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# The importance of perspective in the representation of native american women in films

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## **Mémoire**

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## **MASTER**

**« Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation »**

**Mention 2<sup>nd</sup> degré, Professeur des Lycées et Collèges, Anglais**

The Importance of Perspective in the Representation of Native American Women in Films

Présenté par:

Audrey BALLOT

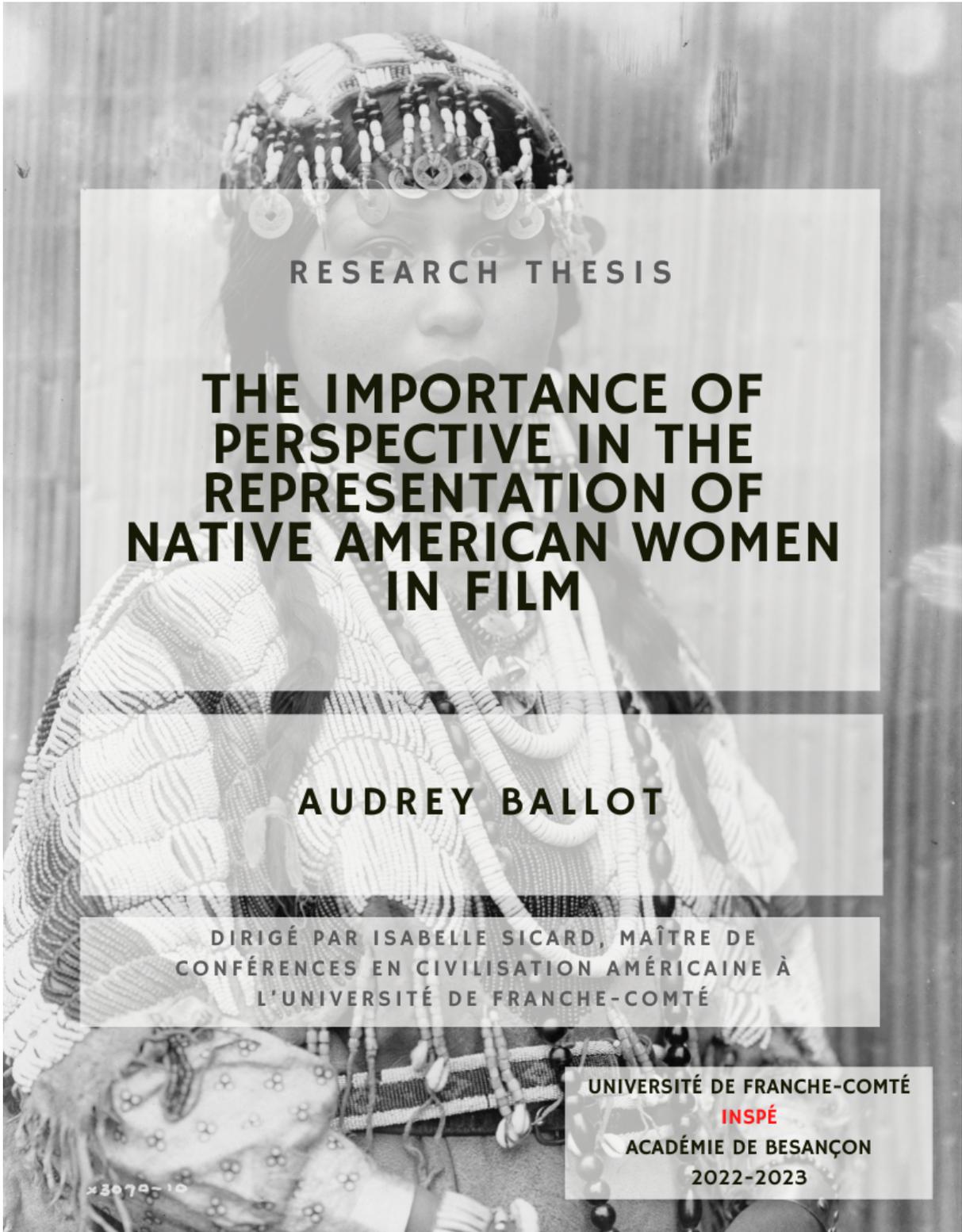
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*Wisham bride*, Curtis, Edward S, c.1910. Photograph taken of a Tlalkluit bride, a tribe most commonly known as the Wishram, native to the banks of the Columbia river.

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Audrey Ballot,

Marnay, May 3rd, 2023.

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Research Thesis:  
The Importance of Perspective in the Representation of  
Native American Women in Film

## Introduction

*“A lot of the stories I've read about myself, I don't even recognize who they're writing about,”*<sup>1</sup> said Sacheen Littlefeather, known mostly for rejecting actor Marlon Brando's 1973 Oscar win in his stead, is a Native American actress and activist of Apache and Yaqui descent. In the speech she delivered on that occasion, she cited “the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry” as the reason for rejecting the award. The quote I chose to introduce my thesis encompasses her struggle, and the struggle of all Native American women, when it comes to films. The way Native American women are represented by the movie industry is not a faithful reproduction of reality, to the point of distorting it and making the characters unrecognizable in the eyes of the very people that they are supposed to portray. The sensitive topic of representation in the movie industry was relevant then, and it still is today.

As someone who is striving to have a career in teaching English to French students, I am particularly concerned with the cultural aspects that I will be integrating into my lessons. My goal is to be able to share as many elements as I can with my students in order to open their minds to the world, to new mindsets and beliefs in order to develop their general knowledge and make them more accepting of others. In order to do so, I will most probably have to face their own bias and made-up conceptions about these foreign cultures. In today's

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<sup>1</sup> Rottenberg, Josh. “Catching up with Sacheen Littlefeather, 40 years after her controversial brush with Oscar history,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 19 Jan. 2013, ew.com/article/2013/01/19/sacheen-littlefeather. Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.

culture of mass media consumption, with the likes of Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime and other streaming platforms, my future students will inevitably be influenced by the representations they encounter in film productions. This is a challenge that I will have to face.

I have chosen to study the medium of film more specifically because it delivers representations that – albeit sometimes unconsciously – tell us a lot about how a certain group of people are perceived by the general population. The American movie industry is an endless source of material if one desires to study the role representations play in portraying and shaping the identity of social groups.

As a European, my knowledge of Native American people growing up mainly came from my few encounters with them in mainstream American media, mainly Hollywood Westerns. Representations in media influence and participate in the construction of the image we have of other social groups and individuals. Therefore, choices in terms of casting, the role and importance given to each character as well as the use made of stereotypes by directors contribute to the making of our social structure.

Inevitably, marginalized groups are the ones most affected by the representations made of them in the media. Indeed, research has shown that media consumption has a direct impact on people's opinions of other social groups, which is even stronger when faced with negative stereotypes<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, people will be more prone to associating an unknown group with a negative image. This implies that the film industry is responsible to some degree for the stereotypes it has propagated.

In the case of Native American women and their representation in films, we are looking at two intertwined issues – the representation of women and the representation of Native people – inducing that the question of representation of Native American women is an intersectional one. This social group combines characteristics of two marginalized groups

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<sup>2</sup> Dwight E. Brooks and Lisa P. Hébert, Chapter 16 *Gender, Race, and Media Representation*, 2006, DOI:10.4135/9781412976053.n16

who have their own specific set of struggles, harmful stereotypes and oppression. Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups”<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, Intersectionality will be a guiding line in my analysis.

Undeniably, Native women struggle today with high rates of poverty, rape and domestic violence, making them one of the most vulnerable minority groups in the USA, adding to the necessity to represent them faithfully and respectfully. As a particularly at-risk group, their image plays a major role in the defense of their rights. Hence, anyone who wishes to include Native female characters in their film must keep in mind that their narrative and characterization choices will inevitably have a concrete impact on the image of Native women in the public eye.

Considering the fact that the representation of Native women in movies has already been studied before, with a focus on the archetypes of representation and their links to Native American history. I wanted to find a new approach to this issue and look at the director’s perspective. Hence, I want to focus on the notion of perspective in relation to representation. The notion of perspective is defined as “the interrelation in which a subject or its parts are mentally viewed”<sup>4</sup>. Perspective in relation to media has been widely studied under the notion of gaze and the “male gaze”, but I wish to extend it further. I believe that there are as many perspectives as there are social groups, and that each group has its own perspective which can offer a new take on representing Native American women. To what extent does the director’s perspective influence the representation of Native American women in their films? Can the director’s perspective help reinforce stereotypes or on the contrary help deconstruct them?

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<sup>3</sup> “Intersectionality.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

<sup>4</sup> “Perspective.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perspective>. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

In the first part, I will draw an overview of the types of representation of Native American women in film in the past decade, analyzing which categories of characters have been brought to life so far and how accurate they are in their depiction of Native Women. To do so, I will have to point out the lack of representation of Native women. I will discuss the stereotypes they have been the victims of so far. Finally, I will explain how such fictional representations have impacted negatively the way they are integrated in American society in real life and have been one more barrier standing in the way of Native women.

Then, I will explore a variety of representations based on the notion of Gaze. This analysis will revolve around a selection of films made by directors of all origins and genders, in order to study a wide array of perspectives. I want to focus on analyzing 21st century movies in order to observe current representations. My goal is to see whether these representations are different from those of the 20th century which have already been widely studied by scholars. The films I will be using in this section are two movies by Native American male directors, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013) by Jeff Barnaby and *Isabelle's Garden* (2014) by Jeffrey Palmer, two movies by Native American female directors, *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* (2019) by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn and *Little Chief* (2019) by Erika Tremblay, two movies by white directors, *Hostiles* (2017) by Scott Cooper and *Woman Walks Ahead* (2017) by Susanna White. To this selection, I am adding *Te Ata* (2016) by Nathan Frankowski, a special case since it was directed by a white man, but produced by the Chickasaw nation.

Lastly, I will discuss how misrepresentations of Native women in film stem from an issue of perspective. Thanks to the different “gazes” that I will have discussed, I will be able to draw conclusions on why representations from non-Native directors are usually flawed as well as question if there is only a specific type of director who can tell Native Women’s

stories. What potential solutions are there in order to solve issues of misrepresentation of Native Women and minorities as a whole in film?

## 1. An Overview of the Representation of Native Women in Film from the 1910s to the 2010s

In order to study the specificities of representation of Native American Women in film under the lens of gaze and perspective, we first need to better understand what types of representation we are currently discussing. Inevitably, they have evolved over the past century, and a variety of scholars have already worked on establishing categories for the different characters that have been portrayed on screen so far.

### 1.1. A Lack of Representation

First and foremost, it goes without saying that Native American Women as a minority are widely absent both on screen and behind the camera. An intersectional approach helps us understand the reasons behind such scarce presence of female Native American characters in movies.

#### 1.1.1. Native People as a Whole

On the one hand, Native American people as a whole are already underrepresented in the media, especially in movies. In fact, Native Americans make up less than 1% of characters seen on screen<sup>5</sup>. This is not representative of the actual population of the United

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<sup>5</sup> Dixon, Travis L. "Chapter 16 Media Stereotypes: Content, Effects and Theory," *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research*, 4th ed., Routledge, 2019, pp.243-257.

States of America, since the 2020 United States Census registered 3,727,135 “American Indian and Alaska Native” residents, excluding mixed-race citizens, making up about 1.12% of the population of the USA. Therefore, Native Americans cannot but be underrepresented in films. Moreover, they are usually shown in Western movies or Period dramas, which reduce Native American people to a thing of the past. This strict and restricted way of portraying them makes Native tribes invisible to the eye of the public, and turns real living people with their own struggles into mythical figures who have no relevance in today’s society.

Additionally, these depictions tend to give a distorted image of Native cultures, either homogenizing the vast number of tribes into a single People, or presenting them as uncivilized and backwards, mainly through the image of the “Savage”. On the contrary, there are still today 574 tribes recognized by the federal US Government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This does not include some tribes that are only state-recognized. Just like there is not a singular Native culture, there is no singular definition of what it means to be a Native woman. In that regard, any archetype would be misleading as it would create a “specific” definition of Native women, thus disregarding the plurality of their experiences and struggles.

#### 1.1.2. Native Women: an “Ultra Minority”

Additionally, Native Women suffer from the lack of representation of women in film on top of barriers they face because of their ethnicity. In fact, Debra Merskin, a professor in media and Native American studies at the University of Oregon, states that “in 100 films that depicted Natives between 1970 and 1984, only 28% featured an Indian woman.”<sup>6</sup> which is a true testament to the invisibilisation of Native American women in the movie industry. This

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<sup>6</sup> Merskin, Debra. “The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman,” *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 21, no. 4, Routledge, 2010, pp. 345-366, DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2010.519616

is partly explained by a general lack of female characters in Hollywood productions. The organization Women and Hollywood<sup>7</sup> collects data each year on the amount of women in film productions, which reveal that out of the one hundred top-grossing films in 2021, “41% featured a female lead/co lead driving the plot”. However, only “11 of the top 100 movies featured a woman of color as the lead/co lead of the story”. This is even more striking when looking at the 1500 major films released between 2007 and 2021, of which “less than 1% featured a woman or girl of color in a leading or co leading role”. Considering that Native people as a whole are widely under-represented in film, one can easily understand that Native American female characters are almost never shown on screen, and when they are it is only in minor roles. Consequently, it is even more concerning that out of the limited instances of representation of Native women, a majority of them convey stereotyped views of this minority.

## 1.2. Stereotyped Representations

Once one has managed to find the rare occurrences of representation of Native American Women in film, the study of these characters often leads to a disappointing conclusion: most of the characters that can be found on screen are based on stereotypical views of Native women and Native culture. These stereotypical depictions were categorized in Elise Marubbio’s *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (2006)<sup>8</sup> which I will be relying on throughout this thesis. In her book, Marubbio creates three categories based on films released from 1908 to the 1990s: The Celluloid Princess, The Sexualized Maiden and The Hybrid Celluloid Maiden. She found that independently from

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<sup>7</sup> Women and Hollywood, *2021 Statistics*, 2021, accessed on 11/05/2022, <https://womenandhollywood.com/resources/statistics/2021-statistics/>

<sup>8</sup> Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

which category a character fits into, they always fall victim to violence. She says that “the reality that Native women find themselves measured against these stereotypes, suggests that a cultural ambiguity toward Native American women still exists, and that it is often played out violently on their bodies”. According to a review of this book, which synthesizes Marrubio’s arguments and findings, “The Celluloid Maidens, portrayed in films for more than ninety years, share a common fate and serve a common purpose: they all die.”<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.2.1. Dehumanizing Native Women

In films Native Women can be seen as savages, the likes of their male counterparts, uncivilized and undeserving of the audience’s compassion. Contrary to historical facts showing that Native women held major roles in their tribes – as healers, teachers, leaders and spiritual guides – their depiction in movies undermine their social status and puts them in a position of inferiority and unrelevancy. Maryann Oshana<sup>10</sup> defines Native women’s roles in Westerns as “narrow and distorted” so unlike the “depth, variety, and richness” of their traditional roles. This is supported by other authors, such as Denise Lajimodiere<sup>11</sup>, an author, artist and scholar of the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians. She states that “Male European explorers and missionaries were unable, or unwilling, to grasp and acknowledge that many tribal cultures are gynocratic, with the woman at the center. As a result, records of women’s tribal roles have been abbreviated” thus explaining that the dehumanization of

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<sup>9</sup> Curtis, Judith G. Review of *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* by M. Elise Marubio, *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 360–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25487886>. (Accessed on Jstor, 19-10-2021)

<sup>10</sup> Oshana, Maryann. “Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, University of Nebraska Press, 1981, pp. 46–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3346212>. (Accessed on Jstor, 19-10-2021)

<sup>11</sup> Lajimodiere, Denise K. “American Indian Females and Stereotypes: Warriors, Leaders, Healers, Feminists; Not Drudges, Princesses, Prostitutes,” *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol.15, no. 2, Routledge, 2013, pp.104-109, DOI: 10.1080/15210960.2013.781391

female Native characters stems from the consequences of distorted historical and anthropological sources.

According to Maryann Oshana, the roles of women in westerns are reduced to “slaves, household drudges, or bodies en masse in camps and caravans.” This corresponds to the evidence showing that the rare female Native American characters shown on screen are usually background characters. Moreover, this participates in depriving them of being given the opportunity to speak and express thoughts or feelings. Hence, female Native characters appear as devoid of individuality and identity, which contributes to the audience’s view that they have none.

The dehumanized female Native characters correspond to what Elise Marubbio defines as the Celluloid Princess<sup>12</sup>. Characterized by her purity and the fact that she seems almost detached from her Indigenous identity on screen, the princess is mentioned by Judith Curtis<sup>13</sup> as the one “Hollywood filmmakers” have made to show “Native women must submit themselves to violence and death and sacrifice their Native culture for the perpetuation of the dominance of the white man and the supremacy of the white culture.” In the case of the Celluloid Princess, who does not have strong opinions and beliefs of her own and is not particularly linked to her cultural heritage, this translates into inevitable death: “The Princess character most often dies by suicide.” The inevitable death of Native American women on screen is incredibly dehumanizing in the sense that it deprives them from the opportunity to have a “happy-ending”. Death means an end to any personal aspirations and wishes, an end to the possibility of bettering one’s condition and social status and striving for happiness and fulfillment.

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<sup>12</sup> Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Curtis, Judith G. Review of *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* by M. Elise Marubbio, *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 360–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25487886>. (Accessed on Jstor, 19-10-2021)

### 1.2.2. Fetishizing Native Women

In addition to their so-called savagery, Native women are also often fetishized in film and seen as objects of desire. This can be mainly seen through the use of the image of the Squaw, a reference now recognized as a racial slur and a pejorative stereotype, but common in mid-twentieth century movies. Ralph and Natasha Friar<sup>14</sup> mention in their book that the original meaning of the word was wife but that it becoming a substitute for “slut or prostitute and was applied generally to all Native American females”. Squaw comes from the Algonquian word “squa” for woman, according to renowned linguist Ives Goddard<sup>15</sup>, and not from the Mohawk word “ojiskwa” which means vagina, as is commonly believed. Because of this change in meaning, “The term became so degrading that Native Americans stopped using it except when referring to a particular woman of that particular persuasion.”. This is a perfect example of how culture and especially film representations of Native American women have impacted American society and the status of these women.

The figure of the Squaw has also been studied by Rayna Green<sup>16</sup>, as a component of what she calls the “Pocahontas Perplex”. Rayna Green is a Native scholar who is also a curator at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. According to her, the character of Pocahontas – inspired by the real Powhatan woman named Amonute and nicknamed Pocahontas by the early colonists – became “a model for the national understanding of Indian women”. That is to say that the image of Pocahontas constructed by the film industry became a frame of reference to define what makes a Native American

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<sup>14</sup> Friar, Ralph E. and Friar, Natasha A., *The Only Good Indian. The Hollywood Gospel*, Drama Book Specials, New York, 1972, p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> Goddard, Ives. "Since the word squaw continues to be of interest," *News From Indian Country*, 15 Ap. 1997, <https://repository.si.edu/handle/10088/94999>.

<sup>16</sup> Green, Rayna. “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, The Massachusetts Review, Inc., 1975, pp. 698–714, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25088595>. (Accessed on Jstor, 19-10-2021)

woman in the eyes of a non-Indigenous audience. This reduces them to two possible identities: either the noble princess or the savage squaw. In both cases, these two identities are strongly linked to how Native women are in their interaction with men. Green says “she must be a partner and lover of Indian men, a mother to Indian children, and an object of lust for white men”. This is linked to the blatant sexualisation of Native American women in film, who are either seen as child-bearers or as objects of fantasy for white male characters and the white male viewers who identify with said characters. Native women are fetishized and seen as exotic by filmmakers and viewers who see them as props and objects rather than human beings.

The “Sexualized Maiden” figure in Elise Marubbio<sup>17</sup>’s work is, in the same fashion as other Native female characters, fated to die on screen. Judith Curtis<sup>18</sup> summarizes it in these words: “The Sexualized Maiden most often is killed by someone from the white culture or sometimes from her own culture.”. Therefore, the Squaw will necessarily die at the hand of a man because she is reduced to a sexual object. No matter if it is a tribe member jealous of her relationship with a white man, or a white man enraged that he cannot own her, or even killed after being raped. All these scenarios use the common trope of the crime of passion, a terribly misleading way of designating murders of women by men who wished to possess their bodies and control their womanhood. Marubbio summarizes the sexualized condition of female Native American characters as follows: “Her gender makes her a target for rape, while her death ensures the end of a generation”. Native women are reduced to being sexual objects made to be “conquered” and “owned”, while still being linked to a cultural and racial identity that is seen as uncivilized and inferior. This echoes with the forced sterilization of hundreds

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<sup>17</sup> Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Curtis, Judith G. Review of *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* by M. Elise Marubbio, *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, University of Nebraska Press, 2008, pp. 360–63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25487886>. (Accessed on Jstor, 19-10-2021)

of Native American women by the US health authorities<sup>19</sup> during the 1960's and 1970's: "Native Americans accused the Indian Health Service of sterilizing at least 25 percent of Native American women who were between the age of fifteen and forty-four during the 1970s". It was investigated and the IHS was proven not to have followed regulation in the process of offering life-changing sterilization procedures to their patients, misinforming them about the consequences on their reproductive ability. Perpetuating the sexualization of Native women's bodies whilst socially keeping them in an inferior position to white Americans is a way to further attempt to control Native women's sexualities and what they do with their bodies by stripping them of their right to choose. Not only do stereotypes come from social and historical realities, but they also play a role in changing current perception and further aggravating the status of Native American women in American society.

### 1.3. Representations Which Have Impacted the Status of Native Women in Real Life

As I have stated before, representations do not come without consequences, impacting both the audience and the social group being represented.

#### 1.3.1. Relation Between Representation and Opinion

Consumption of media, including film, is a complex process. When someone reads a book or watches a movie, they are inevitably influenced by it. This influence is even stronger in the case of film since an audience will relate even more to the actors and unconsciously perceive the story as more "real" than what might be written in a novel. In that regard, stereotyped representations in films have a real impact on the public, which Dixon describes

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence, Jane. "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2000, pp. 400–19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1185911>. Accessed 11 May 2022.

as “heuristic processing”<sup>20</sup>, namely what happens in the brain when associating an image to an idea. Seeing one stereotypical representation is enough to negatively influence the viewer’s opinion of the social group being represented. The heuristic link between such images and one’s perception means that anyone who has seen a film in which Native American women were represented through negative and harmful stereotypes might construct their knowledge built on that experience and view it as the truth. This was clearly put into words in an article published in the *Journal of Social Issues* in 2015: “In the absence of direct in-person contact or other pertinent sources of information, media representations emerge as prototypes that establish the quality and quantity of characteristics people associate with different groups”<sup>21</sup>. Brooks and Hébert<sup>22</sup> argue that gender and race are both social constructs, and what better mirror of society is there other than culture and Film? Cinematic representations of Native American women are a reflection of how they are viewed by society, all the while directly influencing society’s opinion of them, thus creating a vicious circle of representations.

Young people are more prone to consuming visual media than other age groups, but they will not necessarily watch the same western movies as their parents. However, this does not stop them from being influenced by the representation of Native American people they might have seen on screen. Peter Seixas conducted a study of students’ understanding of Native history<sup>23</sup> through movies using *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and *The Searchers* (1956). The interviews helped him draw a variety of conclusions such as “it is congruence to their own conventions and expectations, not replication of the mores of the 1860s, which makes

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<sup>20</sup> Dixon, Travis L. “Chapter 16 Media Stereotypes: Content, Effects and Theory,” *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research*, 4th ed., Routledge, 2019, pp.243-257.

<sup>21</sup> Leavitt, Covarrubias, et al. ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 71, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39-53, doi: 10.1111/josi.12095

<sup>22</sup> Brooks, Hébert, *Chapter 16 Gender, Race, and Media Representation*, 2006, DOI:10.4135/9781412976053.n16

<sup>23</sup> Seixas, Peter. “Popular Film and Young People’s Understanding of the History of Native American-White Relations,” *The History Teacher*, vol. 26, no. 3, Society for History Education, 1993, pp. 351–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/494666>.

the historical film believable for young people”, indicating that viewers are more inclined to accept a story and its depictions as true if it matches their personal social and cinematic norms, and not that of the time of the movie. Moreover, he also found that “students initially tend to view such films without critically comparing them to what we know from other sources”. I have hypothesized on two aspects of P. Seixas’ research. First of all, a viewer’s reaction to a film as a work of fiction and its representation of reality is based on their emotional connection to it rather than a more critical in-depth analysis of its content. This implies that when a film is used as teaching material, the teacher is responsible for providing students with enough factual knowledge while encouraging them to compare that knowledge to whichever movie they are watching. Secondly, an audience is more likely to have an immersive experience – based on feelings rather than rationality – if a movie corresponds to their own norms. Therefore, older western movies have a lesser impact on the perception of today’s youth of Native American people than it did on people born in the 1960s for example. Instead, 21st century movies’ representations of Native American people will have a greater influence over them. Hence, these are the movies that need to be studied today to understand the immediate impact of representation of Native American women in movies upon newer generations.

### 1.3.2. Native Women: a Marginalized Minority Group in American Society

Native women suffer of disproportionately high rates of poverty, rape, murder and domestic violence. In February 2018, the Policy Research Center of the NCAI (National Congress of American Indians) published a report<sup>24</sup> combining recent studies on the violence faced by Native American women. In this report, it was stated that: 84.3% of them had faced

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<sup>24</sup> NCAI Policy Research Center (2018). *Research Policy Update: Violence Against American Indian Women and Girls*, National Congress of American Indians, Feb. 2018.

violence at least once in their life, 56.1% of them had been the victims of sexual violence. Surprisingly or not, 96% of the women who experienced violence did so from non-Native perpetrators. The fact that they are mostly victims of non-Native perpetrators indicates that Native women are seen by non-Native Americans as particularly vulnerable and chosen as targets more often than any other type of woman in the USA. Why is that? Looking at the correlation between representation and perception, on top of the widely spread stereotypical image of Native women spread by the movie industry, I cannot overlook the responsibility held by film representations in shaping the current social status of Native women which puts them at risk every day. “Native women are disproportionately affected by violence at a rate almost 50% higher than that reported for African American males”<sup>25</sup>. This is a shocking comparison, knowing how much African American men are subjected to violence in comparison to their white counterparts, even more so today in the light of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This shocking reality being in part unknown by the general public shows a lack of information from the media, but also highlights the fact that representation of Native women in film does not coincide with the reality they face everyday. By showcasing most Native characters in period pieces, the audience perceives them as people of the past, thus making them blind to the amount of violence Native women are victims of in real life.

When taking the racist stereotype of the Squaw into consideration, one can draw parallels between the over-sexualisation of female Native characters on screen and the alarming rate at which Native American women are being subjected to sexual abuse and rape. Debra Merskin<sup>26</sup> dubs the Squaw as an image “emblematic of manifest destiny”, a myth that has served as the justification for the conquest of the West and the methodical genocide of

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<sup>25</sup> Walters, Simoni. “Reconceptualizing native women's health: an "indigenist" stress-coping model,” *American journal of public health* vol. 92,4 (2002): 520-4. doi:10.2105/ajph.92.4.520

<sup>26</sup> Merskin, Debra. “The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman,” *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 21, no. 4, Routledge, 2010, pp. 345-366, DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2010.519616

indigenous peoples and culture. Most stereotypes about Native American women stem from lies constructed by the theory of manifest destiny and the idea that white Christian settlers had the God-given right to a land that wasn't theirs. It is inevitable that images found in movies made over the past century have been influenced by ideas that still hold an important place in American society and beliefs. Consequently, the struggles faced today by Native women cannot be dissociated from the way they have been portrayed, as exemplified by the image of the Squaw. However, Merskin observed that "Representations of Native women in the media and the everyday effects of stereotypic thinking on the social, legal, cultural, and economic aspects of public policy has received negligible attention from researchers, scholars, and policy makers", which underlines the lack of effort put into deconstructing and finding new solutions to the issues faced by Native women in the United States.

The conquest of the West also shifted the social status of Native women, as expressed by Devon A. Mihesuah<sup>27</sup>, a Choctaw writer and historian, who argues that "Euroamericans pressured tribes to convert to Christianity that included the acceptance of only the male God, thus reinforcing the superiority of males". Forced conversion shifted the relative status quo in most Native American tribes by making women significantly inferior to men. The patriarchal structure of American society is still, today, a cause of suffering for Native women. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women-right related issues are a current priority for Native women. One of the Indigenous women Mihesuah met said to her: "In your culture you have lots of problems with men. Maybe we do too, but we don't have time to worry about sexism. We worry about survival.". This means that the intersectional identity of Native American women does not necessarily mean that their identity as women and as Native people are on an equal footing. Denise Lajimodiere<sup>28</sup> defines Native American feminism in

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<sup>27</sup> Mihesuah, Devon A. "Commonalty of Difference: American Indian Women and History," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. 15–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1184938>

<sup>28</sup> Lajimodiere, Denise K. "American Indian Females and Stereotypes: Warriors, Leaders, Healers, Feminists; Not Drudges, Princesses, Prostitutes," *Multicultural Perspectives*, vol.15, no. 2, Routledge, 2013, pp.104-109, DOI: 10.1080/15210960.2013.781391

these words: “The heart and soul of American Indian feminism remains the promotion of tribal sovereignty and the empowerment of women.”. In light of all the discrimination against Native people, they must feel that they are Native first and that they need to defend their ethnic and cultural heritage more urgently than issues they face on a more “micro” level as Native American women. Nevertheless, racial and ethnic issues does not mean that gender-related issues should be overlooked.

As for the impact of these representations on the way Native American women see themselves, scholars specializing in that field deem that “to date, there is no comparative research among Native Americans or between Native Americans and other racial-ethnic minority groups that supports whether greater invisibility or invisibility coupled with more negative representations has more pernicious psychological consequences”.<sup>29</sup> This means that once again the lack of research allotted to Native American people hinders people’s ability to study and understand the issues that are specific to their situation. However, although there is a lack of scientific evidence, these same searchers “anticipate that Native Americans are at greater risk than other groups, but this may not be true when considering intersectional identities.”. Knowing the specific struggles of Native women today, I believe that their intersectional identity is at an even greater risk than Native men, making them the most vulnerable minority to misrepresentations in the film industry. Anyone who chooses to include a female Native character in a movie should keep this in mind. Their take on representation will undoubtedly impact the audience’s perception with all the consequences we have discussed for this at-risk minority.

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<sup>29</sup> Leavitt, Covarrubias, et al. ““Frozen in Time”: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding,” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 71, no. 1, 2015, pp. 39-53, doi: 10.1111/josi.12095

## 2. The Representation of Native Women in Films from Various Perspectives

The aforementioned notions will therefore be used to analyze the representation of Native American women in twenty-first century films on the basis of gaze and perspective, particularly from the perspective of the director. In order to take into account intersectionality and a variety of points of view, the work of directors of different racial backgrounds and gender shall be analyzed. My goal is to find out if differences in the treatment of their female Native characters can be found depending on the identity of the director.

### 2.1. Movies by non-Native American Female Directors

First, I will focus on works directed by people of either a different race and or a different gender. These are the two main components which may influence how Native American female characters will be portrayed on screen. I wish to find out if, in spite of their outside perspective on the specific experience of Indigenous women, these directors are able to break away from stereotypes and typical tropes. To do so, I have chosen four different films, more specifically three full-length features and a short film.

#### 2.1.1. *Hostiles*<sup>30</sup> (2017) by Scott Cooper

*Hostiles* (2017) by Scott Cooper is a modern movie trying to create a faithful historical representation of the Wild West. The goal of the director and writer is obvious in that the main character is morally ambiguous while foes and heroes alike come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. *Hostiles* is an honest attempt at rekindling the Western genre in the

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<sup>30</sup> Cooper, Scott. *Hostiles*, 2017.

style of Neo-Westerns by incorporating historical accuracy and a variety of racial minorities. It dodges the first stereotypical bullet of not representing Native American at all on screen. In fact, the Native characters appear as both protagonists and antagonists, being given a voice of their own without being restricted to one category or the other.

In Scott Cooper's movie, the female Native characters are pretty much voiceless background characters, not giving much importance in the film except for their relation to the other Native characters. Hence, Elk Woman is introduced as the wife of Chief Yellow Hawk's son Black Hawk while Living Woman is introduced as Chief Yellow Hawk's daughter. The Native women of *Hostiles* are defined by their relationship with men and not as individuals of their own. They remain in the background and are given a minor role in the unfolding of the story: that of the victims. Later on in the film, they become defenseless victims of a kidnapping along with Rosalie, the white female protagonist. They are rescued by the men of their group and used as props to amplify the other characters' heroic deeds. As a matter of fact, only Rosalie is given the opportunity to be strong and fend for herself - but she is the white woman, and the female lead character. The only truly relevant female character, in a movie where a plethora of male characters are given plenty of lines, screen time and plot relevance. The movie ends with a shoutout in which all Native characters are killed - excluding Yellow Hawk who had already died of old age at the end of the journey - cementing the idea that Native female characters are doomed to die in movies. Moreover, the only surviving member of the tribe is Little Bear, Elk Woman's son, and he is adopted by Rosalie. Therefore, even the role of motherhood is passed onto a non-native character, and the boy is shown wearing western garments as he moves away from his ancestors' land and family's graves.

### 2.1.2. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*<sup>31</sup> (2013) by Jeff Barnaby

The late Jeff Barnaby was a Mi'kmaq first nation director. This film is thus set on a fictional Mi'kmaq reservation in the 1970s in Canada, with a majority Indigenous cast except for the few white characters. Moreover, Mi'kmaq is spoken throughout the movie by the Indigenous characters with English subtitles. This is a commendable addition to the film as it reinforces the accuracy and authenticity of the setting by depicting First Nations characters interacting in their mother tongue instead of in English to cater to a majority white audience's habits and expectations. Jeff Barnaby prioritizes Native experience over his audience's comfort in all aspects of the film.

The plot of the movie is centered around the main character, Aila, and her community's troubles dealing with taxes and the local residential school. Aila's family's main way of making money is drug dealing. When her father is imprisoned, she starts leading part of the operations alongside her uncle. Violence is omnipresent throughout this movie, with numerous deaths, beatings and fights. The three female characters of the movie, all indigenous, are deeply affected by this violence. Aila's mother commits suicide in the first part of the movie after accidentally killing her son in a drunk driving accident. Aila finds her mother's body, thus being strongly affected by the events. Later, when she is forcefully taken into the residential school, her braids are cut, thus stripping her of her indigenous pride and heritage. The symbol of the act itself is violent. Popper – the Indian agent in charge of the residential school – tries to rape Aila in a vile attempt to take control over the body of the girl who has dared to disrespect his authority.

The characterization of Aila and her treatment on-screen give me mixed feelings about the representation of Native American women in this film. On the one hand, she does

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<sup>31</sup> Barnaby, Jeff. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, 2013.

have the main role in the story, and she is shown in positions of power, leading her own men and standing up to Popper. On the other hand, she is still sexualized, as shown with the rape attempt. Although it is symbolic of white men's desire to control Native women's bodies, this scene is violent, triggering and still falls back on age-old narrative tropes: the helpless yet fierce Celluloid Maiden who ends up at the mercy of a white man and needs to be rescued. While it does depict the reality of Native women who are victims of sexual assault at dizzying rates, the outcome of the event remains unsatisfactory in the sense that Aila is reliant on male intervention to be saved. Additionally, Aila's existence remains strongly linked to the men in her life and the trajectory of it is affected by them. She is her uncle's subordinate, her father is quick to reassert his authority once he comes back, and most of her willpower is turned towards her rivalry with Popper. Her relationship with these three men are the most developed aspects of her character. The power other Native men have over her is representative of gender inequalities in Canadian Indigenous communities. In fact, patriarchal patterns of domination were exacerbated by the 1868 Indian Act and have since continued to expose Native Canadian women to violence and power-imbalance. However, Joanne Baker argues that "the Indian Act's provisions for status did not create gender-based inequalities or sexism within Indian communities. The provisions represented and perpetuated a much longer process of social formation in which Indian men's political, economic, and cultural roles and responsibilities were elevated and empowered while those of Indian women were devalued."<sup>32</sup> Aila's relationship with the men in her life is a mirror of social norms, yet it does not quite reflect the director's aim to make her a rebellious character. While consistently confronting the white antagonist, she does not stand up for herself against her male relatives.

Hence, while I commend *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* for having a female main character, as well as accurately depicting her struggles and making her the victim of realistic

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<sup>32</sup> Barker, Joanne. "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada." *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, pp. 259–66. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068533>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2023.

traumatic events, I find it regrettable that Aila's character is not as well developed outside of her relationship with men. Not to mention that her only female mentor is dead by the end of the film and it is once again an older male character who becomes her savior by offering her a way out of drug dealing.

### 2.1.3. *Isabelle's Garden*<sup>33</sup> (2014) by Jeffrey Palmer

*Isabelle's Garden* (2014) is a short film by Jeffrey Palmer, a Kiowa Nation director, telling the story of a young Choctaw girl living on a reservation. Isabelle's purpose in life is to give hope and inspire others by providing them with fresh fruits and vegetables grown in her garden.

One of the first things said by Isabelle's character is "I often dream of living in a world where poverty doesn't exist". This short film highlights the extreme living conditions of people on reservations, solely by showing or alluding to them through the choice of setting: run-down wooden houses with no plumbing, rusty vehicles and landfills. Jeffrey Palmer chose to place Isabelle alone in this environment: she seems to be living on her own, does not play with other children, works alone in her garden. We are left to wonder why she is left to her own devices, watching a young girl take care of her community in her own way. This sense of community shows that, while she could be living on her own, she is not alone: after all, everyone comes together to help her out in the garden by the end of the short film.

Isabelle's character is a driving force and a leader in her community despite her young age. She takes the initiative to help others although she is living in poor conditions herself. Her selflessness and devotion to her people give her character substance, unlike stereotypical representations of Native American female characters. However, I must point out that Isabelle escapes any sexualisation probably thanks to her young age. Additionally, her

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<sup>33</sup> Palmer, Jeffrey. *Isabelle's Garden*, 2014.

character is uni-dimensional, made into a symbolic beacon of hope for her people in the form of a nurturing figure. The format of the short movie restricts any potential for a more nuanced character development. Nevertheless, Jeffrey Palmer's choice to give her such a strong will and make her represent idealistic hopes of a better life on reservations means that Isabelle as a character goes beyond any other typical representation despite being a character in a ten-minute-long short production. *Isabelle's Garden* is proof that it takes very little to give a female Native character substance and worth.

#### 2.1.4. *Woman Walks Ahead*<sup>34</sup> (2017) by Susanna White

*Woman Walks Ahead* (2017) by Susanna White is based on the true story of painter Catherine Weldon as she travels to the West in order to paint a portrait of Sitting Bull. Quite a few Native women are seen on screen throughout the movie, all portrayed by Native actresses. Nevertheless, they are given background roles. Obviously their presence is needed for the accuracy of the movie and its settings in the Lakota reservation, but they remain at the margin of the plot.

Additionally, the plot centers around an implicit romance between Catherine Weldon and Sitting Bull which is purely fictional. For one, both actors are much younger than the actual people they portray on screen, relying on their physical attractiveness to paint the perfect picture of a forbidden romance between a Native chief and a white widow. While this is an understandable artistic choice as it enhances the relationship between the two main protagonists, it also further erases Native women from the narrative. In fact, Sitting Bull had multiple wives.

The background roles of Native women in the film, who are more like pieces of decor rather than actual characters, saves them from being killed on screen. The only impactful and

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<sup>34</sup> White, Susanna. *Woman Walks Ahead*, 2017.

dramatic death that has a serious impact on the plot is Sitting Bull's execution, which is a central focus point because the film plays on the romance between him and Catherine Weldon. In this specific context, any other death would not have as much impact as only the fate of those two specific characters matters to the audience. Any additional death for shock value would not have fit in with the overall genre of the movie which strives to be poetic, melancholic and slow-paced. Hence, the irrelevance of Native female characters in *Woman Walks Ahead* is what saves them from once again being killed on screen. This is not quite progress in terms of representation, since while subverting usual tropes condemning Native women to violent fates, they are partially erased from the historical narrative.

## 2.2. Similarities in the Treatment of Indigenous Female Characters

In light of the analysis made of female Native characters in these four films, I have been able to draw parallels between representations from the perspective of a white director, namely Scott Cooper and Susanna White, as well as from the perspective of a male director, with Scott Cooper once again and Jeff Barnaby. Jeffrey Palmer's short film appears to be an exception to the similarities that I am going to talk about, hence I will also delve into why I think it is different from the other examples.

### 2.2.1. The White Perspective

Consequently, both movies directed by white directors, namely *Hostiles* and *Woman Walks Ahead*, unsurprisingly center their narratives around white actors. However, they still portray native characters accurately and respectfully. Male native characters. Native women remain background characters, stripped of any real substance, goals, personality in contrast to strong and complex white female protagonists. Even though the representation of women and

feminist concerns seem to have greatly evolved over the past decades as seen in these two movies, and so has the representation of native culture, Native women remain forgotten. It seems that, while white men and Native men can co-exist on screen as equally relevant characters, there is not enough space for both white women and Native women to be represented properly. Therefore, white directors seem to prioritize white women over Native female characters.

### 2.2.2. The Male Perspective

Scholar Bea Medicine<sup>35</sup> affirms that “Distorted images of Indian women have been perpetuated by the continuing male bias of mainstream writers.”, thus defining gender as a reason for distorted representations of Native American women in the arts. While white male directors might be more prone to misrepresenting them, as they get influenced by both their race and their gender, this can also be observed in films by Native male directors. As a matter of fact, Laura Beadling deplors “the relative lack of complex or well-developed females in feature films created and directed by Native men in the last twenty years. Female characters in these films have tended to be much less stereotyped. However, most of them still lack rich details and are seldom fully-realized.”<sup>36</sup> While this was true for films up until the late 2000s, I think that there has been progress in regards to creating more fleshed-out Native female characters in the past decade.

Although they are definitely background characters in *Hostiles*, Jeff Barnaby does a great job with Aila, making her the main character with a strong personality and motivations of her own. Nevertheless, both *Hostiles* and *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* fail to dissociate

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<sup>35</sup> Medicine, Bea. “Native American (Indian) Women: A call for research.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 19, 86–92, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Beadling, Laura L. “Reel Indigenous Women’s Lives: Female Protagonists in Films by Indigenous Women.” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 2016, pp. 133–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/rockmounrevi.70.2.133>

Native female characters from male characters. In spite of representations straying further away from stereotypes, male directors seem to struggle with letting female Native characters stand on their own, without at least part of their identity being defined by their relationship with the men around them. This bias is not present in *Isabelle's Garden*, helped by the nature of the short film and directing choices which make Isabelle the central focus and only character who is given a voice. Therefore, Jeffrey Palmer proves that a male perspective does not necessarily mean that male bias will distort the representation of Native American women and that new types of representation are possible regardless of who the director might be.

### 2.3. Movies by Native American Female Directors

I believe we must pay close attention to how Native American directors tell their own story, since they did not have a say in the making of the stereotypes that make up the majority of their presence on-screen. As Laura L. Beadling<sup>37</sup> puts it, “Despite the prevalence of such images, none is rooted in indigenous women’s conceptions of themselves”. Therefore, I have selected two films by female Indigenous directors to study and understand their perspective and the way they approach “self” representation.

#### 2.3.1. *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*<sup>38</sup> (2019) by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Kathleen Hepburn

The duo of directors (Tailfeathers is Kainai First Nation and Hepburn is white) chose to create an intimate movie filmed for the most part in a single continuous take, making it a profoundly immersive experience. Áila – who is played by the main director and writer,

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<sup>37</sup> Beadling, Laura L. “Reel Indigenous Women’s Lives: Female Protagonists in Films by Indigenous Women.” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 2016, pp. 133–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/rockmounrevi.70.2.133>

<sup>38</sup> Tailfeathers, Hepburn. *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*, 2019.

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers – comes across a young pregnant woman, Rosie, out in the rain barefooted and fleeing from her abusive boyfriend. Áila tries to help her out by taking her home then bringing her to a women’s shelter, but Rosie steals her medication and wallet before ultimately choosing to go back to her boyfriend.

The film offers a commentary about the lives and sufferings of two First Peoples women who have grown up under different socio-economic circumstances, Áila being more privileged than Rosie who grew up in the foster care system and does not have a job. Nevertheless, the two of them manage to bond over shared experiences linked to their Native identity as well as the topic of motherhood. While Rosie is pregnant and seems already strongly attached to her baby, Áila is seen getting an IUD at the beginning of the movie and admits to not being sure of wanting children.

The main subject matter of *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* is domestic abuse. This is a reality which a majority of Native women have experienced, being victims of violence in astounding proportions as 84.3% of Native American women have been subjected to violence in their lifetime, 56.1% of them being victim of sexual violence<sup>39</sup>. However, Rosie is not presented as a helpless Maiden in need of a male savior, nor is she sexualized at any point in the movie. Instead, help is offered to her by a fellow indigenous woman who gives her options to choose from and is respectful of her intimacy and free-will. Female solidarity is a major component of the film, enhanced by the directing choices made to focus mostly on the two leading characters, emphasizing their connection and the bond growing between them as they navigate the situation. It is welcome to see Native female characters supporting each other without needing to rely on male intervention or support to guide them through this crisis.

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<sup>39</sup> NCAI Policy Research Center (2018). *Research Policy Update: Violence Against American Indian Women and Girls*, National Congress of American Indians, Feb. 2018.

Undoubtedly, this film's true strength lies in *Tailfeathers* and Hepburn's ability to represent Native American women as flawed individuals while avoiding every pre-constructed stereotype. They are not helpless maidens, neither are they hyper sexualised squaws, nor are they background characters without substance. Instead, Rosie steals and lies to Áila in spite of her generosity. In the end, she even chooses to go back to living with her abusive boyfriend, a bitter and worrisome choice which saddens Áila and leaves the audience with more questions than answers. Even then, it is still a perfectly normal and realistic reaction on Rosie's part, cementing this film as a work which prioritizes harsh realism over conventional expectations. In an interview, Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers reveals: "With stories that speak about Indigenous women, so often we're framed within this victim narrative. We're trapped within the confines of the trauma from that history and the ongoing reality of settler colonialism. But this film is an act of resistance, a means of speaking to the sovereignty of the body for Indigenous women."<sup>40</sup>. The directors' aim was to subvert societal expectations and uplift Indigenous women while staying true to the reality of their experiences. This makes it one of the best representations of Native women I have ever come across in film.

### 2.3.2. *Little Chief*<sup>41</sup> (2019) by Erica Tremblay

*Little Chief* (2019) by Erica Tremblay is a short film which was part of the 2020 Sundance Festival. It was in fact funded by a Sundance Festival grant towards Indigenous creatives. Erica Tremblay is a Seneca-Cayuga filmmaker, and the cast of the movie is made-up of Native American actresses and actors. *Little Chief* tells the story of Sharon, a teacher on a reservation, who tries to help one of her students, Bear.

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<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, Robert. "In The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open, Two Women Grapple With Trauma and the Past". *Vogue*, 5 December 2019, [www.vogue.com/article/the-body-remembers-when-the-world-broke-open-interview](http://www.vogue.com/article/the-body-remembers-when-the-world-broke-open-interview). Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Tremblay, Erica. *Little Chief*, 2019.

The film gives an austere and faithful portrayal of life on reservations in the 2010s, showing a bleak economic reality leaving public infrastructures such as schools without essential goods. They're left to fend off for themselves through unlawful conducts, with Sharon stealing soaps from the casino-hotel to bring back to the school to put in the bathrooms or be used in the kitchens. Poverty impacts all of the community on reservations, yet it is not the only issue they have to deal with. Bear's father is an alcoholic who beats up his mom. His home situation means that the boy is left to his own devices, not wearing clothing fit for the weather and being unclean. Bear's dirtiness is a source of mockery for his peers who bully him.

Elements of Native American culture are scattered throughout *Little Chief*, such as the beaded necklace hanging inside Sharon's car which she later puts on. The students also make their own beaded jewelry in the afternoon, which indicates that schools on reservations integrate meaningful cultural practices into their teachings. Contrasting from twentieth century schools, the one depicted in the film no longer serves the purpose of separating Native children from their culture. In fact, at the beginning of the school day, greetings are exchanged in the children's tribal language. Every glimpse into indigenous culture is authentic because it does not serve a purpose of emphasizing the presence of Native characters, neither are they used as tokens of good faith towards inclusivity, or worse, elements put there to give the film an exotic feel. Instead, these instances ground the film in the reality of reservations and Native people's strong attachment to their traditions.

Sharon picks up one of her students, Bear, who's walking to school on his own without wearing a coat despite being in the middle of winter. His father is an alcoholic who beats up his mom, which Sharon knows even though Bear has not told her, which shows how attentive she is to her students' life and wellbeing. Sharon appears to be burnt out because of the pressure of having to work in such poor conditions. In spite of her lack of apparent

motivation and energy, she pays attention to her students and is aware of the bullying Bear is enduring as well as his home situation. Sharon's importance in her school and in Bear's life reflects the central role of women in Native communities. This is exactly how Erica Tremblay came to make this movie: "I'm going to write a love letter to my mom and my sister, and really all of the other matriarchs that are in our community that are really struggling to push through their own traumas to provide safety and education to our youth, and also bring love and joy to the youth community."<sup>42</sup>. The director drew from her own experience of observing life on reservation and her mother's job as a teacher to create this short film which becomes a hybrid between an autobiographical documentary and fictional tale of the importance of female figures. Sharon is a key element, and without her support everyone else would be worse off. This is why the film's serious tone and emphasis on Sharon's aloof behavior is worrisome: if she loses hope and starts getting less involved, who will be there to help these children?

Erica Tremblay gives the character unmistakable significance and a major role which surpasses the usual stereotypical depictions of Native women. Sharon does not exist on screen as an object of desire or a beacon of purity to be saved by a male character. She is her own person, and an important and valuable part of her community. She does not fall under any of the stereotypes previously identified.

### 2.3.3. Uniqueness in the Treatment of Indigenous Female Characters

On the topic of films made by Native women and the way they represent female characters, Laura Beadling makes the observation that these women "resist the amnesia about Native dispossession, so prevalent in Hollywood cinema, by creating complex female

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<sup>42</sup> Martin, Rebecca. "Indigenous Filmmaker Erica Tremblay charts her road to making "Little Chief" and future projects". *Cinema Femme*, 8 January. 2021, <https://cinemafemme.com/2021/01/08/indigenous-filmmaker-erica-tremblay-charts-her-road-to-making-little-chief-and-future-projects> . Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

protagonists who have not only a full emotional life, but who also engage with the continuing trauma of history in their communities.”<sup>43</sup>. This proves to be true based on the conclusions I’ve drawn from studying *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* and *Little Chief*. All indigenous female characters are fully developed as people in a nuanced way, given qualities and flaws, aspirations and disillusionments. They exist outside of their relationship with men – white or Native – and are not presented as objects of sexual desire or virginal virtue.

Hence, films made by Native female directors seem to provide the most accurate representations of Native women out of all the different films which I have analyzed. This is due to the intersectional nature of their personal experience, being able to empathize with both the reality of being Native and being a woman, with its particular set of struggles. Inevitably, the conclusion drawn from these observations raises an important question: are Native female directors the only ones capable of avoiding stereotypical representations of Native women in movies? If so, is it not too restrictive of a solution to the issue of misrepresentation?

### 3. Misrepresentation: an Issue of Perspective

The question raised by my analysis of various films is that of the legitimacy of different directors in making stories about Native Women, especially in instances where they’re either another ethnicity or another gender. What is the root cause of misrepresentations and can they be avoided in the future? Moreover, this also raises ethical

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<sup>43</sup> Beadling, Laura L. “Reel Indigenous Women’s Lives: Female Protagonists in Films by Indigenous Women.” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 70, no. 2, Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, 2016, pp. 133–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/rockmounrevi.70.2.133>

questions about defining what makes a film a proper representation simply on the basis of the director's identity and perspective.

### 3.1. An Outsider View is a Partial One

Consequently, I will define potential causes for unfaithful or distorted representations of Indigenous female characters in film. From my analysis of the aforementioned movies, I have found two components playing a major role in inaccuracies or inconsistencies. On the one hand, someone who is not Native themselves might lack the proper understanding of Native culture and customs. On the other hand, a director who is not a Native woman will be unable to understand the specific intersectional discriminations they face, therefore undermining their experience or even fully missing out on the reality of Native women's struggles.

#### 3.1.1. Lacking the Cultural Understanding

With traditional Hollywood Westerns and most twentieth century representations of Native women, the main issue linked to inaccurate portrayals is a clear lack of knowledge about Native culture and customs. Because of the constant use of stereotypes and the tendency to avoid portraying modern Indigenous character, the mainstream image of Native culture is "Native culture as a dead culture"<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, these very manipulations of cultural practices have created most of the archetypes of Native female characters such as the Squaw. It is yet again a reminder of the power of words and how misusing "names [...] pertaining to

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<sup>44</sup> Croisy, Sophie. "Fighting Colonial Violence in "Indian Country": Deconstructing racist sexual stereotypes of Native American Women in American popular culture and history", *Angles* [Online], vol. 5, 2017, Accessed on 29 December 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.1313>

some of their communities — such as the word “squaw,” an Algonkian word which signifies “being female”<sup>45</sup> can lead to tenacious visions in the collective psyches.

Buescher Ono analyzes the transformation of Pocahontas into mainstream costume and toys which are blatantly inaccurate in regards to cultural accuracy of Native dress. He states that : “This construction of the Native American apparel detached from Native American cultural contexts encourages parents to imagine children playing Native Americans without input from Native Americans about what it means to be Native American and to rely on their own possibly limited understanding of and exposure to Native American history and culture”<sup>46</sup>. I want to compare non-Native directors to these children playing with Pocahontas dolls and costumes. In a similar fashion, non-Native directors invent stories and “play” with Native female characters such as Pocahontas without proper knowledge about Indigenous cultural norms and practices. The information gap left by a lack of complete understanding of Native culture lead to superficial representations.

However, these particular issues have been avoided to an extent in *Hostiles* and *Woman Walks Ahead*. Indeed, both movies make their Native characters speak their tribe’s language, and respect cultural dress and social structure. The gloss of Sitting Bull’s relationships with his wives in *Woman Walks Ahead* represents an obstacle to true cultural accuracy which proves that even “conscious” representations by non-Native authors tend to disregard cultural elements to some extent, especially in narratives centered around a white character as it is the case here.

Hank Adams extensively studied the case of Gregory J. Markopoulos, a Greek immigrant who pretended to be Native American and fooled the public. He explains Markopoulos’ ability to lie about his identity in these words: “Sophistry itself, and stereotypes, have aided in making Gregory Markopoulos the principal representative for

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ono, Buescher. “Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the commodification of a native American woman”, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol.18:1, 2001, pp. 23-43, DOI: 10.1080/15295030109367122

Indians, Indian culture and Indian mentalities, to millions of Americans - Indian and non-Indian alike<sup>47</sup>. This is an extreme example of someone who appeared to be a reliable and authentic part of Native culture when he was in fact an impostor. The case of Gregory J. Markopoulos is proof that representations of Indigenous culture can be distorted by lies and deceit while still appearing to be genuine. Hence why it is difficult to imagine an outsider representing Native culture in an appropriate manner, even more so when it comes to Native women considering the vast difference in gender roles and practices with Western culture.

### 3.1.2. Lacking the Experience of Discrimination

Another issue stemming from not being a Native woman is that it is tricky to fully grasp the mechanics of the discrimination they face and empathize with them. Dakota writer and scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn<sup>48</sup> believes that non-native creatives who monopolize stories about Native people and experiences “claim the power to narrate” all the while blocking “dissenting narratives from the audience” in order to perpetuate the current social order. “It is not the Native woman that is able to define herself, but the Squaw Native woman is defined by those in power. Being that White men have traditionally held power, Native women are often defined as they are viewed by White men.”<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, White directors will have trouble grasping the extent to which Native women are affected by racism while Male directors will generally undermine the impact of sexism. All this leads to old stereotypes such as the “Squaw” as well as instances such as *Hostiles* in which Native women have no substance at all, or *Woman Walks Ahead* which centers the narrative around a wealthy white widow whose circumstances are vastly different from those of Native women at the time.

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<sup>47</sup> Adams, Hank. “The Golden Indian”, *Akwesasne Notes*, vol. 11, 1984.

<sup>48</sup> Cook-Lynn, Elizabeth. “Who Stole Native Studies”, *Wicazo Sa Review*, spring 1997.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

Ignoring the intersectional dynamics of discrimination faced by Native women would be akin to being “color-blind” or in denial of reality. Indeed, while film productions continue to thrive, “American Indian communities struggle to regain the power to determine their communal futures through economic, governmental, social, educational, and kinship refigurations”<sup>50</sup>. Not taking these struggles into account when representing Indigenous women in film implies a conscious choice on the part of the director to turn a blind eye on reality.

### 3.2. The Ethical Issue of the “Right” to Represent a Minority

Considering all of the elements which can influence directors who are not Native women themselves, as well as some people’s beliefs that only individuals who can fully relate to a minority’s culture and experience are able to represent them properly on screen, I must find the limits to such arguments and explore potential alternative solutions to issues of representation.

#### 3.2.1. Can Artistic Production Be Restricted?

In light of a majority of misrepresentations of Native women by non-Native directors, one could easily be tempted to state that any representation made by someone who is not a Native woman is inherently flawed and wrong. This judgment, albeit rooted in tedious study and analysis of representation, raises ethical questions. Indeed, how and according to whose authority can Artistic production of films be stopped on the basis that they might include unfaithful portrayal of Native American people and culture? Can it be argued that non-Native

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<sup>50</sup> Shanley, Kathryn W. “The Indians America Loves to Love and Read: American Indian Identity and Cultural Appropriation.” *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1997, pp. 675–702. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185719>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

directors are not legitimate story-tellers when it comes to being truthful in the way they depict this minority?

More radical views on the matter do argue that only members of the minority group in question are legitimate to tell the stories of their own community on screen. This is rooted in the belief that stereotypes and clichés are embedded inside American culture because of the country’s colonial legacy. Sam Pac says that “To some degree, it can be argued that all representational accounts of Native Americans by non-Native Americans is rooted in paternalism.”<sup>51</sup> and goes even further by mentioning that “Some have even suggested that the misrepresentation is so entrenched that only members of the group can properly represent themselves”<sup>52</sup>.

Representing a minority group can be interpreted as a form of cultural appropriation which James O. Young theorized as “Subject Appropriation”<sup>53</sup>. He defines it as instances “when an outsider represents members or aspects of another culture. This sort of appropriation would occur “when an outsider makes the culture or lives of insiders the subject of a painting, story, film, or other work of art.”. However, Young does not argue that all instances of Subject Appropriation are wrong but merely that it can be defined as such in “instances of subject appropriation that are regarded as misrepresenting the cultures of insiders.”. Finally, he concludes with this rule: “When outsiders appropriate content from a disadvantaged minority culture, the source of the appropriated material ought to be fully and publicly acknowledged.”. I agree with the overall message of his paper, which is asking for a case-to-case analysis instead of relying on pre-made rules that do not allow for nuance. In fact, the director’s intentions should also be taken into account, as it can strongly impact the extent to which representations might be perceived as offensive. All in all, while I understand

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<sup>51</sup> Pac, Sam. “The Best of Both Worlds: Otherness, Appropriation, and Identity in ‘Thunderheart.’” *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2001, pp. 97–114. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1409609>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Young, James O. “Profound Offense and Cultural Appropriation.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2005, pp. 135–46. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3700467>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

why some would want only Native female directors to create films about Native women, such rigid standards restrict artistic freedom and deny the possibility of respectfully-made films by white or male directors. Moreover, representations in films by Native women can also be criticized.

### 3.2.2. There Is No Perfect Representation

Subjectivity in the arts is unavoidable. Ranging from casting, to script, dialogue or directing choices, a film is made up of a myriad of choices reflecting its maker's beliefs and vision. In the case of representations of Native women, this can result in negative and positive aspects regardless of who the filmmaker is. It is the viewer's responsibility to keep in mind that "what they are watching is a representation, not reality itself"<sup>54</sup>. Indeed, Paul Klee himself said that "art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible"<sup>55</sup> which encapsulates the idea that, although art is built on reality, its essence is not to mimic it faithfully but rather to reveal the artist's vision. What is made visible in films representing Native American women is not a true-to-life depiction of their lives and struggles but rather how they are perceived by the director. Determining in what ways this perception has been influenced by societal norms and stereotypes is up to the viewer. Similarly, the viewer holds the interpretative power, meaning that a film can very be seen as offensive by some and inoffensive by others. Only an informed viewer can at the same time recognize the director's bias and acknowledge artistic freedom.

Consequently, even when films are made by Native women about Native women, their artistic choices represent a filter atop reality. The examples of *Little Chief* and *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open* are a perfect representation of what could be

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<sup>54</sup> Adams, John W. "Representation and Context in The Ethnographic Film." *Film Criticism*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1979, pp. 89–100. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44018654>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2023.

<sup>55</sup> Klee, Paul. *Creative Credo [Schöpferische Konfession]*, 1920

defined as Ethnographic films, meaning films focused on a specific ethnic group with the aim of representing their lives and socio-economical environment faithfully. John Adams argues that “Ethnographic films are not intended to be "real," nor to be "closed," let alone "complete." They invite reflection and study about the world around us as part of the on-going discourse of anthropological science.”. Both films, in their documentary-like depiction of Native women’s lives in modern society, manage to reference factual struggles combined with a plot made to make the viewer engage with the message and soak in the experience of Native women.

However, it is true that these attempts have their own limitations. Indeed, some of them can feel somewhat monolithic, often striving for exclusively positive representations as is the case for *Isabelle’s Garden*’s main character who is close to being an allegory for the generosity and nurturing of mother nature. Judith A. Howard observes that “When identity struggles arise, they generally take the form of redefining negative images as positive, or of deciphering the "authentic" identity.”<sup>56</sup> which supports this idea that most well-meaning recent attempts at representation of Native American women can sometimes feel uni-dimensional by trying to repair the damages of Hollywood’s long history of racist stereotypes in Westerns and other genres.

More importantly, it is crucial to remember that even Native female directors are not spokespersons for the whole of their community and that the message of their works are first and foremost personal. Dakota writer and scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn herself stated, in reference to her writings, “I do not speak for my people.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, no representation of Native American women can be viewed as flawless and representative of the experience of all Native women, no matter who is at the root of the project.

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<sup>56</sup> Howard, Judith A. “Social Psychology of Identities.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, Annual Reviews, 2000, pp. 367–93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/223449>

<sup>57</sup> Shanley, Kathryn W. “The Indians America Loves to Love and Read: American Indian Identity and Cultural Appropriation.” *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1997, pp. 675–702. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185719>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

### 3.3. The Solution of Collaboration

“If we want to “help Native Americans regain their rightful place”, we must carve a space to do it collaboratively with them.”<sup>58</sup> This quote encapsulates the need for Native voices to be heard. Hence, while it is true that artistic production cannot be restricted, Native women still need to have opportunities to represent themselves for it to be fair. Consequently, creating space for Native creatives to have opportunities in the film industry is primordial for the development of better representations of Native women and Native people in general.

#### 3.3.1. *Te Ata*<sup>59</sup> (2016) by Nathan Frankowski

This is a biopic about Chickasaw performer Mary Frances Thompson, known under the stage name Te Ata (1895 – 1995). The movie was directed by a white director but the film was produced by the Chickasaw nation.

The film follows Te Ata’s growth from childhood to her famous performance at the White House for President Roosevelt’s first day in office in 1933. The film tackles issues surrounding the erasure of Native cultural practices because of The Code of Indian Offenses. It shows a struggling people whose attempts at making life better for their community are cut short by Congressmen’s ambition and notably the creation of the State of Oklahoma, dismantling their tribal government.

Amidst troubled circumstances, Te Ata rises as an unstoppable force. She is depicted as curious, and having a hunger for knowledge and the state. She pushes to get an education in spite of her father’s opposition, going to college then theater school and finally Broadway.

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<sup>58</sup> Saldanha, Ken, and Kay McGowan. “On Discussions of Westerns, Cowboys, and Indians: But Ought There To Be Included a Native American Perspective Too?” *International Review of Qualitative Research*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2015, pp. 363–78. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2015.8.3.363>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Frankowski, Nathan. *Te Ata*, 2016.

The family dynamic helps introduce notions of respect for the elders but also portray Te Ata as an independent and opinionated woman who does not hesitate to make a path for herself. Her determination is commendable as she is never shown as helpless or in need of savings, the other characters merely being there to counsel her.

Additionally, Te Ata is characterized by her attachment to her tribe's culture which she devotes her performances to. She relentlessly hopes to bring understanding for her culture and make her people seen. Moreover, she is sensitive to wrongful representations of Native people as seen in a scene where she sees a racist cartoon in a cinema portraying Natives as savages.

Te Ata, although representing a real-life individual, is represented as an idealistic yet goal-driven woman who never loses sight of her life's purpose: telling the world about her people's story. The different struggles faced over the course of the movie as well as encounters with other people only serve the purpose of making her grow into herself and assert her own goals and wants.

The film is special in the sense that it was created in close collaboration between director Nathan Frankowski and the Chickasaw Nation. Frankowski himself admits: "I realized that I myself could never do the story of Te Ata justice without the guidance of the Chickasaw Nation. After all, it's their story, their history, and their legacy."<sup>60</sup>. Many people involved in the making of the movie are Chickasaw themselves, including writer Jeannie Barbour, as well as actors, extras, cameramen and technicians. This is highly symbolic as Te Ata's own tribe is the one able to control how her story is told, fact-checking everything from costumes to language. This allows for a very authentic representation of Te Ata both as a historical figure and as a character. Actress Q'orianka Kilcher is not Chickasaw herself but she "met with a Chickasaw storyteller and historian. She soaked up all things Te Ata.". This

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<sup>60</sup> Frankowski, Nathan. "How They Did It : The Te Ata Director on Taking Cues from the Chickasaw Nation and Respecting Their Legacy", *MovieMaker*, 2 oct. 2017, [www.moviemaker.com/te-ata-nathan-frankowski](http://www.moviemaker.com/te-ata-nathan-frankowski). Accessed 8 Apr. 2023.

is a great example of even a Native woman having to learn and adapt in order to stay faithful to reality because the Indigenous peoples of America are undeniably heterogenous and have different social, cultural and linguistic practices.

### 3.3.2. Hire Native Creatives

The main reason for a lack of respectful and accurate representations of Native women in film is a lack of Indigenous people in the film industry at all levels. Historically speaking, the lack of opportunity has been the cause for a great number of compromises on the question of representation. For instance, the actor who played Wind in His Hair in *Dances with Wolves*, Rodney Grant, justified his taking part in the movie by saying “If a white man didn't tell the story, then the story wouldn't have been made.”<sup>61</sup> This means that Native stories are being almost exclusively told from an outsider perspective, thus stunting the diversity of representations available to the public and impacting their perception of Native American women and people as a whole. Sidner Larson sums up this idea in these words: “At the present time, Native Americans are a minority defined by the majority culture and as a result they are dependent on notions of identity developed by others.”<sup>62</sup>

As I see it, there is one truly efficient solution: hiring Native creatives in Hollywood. Giving Native women the opportunity to tell their own story by giving them the funds to do so is only one of the pieces needed to fix issues of representation of Native women in cinema. Film producers hiring Native actresses, directors, writers, costume designers and so on will be the way to ensure that in any film production, native women will have a say and a role to play in the decision-making and creative choices that involve them. In a review of *The Invented Indian*, Vine Deloria says “For most of the five centuries, whites have had

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<sup>61</sup> Masayeva, Victor. *Imagining Indians*, 60 min., Documentary Education Resources, 1992, videocassette

<sup>62</sup> Larson, Sidner. “Native American Aesthetics: An Attitude of Relationship.” *MELUS*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1991, pp. 53–67. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/467240>. Accessed 5 Apr. 2023.

unrestricted power to describe Indians in any way they chose. Indians were simply not connected to the organs of propaganda so that they could respond to the manner in which whites described them.”<sup>63</sup>, which echoes the idea that Native people deserve to have opportunities to tell their own stories, and that “updated” accurate depictions of Native female characters on screen cannot solely come from white creatives for it to be considered as actual reparations.

Intersectionality cannot only happen at the level of the story itself, since the bias of the director will inevitably influence their creative choices. To avoid inaccurate representations without hindering or censoring creative freedom, the movie industry must offer opportunities for people of all backgrounds in every role involved in the making of a movie. This will create a positive dialogue between all parties involved and nurture constructive evolution in regards to issues of representation. “Beyond collaboration, the highest form of participation is when indigenous peoples seize control of their own representation.”<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

From the beginning of film as a medium, Native women had been portrayed according to dehumanizing stereotypes perpetrating a long history of violence against them. At times idealized as beacons of purity to be saved by the white man, at other times sexualized and vilified as a temptress and a savage, Native female characters were often background characters used as tools to perpetuate the domination of Western Christian culture over Indigenous people.

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<sup>63</sup> Deloria, Vine. “Comfortable Fictions and the Struggle for Turf.” *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1992, pp. 397–410. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185800>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Pack, Sam. “The Best of Both Worlds: Otherness, Appropriation, and Identity in ‘Thunderheart.’” *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2001, pp. 97–114. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1409609>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2023.

Western movies in particular have served a purpose akin to propaganda, distorting reality and creating the figure of the Squaw which justified sexual violence against Native women as lesser, animalistic individuals. Inevitably, Hollywood's legacy is a complete misunderstanding of Native culture and the place occupied by women in many tribes as leaders and matriarchs by most people in America and around the globe.

Nevertheless, Civil Rights activists and open minds have led towards a positive evolution of the representation of Native American women in the twenty-first century. Generally speaking, current films are more respectful of traditional Indigenous practices and mindful of offensive stereotypes. However, I have noticed a correlation between the director's perspective and how it affects representation of Native female characters. Indeed, White directors tend to shift focus away from Native characters, either making them side characters or having them share the center of the stage with a white character. Similarly, male directors will often limit the number of female characters on-screen and have them mostly interact and develop within the boundaries of male-centered relationships. On the contrary, Native female directors tend to have an almost documentary approach to the way they represent their own lives as they draw directly from personal experience and struggles, often leading to extremely raw portrayals of Native women.

When reflecting on who is best fit to represent Native women in film, I have come to the conclusion that bias is inherent to film production, and that while it may be stronger when lacking cultural or personal understanding of the lives of Native women, any director is subject to having their perspective influence the way they represent Indigenous female characters. Consequently, there is no miracle solution to avoiding negative representations. However, it is undeniable that Native people deserve more opportunities in the film industry to make their voice heard and become part of the creative process to help check for misconceptions and unrealistic depictions of Native characters. Meanwhile, Indigenous artists

can turn to other art forms to uplift their communities and share their experience, such as writing or poetry with for example renowned poets Natalie Diaz (Mojave) who won a Pulitzer prize, and Joy Harjo (Muscogee). Visual arts are also a powerful way to convey a message, as seen with Wendy Red Star (Crow)'s striking mixed-media paintings or the powerful photographs taken by Cara Romero (Chemehuevi). Additionally, beyond artistic media, one medium stands above all else today when it comes to raising awareness and sharing your experience with the world: social media. Across all platforms, there has been a surge in Indigenous activists and content creators eager to share their cultural practices and speak up about the challenges they face. This is perhaps the easiest way to bypass Hollywood and the arts industry's closed-off systems and discover up-and-coming Indigenous artists.

All in all, the impact of representations of minorities in media and film is undeniable and a strong component in the upholding of discriminatory social structures. Yet, although more positive representations can definitely influence people's minds for the better, real advancement of the condition of Native women can only be made through structural and political changes. "Popular culture is consumed as entertainment, not as a learning tool. That does not mean it has no potential lasting power in the images it portrays. But the popular culture items exist in a larger political context. Unless that context and its representations are addressed by people acting outside of popular culture, the novel images offered by artists [...] could be fleeting."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Mihelich, John. "Smoke or Signals? American Popular Culture and the Challenge to Hegemonic Images of American Indians in Native American Film." *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, pp. 129–37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1409611>.

## 4. Séquence Didactique

Afin d'intégrer les recherches de mon mémoire à ma pratique professionnelle, j'ai construit cette séquence destinée à une classe de Première Spécialité AMC (Anglais Monde Contemporain) pour montrer que le thème que j'ai choisi d'étudier s'inscrit dans une logique didactique et éducative accessible pour des élèves du second degré. Comme développé dans la première partie de ce mémoire, le point de vue Européen (et par conséquent celui des élèves français) des peuples autochtones d'Amérique du Nord est celui d'une civilisation d'un autre temps qui n'existe presque plus actuellement, fortement influencés par le soft power Hollywoodien et les films western. Selon James H. Howard, "There is, as one might expect, a great emphasis on Native American culture as it existed in the early nineteenth century and a seeming lack of awareness that most of these cultures have changed a great deal since then."<sup>66</sup> Ainsi, cette séquence a pour but d'aborder la représentation des Amérindiens au cinéma en apportant aux élèves un bagage contextuel et historique conséquent afin de traiter des problématiques de représentation.

En effet, afin de lutter contre les stéréotypes dont sont inconsciemment victimes des élèves, on peut envisager de travailler sur trois axes différents. Tout d'abord, apporter aux élèves les connaissances culturelles nécessaires pour comprendre l'origine des stéréotypes et pouvoir les confronter à la réalité. Ensuite, leur faire prendre conscience de l'influence des représentations stéréotypées sur leur perception du monde qui les entoure. Enfin, les confronter à des témoignages et des situations concrètes pour avoir une meilleure compréhension du vécu des individus touchés par ces stéréotypes. Lorsque l'on combine ces trois axes, on offre aux élèves les outils nécessaires pour analyser les représentations plus ou

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<sup>66</sup> Howard, James H. "The Native American Image in Western Europe." *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 1, University of Nebraska Press, 1978, pp. 33–56, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1183964>.

moins stéréotypées véhiculées par l'industrie du cinéma. Par conséquent, ce sont ces stratégies que je vais m'efforcer d'appliquer dans la séquence proposée ici.

Compte tenu de la quantité très limitée de productions centrées autour des femmes, il m'est apparu plus sage d'agrandir le choix des documents étudiés au-delà des représentations strictement féminines. Puisque la séquence se destine à des élèves en classe de spécialité AMC, chaque séance dure deux heures. Cette séquence nécessite des capacités d'analyse relativement développées, il est donc judicieux de la proposer dans la deuxième moitié de la progression annuelle d'une classe de Première AMC.

<b>PLACE DE LA SÉQUENCE DANS LA PROGRESSION (cycle/axe)</b>
<p><b>Classe de 1ère Spécialité AMC</b></p> <p>Thématique 2 : « Représentations »</p> <p>Axe d'étude 3 : Représenter le monde et se représenter</p>

<b>TÂCHE FINALE ET NIVEAU DE COMPÉTENCE CIBLE DU CECRL</b>
<p>B1 vers B2</p> <p><b>TÂCHE FINALE</b></p> <p>EOC (Expression Orale en Continu)</p> <p><i>“You are giving a speech at a film award ceremony. Fifty years after Sacheen Littlefeather, reflect on the evolution of representation of Native American people in movies, specifically of Native Women.”</i></p>

<b>OBJECTIFS</b>		
<b>Culturels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Découvrir l'histoire et la culture des amérindiens</li> <li>● Le cinéma Américain</li> </ul>	
<b>Linguistiques</b>	Grammaticaux	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prétérit, present perfect, past perfect (parler de la situation passée et de son évolution)</li> <li>● L'obligation morale (Should, Must)</li> <li>● Le futur dans le passé (Would)</li> </ul>
	Lexicaux	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Le vocabulaire du cinéma (director, actor, character, script, plot, costume, setting)</li> <li>● Le vocabulaire de la culture amérindienne/l'ouest américain (Native</li> </ul>

		American != Indian ; settlers ; reservation ; tribe)
	Phonologiques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Accent tonique (discours)</li> <li>● Les mots en -tion [ʃən] (representation, action, ambition...)</li> <li>● La prononciation de -ED (prétérit)</li> </ul>
<b>Pragmatiques</b>	Construire un discours pour convaincre et défendre ses convictions devant un public.	
<b>Citoyens</b>	Les problématiques de représentation des minorités, l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre les stéréotypes racistes et misogynes.	

ÉVALUATIONS	
<b>Auto-évaluations</b>	Ateliers d'expression orale
<b>Évaluations formatives</b>	Quizzes de connaissances interactif
<b>Évaluations sommatives</b>	Tâche Intermédiaire (EOC), Tâche finale (EOC)

Séance	Support	Objectifs	Activités/Modalités
1	Extrait de discours Barack Obama, 29 Janvier 2013 "Unless you're Native American, you came from someplace else"	Découvrir le thème de la séquence.	Activité frontale réalisée en classe entière: l'extrait est projetée au tableau. <b>Listen and react.</b> Puisque ce sont des élèves de Terminale AMC, on peut mettre l'accent sur l'implicite, l'expression du ressenti/de l'opinion, et l'émission d'hypothèses.
	Corpus de textes (source: <a href="https://history.com">https://history.com</a> ) et Frise Chronologique (Annexes 1 et 2)	Connaître les principaux éléments de l'histoire du peuple amérindien depuis la colonisation du continent par les européens.	Dans un premier temps, les différents textes du corpus sont répartis entre les élèves qui travaillent en binôme. La consigne est la suivante: <b>Highlight information about the people, place(s), event(s) and date(s). Get ready to explain your text to the other groups!</b> → Cette activité combine le repérage des éléments clés à une reformulation des idées de manière synthétique.

			<p>→ En travaillant à deux, on permet aux élèves de combiner et croiser leurs idées pour une compréhension plus exhaustive du texte</p> <p>Puis, les élèves des différents groupes sont mélangés.</p> <p><b>Explain your event to your group mates and complete the timeline with the missing elements.</b></p> <p>→ Grâce à cette activité, les élèves auront une connaissance globale de l'histoire amérindienne leur permettant d'aborder la séquence en comprenant le contexte des différents documents.</p> <p>Cette activité nécessite une correction en classe entière. La frise chronologique complétée fait office de Trace Écrite.</p>
2	Corpus d'affiches de films Western et de Stills ( <a href="#">Annexe 3</a> )	Anticiper le thème de la séance.	<p>Les affiches sont imprimées et distribuées aux groupes d'îlots dans la classe.</p> <p><b>Look at the pictures. Find adjectives to describe the Native characters.</b></p> <p>→ On crée un nuage de mots à partir des réponses des élèves.</p> <p><b>Pick the most stereotypical picture according to you and explain your choice.</b></p> <p>→ Ici, les élèves doivent justifier leur choix et développer une argumentation en se basant sur le sentiment évoqué dans l'étape précédente.</p>
	Carte Mentale au Tableau	Dégager les différents stéréotypes sur les amérindiens, en s'appuyant en partie sur l'activité précédente.	<p><b>Give me stereotypes about Native Americans.</b></p> <p>→ La carte mentale permet de catégoriser ce qui vient d'être développé dans l'optique de s'y référer plus tard dans la séance et dans la séquence. On fait appel aux stéréotypes des films mais également aux stéréotypes propres aux élèves.</p>

	<p>Vidéo  “Indigenous People React To Indigenous Representation In Film And TV (Pocahontas, The Lone Ranger)”  <i>REACT</i>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZkyL5pn74E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZkyL5pn74E</a>  +  Worksheet  (<a href="#">Annexe 4</a>)</p>	<p>Corroborer ou nuancer les propos des élèves grâce à des témoignages.</p>	<p>La vidéo nécessite d’être didactisée pour d’une part, la rendre plus courte, et d’autre part ne garder que les passages les plus pertinents (uniquement les réactions aux films, sans les questions adjacentes et la partie de 12:56 à 14:00 sur Columbus Day). Dans l’idéal, la version utilisée en classe ne devrait pas durer plus de cinq minutes.  La compréhension se ferait à l’aide d’un tableau.  <b>Listen and fill in the grid.</b>  → Le format du tableau dans le cadre d’une compréhension orale permet de compartimenter les informations et de les synthétiser sans surcharger l’élève avec une multitude de consignes et questions différentes.  À la suite du visionnage de la vidéo, on envisage une phase de discussion entre les élèves.  <b>After seeing this video, has your opinion on some of these movies changed? Do you agree with everything that was said? Discuss in pairs.</b>  → Il est important en classe de spécialité AMC de développer l’esprit critique, l’analyse et l’argumentation des élèves ainsi que l’aisance à l’oral. C’est pourquoi cette séance est ponctuée par ces moments d’échange.</p>
3	<p>Corpus d’oeuvres représentant Pocahontas  (<a href="#">Annexe 5</a>)</p>	<p>Anticiper le thème de la séance.  Travailler l’analyse iconographique.  Faire le lien entre stéréotypes et représentations.</p>	<p>Les élèves sont répartis en groupes de 4. On leur donne quatre consignes:  <b>Sum up what you know about Pocahontas’ story.</b>  <b>Rank the pictures from oldest to newest.</b>  → Cela permet aux élèves de prendre compte de la période pour analyser les images par la suite.  <b>Choose one picture each and describe it. (activité individuelle) Share your analysis with your group mates.</b></p>

			<p>→ On répartit le travail entre les élèves pour les responsabiliser et permettre à chacun de s’entraîner à l’analyse de documents. Ils doivent s’écouter pour réussir l’étape suivante.</p> <p><b>Rank the pictures from worst representation to best representation according to you. Get ready to explain your reasoning.</b></p> <p>→ Avec cette consigne, on fait appelle à l’opinion des élèves tout en s’assurant qu’ils aient pris en compte les idées abordées lors des deux premières séances.</p>
	<p>Montage de différentes scènes du film Disney ; “The Real Native History of Pocahontas - From a Native Journalist” by Nathan Schilling  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaO3waqN_Y8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaO3waqN_Y8</a>  + Worksheet (Annexe 6)</p>	<p>Confronter réalité historique et représentation cinématographique de deux figures féminines amérindiennes majeures</p>	<p>En salle informatique. Les élèves sont répartis en binômes. Un élève du binôme regarde la vidéo avec les extraits du film, tandis que l’autre regarde celle sur l’histoire vraie (les deux supports nécessitent une didactisation, la première un montage, et la deuxième doit à nouveau être coupée pour être plus courte). Ils remplissent chacun leur fiche de compréhension, puis comparent les différents éléments.</p> <p><b>Watch your video and complete your part of the worksheet. Then, compare your findings with your partner. Together, write a paragraph to explain how the movie portrayal is inaccurate and may be harmful.</b></p> <p>→ Avec cette activité, les élèves découvrent comme le septième art peut être utilisé pour manipuler l’histoire et véhiculer une image faussée des amérindiens. On se sert des productions des élèves pour créer une trace écrite commune.</p>
4	<p>Quizz sur Wooclap</p>	<p>Vérifier les acquis des élèves pour anticiper d’éventuelles difficultés.</p>	<p>En proposant aux élèves un quizz interactif, on s’assure de l’acquisition des connaissances tout en proposant une activité ludique permettant de motiver les élèves et de ne pas vivre cette étape comme une évaluation.</p> <p>→ Ce quizz est évidemment non noté mais est une occasion pour</p>

			l'enseignant d'éclaircir certains points si nécessaire ou d'envisager des modifications pour la suite de la séquence.
Logos Washington "Redskins" / Commanders ( <a href="#">Annexe 7</a> )	Comparer les deux logos, émissions d'hypothèses.	<p>A l'aide d'un support type diaporama, on projette au tableau les deux logos (l'ancien et le nouveau) de l'équipe de football américain Washington Commanders.</p> <p><b>Describe and compare the two logos.</b></p> <p>→ On attend des élèves qu'ils reconnaissent les couleurs identiques et la ville de Washington en point commun. On attend également qu'ils commentent le mot "Redskins" et l'image utilisée dans le logo</p> <p><b>Imagine what these logos correspond to.</b> (<i>Do they correspond to the same thing? The same time period?</i>)</p> <p>→ On attend des élèves qu'ils mentionnent une équipe sportive, et au mieux qu'ils comprennent qu'il y a eu un changement de nom et de logo</p>	
Article "Appropriating Native American Imagery Honors No One but the Prejudice" <a href="https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/ABC_Univision/native-american-imagery-appropriation-redskins-disrespectful/story?id=20286034">https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/ABC_Univision/native-american-imagery-appropriation-redskins-disrespectful/story?id=20286034</a> + Worksheet (Annexes <a href="#">8</a> et <a href="#">9</a> )	Comprendre le caractère offensant des mascottes et autres représentations caricaturales.	<p>Le texte est divisé en 2 parties, du début du texte à "a repetitive drum beat" et de "Racial stereotyping" à la fin du texte. Les élèves travaillent en groupes de 4, d'abord deux par deux sur les questions de compréhension (worksheet), puis ils ont chacun un rôle: un élève explique la première partie du texte, puis un autre la deuxième, tandis qu'un troisième fait un compte rendu écrit et que le quatrième se tient prêt à partager le travail de son groupe avec la classe.</p> <p>Pour ce faire, on distribue les rôles aux élèves en les faisant choisir.</p> <p><b>Pick a role then answer the different questions on your worksheet. Then, recap what you've learned with your group and get ready to share it with the class.</b></p> <p>→ En donnant des rôles aux élèves on crée un sentiment d'appartenance au groupe et une collaboration étroite qui</p>	

			<p>responsabilise les élèves. Cette construction du savoir à plusieurs permet une meilleure réalisation des objectifs de l'activité.</p> <p>Lors de la correction, on en profite pour demander aux élèves de faire attention au temps du récit (prétérit, past perfect) et faire un rappel sur la différence entre present perfect et past perfect. Une fois la correction du texte terminée, on reprend la caricature utilisée dans l'article ainsi que les deux logos utilisés lors de l'activité d'anticipation.</p> <p><b>In groups, comment on the caricature. Discuss the logo change.</b></p> <p>→ On attend des élèves qu'ils fassent le lien entre stéréotypes et véritables conséquences sur les personnes amérindiennes. Ils expriment leur opinion sur le changement du logo de l'équipe de football américain.</p>
	<p><b>CO</b> Ted Talk "Why Representation Really Matters" Aisha Thomas <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X-taPvK-WbY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X-taPvK-WbY</a> 1:33-4:35 ; 6:30-8:38 + Worksheet (<a href="#">Annexe 10</a>)</p>	<p>Comprendre la relation entre représentation, stéréotypes et perception des individus. Étudier la rhétorique du discours.</p>	<p>La vidéo nécessite d'être didactisée car elle est longue. Le travail sur la worksheet est individuel. Avec la première partie de la vidéo, les élèves doivent faire le lien entre les événements et des stéréotypes.</p> <p><b>Imagine how these events can be linked to issues of representation.</b></p> <p>→ Ici, on rentre dans l'implicite, puisque les problèmes de représentation sont sous-entendus mais non explicités. Il faut marquer une pause pour laisser aux élèves le temps de formuler leurs hypothèses avant de travailler sur la deuxième partie de la vidéo.</p> <p>La deuxième partie traite d'une expérience personnelle en lien avec l'impact des représentations négatives.</p> <p><b>Quote where she thinks her expectations come from.</b></p> <p><b>Rephrase the final idea of Aisha Thomas about positive representation.</b></p> <p><b>Name the most used rhetorical tool used in this speech.</b></p>

			<p>→ On attend des élèves qu'ils fassent le lien entre représentations dans les médias, films etc. et l'image que l'on se fait des autres et de soi-même. La vidéo donne également l'opportunité de mentionner un procédé rhétorique intéressant dans la perspective de la tâche finale (répétitions/anaphores).</p> <p>Enfin, puisque cette vidéo porte sur les stéréotypes et la représentation des personnes noires, il faut faire le lien avec le thème de la séquence.</p> <p><b>Transfer the message of this Ted Talk to what you know about Native American representation in movies. Discuss in groups.</b></p> <p>→ Grâce à cette phase d'interaction entre élèves, le but est d'imaginer l'impact des représentations stéréotypées des amérindiens déjà étudiées sur le public.</p>
5	Tâche Intermédiaire	Obtenir des informations supplémentaires pouvant aider les élèves à la réalisation de la tâche finale.	<p><b>In pairs, present one or two Native American character(s) to the class. You must talk about the stereotypes or lack thereof used, link the character to what you know about Native Americans and comment on the representation made by this character of Native Americans. (8 minutes)</b></p> <p>→ On aura fourni aux élèves une liste de personnages pour les aider dans la réalisation de cette tâche finale. Les consignes reprennent ce qui a été abordé lors des quatre séances précédentes (contexte historique et culturel, stéréotypes, problématiques de représentation) pour permettre aux élèves de les appliquer sur un cas concret.</p> <p>Pendant les présentations, les élèves doivent prendre des notes pour pouvoir réutiliser les exemples pour leur tâche finale si besoin et dans la perspective d'un quizz.</p>
6	Quizz sur	Vérifier la bonne	L'enseignant se sert des présentations des

	Wooclap	écoute des élèves lors des présentations de leurs camarades.	élèves pour réaliser un quizz. Ce quizz sert notamment de motivation pour s'assurer de l'attention des élèves lors des présentations de leurs camarades, bien qu'il ne soit pas noté.
	Sacheen Littlefeather's speech at the 1973 Oscars Vidéo <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QUacU0I4yU&amp;t=75s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QUacU0I4yU&amp;t=75s</a> et Script + Worksheet ( <a href="#">Annexe 11</a> )	Parler du problème de représentation des amérindiens au cinéma dans le passé. Travailler l'accent tonique et l'utilisation de poses dans un discours.	Dans un premier temps, les élèves travaillent uniquement avec la vidéo et remplissent leur worksheet. Dans un second temps, on leur donne le script. <b>Highlight the stressed words and pay attention to the pauses.</b> → Cette phase de repérage donne lieu à une réflexion sur l'accentuation dans un discours et l'accent tonique. (Activité de PRL ou Pratique Raisonnée de la Langue) <b>Why are some words stressed? Think about the effect it creates.</b> Puis, on leur propose de manipuler l'accent tonique et le sens qu'il donne à la phrase en le déplaçant sur certaines phrases du discours.
	Article "Catching up with Sacheen Littlefeather, 40 years after her controversial brush with Oscar history" <a href="https://ew.com/article/2013/01/19/sacheen-littlefeather/">https://ew.com/article/2013/01/19/sacheen-littlefeather/</a> ( <a href="#">Annexe 12</a> ) + Worksheet ( <a href="#">Annexe 13</a> )	Faire le lien avec la représentation des amérindiens au cinéma aujourd'hui. Revoir l'expression de l'obligation morale (Should/Must)	Tout d'abord, les élèves travaillent sur l'article pour comprendre les conséquences du discours sur Sacheen Little Feather. C'est également l'occasion pour une activité de PRL sur le modal Should de conseil moral et de l'étendre à l'obligation morale avec Must. → Il est important d'étudier les objectifs linguistiques en contexte pour que les élèves construisent eux-mêmes le sens. Puis, les élèves étudient les graphiques. <b>Observe these two graphs and draw conclusions about the opportunities for Native American people in the film industry.</b> → On attend des élèves qu'ils déduisent qu'à cause du peu de rôles dédiés à des personnages amérindiens (nombre encore plus infime pour les femmes), il y a peu de chances pour des représentations non stéréotypées.

7	Préparation à la Tâche Finale (Annexes <a href="#">14</a> , <a href="#">15</a> , <a href="#">16</a> , <a href="#">17</a> )	Préparer la tâche finale. S'exercer à prononcer un discours (accent tonique, rhétorique, pauses...). Réviser les éléments culturels. Gagner en aisance à l'oral.	<p>Cette séance est dédiée à la préparation à la tâche finale. La séance est construite selon un principe d'autonomie: on propose aux élèves une variété d'ateliers visant à travailler les différents objectifs de la séquence. Les élèves sont responsabilisés par le choix qui s'offre à eux: en décidant quel aspect travailler, ils s'engagent à devenir acteurs de leur apprentissage. Chaque atelier représente entre 10 et 20 minutes d'activité. La séance se passe en salle informatique ou avec les ordinateurs portables/tablettes éventuellement mis à la disposition des élèves. Les éléments des worksheets sont découpés et plastifiés sous forme de flash cards. Les ressources informatiques sont mises à disposition sur un Drive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Atelier 1 (Annexe 14):</u> Jeu d'improvisation pour s'entraîner à la spontanéité. <b>Pick a card of each color. Start the story. When the game master says "Switch", the other player continues the story. You can switch as often as you want!</b> → L'activité reprend les codes des différents films étudiés pendant la séquence. C'est une activité d'Expression Orale en Interaction (EOI) qui a pour but d'améliorer la spontanéité et la réactivité des élèves à l'oral. Le format ludique rend la prise de parole moins intimidante.</li> <li>● <u>Atelier 2 (Annexe 15):</u> Travail sur le discours à partir d'exemples. <b>Watch the video corresponding to the speech of your choice. Pay attention to the stresses, the use of silence, rhetorical devices and the posture of the speaker. Read the extract yourself and try to imitate the speaker.</b> → Ceci n'est pas un exercice de compréhension mais un exercice d'observation et d'imitation pour que les élèves s'approprient les</li> </ul>
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			<p>codes du discours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>Atelier 3 (Annexe 16):</u> Manipuler l'accent tonique. <b>Place the stickers underneath the word(s) you think should be stressed. Read the sentence out loud. Move the sticker around and observe how it changes the meaning of the sentence.</b> → Avec cet exercice, on fait manipuler à la fois la langue et des objets, ce qui stimule les capacités cognitives des élèves. On reproduit l'exercice réalisé lors de la PRL de la séance 6.</li> <li>● <u>Atelier 4:</u> Quizzes de connaissance sur les éléments culturels vus en cours sur Quizlet ou Quizinière. → Ce sont deux plateformes qui permettent aux élèves de se tester en autonomie et d'avoir les résultats.</li> <li>● <u>Atelier 5 (Annexe 17):</u> Réviser les stéréotypes utilisés dans la représentation des amérindiens. <b>Use the cards to associate each stereotype to its definition and an example. Try to explain each stereotype to other players. After that, you can quizz each other!</b> → On passe par une activité de médiation (reformulation) pour que les élèves s'approprient le sens des différents stéréotypes vus au cours de la séquence.</li> <li>● <u>Atelier 6:</u> Écriture du discours en prévision de la Tâche Finale. <b>Write the draft for your speech. You can use dictionaries and the internet to research artists.</b> → Préparer le travail en classe permet aux élèves de faire appel à l'aide du professeur tout en s'assurant qu'ils n'aient pas recours à des outils de traduction ou d'intelligence artificielle.</li> </ul>
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8	Tâche Finale	<p>Idéalement, les discours des élèves pourront se faire dans la salle polyvalente/de théâtre/de réunion de l'établissement.</p> <p>On tire partie de la scène pour donner un aspect officiel au discours.</p> <p>C'est une tâche finale individuelle, les élèves doivent parler environ 7 minutes.</p>
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# Annexes Partie Didactique

## Group 1 - Early settlements and the creation of the USA

In 1492, Christopher Columbus lands on a Caribbean Island after three months of traveling. Believing at first that he had reached the East Indies, he describes the natives he meets as "Indians." On his first day, he orders six natives to be seized as servants. Chief Powhatan, also known as Wahunsenacawh, was born in the Chesapeake Bay region in the 1540s or 1550s. He became leader of more than 30 tribes and controlled the area where English colonists formed the Jamestown settlement in 1607. The marriage of his daughter Pocohantas to a colonist led to a peace that remained in effect when Powhatan died in April 1618. The French and Native tribes formed an alliance in 1754: The French and Indian War begins, pitting the two groups against English settlements in the North. It continues on May 15, 1756: The Seven Years' War between the British and the French begins, with Native American alliances aiding the French.

Some officials in the early years of the American republic, such as President George Washington, believed that the best way to solve this "Indian problem" was to simply "civilize" the Native Americans. The goal of this civilization campaign was to make Native Americans as much like white Americans as possible by encouraging them to convert to Christianity, learn to speak and read English and adopt European-style economic practices such as the individual ownership of land and other property (including, in some instances in the South, enslaved persons). In the southeastern United States, many Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek and Cherokee people embraced these customs and became known as the "Five Civilized Tribes."

On May 28, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, which gives plots of land west of the Mississippi River to Native American tribes in exchange for land that is taken from them. Six years later, the last of the Creek Native Americans leave their land for Oklahoma as part of the Indian removal process. Of the 15,000 Creeks who make the voyage to Oklahoma, more than 3,500 don't survive. Then, in 1838, with only 2,000 Cherokees having left their land in Georgia to cross the Mississippi River, President Martin Van Buren enlists General Winfield Scott and 7,000 troops to speed up the process by holding them at gunpoint and marching them 1,200 miles. More than 5,000 Cherokee die as a result of the journey. The series of relocations of Native American tribes and their hardships and deaths during the journey would become known as the Trail of Tears.

## Group 2 - Reservations

In 1851, Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, creating the Indian reservation system. Native Americans aren't allowed to leave their reservations without permission.

On April 29, 1868, the U.S. Government and the Sioux Nation sign the Treaty of Fort Laramie. In this treaty, the United States recognizes the Black Hills of Dakota as the Great Sioux Reservation, the exclusive territory of the Sioux (Dakota, Lakota and Nakota) and Arapaho people. But after gold is discovered in the Black Hills, miners and settlers begin moving onto the land en masse. Native resistance to the treaty's violation culminates in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. In 1980, the Supreme Court rules that the Black Hills were illegally confiscated, and awards the Sioux more than \$100 million in reparations. Sioux leaders reject the payment, saying the land had never been for sale.

Daily living on the reservations was hard at best. Not only had tribes lost their native lands, but it was almost impossible to maintain their culture and traditions inside a confined area.

Feuding tribes were often thrown together and Indians who were once hunters struggled to become farmers. Starvation was common, and living in close quarters hastened the spread of diseases brought by white settlers. Indians were encouraged or forced to wear non-Indian clothes and learn to read and write English, sew and raise livestock. Missionaries attempted to convert them to Christianity and give up their spiritual beliefs.

Modern Indian reservations still exist across the United States and fall under the umbrella of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The tribes on each reservation are sovereign and not subject to most federal laws. According to the BIA, 567 federally-recognized American Indian tribes and Alaskan natives reside in the United States. The BIA is responsible for improving their quality of life, providing them with economic opportunities and improving their assets which the BIA holds in trust. Despite their efforts, living conditions on reservations aren't ideal and are often compared to that of a third-world country. Housing is overcrowded and often below standards, and many people on the reservations are stuck in a cycle of poverty. Infant mortality rates are significantly higher for Indians than for whites, and alcohol and drug abuse is on the rise. Many people leave the reservations for urban areas in search of employment and improved living conditions.

## Group 3 - Later struggles and Civil Rights

On June 25, 1876, in the Battle of Little Bighorn, also known as "Custer's Last Stand," Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's troops fight Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne warriors, led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, along Little Bighorn River. Custer and his troops are defeated and killed, increasing tensions between Native Americans and white Americans.

Afterwards, on December 29, 1890, U.S. Armed Forces surround Ghost Dancers led by Chief Big Foot near Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, demanding the surrender of their weapons. An estimated 150 Native Americans are killed in the Wounded Knee Massacre, along with 25 men with the U.S. cavalry. This event marked the official end to the Conquest of the West.

Finally, on June 2, 1924, U.S. Congress passes the Indian Citizenship Act, granting citizenship to all Native Americans born in the territorial limits of the country. Previously, citizenship had been limited, depending on what percentage Native American ancestry a person had, whether they were veterans, or, if they were women, whether they were married to a U.S. citizen. Only on April 11, 1968, the Indian Civil Rights Act is signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, granting Native American tribes many of the benefits included in the Bill of Rights. Later, Congress passes the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which reverses the termination policy of previous decades when American Indian tribes were disbanded, their land sold and "relocations" forced Indians off reservations and into urban centers. The 1975 act provides recognition and funds to Indian tribes.

# Native American History

APRIL 11, 1968

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Winnisnet



1924

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DECEMBER 29, 1890

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THE BATTLE OF LITTLE BIG HORN

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1851

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BOSTON

MODERN RESERVATIONS

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1838

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\_\_\_\_\_

1830

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JAMESTOWN

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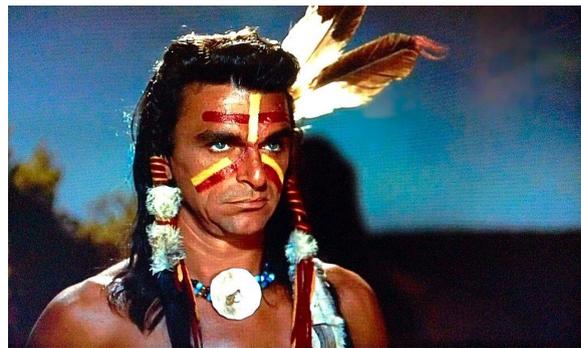
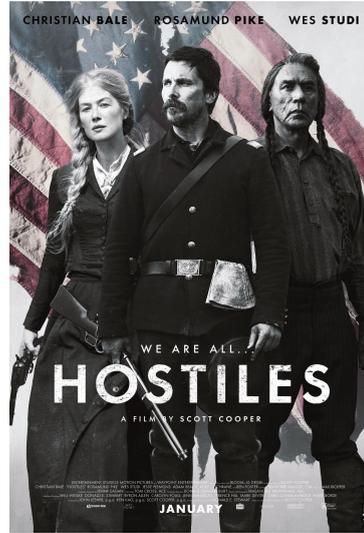
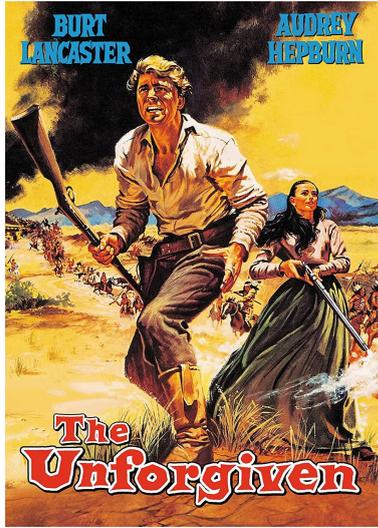
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Annexe 2



Annexe 3

“Indigenous People React To Indigenous Representation In Film And TV (Pocahontas, The Lone Ranger)” *REACT*

1) Watch the video and fill in the grid.



	Positive Comments	Negative Comments
Peter Pan (1953)		
The searchers (1956) & Western movies		
Smoke Signals (1998)		
The Lone Ranger (2013)		

2) Explain the difference between Columbus Day and Indigenous People Day in your own words. Do you agree with the name change? Discuss with your group.



Annexe 4



*Baptism of Pocahontas*, John Gadsby Chapman, 1840



*Pocahontas Saving John Smith*, Unknown, 1970



Unknown, 1793



William Ordway Partridge, 1957, statue near St George's Church in Gravesend, England



*Pocahontas*, Walt Disney Studios, 1995

Annexe 5

## Pocahontas

1) Watch your video and complete your part of the worksheet. Then, compare your findings with your partner.

	History	Pocahontas by Disney
Pocahontas herself		
The Powhatans		
Her relationship with John Smith		
Relations between the Powhatans and the settlers		
Pocahontas' life in Britain		

2) Together, write a paragraph to explain how the movie portrayal is inaccurate and may be harmful.



Annexe 6



Annexe 7

## Appropriating Native American Imagery Honors No One but the Prejudice

Native American community attempts to [change Redskins team name and mascot](#).

By AMY STRETTEN (a member of the Chickahominy Tribe of Virginia.)September 17, 2013, 11:34 PM



Lalo Alcaraz illustrates Native American misappropriation by Redskins fans.

Sept. 18, 2013 ; -- I was a sophomore in high school, about 15 years old, when a rather hostile group of cheerleaders and football players cornered me, yelling, as I sat on a bench in the quad between classes. "Don't you have school pride?" a cheerleader shouted. "You should feel proud! We're honoring your people!" one football player hollered.

I was the only Native American (as far as I knew) at Woodbridge High School in

Irvine, California. Irvine is a planned city in Southern California and one of the safest cities in the United States, but I didn't feel safe that day.

I had met one-on-one with the principal, my guidance counselor, a few teachers and several students to share my negative feelings toward our school's mascot -- an anonymous Native American "warrior" with long, flowing, jet-black hair, a large nose and huge muscles. I guess I thought if I made it known that I felt appropriating Native American imagery was offensive, they'd stop. I was outnumbered, though, and my personal feelings didn't matter. But that's the thing: As Native people, especially as urban Natives (what we Indigenous people living in urban centers call ourselves), we are almost always outnumbered. So, we go unnoticed and unheard. Our opinions never really matter.

Students wore goofy, cartoonish costumes of our mascot (and his equally tasteless "warrior princess" girlfriend) at pep rallies and games. The pair would dance and do occasional acrobatic moves, as they made their grand entrance to the deafening sounds of the school's marching band, playing the quintessential Hollywood fight song that, for me at least, conjures up images of a scene from an old Western movie: "savage" Indians on horseback approaching a village of settlers...Uh-oh, there must be trouble.

Spectators always stood for the song and sliced the air with their arms. I'm sure you've seen it, or done it yourself -- the tomahawk chop. Every now and then you'd hear a distant war whoop. And if you were lucky, you'd get to see an imitation of war paint on game day.

I didn't understand how face paint purchased from a drug store and a faux headdress made of brown construction paper and dyed arts & crafts feathers was respect. How does celebrating Native people with war imagery [honor a living](#) people? Well, it doesn't. It saddens me that this is all we are to you: people who speak in broken English ("How.") and the only thing we do is engage in battle with bows, arrows and tomahawks. Oh, and perform an occasional rain dance when we hear a repetitive drum beat.

Racial stereotyping, inaccurate racial portrayals, and cultural appropriation do not [honor a living](#), breathing people. Plain and simple, cultural appropriation -- especially when members of the culture protest the appropriation -- is not respectful. It's beyond me why people are okay with this. With any other culture, people would be up in arms.

Maybe the Woodbridge High School community and others don't understand how this type of bullying -- yes, it's bullying -- affects young people. Native American and Alaskan Native youth have the highest rates of suicide-related fatalities, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The lack of positive images of Native Americans doesn't help self-esteem.

The American Psychology Association (APA) recommends retiring American Indian mascots altogether. First of all, the organization found that the stereotypical images were harmful for the development and self-esteem of American Indian students. That wasn't all. The portrayals had a negative effect on all students. The problem, according to the APA, is that American Indian mascots are "undermining the educational experiences of members of all communities--especially those who have had little or no contact with Indigenous peoples." And, it "establishes an unwelcome and oftentimes hostile learning environment for American Indian students that affirms negative images/stereotypes that are promoted in mainstream society."

Unfortunately, this racial insensitivity extends beyond U.S. borders. Ian Campeau, an Ojibway father and member of the DJ group, A Tribe Called Red, has filed a human rights complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal against an amateur football club, the Nepean "Redskins," in hopes of eradicating the use of the term altogether. The team is based in Canada's capital city, Ottawa, and uses a cartoon image of a red-faced Indian man with a large nose, a long, black braid and two feathers in his hair as their mascot.

"The players call each other 'redskins' on the field," said Campeau in a press release. "How are they going to differentiate the playing field from the school yard? What's going to stop them from calling my daughter a redskin in the schoolyard? That's as offensive as using the n-word."

The most in-your-face examples of racist mascots are in professional sports, including the football team of our nation's capital, the Washington Redskins. The team's owner, Dan Snyder, refuses to change the team's name despite the obvious offensive nature of the imagery and name itself. Snyder has been quoted as saying, "We'll never change it. It's that simple. NEVER -- you can use caps."

In 2001, after facing increased pressure from the Southern California Indian Center and others, Irvine Unified School District decided to retire Woodbridge High School's Warrior mascot and imagery. The school would paint over the huge mural on the side of the gym of the anonymous Native American warrior and they would remove it from the gym floor. The LA Times reported on it.

Last year was my 10-year high school reunion and despite making close friendships with some classmates, I decided not to attend primarily because one former classmate suggested they get together to repaint the warrior face on the exterior of the gym.

The name Redskins is offensive to many, but my beef is not just with the name. It's with the imagery. When can we let go of our need to own Native American imagery?

## Native American Mascots

Pick a role then answer the different questions on your worksheet. Then, recap what you've learned with your group and get ready to share it with the class.

### Part 1:

1. Sum up the issue in your own words.
2. Highlight information about the author's feelings. Explain why he felt this way.
3. Underline stereotypes about Native American in the text. Choose two and explain them.

### Part 2:

1. Rephrase the argument about mental health and bullying.
2. Find other examples of sports' teams using Indigenous mascots in the text. How did each of them react to criticism?
3. Focus on the ending sentence. In your own words, explain what the author means by "the need to own Native American imagery".



In groups, comment on the picture. Discuss the logo change.

### WASHINGTON REDSKINS REBRAND TO WASHINGTON COMMANDERS WITH NEW VISUAL IDENTITY

By Alexander Shapkin

Feb 10, 2022



Annexe 9

## Why Representation Matters

**Part 1:**

1. List the 5 instances of racism experienced by Aisha Thomas and her family.
2. Imagine how these events can be linked to issues of representation.

**Part 2:**

1. Sum up the context of the situation.
2. Fill in the grid about her perception of the young man.

Her expectations	His real behavior

3. Quote where she thinks her expectations come from.
4. List all the possible paths to success the young man envisioned.
5. Rephrase the final idea of Aisha Thomas about positive representation.
6. Name the most used rhetorical tool used in this speech.



**Transfer the message of this Ted Talk to what you know about Native American representation in movies. Discuss in groups.**

### Annexe 10

The 1973 Oscars

**Watch the video.**

- 1) Take notes about
  - the context
  - the speaker.
- 2) Explain the reason for Marlon Brando's refusal.
- 3) How did the audience react?

**Highlight the stressed words and mark the pauses.**

Hello. My name is Sacheen Littlefeather. I'm Apache and I am president of the National Native American Affirmative Image Committee. 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 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 – and on television in movie reruns, 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.

### Annexe 11

## Catching up with Sacheen Littlefeather, 40 years after her controversial brush with Oscar history

By [Josh Rottenberg](#), Updated January 19, 2013 at 03:00 PM EST



CREDIT: GLOBE PHOTOS

It was one of the most memorable moments in the history of the Academy Awards—and one of the most controversial: Awarded the Best Actor Oscar for his instantly iconic performance as Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* in 1973, Marlon Brando sent an unknown 26-year-old Native American activist and aspiring actress named Sacheen Littlefeather up to the stage to refuse the statuette on his behalf. As the stunned audience erupted with a confused mix of boos and applause, Littlefeather explained that Brando was regrettably turning down the award to protest “the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry” and the ongoing siege of 200 American Indian Movement activists by armed authorities in Wounded Knee, S.D. “I beg at this time that I have not intruded upon this evening,” she concluded before leaving the stage, “and that we will, in the future, our hearts and our understandings will meet with love and generosity.”

In the wake of her appearance at the Oscars, though, Littlefeather received little respect from Hollywood and the mainstream media, let alone understanding, love, or generosity. Even as she was cheered by Native Americans for taking a civil rights stand, false stories soon spread claiming that she was not a real Native American, that she had rented her buckskin Oscar dress, that she was just a wannabe opportunistically trying to ride Brando’s coattails. “If [Brando] had something to say,” actor John Wayne grouched dismissively, “he should have appeared that night and stated his views instead of taking some little unknown girl and dressing her up in an Indian outfit.” Brando himself expressed some misgivings a few months later about the position he’d put Littlefeather in: “I was distressed that people should have booed and whistled and stomped, even though perhaps it was directed at myself,” he told Dick Cavett. “They should have at least had the courtesy to listen to her.” Facing what she saw as an all-out campaign to discredit and blacklist her, Littlefeather soon abandoned any ambitions she’d had of an acting career and dropped almost entirely out of the public eye. Still, her Oscar notoriety never fully faded.

But while she may have paid a price for being the messenger for Brando’s Oscar protest, Littlefeather has moved on. For the past four decades, she has worked to provide health-care education and advocacy in the Native American community, ministered to AIDS patients with Mother Teresa in the 1980s, and led a prayer circle devoted to the first Native American Catholic saint, Kateri Tekakwitha. She betrays no regrets about anything. “I promised myself a long time ago that I would lead an interesting life,” she says. “And that’s what I’ve done, Marlon Brando or no Marlon Brando.... I’m an elder now, coming to the end of my road. Now I am in a place of being a healer, if you will, of my own journey.”

## Annexe 12

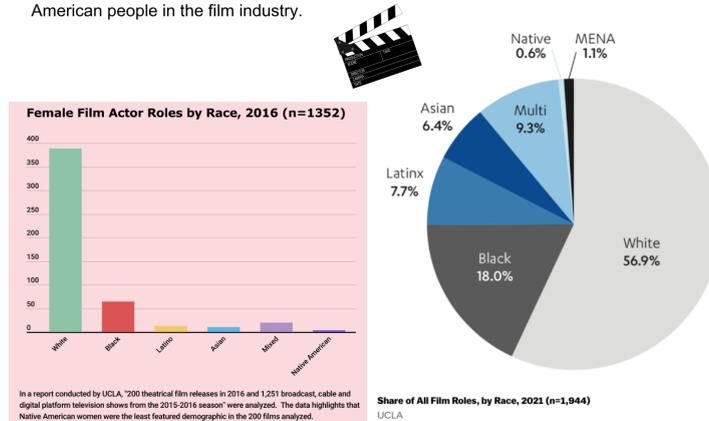
### Native Americans in the Film industry

#### The article

- 1) Sum up the aftermath of the 1973 Oscars for Sacheen Littlefeather.
- 2) Highlight the modal used in the quotes of the second paragraph. What is it used for?
- 3) Underline things Sacheen Littlefeather has done since then.



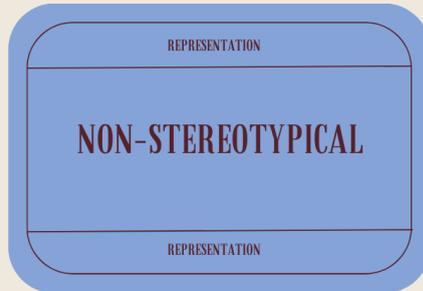
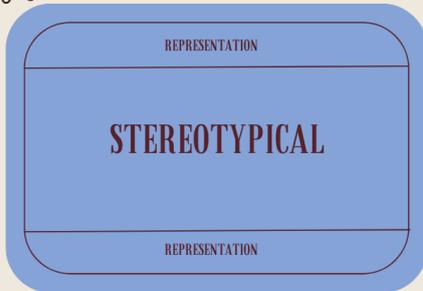
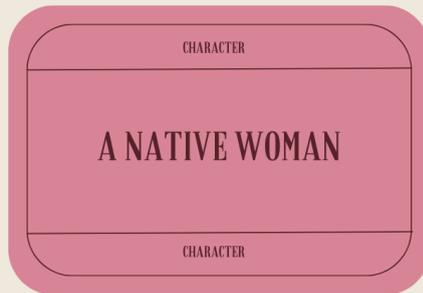
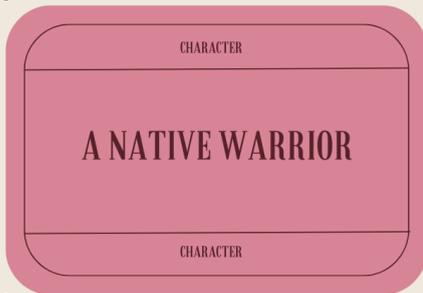
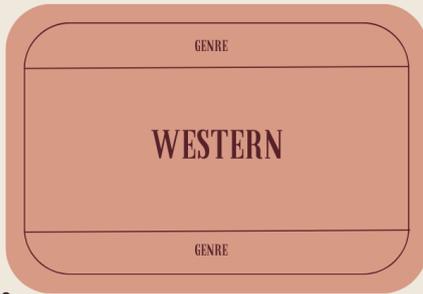
Observe these two graphs and draw conclusions about the opportunities for Native American people in the film industry.



## Annexe 13

# IMPROVISE A STORY!

Pick a card of each color. Start the story. When the game master says "Switch", the other player continues the story. You can switch as often as you want!



Annexe 14

## Famous Speeches

Watch the video corresponding to the speech of your choice. Pay attention to the stresses, the use of silence, rhetorical devices and the posture of the speaker. Read the extract yourself and try to imitate the speaker.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today

"I Have A Dream", Martin Luther King, 1963

In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in our history, I send to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas this message spoken with the same depth of feeling for each one of you as if I were able to cross your threshold and speak to you myself.

For the second time in the lives of most of us we are at war.

Over and over again we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies. But it has been in vain. We have been forced into a conflict. For we are called, with our allies, to meet the challenge of a principle which, if it were to prevail, would be fatal to any civilized order in the world. Such a principle, stripped of all disguise, is surely the mere primitive doctrine that might is right. For the sake of all that we ourselves hold dear, and of the world's order and peace, it is unthinkable that we should refuse to meet the challenge. It is to this high purpose that I now call my people at home and my peoples across the seas, who will make our cause their own. I ask them to stand calm and firm, and united in this time of trial. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead, and war can no longer be confined to the battlefield. But we can only do the right as we see the right and reverently commit our cause to God.

If one and all we keep resolutely faithful to it, then, with God's help, we shall prevail.

*The King's Speech, 2011*

So today, we call upon the world leaders to change their strategic policies in favour of peace and prosperity. We call upon the world leaders that all the peace deals must protect women and children's rights. A deal that goes against the dignity of women and their rights is unacceptable. We call upon all governments to ensure free compulsory education for every child all over the world. We call upon all governments to fight against terrorism and violence, to protect children from brutality and harm. We call upon the developed nations to support the expansion of educational opportunities for girls in the developing world. We call upon all communities to be tolerant - to reject prejudice based on cast, creed, sect, color, religion or gender. To ensure freedom and equality for women so that they can flourish. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave - to embrace the strength within themselves and realise their full potential.

Malala Yousafzai, 2013 United Nations Speech

## L'accent tonique.

Place the stickers underneath the word(s) you think should be stressed. Read the sentence out loud. Move the sticker around and observe how it changes the meaning of the sentence.



John is coming over tonight. We are going to work on our homework together.

Racial stereotypes in film are frankly revolting.

We should have visited some more castles while we were traveling.

Pocahontas was actually only ten years old when she met John Smith.

Shakespeare wrote passionate, moving poetry.

As you might have expected, Native women are still not given any opportunities.

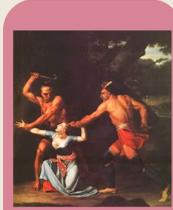
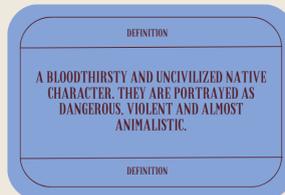
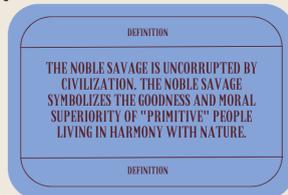
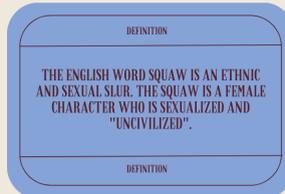
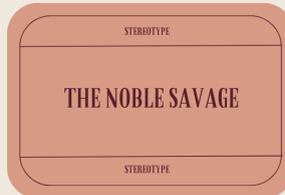
Many Indigenous characters in Westerns were played by white actors!

Life on reservations is harsh and people are struggling.

## Annexe 16

### TYPICAL STEREOTYPES

Use the cards to associate each stereotype to its definition and an example. Try to explain each stereotype to other players. After that, you can quiz each other!



## Annexe 17

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## Abstract

This thesis strives to analyze representations of Native American women in twenty-first century films by focusing on the perspective of the director. It reflects on previous findings predominantly based on the study of Western movies by comparing them to recent movies with the goal to compare and contrast them in the hope of finding solutions to issues of misrepresentation.

## Keywords

Film, Native American Women, Media, Perspective, Stereotypes, Intersectionality