



FROM VILLAINOUS SAVAGE TO OSCAR NOMINATION —

HOW THE REPRESENTATION OF NATIVE NORTH
AMERICANS IN FILM HAS CHANGED OVER TIME.

The **representation** of **Native North Americans** has evolved over time, shifting from **stereotypical** and often **inaccurate portrayals** to **more diverse and nuanced depictions**. Early representations were often based on Eurocentric perspectives, portraying Native peoples as either noble savages or dangerous adversaries. Over the years, there has been a growing awareness of cultural misrepresentations, leading to efforts to present a more authentic and respectful portrayal of Native communities in literature, media, and art. This Magazine aims to **raising awareness** and gives a brief insight into the topic since misrepresentations still occur in contemporary movies.

CONSTANT FIGHT AGAINST MISREPRESENTATIONS

STEREOTYPES

The following stereotypes are to fight:

- ▶ Beautiful Maidens (Pocahontas)
- ▶ Stoic Indians
- ▶ Magical Medicine Men
- ▶ Bloodthirsty Warriors
- ▶ Living in the Wild

(Nittle)



disneyscreencaps.com

picture from: www.thoughtco.com

HOW TO FIGHT

Hollywood has long represented Native Americans unrealistically through the Eurocentric perspectives prevalent during periods of colonization mainly in the popular **Western genre**. Filmmakers have often degraded Native American characters to **flat character roles** (e.g. sidekicks, minor characters etc.) pushing stereotypical, historical inaccurate behaviour (Boyd 106).

By **becoming producers, directors and writers**, Native Americans get the chance to retell their own stories (Boyd 105). This way Indigenous North Americans can regain control of their representation (Boyd 105).



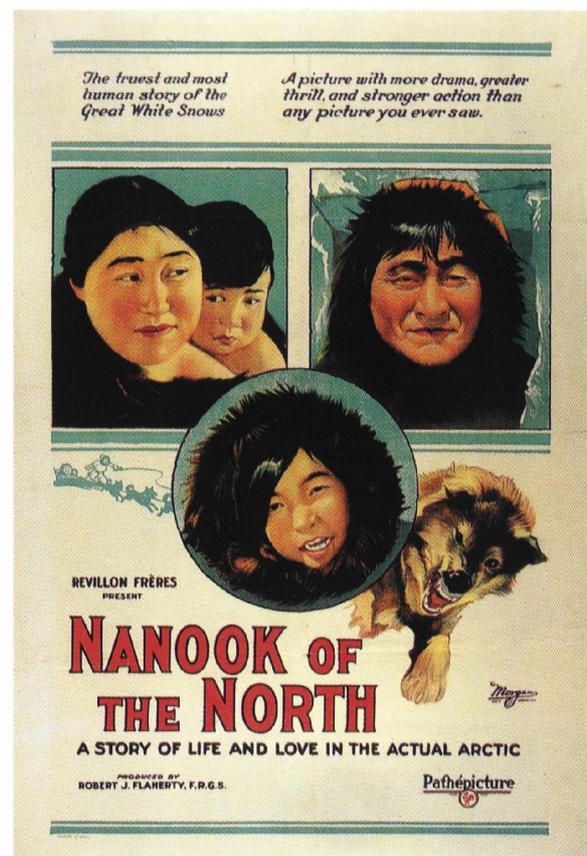
picture from: www.sbs.com.au

THE HISTORY OF INUIT FILM MAKING

The **history of Indigenous film** is closely linked to the diversity of cultural experiences and perspectives in the country. In particular, the evolution of Native American/Canadian movies reflects the changing and dynamic relationship between Indigenous peoples and the film industry over time. From the early silent films to today's internationally acclaimed works, Indigenous filmmakers have found a powerful voice to bring their stories, traditions and concerns to the screen.

EARLY 1900'S

- Many tribals were exposed to the media but couldn't see the purpose of it as the camera seemed more like an item (Weatherford 58)
- Inuit films were exclusively made by southerners
- Media misrepresentation of cultural traditions (Dowell 376)
- Romanticisation as Inuits were portrayed as cheerful, friendly and clever (Arnaquq-Baril)



picture from: www.wikipedia.org

ROBERT FLAHERTY NANOOK OF THE NORTH (1922)

- First successful feature-length documentary
- Used "documentary" before the term had even coined (Arnaquq-Baril)
- Flaherty wanted the Inuits to hunt with harpoons instead of rifles
- past more important than present/Displacement of real struggles of Inuit

LATE 1960'S/ EARLY 70'S

Three major Events for the development of Indigenous film making:

- 1 - National film board (NFB) delivered workshops in animation and film making in Cape Dorset and Iqaluit (Weatherford 60) A group of participants started the Nunatsikmiut film society (NFC)
- 2 - Launch of the Inukshuk Project which later became the Inuit Broadcasting Cooperation (IBC)
- 3 - The now famous Zacharias Kunuk bought his first video camera by selling his soapstone carvings

Types of films produced by different societies:

- NFC - Drama, Comedy, Children shows
 - IBC - News coverage
- In addition three other native communication societies located across Canada (Weatherford 60)

"NANOOK TAXI"

An original television drama of film by Edward Folger

Nanook, cast Edward Folger's first television drama. Folger has been associated with the late Alan Rapaport, James Lurie, Alfred Hitchcock, Blair Noy, John F. Casson, Nelson Fox, and other Inuit people. Resurrected the script among them. Filmed "Nanook" in an Inuit location.

It's all-wooden television

VISIONS
Tonight 10 PM
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Produced by WNET, Los Angeles, California, under license to WNET, Inc. by the Corporation of the City of Los Angeles, California, and the City of Los Angeles.

988



picture from: www.imdb.com

EDWARD TAYLOR - NANOOK TAXI (1977)

- First film showing the harsh reality of Inuit life
- Expresses the rampant racism and substance abuse of many decades (Arnaquq-Basil)

Structure of film making

Inuits - handled creativity and storytelling of the film

Non-Inuits - handled budgeting, fundraising and cost-reporting

EARLY 2000'S

ZACHARIAS KUNUK – ATANARJUAT: THE FAST RUNNER (2001)

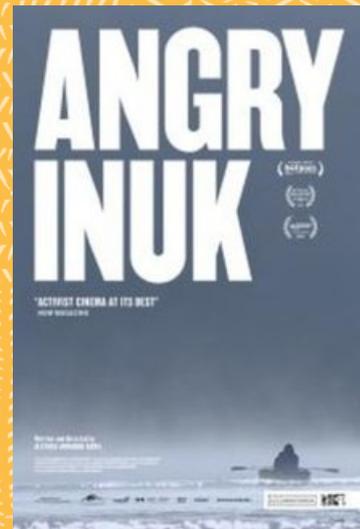
- Became first Inuktitut feature film which was written, directed and produced by Inuits (Dowell 379)
- Story based upon an Inuit oral tradition that has been passed on across the Arctic since time immemorial (Arnaquq-Basil)
- Traditions and tales used by elders to teach moral lessons (Dowell 378)
- 2015: International Film Festival in Toronto named it the Top Canadian Film of all time



picture from: www.rogerebert.com

2010'S

- More recognition after multiple success of different films
- Ajjit Nunavat Media Association cooperated with IBC in a study for a regional Inuit language television network
- Interest and financial viability of this project
- Conference in 2012 which lead to an overall mandate of the regional television network with the aim to reflect Inuit identity and culture



picture from: www.wikipedia.org

ALETHEA AGGIUQ ARNAQUQ-BASIL – ANGRY INUK (2016)

- Film about the reality of Inuit sea hunting
- Different facettes of reality
- Collected multiple awards

She and her success are an expression for the new generation of Inuit film makers who reclaim their image and share their own stories to the world. (Dowell 377)

A NEGATIVE EXAMPLE THE LONE RANGER (2013)



picture from: www.filmstarts.de

The film *The Lone Ranger*, directed by Gore Verbinski and released in 2013, has sparked **significant debate and criticism**, particularly regarding its portrayal of Native American culture and its implications on societal perceptions of indigenous people. At the heart of the controversy is **Johnny Depp's casting** as Tonto, a Native American character, which has been criticized for perpetuating racial stereotypes and white superiority.

The Lone Ranger presents a revisionist take on the classic American Western genre, attempting to subvert traditional narratives by placing a Native American character, Tonto, alongside the titular character, John Reid, also known as The Lone Ranger.

The **casting of Johnny Depp**, a white actor, in the role of Tonto has been criticized for undermining the potential progressive portrayal of Native Americans in cinema (Pratiwi 254).

The decision to cast Depp, a popular actor known for his numerous fan following, in the role of Tonto, rather than an actor of Native American descent, contradicts the film's attempt at subversion, reinforcing the dominance of white narratives in Hollywood (Pratiwi 254). This choice highlights the commercial considerations that often overshadow attempts at cultural sensitivity and accuracy in film production.



picture from: www.straight.com

Critics argue that *The Lone Ranger* attempts to navigate the complex terrain of American cultural history, particularly the portrayal of Native Americans. While the film diverges from **traditional depictions** of Native Americans as **savages** or **sidekicks** by presenting Tonto as a more complex character, it simultaneously falls into the trap of commodifying indigenous culture for entertainment purposes (Pratiwi 245,246). This paradox underscores the film's struggle to reconcile its commercial objectives with a meaningful critique of historical injustices.



picture from: www.todayparent.com



picture from: www.gala.de

The broader societal critique of *The Lone Ranger* centers on its reflection of ongoing issues of racism and cultural appropriation in America. The film's portrayal of Native Americans, particularly through the character of Tonto, serves as a lens through which to examine the perpetuation of racial stereotypes and the commodification of indigenous cultures (Pratiwi 255). Despite its attempts at challenging conventional narratives, the film **reinforces the hierarchical power dynamics** between white Americans and Native Americans, suggesting that true representation and empowerment of indigenous peoples in media remain elusive goals.

FROM VILLAINOUS SAVAGE TO OSCAR NOMINATION

KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON:

THE OSAGE MURDERS AND THE BIRTH OF THE FBI BY DAVID GRANN

presents a chilling narrative of the serial murders of members of the Osage Indian Nation in the early 1920s, an era that came to be known as the Reign of Terror (Morska 97,120). The Osage Nation, located in northeastern Oklahoma, found themselves in possession of valuable oil deposits, which led to a surge in wealth among its members. However, this newfound wealth attracted a sinister wave of crime against the Osage people, involving schemes that ranged from marriage fraud to outright murder to gain control of the oil wealth (Morska 99).

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

"A masterful work of literary journalism crafted with the urgency of a mystery." —*The Boston Globe*

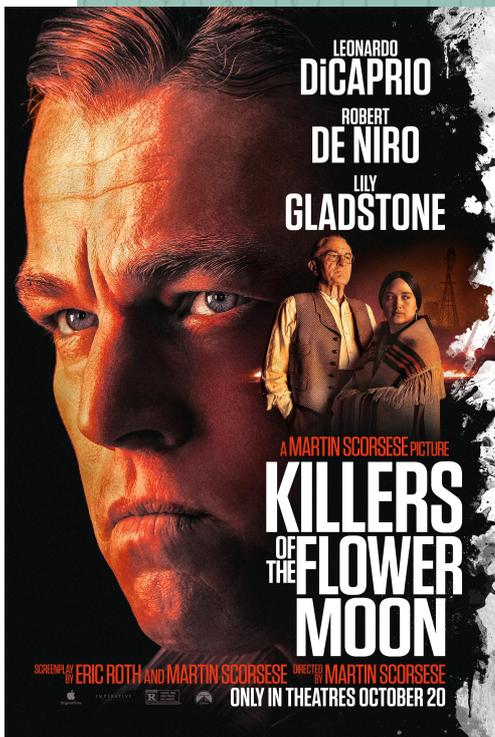
Killers of the Flower Moon

Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture

The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI

David Grann

picture from: www.amazon.com



picture from: www.imdb.com

The book's adaptation into a film by **Martin Scorsese** has brought renewed attention to this dark chapter in American history. The film's development has sparked discussions on the representation of Native Americans in cinema, a genre often criticized for its portrayal of Indigenous peoples (Morska 117). The collaboration between Scorsese and the Osage Nation, including consultations with Chief Standing Bear, indicates an effort to present a more nuanced and respectful depiction of the Osage people and their history (Morska 117).

REACTIONS

Indigenous people's responses to both the book and the upcoming film have been **mixed**. While there is appreciation for bringing attention to this often-overlooked tragedy, there is also concern about how these narratives are framed and who gets to tell them. The Osage murders are a part of a larger history of violence and exploitation against Indigenous peoples in America, a history that is still felt today (Morska 120). The engagement with this painful past requires sensitivity and a commitment to honoring the voices and perspectives of the Osage people and other Native American communities.



picture from: www.stern.de

RECOGNITION

On January 7th Lily Gladstone - who plays Mollie Burkhardt in "Killers of the Flower Moon" - became the **first Indigenous person to win a Golden Globe for best actress**. Now she is nominated for an Oscar.

"It's something that I wasn't sure I would see in my career, in my lifetime," said Gladstone, 37, who has Blackfeet and Nez Percé heritage. "I hope that it just means that people start caring more and learning more about these histories." (Bahr 2024)

"I'm hopeful because of the way things are trending now: We're telling our own stories, or we have a really heavy hand in shaping how stories about us are told," she said. (Bahr 2024)



Lily Gladstone makes history as first Native American best actress Oscar nominee

picture from: www.x.com

INDIGENOUS VOICES IN OTHER PRODUCTIONS

THE BALLAD OF CROWFOOT

The Ballad of Crowfoot is referred to as the first music video of Canada. It was released in 1968 and the "first NFB film directed by an Indigenous person" (Wright and McIntosh). Creator of this piece is Willie Dunn. He was born in Montreal in the year 1941 and died in 2013. Having a mother of Mi'gmaq and a father of English/Cornish descent, Willie had a strong connection to both cultures during his life. ("Willie Dunn"). This can also be seen in his short film, where he combines the English language in form of music and Native Canadian culture in form of images. However, those images as well as the music are not an idyllic illustration of Native life. On the contrary, the film puts an emphasis on colonialism and looks at the "Siksika (Blackfoot) chief who negotiated Treaty 7 on behalf of the Blackfoot Confederacy" in the 19th century.



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