

Module 3 – Getting Started Final Assignment

LBST 330 – Fall 2018

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### **Topic of Investigation for a Related Tutorial**

- Depiction of minorities in film and film industry (on screen and off screen)
  - First Nations and/ or LGBTQ+
- First Nations oral histories and education
  - Incorporation of First Nations oral histories and traditions into the mainstream public-school system syllabus
  - Incorporation of colonization from the First Nations perspective (including Residential School System, Banning of Potlatch and the Indian Act)
- Access to education including post-secondary for First Nations/ Metis/ Inuit

### **Proposed Learning Outcomes**

- By the end of my first tutorial, I will be able to evaluate mainstream media depiction of Indigenous people
- By the end of my first tutorial, I will be able to analyze attitudes and responses to Indigenous people in film
- By the end of my first tutorial, I will be able to compare and contrast media depictions to general stereotypes of First Nations people

### **Literature Review**

Like all forms of art, the medium of film is of importance for many. It is an easy way to portray topics which yield significance in cultural, educational and leisurely aspects, however from its origin, it was a medium of high class and predominantly for the elite. For many who

view films, there is a lack of representation of their ethnic or cultural background. This literature review will look at First Nations representation in film and new efforts that are being made to reverse this theme of class and superiority within the medium. Since the time of colonialization, the White men were seen to have more importance than First Nations, and this still rings true today. This literature review will analyze periodicals, book reviews, film reviews and other writings to gain greater perspectives and insights on the struggles faced by First Nations peoples in film. For reference, there will not be any use of the word “Indian” in this literature review, rather, in any quotations the word will be substituted by other words such as Indigenous people, or First Nations.

In a short newspaper clipping from the Globe and Mail dated February 19, 2010, journalist James Adams shares his preconceived notions of First Nations people and stories in film, “In my youth, cowboys and [First Nations] went together like horses and stagecoaches. Big screen or small you couldn’t have one without the other” (Adams, 2010). This unfortunate reality of First Nations people seen merely as additions to cowboys in western film started early on in the film industry and continues to persist. Out of the nearly 4,000 native themed films in the last century, the majority of them depicted the cowboy and Native American idiom and continue to be “pro-cowboy”. According to Adams, Cree director Neil Diamond recalls watching many “Cowboy-and- [Native American]” themed movies growing up and what came to a surprise to him and his friends was that they “had [been cheering] for the cowboys without realizing [they themselves] were Indians.” (Adams, 2010). It was this perpetuation of the “Cowboy-and- [Native American]” theme within film that inspired Neil Diamond to create his film *Reel Injun*, an “entertaining and informative documentary on how native people have been portrayed on-screen

over the years and how these portrayals have shaped native self-perception and non-native prejudice.” (Adams, 2010). The release of *Reel Injun* sparked a change in Native film, with native filmmakers beginning to tell their own stories, the way they wanted; through film.

In the novel “Indian Voices: Listening to Native Americans” author Alison Owings highlights how much Native people have in common with the wider American society, which is not generally known as many American groups hold strong stereotypes of First Nations people, as depicted in the media and Hollywood films. Kim Hogeland reviewed Owings book along with Neil Diamond’s film *Reel Injun*. Hogeland introduces Neil Diamond’s film *Reel Injun* which,

“takes the viewer on a journey through film history, showing the development of Native roles and portrayals in movies from the early silent film era, when many films were sympathetic to the “vanishing” Indian, through the heyday of the Western, to the current era of films that originate from within Native communities” (Hogeland, 2011).

The film goes through different interviews with Native and non-Native people in the film industry, including actors, directors and film critics. Diamond uses the interview method as a means to show the harmful impacts of the negative images of the “savage First Nations people” as popularized by Westerns. He also introduces new First Nations filmmakers who are overturning that outdated trend. Hogeland analyses the film and shares her own personal opinion stating the only thing that struck her as odd, or out of place was “that no one ever talks about the irony of hiring white men to play [Native Americans] in midcentury westerns while real [Native Americans]— real Hollywood [Native Americans], one might say—worked in the crew” (Hogeland, 2011). This is a reality that many First Nations face, as the lack of First Nations hired

as actors to portray their own people is stagnantly low and it is more difficult for them to land roles to play Indigenous people in movies or TV shows, while the White man gets hired in their place.

Lastly, this literature review will be looking at and analyzing a paper written by Miléna Santoro from Georgetown University. Santoro wrote her piece, “The Rise of First Nations’ Fiction Films: Shelley Niro, Jeff Barnaby and Yves Sioui Durand” in 2013. She begins by introducing First Nations films in Canada and Quebec through the first documentary shot by a First Nations crew and produced by the National Film Board in the 1960’s. The case in which she is making is that First Nations people, although visibly given less opportunity in film, are generally targeted in documentary style productions. The films made by the National Film Board are all made about Native people, but very rarely are ever made by Native people. Santoro states, “the cinematic gaze on indigenous lives is clearly that of a non-native, at worst imbued with superiority and at best with ethnographic or ideological intentions” (Santoro, 2013) supporting the clause that these films are still documentary style, lacking input from First Nations people themselves.

Santoro continues on through introductions of films and filmmakers who challenge this outdated notion of Indigenous portrayals in film. This recent rise in First Nations films and filmmakers in Canada “testifies to the thirst among indigenous peoples to tell their stories and express their cultural imaginary through a fictional frame” (Santoro, 2013) while also telling their own historical, cultural, and emotional stories to others through a medium constructed by the mainstream. Since the medium of film carries such importance in Western cultures and can

be used to various reasons and as different tools, First Nations filmmakers are using the medium as a tool in the decolonization process. “For Indigenous filmmakers, decolonization starts when they take their image-making and self-representation into their own hands, creating decolonized cultural, historical, and political discourses, and becoming progressively emancipated from the Hollywood-dominated industry.” (Santoro, 2013). Film can bring awareness, education, and leisure, but as it becomes more accessible and visible, so does the portrayal of Indigenous people.

All in all, the literature surrounding First Nations portrayal and depiction in film all tend to agree with one another. There needs to be a larger sector created for Indigenous actors, producers, directors etc. to do what they do best; make films. There has been great progress made with various programs and institutions put in place similar to the Aboriginal Filmmaking program, in conjunction with the National Film Board, created in 1996. The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network is another great example of institutions and initiatives that support the surge of Indigenous production.

### **Departments + Instructors for Upcoming Tutorials**

- Tutorial 1 – Ki White – Film and minority depiction (including LGBTQ + First Nations)

Although not completely solidified in my idea, I would really love to do a tutorial with Ki White surrounding the issue of portrayal of minorities in the film industry (both on screen or off screen). I understand this is a very broad topic and I still have to decide which minority group I would like to focus on, either LGBTQ or First Nations. In many films, First Nations people are played by non-First Nations actors, similarly in many films with

members of the LGBTQ community, roles are given to cis gendered, heterosexual actors. Many smaller independent films hire actors who fit the proper demographic of their characters they are portraying, but it seems to be less common in bigger Hollywood films. The portrayal and depiction of minorities is an important topic as films have such a far reach in terms of who sees them and how it effects people lives.

- Tutorial 2 – David Kirk – Incorporation of First Nations oral histories and traditions into the mainstream public-school system syllabus

For this tutorial, I believe David Kirk would be instrumental in helping me reach my research goal. I am very interested in how kids from kindergarten to grade 12 are taught and introduced to Canadian First Nations history and colonization. Growing up, I was never explicitly taught about how Canada became the country it is today. My hope of doing this tutorial would be to open up a dialogue and hopefully move forward with reconciliation between First Nations and non-First Nations people in Canada. There needs to explicit sections in Social Studies throughout public schools in both elementary school and high school covering the coming of Europeans, the banning of the potlatch, the introduction of reserves/ Indian Act and the residential school system and the effects it has on future generations.

- Tutorial 3 – Bob Muckle – General stereotypes of First Nations

I feel as though Bob Muckle would have lots of very interesting and useful information regarding stereotypes of First Nations in Canada and sentiments from the outside community that would assist me in completing my final project. This tutorial would

complement my first tutorial well and tie in with the information gathered with Ki White to successfully reach my proposed learning outcomes.

### **References**

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