American Indian Studies (AMIND) 435
American Indians Through Film, TV & Popular Culture
Spring 2017 Syllabus

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Course Description

“You know the only thing more pathetic than Indians on T.V.? Indians watching Indians on T.V.!”
- Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Smoke Signals (1998)

Thomas’ observation was, when he made it, an accurate assessment. What he was referring to was the time when the portrayal of Native Americans on both the large and small screens, and therefore popular culture, was not determined by Native Americans, but by “Hollywood.” This would consequentially lead to the reinforcement of racial stereotypes, as well as the creation of new ones, about Native Americans that would be perpetuated by the dominant “white” society, even to this day. More recently, Indigenous film makers both in the Americas and around the world, are reclaiming the presentation and representation of their respective People, Cultures and stories in film and social media. However, they still must contend with the impact of nearly 100 years of Indigenous Peoples being (mis)represented in film and popular culture, and the damage that has created in the form of ignorance. One need look no further than our own campus, with its “aztec” moniker and mascot, and the manner in which Native Americans have been misrepresented by this very university, to this day, as evidence of the influence film, TV and popular culture influence attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples.
This course studies the relationship between active visual images of American Indians and the social construction of Indianness in greater American culture. In other words, how are film and television affected by the way that the general public thinks about Indians and at the same time how do films shape general perceptions of Indians? This class will examine the subject from both the micro and the macro levels: we will do close readings of the details that produce these images and look at how these images circulate in the larger historical, social and political contexts of American society. In the latter will particularly pay attention to the relationship between (mis)representations of Indians and Federal Indian policies. You will also have the chance to take a hands-on approach to the topic by producing and/or editing ethnographic films of American Indians. A major theme throughout this course will be examinations of popular expectations of what Indians look like, how Indians are, and what they do and to not do, and how these expectations relate to cinematic genres, such as the Western, Ethnographic Film, and Documentary.

Much of this class will rely on student participation and open discussion. Your ideas matter, and it is important that you share them with the class so that we can learn from one another. In order for this to work it is imperative that you come to class and that you come prepared: having read the assignments and being able to talk about them. It is critical to foster a positive environment for discussion—one that generates respectful attention to classmates and critical analysis of course material. In order to accomplish this I will always urge you to approach the course subject matter and your classmates with mindfulness: to be precise, honest, humble, and rigorous; to say or write nothing you can’t stand behind; to respect difference, your classmates, the instructor, and the complexity of the material; to be self-interrogating but also generous; to be detail-attentive and imaginative.

*Lady In Waiting*, Robert Freeman, Hunkpapa Lakota and Luiseño (Rincon)
Course Objectives

**Learning Objective 1** The successful student in this course will be able to articulate verbally and in writing what constitutes a cinematic genre.

**Goal 1.1** Students will be able to identify how Americans Indians have been conventionally represented in popular culture.

**Goal 1.2** Students will be able to explain how cinematic genres call upon and create popular expectations of Indianness.

**Goal 1.3** Students will be able to describe how representations and images of Indianness from one type of popular culture relate to, overlap, or contradict representations from other types of popular culture.

**Learning Objective 2** Students will identify how visual representations connect to action and policy.

**Goal 2.1** Students will distinguish the historical, social, and political contexts that affect how a film is made and received.

**Goal 2.2** Students will articulate the ways in which representations of Indians creates common sense ideas about Indians that are then used to establish and justify policy.

**Goal 2.3** Students will explain the way actors and filmmakers attempt to undo and subvert popular notions and stereotypes of Indians through visual narrative representation.

**Learning Objective 3** Students will be able to edit ethnographic films.

**Goal 3.1** Students will be able to create a short film by shooting and editing or editing pre-shot footage.

**Goal 3.2** Students will connect the theory of ethnographic filmmaking the actual production and editing of film.

**Goal 3.3** Students will illustrate how the process of production and editing supports or subverts conventional representations of Indianness.

*Live Long and Prosper (Spock was a Half-Breed)*, Debra Yepa-Pappan, Native American (Jemez Pueblo) and Korean

Capt. James T. Kirk (William Shatner), going where a lot of “white” people have gone before – perhaps to Coachella? Scene from “The Paradise Syndrome,” *Star Trek* S3E3 (1968)
**Required Texts:** All books for this course are available at the SDSU Bookstore ([http://www.aztecshops.com/](http://www.aztecshops.com/)). A copy of these books will be held at the Reserve Desk at the Love Library. There will also be readings posted to Blackboard. Most of the films that we will be watching will be on reserve at the Media Center in the Love Library. Some of the others can be found at local video rental stores such as Kensington Video or through Netflix.com if you have a membership.

- Philip J. Deloria (Dakota). 2004. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. (University of Press Kansas, 0700613447) – *IUP*
- Edward Buscombe. 2006. “*Injuns!*”: *Native Americans in the Movies*. (Reaktion Books, 1861892799) – *NAM*
- *BlackBoard Readings* – *BB* Readings will be posted to Blackboard

**Assignments and Grades**

- **Attendance and Participation (10%)**: Attendance and Participation are mandatory. *More than THREE absences will result in a zero for “Attendance and Participation.”*

- **Keyword Assignments (10%)**: Once during the semester each student will turn in one SHORT paragraph description of a keyword of the student’s choice from the reading. You will choose a phrase or term from the reading that you believe to be significant then write a short paragraph about how this term is significant to that week’s reading and the class over all. I will compile a list of these terms, make the available to you, and they will become the study guide for the midterm. These assignments must be e-mail to me (at dkamper@mail.sdsu.edu) by midnight, Mon. (the night before class). Please either send this assignment as a MS Word file or cut and paste it in to the body of an e-mail.

- **Film Response Papers (20%)**: Over the course of the semester each student will write a 1-page response papers to a film the student will be watching on his/her own. You will be analyzing and responding to a film of your choice from the Supplemental Film List (appended and posted on Black Board) that is divided up based on the weeks of the class. This paper should be no longer than one page and is meant to be an analysis and your response to a given film and your explanation of how this film relates to the major themes of the class and the week’s readings. You will be expected to discuss this film in terms of the components that make meaning in a film. These assignments need to be e-mailed to me by noon on the day that you sign up to turn yours in. Please either send this assignment as a MS Word file or cut and paste it in to the body of an e-mail.

- **Midterm Exam (30%)**: The exam will be taken in class and consist of a combination of identifications, short answers and an essay question. It is not designed to take longer than 1 – 1 ½ hours, but you will be given the whole class period to complete it. **The Midterm Exam will be on Tuesday, March 19th.**

- **Final Exams (30%)**: Your final can be completed in two different formats: either a short film project or a 5 – 7 page paper. It will be due on the day of the scheduled class final (there will be no in-class final that day), **TUESDAY May 14th by 6:00 pm.** Written exams shall be submitted via Turnitin on Blackboard. Film projects must be submitted as a DVD, Quicktime file on CD, or youtube link e-mailed to me. Film projects can be based on footage that you have shot or pre-recorded material edited together. If you do your own footage make sure that you discuss your idea with me, get my approval, and start shooting soon. You may do this project in groups of two (but no more than two). If you choose to write the paper you will write comparison of three films (one from each of the lists from the Supplemental Film List). **NO LATE PAPERS/PROJECTS WILL BE ACCEPTED, NO EXCEPTIONS.**
General Grading Rubric: This gives you an outline of what I and the course grader will be looking for when we grade your Film Response papers, any writing part of the Midterm, and the Take Home Final (if you choose to do the written one):

An “A” has

- a clear central focus or argument—a thesis;
- introductory sentence (for shorter assignments) or paragraph (for longer assignments) that establishes its central focus or argument;
- well-developed body paragraphs, built around attentive analysis of the film (based on the cinematic techniques) and/or text (based on central ideas of the text), that is not a mere summary;
- analysis of not just plot/narrative but how cinematic techniques employed by the filmmaker support or undercut the plot and main theme of the film;
- analysis of how/what kind of representation of Indianness or Whiteness (in relation to Indianness) the film establishes, reinforces or undercuts;
- very few grammatical/spelling errors;
- original ideas and distinctive insights.

A “B” has

- a clear central focus or argument;
- an introductory paragraph that establishes its central focus or argument;
- well-developed body paragraphs, built around attentive analysis of the film (based on the cinematic techniques) and/or text, that is not a mere summary;
- analysis of not just plot/narrative but how cinematic techniques employed by the filmmaker support or undercut the plot and main theme of the film.

A “C” is deficient in one or two of the above-listed areas.

A “D” is deficient in three or more of the above-listed areas.

Hopi Princess Leia, Steven Paul Judd, Choctaw and Kiowa
Attendance and Participation: More than 3 absences over the course of the term will yield a “0” in “Attendance and Participation.” Students who arrive to class more than fifteen minutes late or who leave class more than fifteen minutes early will be marked absent. Phoning or e-mailing to explain the absence does not excuse it. Additionally, “participation” will be evaluated on the basis of your preparation for and contributions to each class meeting. Adequate preparation for class means completing assigned readings as specified in the course schedule. Respect, attentiveness, and civility are expected of all class participants. Attentiveness includes not texting during class and using your computer only to take notes on the class.

Blackboard: With this class we will use Blackboard to post assignments, additional course materials and web-links. We may also use its digital drop box, and group e-mail features. To be sure that you receive my e-mails make sure that your e-mail address is up-to-date with the university. To log into Blackboard visit http://courses.sdsu.edu.

Disabled students: If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated. To learn more, visit http://newscenter.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/sds/facultyrole.aspx

Counseling: There are many events and situations that put additional stress on being a student. SDSU has an excellent center for Counseling & Psychological Services that is open to students Monday through Friday from 8am-4:30pm. To set up an initial consultation, call (619) 594-5220. For immediate or emergency help, you are welcome to use San Diego’s free 24-hour counseling access line at (800) 479-3339. C&PS on campus also has a “Center for Well-Being” with multiple stations for relaxation if you are feeling stressed during the semester. C&PS is located in the Capulli Center, Room 4401. http://go.sdsu.edu/student_affairs/cps/Default.aspx Sometimes, especially at the beginning of the semester, their services can be overwhelmed and a “wait list” is created – this can be frustrating. If this is the case and you require immediate assistance, please ask me to accompany you to the counseling center, and we will get you immediate attention. I won’t say no. If I am not available (for example, if I’m not on campus), please ask another faculty member to accompany you.

Student-athletes: First, my apologies about our racist mascot, and the white supremacist history behind our institutional identity (mission architecture + “Indian” mascot). I am working hard to bring about the day when you will no longer unwittingly represent these abhorrent ideologies. Student-athletes have demanding, dynamic schedules. As an instructor, I am committed to helping you succeed in the course. To do so, regular and effective communication is needed. While exceptions will not be made for attendance, assignment deadlines, or exams, I’m happy to work with all student-athletes in conjunction with Student-Athlete Support Services (SASS) to help you excel in this course. For more information on SASS’ academic advising and tutoring services, please call (619) 594-4743.

Resources available to you: As a student at SDSU, you have a variety of programs and resources available to you to ensure your academic success and personal well-being. Check them out! Utilize them! For a full listing, please go to: http://go.sdsu.edu/home/currentstudents.aspx?
Course Outline

Week 1 Jan. 19  Introduction & Course Details: How do we analyze film? What are the contexts under which American Indians have been filmed and participated in visual reproduction? What is unique about cinematic representations of American Indians?

Reading: BB, Sherman Alexie, “Vision (2)”

Part I: Popular Culture’s Depictions of Indianess

Week 2 Jan. 24  Historical Contexts and Precedence: What representational modes and technologies influenced the representation of Indians? Where do the notions (or tropes) of barbaric savage and noble savage come from? How do these tropes relate to historical events? How do they impact policy?


Viewing: The Battle at Elderbush Gulch & The Red Man’s View by D.W. Griffith

Week 3 Jan. 31  Expectations and Conventions: What is the relationship between expectations, representations, and stereotype? How are anomalies connected to what is expected and unexpected? What control did early Native actors have in the way that they were represented?


Viewing: Scenes from the Last of the Mohicans by Michael Mann

Week 4 Feb. 7  Formation of a Genre: How do individual films relate to each other to form what could be called a genre? How did cinematic representations of Indianness reiterate literary and exhibitory representations? What does the uniqueness of moving pictures add to the conventions of representing Indians?

Reading: NAM, Ch. 1, pp. 23 – 99.

Viewing: Scenes from The Stagecoach by John Ford & starring John Wayne & The Searchers directed by John Ford & starring John Wayne

Week 5 Feb. 14  Heights of the Genre: Why were Westerns so popular? What notions of masculinity in general and Indian masculinity in specific are promoted by Westerns? Why are Westerns no longer as popular?


Viewing: The Searchers (cont.) directed by John Ford & starring John Wayne

Week 6 Feb. 21  Revising the Genre: How did revisionist Westerns promote the tropes Noble Savage? How do they reverse, subvert, and/or reiterate the tropes of earlier Westerns? What social and political circumstances brought about these changes in the Westerns?


Viewing: Scenes from The Return of Navajo Boy directed by Jeff Spitz & Broken Arrow directed by Delmer Daves & starring Jimmy Stewart

Week 7 Feb 28: The Non-Western Indian Movie: How are Indians portrayed in non-Westerns? How are these portrayals tied to the expectations of the Western genre? How do they refute the notion of the “Vanishing Indian”?

Part II: Ethnographic Films

Week 8 Mar. 7  Early Ethnographic Films: What makes a film an ethnographic film? What is the relationship between documentaries and ethnographic films? How ethnographic films align with or contradict Hollywood films and Westerns?

Reading: BB, Karl Heider Ethnographic Film, Ch. 1, 1 – 15 & BB, Shari Huhndorf, “Nanook and His Contemporaries,” pp. 79 – 128.

Viewing: Scenes from In the Land of the Headhunters/War Canoes by Edward S. Curtis; Nanook of the North directed by Robert Flaherty; & Nanook Revisited by Claude Massot.

Week 9 Mar. 14th  MIDTERM EXAM: Tuesday, MARCH 11th

Week 10 Mar. 21  Mid-Century Ethnographic Films (Guest Lecture Prof. Field): How do ethnographic filmmakers choose their subjects? What dimensions does ethnographic film add to ethnography? What changes with self-ethnographic filmmaking? Should these films still be consider ethnographic?

Reading: BB, Manohla Dargis, “Despair and Poetry at Margins of Society”

Viewing: The Exhiles by Kent Mackenzie

Spring Break  Mar 29 to Mar 31 - NO CLASS

Week 11 Apr. 4  Making Contemporary Ethnographic Films: What is the relationship between shooting and editing? Is this connection different for ethnographic films than other genres of filmmaking?


Viewing: Navajo Film Themselves edited by John Adair; Grandma Documentary by Deidre Peaches; Scenes from Miss Navajo directed by Billy Luther.

Part III: Native Perspectives & Filmmakers

Week 12 Apr. 11  The Reservation On Screen: How do movies set on reservations differ from Westerns? How are Native connections to land and place communicated in these films? How do filmmakers balance the positive and negative aspects of reservation life? How do reservations movie relate to ethnographic films?


Viewing: Scenes from Powwow Highway starring Gary Farmer & Scenes from Edge of America directed by Chris Eyre.
Week 13 Apr. 18  Natives Imagining Themselves: What difference does it make to have Natives playing Natives? Do contemporary Native actors have more control over movie’s outcome than they used to? How do filmmakers balance the positive and negative aspects of reservation life? How do reservations movie relate to ethnographic films?

Reading: BB, Beverly Singer, Ch. 4 “Native Filmmakers, Programs and Institutions” pp. 33 – 60 & “Conclusion: Continuing the Legacy” pp. 92 – 100.

Viewing: Scenes from Frozen River starring Misty Upham.

Week 14 Apr. 25  Revisiting the Old West: Can you make a movie that has unexpected portrayals of Indian yet is still set in the past? How over-determining is the Western genre? What role might Indians have in new Westerns?


Viewing: Scenes from Dead Man starring Gary Farmer.

Week 15 May 2  Indigenous Tradition in the Contemporary World: How do films portray indigenous traditions without falling into the Noble Savage expectation? How is tradition made meaningful in the contemporary world? What commonalities do indigenous films share worldwide?


Viewing: Whale Rider starring Keisha Castle-Hughes.

May 9:  FINAL EXAM due by 6:00 pm Tuesday May 9

The Summer They Visited, Steven Paul Judd, Kiowa and Choctaw
**Supplemental Film List**

Each student will choose one movie from these lists. You will write a Film Response Paper for the film that you select. Titles labeled MC can be found at the Love Library’s Media Center. I will explain to you how this is done. Titles labeled KV can be rented from Kensington Video (http://www.kenvideo.com/) located at 4067 Adams Ave., SD, CA 92116, (619) 584-7725. Lastly, almost all of them are Netflix-able, of course as long as you happen to be a Netflix customer.

**Part I – Popular Culture’s Depiction of Indianness**

**Jan. 24 – Feb. 14 (List 1)**

*The Paleface (1922) KV*

*The Vanishing American (1925) KV*

*Northwest Passage (1940) KV*

*They Died with their Boots On (1941) KV*

*Fort Apache (1948) KV*

*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949) MC*

*Apache (1954) KV*

*The Indian Fighter (1955) KV*

*Run of the Arrow (1957) KV*

**Feb. 21 – Feb. 28 (List 2)**

*Tell them Willie Boy is Here (1969) KV & MC*

*The Mission (1986) MC*

*Little Big Man (1970) KV*

*A Man Called Horse (1970) MC*

*Running Brave (1983) KV*

*The Last of His Tribe (1992) MC*

*Black Robe (1991) MC*

*Geronimo: An American Legend (1993/4) KV & MC*

*The Last of the Dogmen (1995) KV*

*Burry my Heart at Wounded Knee (2007) KV*

**Part II – Ethnographic Films**

**Mar. 7– Apr. 4**

*You Are on Indian Land (1969) MC*

*Geronimo and the Apache Resistance (1989) MC*
Winds of Change: A Matter of Promise (1990) MC
Chief Wilma P. Mankiller (1992) MC (via ITS)
Surviving Columbus (1992) MC
Incident at Oglala (1992) KV & MC
Before Columbus: Teaching Indians To Be White (1993) MC
500 Nations (1995) MC (choose any volume 1 – 8)
Rocks With Wings (2002) MC
We Shall Remain (2009) On line @ pbs.org, MC (choose any episode 1 – 5)

Part III – Native Perspectives & Filmmakers

Apr. 11 – Apr 18

PBS Hillerman Series: Dark Wind (1993), Skinwalkers (2002), Coyote Waits (2003) MC (choose one of these 3)
Once Were Warriors (1994) MC
House Made of Dawn (1996) MC
Smoke Signals (1998) MC
Naturally Native (1998) MC
The Fast Runner (Atanarjuaq) (2001) MC
Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002) MC