Music and background noise]
^M00:15:10
>> In the movies, all natives are supreme horsemen, at one with their horse. But, most of us can't even ride. Perhaps that myth was born here, with the Crow people of Montana.
[Cheering and music]
The Crow are renowned riders throughout North America. It's like they were born on a horse.
>> The Crows, they love horses. Without a horse, it's like losing a mom or a family member.
^M00:15:48
[Music]
^M00:15:53
When a horse dies, some people cry.
^M00:15:56
[Music]
^M00:16:14

>> There is a spiritual connection between the Crow and the horse. Because, the horse come along and he saved a lot of people like me, you know, from [inaudible]. It heals you. It makes you think about something not yourself, but even though you became like this with him, you know, he was still something that you could open your hand to and let go. Something you gave away.
[Music]
>> Fed up with seeing only white guys riding in movies, [inaudible] became Hollywood's top stunt man.
>> [Inaudible]. No longer just how, you know? Now I can travel low-rider and shoot you with [inaudible]. You can wrap me up in a turban, and I can be your worst nightmare.
>> He now trains young natives in the secrets of his craft.
>> Hey, come in! Come in toward me. Come in toward me. Come in toward me. Now, go! [Inaudible]. You see some good in some of these kids and you want to bring it out in them. I'm trying to give that back, because I can, because I want to.
^M00:17:42
[Music]
^M00:17:55
I don't just take in anybody. If you can't ride your horse anywhere you want, with your hands out to your side and still be in control; that's horsemanship. I'll put you on the edge. I want you to feel [inaudible]. You know? I want you to feel that. Whoa!
^M00:18:17
[Music]
^M00:18:24
If we don't teach them, they're never going to learn. And, I take that in life, you know? If I don't tell people about Indians, they're going to think we're all junks. You know? They're going to think we all can ride bareback.
^M00:18:40
[Music]
^M00:19:00
>> Throughout the silent era, the Indian becomes not only a hero, but a Hollywood star.
>> The [inaudible] silent era was tremendous. The people in the silent days were going to movies every week, so much was being produced. So, it was a natural for Native American perspectives to be viewed.
>> The portrayal of native people on the screen has changed dramatically since the silent era. They were a very popular character.
>> Native American people directing and acting in films, and they were bringing their viewpoints to table, too. And, those were being listened to. Everything was wide open. It was really exciting times.
^M00:19:41
[Music]
^M00:19:46
>> One of the most [inaudible] films of its time, featuring real native actors, is The Silent Enemy.
>> The Silent Enemy refers to starvation. It's what is occurring to native people who are being encroached on, and how are they conquering the silent enemy of starvation. In the beginning of the film, it talks about the demise of American Indian people. And, you're talking about a film in the 1930's, when the population of American Indian people had dipped to around 250,000. So, the idea of the vanishing American was probably very real in people's minds. So, here we have this chance to capture the Indians before they vanish, and what better way to capture them than on film?
^M00:20:32
[Music]
^M00:20:39
>> The most famous Indian of this era, and star of The Silent Enemy, is Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance.
>> Buffalo Child Long Lance, in the movie, becomes the ultimate warrior, the mystic warrior, the one who's going to help his people.
>> But, Long Lance lived his whole life with a dark secret.
>> He disguised his tri-racial background; Indian, black and white. And, promoted a new image of who he was. So, he changed his name to Long Lance. So, he took off from there. What made him the darling of the cocktail set is that he would show up, his hair slicked back, dark skin, in this beautiful tuxedo. And, everybody's looking for the Indian to appear, and they don't see this very sophisticated man in the tuxedo. When it came out that he was part black, of course he was shunned. And, nobody wanted to invite him to any of their sheik cocktail parties. He ended up at a

benefactor's home in California, and ended up committing suicide because it was going to be revealed about his true heritage.
^M00:21:50
[Music]
^M00:21:58
>> I was lucky enough to grow up in a time when native people were the cool thing to be. And, I remember going to parties where white people would come to me and want to touch my hair, and would describe themselves getting an Indian name from an elder at some ceremony somewhere that they had managed to attend. And, it was always, you know, Dakota.
>> Ah, choosing your animal name. First, you choose your animal, which is your spirit; the animal most like you.
^M00:22:27
[Howling and screaming]
^M00:22:32
>> I am the wolverine! I am the wolverine!
[Screaming]
[Music]
>> Scattered throughout North America are summer camps like these, keeping Hollywood's notion of the noble savage alive and well.
^M00:22:52
[Music]
^M00:23:08
This is the event of the summer; tribal games. The time when boys become Indian braves of war.
>> [Inaudible] is that [inaudible] so many people want to be Indians.
[Whooping noises]
[Inaudible] put around the Indians, putting [inaudible] this magic [inaudible]. Everybody wants to be there. And, one of the ways to be there was to become Indian.
>> David Tyfner [assumed spelling] comes all the way from Austria.
>> I am here because I'm a counselor in Camp [inaudible]. I was chosen as a tribe leader's [inaudible] Sioux tribe, which was a great, great surprise for me and a great honor.
^M00:24:00
[Several people chanting]
^M00:24:17
>> [Inaudible]. I mean, basically it's sort of like two or three movies that I would have watched. But, through these movies, I just got the whole mentality of the natives. It gave me a very positive [inaudible]. Like, the unity, the family; the unity, how they pulled together, like brotherhood.
>> I wonder if any of these kids have ever met a native person, or if their image of us comes only from the movies. I hope I don't disappoint them.
>> On one side, I like the peaceful image of the natives. But, if necessary, the warrior image. I'd say it's very brutal. The natives had brutal times. But, I think it was not as it was necessary.
^M00:25:03
[Many people chanting and cheering]
[Music]
[Many people chanting and cheering]
^M00:26:12
>> In the 1930's, the Indian is transformed into a brutal savage. And American, struggling through the Great Depression, needs a new brand of hero.
>> There were a number of Hollywood films that came out in the early 1930's that followed in the steps of The Silent Enemy. And, the Indians were the stars of these movies. But, the interesting thing about that whole cycle, they just found at the box office; Americans are not that interested in them.
>> For the most part in that decade, we're looking at films where it's the savage. It's the attacking marauders.
>> Savages!
>> That's my wife, Yakima [assumed spelling], my squaw.
>> Yes, but she's; she's savage.
>> Si, senor. She's a little bit savage, I think.
>> People lined up in droves. Americans loved westerns. It's in our blood.

^M00:27:10
[Music]
^M00:27:15
>> Stagecoach is the iconic western. It's the western that all others were really modeled after and it's one of the most damaging movies for native people in history. You have white society inside a stagecoach and they are besieged on all sides by native people, by the wild of America.
^M00:27:37
[Screaming, gunshots and music]
^M00:27:42
Those that are stopping progress, those that are backwards, those that are vicious and bloodthirsty. Stagecoach summed up and gave the opinion of native people for decades to the populous in the U.S.; that's how they thought of us and it's because of John Ford that they thought of us like that. And, that native people may have even thought of themselves.
^M00:28:09
[Cartoon sounds and music]
^M00:28:18
That's when we developed the sort of Tonto speak that now, I think, is most associated with the portrayal of [inaudible].
>> But, some films, instead of using a native language; well, they just ran English backwards.
^M00:28:32
[Person speaking in foreign language]
^M00:28:38
Listen for the satanic messages.
^M00:28:41
[Person speaking in background]
^M00:28:45
And as for the Indians, they were usually white guys in red face.
>> White people playing native roles? I love it, because it's funny.
[Music]
All of the big stars played natives.
>> She can chew on my moccasin anytime she wants to.
>> [Inaudible]; Chuck Connors as Geronimo. It's like Adam Sandler [inaudible].
>> I remember once we were on a set. The director says, I want a real native. [Inaudible] real, up front. I want to see the real thing. We couldn't find one.
^M00:29:31
[Music]
^M00:29:36
>> Native women, on the other hand, are pretty much absent in the western.
>> I knew I could count on [inaudible].
>> Except, of course, for the Indian princess, epitomized by Pocahontas.
>> Why is this woman, the Disney Pocahontas, such a profound image, a mythic image, for American people? What about children who know nothing about native society and they see this young woman who has this one shoulder, skimpy dress that she's wearing, and she has Nikko [assumed spelling], her raccoon that she communes with. Well, the reality of Pocahontas is that at the time of the contact with John Smith and this event, you see, she was about nine years old. So, we imbue in her all of the wrong notions of what we want to see in a mythical princess, and she becomes the embodiment, not of native society; she becomes an embodiment of American society, of American desire.
^M00:30:38
[Music]
^M00:30:43
>> Native men are reduced to a mere caricature.
>> Richard Lamont [assumed spelling], one of Hollywood's biggest costume designers, knows first hand about how Hollywood dresses up Indians.
>> Richard Lamont: Yeah, a finger necklace. I don't know what show it was, but I'm sure somebody saw that in the research, you know.
>> Yeah.

>> Richard Lamont: Where they used body parts or wear them as trophies; you know, made a necklace.
>> If you look at the movies in the '30's, Native Americans, I want to say much like African Americans, were sort of props. Rather than try to make them look regional, everybody was identifiable. So, they weren't interested in explaining the tribes. They said; well, they're Indians.
>> [Inaudible]. This Indian's no Indian.
>> If he's no Indian, why is he wearing a chicken for a hat?
>> So, to keep things simple, every Indian becomes a Plains Indian, wearing the headdress, buckskin, and the headband.
>> That's not a headband, is it?
>> Yeah, it probably is a headband.
>> [Inaudible].
>> Yeah, and it's probably just like the ones we were talking about; the ones that never existed.
>> Headbands are an interesting thing. Certainly, certain Americans, Native American tribes, did use headbands and wear headbands. But, the Plains Indians, usually not. But when you're working on a western and you have stunt people and they're going to fall off horses, they need to keep their wigs on and that's the best way to do it. So, Hollywood started putting headbands on Plains Indians and then it just got to be a thing where you saw it in every movie.
>> A headband with an elastic back; something you'd never find on a native.
>> This is actually; well, probably not calculated as an ingenious act of colonialism. You were essentially robbing nations of an identity and grouping them into one.
^M00:32:19
[Cheering and chanting noises]
^M00:32:24
>> And the western forces all Indians to live in the deserts of the Southwest.
^M00:32:29
[Music]
^M00:32:36
John Ford shot so many movies here that tourists come by the thousands to experience the iconic American West. And, to pick up a memento of America's greatest Indian fighter.
^M00:32:52
[Music]
[Sound of John Wayne movie clip]
^M00:33:11
>> John Wayne is an icon of American cinema, one of the great action heroes in history. His actions, which are remarkably violent, seem excused actually, that this is the exact appropriate behavior one would have.
>> In The Searchers, John Wayne literally uncovers a grave with an Indian person, a dead Indian person, in it.
^M00:33:39
[Sound of John Wayne movie clip]
^M00:33:46
And, shoots him in the face.
^M00:33:48
[Sound of John Wayne movie clip]
^M00:34:01
He embodied the idea of the unstoppable American that, the true American who wasn't native. Native Americans were the ones that stopped real Americans from settling their own country.
^M00:34:16
[Music]
^M00:34:28
>> I found two Navajo elders who were extras in some of John Ford's films. Effie and James Etna [assumed spelling] were teenage sweethearts when they met on set. They're seeing these films for the very first time.
>> [Inaudible].
>> [Inaudible].
>> James can remember how many of the Navajo actors, who go off script in some scenes, joking around in their language. No one ever bothered to translate what was said, until now.
^M00:35:04

[Music and sound of movie clip]
^M00:35:29
After playing the bonehead savage for so many years, the Navajo get their sweet revenge.
^M00:35:36
[Music]
^M00:36:01
[Sound of gunshots]
[Music]
^M00:36:10
Right next door to the Navajo is a place where anybody can be a cowboy for a day, even an Indian like me. Here, they worship one man. His swagger is screen legend. His name; The Duke.
>> John Wayne never did a bad movie; okay, partner? You got it? All right, pilgrim.
^M00:36:35
[Man doing impression of John Wayne]
^M00:36:41
>> Everybody's always fantasizing about an age when individuals were very strong. The lone guy traveling across some wide landscape and dealing with all of the elements. Everything from rattlesnakes to who knows what.
>> There's always this kind of John Wayne guy that is sort of the moral standard that represents America and its moral values. So, it's a big, hunky, white guy that's not real smart, but is going to do the right thing and he's going to drive the Indians away and marry the schoolmarm and walk off into the sunset.
^M00:37:24
[Sound of John Wayne movie clip]
^M00:37:30
>> I'd like to thank you for the use of your mustang, lady, and apologize for the [inaudible] marks on the dashboard, uh-huh.
>> Who's the quickest draw here?
>> Who's the quickest? I would say maybe [inaudible].
^M00:37:44
[Several people speaking at once]
[Music]
^M00:38:19
>> As a kid, I didn't realize he was me Bugs Bunny was killing on screen.
^M00:38:24
[Sound of a Bugs Bunny cartoon]
^M00:38:33
>> Yes, sir; I sure love to kill me Indians.
^M00:38:37
[Music]
^M00:38:45
>> When we were kids, we used to play Cowboys and Indians. I was always Gary Cooper.
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[Music and cheering sounds]
^M00:38:58
>> Those images do shape people's opinions and I think they put it at odds a bit for me. You know, when you're kids and you're trying to play Cowboys and Indians, and if you're an Indian kid; well, doesn't that mean you're going to lose all of the time?
^M00:39:11
[Music]
^M00:39:16
>> When we watched the Indians being slaughtered at the end of every movie; well, my brother would refuse to watch it. Every time that bugle went off and the charge started, my brother; he was a year and a half younger than me. He'd go like this and he wouldn't look; he wouldn't watch.
>> We'd come out of those theaters after the cavalry had rescued the white people, and all of a sudden, we'd hear; there's those Indians! And, we'd start fighting. We had to fight them white kids. Every Saturday, we knew we was going to get in a fight.

^M00:39:54
[Music]
^M00:40:20
>> I'm here to find out how native kids today would react to the kinds of westerns I saw growing up.
[Music]
>> So, what you understand. I want you to listen real carefully and find out what they're talking about, okay?
>> The film is Little Big Man, where an Indian massacre was made graphic and real for the very first time.
^M00:40:44
[Sound of movie clip]
[Music]
^M00:42:13
>> See, when they got off the boat, they didn't recognize us. They said, who are you; and, we said, we're the people, we're the human beings. And they said; oh, Indians. Because, they didn't recognize what it meant to be a human being.
^M00:42:22
[Music]
^M00:42:28
I'm a human being. This is the name of my tribe. This is the name of my people. But, I'm a human being.
^M00:42:33
[Music]
^M00:42:39
But, the predatory mentality shows up and starts calling us Indians and committing genocide against us as a vehicle of erasing the memory of being a human being.
^M00:42:51
[Music]
^M00:42:56
So, they used warped textbooks, history books, and when film came along, they used film.
[Music]
Even in our own communities; how many of us are fighting to protect our identity of being an Indian? And, 600 years ago, that word, Indian; that sound was never made in this hemisphere. That sound, that noise, was never, ever made. Ever. And, we're trying to protect that as an identity, see? So, it affects all of us. It's reached the point, evolutionarily speaking; we're starting to not recognize ourselves as human beings. We're too busy trying to protect the idea of a Native American or an Indian. But, we're not Indians and we're not Native Americans. We're older than both concepts. We're the people; we're the human beings.
>> Thank you for making me a human being!
>> It makes my heart sad. A world without human beings has no center to it.
^M00:43:56
[Music]
^M00:44:14
>> I always liked; the best part of any movie was when you heard [inaudible]. Well, I loved that; [inaudible].
>> There's not an Indian within miles of here?
>> Yeah, I just loved that. And then, long ago when we had that, we were never stressed out. Because, when you see old pictures of Indians, we were never fat, we weren't diabetic, heart problems. Because, we had problems, we had; [inaudible], you know. We didn't need Dr. Phil. [Inaudible]. So, I'd say we should bring that back. If we got somebody from the IRS come over.
>> There is one face that has become an American icon for all that is good about native people; Hollywood's most famous Indian actor, Iron Eyes Cody.
>> Iron Eyes Cody was a very interesting character. All in all, he was probably involved in close to 100 westerns.
[Sound of a movie clip]
He was very much the Plains Indian with the war bonnet, the paint. He fit the image of what people thought American Indians should be. So, he became a symbol, an icon for American Indians in this country and all over the world.
>> Some people have a deep, abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country. And, some people don't. People start pollution. People can stop it.
[Music]
>> The Iron Eyes, like many heroes, had a secret identity.

>> He was actually born Oscar de Corti around 1904 in Louisiana. His parents were immigrants from Sicily and Southern Italy. Back then, at the turn of the century in Louisiana, Italians were not welcome. There was a lynching by the Irish against the Italians. So, he grew up amongst all sorts of prejudice against Italians. He always loved American Indians very much and wanted to be part of them, even though he was Sicilian. So, he took on another identity. He always wanted to be in pictures, so he eventually joined Hollywood.
>> That's Iron Eyes, behind James Cagney, waiting to be spray painted Indian red.
>> Behind the camera, he was very much involved. His wife was Native American. He had the whole image, in his real life as well as in Hollywood.
^M00:46:50
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:46:55
So, when the camera stopped, he kept his identity and he became what his image was. He really believed it and he lived it and he breathed it.
>> You used the bow and arrow. You were pretty good with that, I understand.
>> [Inaudible].
>> DeMille used you in all of his pictures.
>> Iron Eyes Cody: I did all of his stuff with the shooting with the bow and arrow into bodies and things like that. I hunt with a bow and arrow.
>> The older he got, the more he believed it. I remember visiting his house and at that time, it was after his stroke. His whole house was just full of photographs with celebrities of himself as an Indian, and he had a number of videos going simultaneously. I counted about seven, where he would be playing his own movies constantly, all of the time. He believed he was what he saw on the screen.
^M00:47:48
[Music]
^M00:47:58
>> Iron Eyes Cody died on January 4th, 1999. Today, I am meeting the eldest of his two adopted sons, Robert Tree Cody.
[Sound of knocking on door]
>> [Inaudible].
>> Tree Cody?
>> Robert Tree Cody: Oh, yes. How are you?
>> [Inaudible].
>> Robert Tree Cody: Yes, good morning. [Inaudible].
^M00:48:21
[Music]
^M00:48:37
>> To this day, Robert celebrates his father as native.
>> Robert Tree Cody: He was a man with a good heart. He raised us to know the Indian way of life, through our dancing and songs, and language, too. But, like I said, I will always stick to my guns. I will defend my father's honor. And, I will always defend that. I lived with this man. This man was a great man. My father was of Indian people.
^M00:49:11
[Music]
^M00:49:33
>> In the '60's, everything was turned on its head.
>> The western was [inaudible], and the hippies become Indians.
>> The '60's, man. My daughter said, well, how can you listen to people that were named; the groups were Vanilla Fudge, Cream, Strawberry Alarm Clock. Well, we had the munchies for 15 years, that's why.
^M00:49:56
[Music]
^M00:50:01
And, we always tolerated it, too, because they always had the best smoke. So, you had to put up with [inaudible]. You know, that was like, hippie, man. You know, like [inaudible]. I was, like Indian, you know, in a previous life.
^M00:50:13
[Music]
^M00:50:27

>> I've come to San Francisco, birthplace of the hippie. It's during the summer of love that the Indian is at his grooviest. Sasheen Little Feather [assumed spelling] was there.
>> Oh, Haight-Ashbury.
>> Sasheen Little Feather: Brings back a lot of memories. A lot of people have stolen the street signs over the years, so it must have cost them a fortune to keep replacing them. My first visit to Haight-Ashbury here was in 1966. People were dancing in the streets. Some of them were nude.
[Laughter]
>> Sasheen was raised native. But, when she moved to Haight-Ashbury, people's reactions to the way she dressed surprised her.
>> Sasheen Little Feather: People asked me; what are you? Are you a hippie? And, I said, no; what's a hippie? So, I went to a place where the hippies lived to see what a hippie looked like, and I said; I don't look like that.
^M00:51:29
[Music]
^M00:51:34
I did some modeling at that time and they put me in these outfits.
>> Really?
>> Sasheen Little Feather: People emulated the American Indian as a free spirit. They always said; oh, my greatgrandmo was a Cherokee princess.
>> One of the ways you could honor native people was to dress like a native person. So, you have this, you know, extension of the headband. And, native people were saying; well, we actually don't dress like that. They also created this fictionalized notion of native society. And, it was supported by the films they were seeing.
>> They don't understand us, so we do the best we can. At least we stay alive. Are you alive?
>> They were in a way trying to imitate us, but in another way, they were trying to remember who they were.
[Music]
>> Every human being was a descendent of a tribe. So, these white people, they're descendents of tribes. There was a time in their ancestry when they wore feathers. All right? And they wore beads and shells. There was a time in their ancestry, all right, before this colonizing mentality came and did to them, to turn them into the white people they are, and then it came and did it to us. The very same thing that happened to us, happened to them.
^M00:52:57
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:53:06
>> It's emblematic of one of the ways that people in the '60's, Hollywood particularly, were now trying to deal with their own legacy, which I think at this point was sort of hard to deny, and they were coming to some sort of reconciliation about it.
^M00:53:22
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:53:37
Native American people became a great allegorical tool to stand in for virtually any oppressed people.
^M00:53:44
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:53:51
So, you had Native Americans really standing in for the civil rights movement, which was what was going on at the time.
^M00:53:56
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:54:03
There was a moment when Native Americans began to assert themselves more politically and more forcefully.
>> It was more than five months ago that a determined band of American Indians seized Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay in their own demonstration for a better life. Today, they're still there.
>> This is a country where all men are created equal and it's the land of the free and the home of truth, justice and liberty for all. Well, we want to know why that doesn't apply to us.
>> From the time I went to Alcatraz, I had been out of the non-native world for six years trying to find a place and there was just no place that I felt like I fit. So then, Alcatraz happened.
>> We want to be treated as human beings, to be looked upon with respect, as equals.
>> The main accomplishment is that it rekindled the spirit of the people. The spirit that is the people was diminishing.

Because, Indians were ashamed. Because, just the hostility of the non-native communities around native communities, and in its own way, the hostility of the media through the film because these are subtle hostilities, if they're not blatant hostilities. So, something was diminishing the spirit, and I think that this activist period of time rekindled the spirit.
>> That presented a new opportunity to see native people in a different light, and you began to see filmmakers portray native people in a completely different manner.
^M00:55:34
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:55:44
Billy Jack was sort of an action hero. He was really representative of something we saw emerge in the '70's, which was a native style hero who would use physical violence to enact justice.
^M00:55:57
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:56:23
[Inaudible] a little vengeance in this or something, the right kind of vengeance.
^M00:56:28
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:56:33
You couldn't help but just root for this guy and what he stood for.
^M00:56:37
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:56:43
>> In that one character you have embodied pretty much all of '70's angst and anger that one [inaudible] in America.
^M00:56:50
[Sound of movie clip]
^M00:56:56
So, he would come back and fight off injustice using his feet and fists and kung fu, and one of the most amusing character traits, would remove his shoe and sock before kicking the heck out of someone.
^M00:57:09
[Music]
^M00:57:27
>> The Indians start to fight back, not just in the movies, but in real life as well. This is Wounded Knee. For me, and many natives, it's sacred ground. What happened here in 1973 would change the image of natives in Hollywood forever. It all started when the American Indian movement faced off against the FBI.
>> Inside Wounded Knee, the Indians are prepared. They have weapons and Molotov cocktails to handle the armored vehicle which federal agents have moved into position.
>> The American government fought a war against us. From the tanks that they used at Wounded Knee to the way they used the FBI as paramilitary and National Guards, we were fighting for our lives. Our death casualty went quite high.
[Music]
>> [Inaudible] our lives as something meaningful. In the course of history, the Indian Affairs has been changed. We were prepared to die.
>> We were at Wounded Knee, surrounded by the military might of the United States of America.
>> Their field of fire; it was very precise, the feds.
>> They had snipers and, automatic; I mean, they had 50-calibers, [inaudible] meant business.
>> Help would come from the most unexpected source; Hollywood.
>> I was sitting at home one day and I got a phone call from Marlon Brando. He was up for an award for best actor for The Godfather. And, he asked me, would I go up and represent him at the Academy Awards. He said this would be an opportunity to explain to people about the stereotype of Native Americans in film and also because of the Indian occupation at Wounded Knee in South Dakota.
>> Well, we were inside Wounded Knee. They're shooting at us every damn night. And, there was quite a few people inside watching, in the trading post, the Academy Awards.
>> The ceremony was due to start about six o'clock in the evening. That's when they rolled out the red carpet. And, I got dressed in my traditional Indian regalia. But, there was a man, and he was the producer of the whole show, and he took that speech away from me and he warned me very sternly; I'll give you 60 seconds or less. And, if you go over that 60 seconds, I'll have you arrested. I'll have you put in handcuffs.

>> Marlon Brando, in The Godfather.
^M01:00:19
[Applause]
^M01:00:24
>> Accepting the award for Marlon Brando in The Godfather, is Sasheen Little Feather.
>> And, all of a sudden, we get a call. [Inaudible], hey; there's an Indian. And so, I rushed in there and saw Sasheen Little Feather just get to the microphone. And, she starts making this speech.
>> Sasheen Little Feather: I'm representing Marlon Brando this evening and he has asked me to tell you, in a very long speech which I cannot share with you presently, because of the time, but I will be glad to share with the press afterwards, that he very regretfully cannot accept this very generous award. And, the reasons for this being are the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry. Excuse me.
[Applause]
>> Sasheen Little Feather: There was a round of confusion in the whole audience. Everybody's mouths flung open. Everybody was in chaos. And also, with recent happenings at Wounded Knee, I beg at this time that I have not intruded upon this evening and that we will, in the future, our hearts and our understandings will meet with love and generosity. Thank you on behalf of Marlon Brando.
^M01:01:54
[Applause]
^M01:02:00
And, it was really an experience for me, being lied about in the media; people saying that I wasn't Indian. People saying that I rented my dress. It was a very tough time. There were many death threats at that time.
>> But, it was to personally discredit her and at the same time, discredit the message that she was trying to deliver about the depiction of native people in film. But, she was also talking about the atrocities against native people that were continuing.
>> We don't believe we're going to get out of there alive. And, the morale is down low. And, Marlon Brando and Sasheen Little Feather totally uplifted our lives.
^M01:02:48
[Music]
^M01:03:31
>> I just have a dream that someday I will get into the movies and then I will win an Academy Award, and then I'll refuse it because of the mistreatment of Marlon Brando.
^M01:03:41
[Laughter and applause]
^M01:03:46
[Music and whooping sound]
>> Will Sampson [assumed spelling] in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is one of those great performances that is completely memorable.
>> Raise your hands up, up. That's it, that's it, up; all the way up.
>> Everyone talks about Nicholson, but you couldn't have that movie without Will Sampson. He's the stoic Indian who really is silent for the movie. But, there's something about the way he portrays them. It has a dignity.
^M01:04:15
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:04:50
>> There was a beginning to see an ownership over these very stereotypes, so suddenly the fact that Will Sampson plays the stoic Indian in the way he did in that movie, in some ways reclaims that character for our people. It says, I will take it within me and I will own it, and I will give it a grace.
>> The character in Cuckoo's Nest started out as the stereotypical Indian, and it rose to a level of humanity as the picture unfolds. He has to become the symbol of freedom for America, really.
^M01:05:32
[Music]
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:06:13
>> What we began to see in the film, like say Little Big Man, was an attempt to portray [inaudible] people as nonstereotyp or at least attempt to flesh out the characters that they could portray on screens.
[Sound of movie clip]

It played a lot with satire and sending up a lot of the stereotypes, and it was also a home to an absolutely brilliant performance by Chief Dan George, who played the elder in the film with a sly, comic wit that I'm not sure we'd ever seen.
^M01:06:47
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:06:53
>> In The Outlaw Josey Wales, when Eastwood in the film encounters this native man, played by Chief Dan George, and he's hilarious in the movie.
^M01:07:04
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:07:09
>> He had most of the humor in the film. So, that's what attracted me to the script in the first place, is that the Indians were treated as people with all different kinds of shadings.
^M01:07:20
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:07:25
>> He was an elder, but he wasn't pseudo-wise; you know, he wasn't a cliche of the wise, tribal leader. He was kind of a guy who is adrift, just like Josey Wales was.
^M01:07:36
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:07:48
>> He was the key that brought that warmth and authenticity of who native people really are, because he had that sense of humor. See, one of the things that I think is a very vital part in our community, what has kept us alive, is humor. Our ability to laugh at just; you know, it gets ugly sometimes, and our ability to laugh at the ugly.
^M01:08:07
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:08:17
Humor; it's the thread that we weave our lives around as native people, because the humor has saved us. The Great Spirit and humor; that's what saved us.
>> Comedy, the ability to make light throughout this, was one of his great, great skills. And, it's Clint Eastwood at his violent best, and yet, in the middle of that film, there's Chief Dan George, undoing a lot of the problems that had been done before, and in a single role.
^M01:08:47
[Music]
^M01:08:53
>> [Inaudible] problems doing my act, you know, because I know a lot of you white people have never seen an Indian do stand up comedy before, you know. [Inaudible] so long you probably thought that Indians never had a sense of humor, you know? We never thought you were too funny, either.
^M01:09:06
[Laughter and applause]
[Music]
^M01:09:17
>> In the '80's, the western goes out of style. It wasn't until the '90's that the Indian comes back big.
>> The '90's began as a decade with the iconic movie that started it all; Dances with Wolves.
>> It was a box office hit. It picked up several Oscars, including Best Picture. And, people lined up in droves because it was a western, and a very good one at that.
>> The natives were fleshed out as characters, allowed to be seen as more complete people. They weren't just warriors; they weren't just peaceful.
^M01:09:54
[Music]
^M01:10:00
There was a very sensitive and sympathetic approach. It doesn't erase the fact that at it's core the film is not a native movie. It is still a movie made from the outside of us and it's about us and is meant to be sympathetic towards us. But, it isn't us.
>> It's a story about a white guy. And, Indians are the T and A, but it gets promoted as being about native people or

Indians, but it's not, really. We're just backdrop.
>> I thought; okay, here's a guy with a mullet and he conveniently finds a white woman in the Indian camp. When they show her portrayal in it, it was; well, she if she lived with these native people, she would have been well groomed and dressed like them. They had her dressed like Wilma Flintstone, with mud on her and disheveled and lost.
>> And then, to treat my nation like we don't know how to fight.
^M01:10:52
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:10:56
We, the Lakota, who are responsible; the first nation to ever militarily defeat the United States of America, on the field of battle? And, Lawrence of the Plains has to teach us how to fight?
^M01:11:10
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:11:19
>> But, the brilliant performance by Graham Green[assumed spelling]; I think beginning with that performance that Graham Green becomes legend.
>> I had to learn Lakota.
[Sound of movie clip]
I worked eight hours a day on it until I was fluent in what I was saying. I can't even speak my own language. The only language I speak is English, and not very well.
>> He expanded what it was meant to be; a native on screen. And, for us to see ourselves is very empowering, and for us to see ourselves presented in the way Graham Green did it is especially empowering. In many ways, I think that performance is what has informed so many of the films that have followed.
^M01:11:58
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:12:03
>> With the huge success of Dances with Wolves, playing Indian meant box office hits for Hollywood and its stars. Scenes, stories and roles were designed to cash in on the new popularity. Being Indian was lucrative, and cool again.
^M01:12:20
[Music]
^M01:12:31
Oddly enough, this resurgence of the western bankrolls the birth of Independent Native Cinema, and for the first time, I hear my own language in the movies.
[Sound of movie clip]
Even the leaders of the American Indian movement, Russell Means [assumed spelling] and John Trudow [assumed spelling], go Hollywood, cast in films like Thunderheart for a touch of native [inaudible].
^M01:12:59
[Sound of movie clip]
[Music]
^M01:13:10
>> [Inaudible], by the '80's. What is emerging onto that is a cultural artistic voice. And, I see it coming. There's more native filmmakers, songwriters, and so, out of all of that native creativity, it's coming out. See, we will find our voice.
>> It's a good day to be indigenous. It's 45 degrees in the sun. It's 8AM, Indian time.
>> Smoke Signals was another film that came right at the end of the '90's, that started the golden age of [inaudible] cinema. This was a movie made by a native guy, Chris Eyre, starring native people, and not about what occurred 120 years ago. It was a movie about nativeness now and, that was a big breakthrough.
>> You're leaving [inaudible], going into a whole different country, cousin.
>> But, it's the United States.
>> Damn right it is. That's as foreign as it gets. Hope you two got your vaccinations.
[Laughter]
>> Maybe all we need is a good laugh. Maybe that's all we need as a people, is a good laugh. And, I think Evan Adams [assumed spelling], you know, was really the center of that.
^M01:14:21
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:14:27
I was watching Evan perform, and I said; Evan, what are you doing? I go, what are you playing, because I could never

place it. He had this Indian humor and goodness to him. And, he kept it the whole time we were shooting. I said to Evan; I said, now, what's going on? What are you doing here? You know? And, he told me he was playing his grandma.
^M01:14:52
[Music]
^M01:15:03
>> After criss-crossing North America, I finally arrive; Hollywood.
^M01:15:09
[Music]
^M01:15:23
Living in the Hollywood Hills is one of today's most successful native actors, Adam Beach.
>> Adam Beach: The perception of who we are in Hollywood has a lot of respect, because they are still fascinated with who we are, as a culture, as a people throughout history and stories they tell, throughout film, which is great because it really teaches a lot of people that, you know, we have something to offer to the world.
>> In his starring role in Clint Eastwood's Flags of Our Fathers, Adam Beach puts a human face to the stereotype of the drunken Indian.
^M01:16:00
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:16:05
>> Adam Beach: Ira Hayes was consumed by alcohol. I, myself; I can't even attempt to drink one in a crowd because, it's another drunk Indian. I've always called myself a child of an alcoholic. So, throughout that film, when you watch it, that's me. It's not acting.
^M01:16:24
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:16:29
>> Adam, I know he's very conscious of the problems in the community, of alcoholism and been on the reservations and have done work in this area, and it made him play it very well.
^M01:16:41
[Sound of movie clip]
^M01:16:47
>> Adam Beach: Here's a human being shedding human emotion; no stereotypes, no stoic Indian. It's just a young boy that wants to see his mom. He lost a lot of his friends.
^M01:17:00
[Music]
^M01:17:27
>> I'm at the end of my quest, back up north in the high, Arctic community of [inaudible]. After traveling across America, the answers were here all along.
^M01:17:38
[Music]
^M01:17:51
It's an unlikely place to give birth to a film that has revolutionized native cinema, and gone on to win at the Cannes Film Festival. [Inaudible], the fast runner, captures one of the Inuit's most cherished legends and brings it to the world.
>> [Inaudible] that point where cinema was being altered to tell our stories our way, and gone were the stereotypes of past. Really in that one movie, there's none of that nonsense. It's a gloriously sexy film, set in the Arctic.
^M01:18:23
[Singing and music]
^M01:18:28
I've never seen anything like this before. This is so pure in its soul. I always say that that's the most Indian movie ever made. It's much more Indian than Smoke Signals. Smoke Signals was made for Indian people, but certainly for the overculture. When you get a movie like The Fast Runner, you're watching this movie and you're saying to yourself; this is an inside job.
^M01:18:56
[Music]
^M01:19:04

>> Outside of town, in his hunting cabin, I meet the director of The Fast Runner, Zacharius Kunuk. I ask him why he makes films.
>> Zacharius Kunuk: I see it as talking back. We picked up the camera and started [inaudible] history. The stories that we used to hear when we were children, like [inaudible], why we are here.
>> As his elders pass on, so does their knowledge. Zach is in a race against time.
>> Zacharius Kunuk: I had a problem. I wanted [inaudible] romantic scene [inaudible] people are kissing and [inaudible] necking. [Inaudible] necking is not our culture. So, we're making a good story and I'm sitting down with elders, asking them; how did you get married? What is Inuit kiss like?
[Music]
And that's what we've been using the camera for. How much trouble they went through to get us here, to [inaudible] ten years down the road, because then the elders will be gone.
>> The most compelling moment of this film is when the fast runner runs.
>> [Inaudible] and [inaudible] tried to kill everybody [inaudible] tent, and you have blood all over. So, you [inaudible] where all of this blood [inaudible], freely in the sun. That's the image of the [inaudible].
>> You have a native guy running across the ice, naked, through the water, in the snow. And, as a director, I'm sitting there saying; that's not an actor. Because, an actor wouldn't do that.
>> Natar Ungalaag, who plays Atanarjuat, he knows the story. He knows that he's going to have to run naked across the ice in this movie. That's the iconic image. There might be all kinds of other things we can change in this film, but we can't change it. We had a props genius make up fake feet. The fake feet tore up right away. Running on ice is not smooth; it's very abrasive. So, you've got to film that maybe 50 times. The actor was so committed, responsible to the requirement of his role, which was an iconic legend in his culture, that he was willing to do things that most people, even if they were willing to do, they couldn't.
^M01:22:06
[Music]
^M01:22:20
>> A new age of native cinema is born. These films revolutionize the native image of the world.
[People chanting]
>> Those movies, the movies made in the north, are incredibly special. And, they are progress. They are finally an [inaudible] cinema that isn't someone else's. It gazes out. But, at the same time, you have a core aboriginal cinematic movement springing up all over the world, where you have filmmakers in New Zealand, filmmakers in Australia and filmmakers in North America and South America making truly aboriginal movies.
>> You don't always have to make great representations of native people. We're not asking for that. We're not asking to be, you know, nobles or righteous or good all of the time. We're asking to be human.
>> Indians aren't dead. We're here. We're vital. We've got something to say. We've got something to play.
>> To see it come in my lifetime is very empowering for the culture. We can't describe the importance now. That will be described years from now by critics far [inaudible] important than me. They [inaudible] about what those movies meant.
^M01:23:42
[Chanting, laughter and music]
^M01:23:54
>> We're creative natives, and we're like the energizer bunny. The mightiest nation in the world tried to exterminate us, Anglosize [assumed spelling] us, Christianize us, Americanize us. But, we just keep going and going. And, I think that energizer bunny must be Indian; he's got that little water drum he plays. And, I always say; next time you have a pow-wow, have the energizer bunny lead the grand entry, and after a few rounds, then we can get together and eat him, because we never waste anything. We share everything. It's all right. I don't mind laughs in the show.
^M01:24:28
[Music]