

Introduction

Māori writer, director, and performer Taika Waititi's land acknowledgment at the 2020 Academy Awards ceremony might be the biggest Indigenous moment at the Oscars since 1973, when Marlon Brando declined his award and Sacheen Littlefeather took the microphone in his place to make a statement supporting the American Indian Movement's occupation of Wounded Knee. Waititi's acknowledgment of the Tongva, Tataviam, and Chumash as "the first peoples of this land on which the motion pictures community lives and works" ricocheted across the internet.¹ Indigenous responses ranged from Nick Martin's remarks about the "dissonance" of land acknowledgments in the face of public apathy on Indigenous issues to Heperi Mita's deeply appreciative contextualization of Waititi's achievements within a Māori "filmmaking whakapapa."² Whakapapa is often defined as "genealogy," the ordering of generations and the relations among their stories, although the term also entails broader concepts fundamental to Māori worldviews and epistemologies; Mita invokes it here to foreground Indigenous relationality across multiple generations of filmmakers.

Indeed, this moment—Waititi's win and his speech—has multiple genealogies, some obvious and others more hidden, because Indigenous participation in film and media production has occupied contradictory positions of invisibility and hypervisibility for a very long time. In the face of long-term erasure from the screen—with Indigenous participation both limited and often

1 Nick Martin, "The Dissonance of a Land Acknowledgment at the Oscars," *New Republic*, February 10, 2020, <https://newrepublic.com/article/156520/dissonance-land-acknowledgment-oscars>.

2 Martin; Heperi Mita, "What Taika's Oscar Means to Me—and All Indigenous Filmmakers," *The Spinoff*, February 13, 2020, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/13-02-2020/what-taikas-oscar-means-to-me-and-all-indigenous-filmmakers/>. With thanks to Chadwick Allen for consultation in defining this concept.

Joanna Hearne, "Introduction: Indigenous Performance Networks: Media, Community, Activism," *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 152–156.

unacknowledged—“our presence is our weapon,” as Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg poet and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes.³ While Simpson uses “presence” broadly to indicate Indigenous survival of “centuries of attack,” I cite her phrasing here to point more specifically to the resilience and endurance of historical and ongoing communities of Indigenous performers and filmmakers. Recognizing this presence and power re-centers Indigenous participation in North American film and media; it draws our attention to offscreen production networks and infrastructures, interventions in regimes of redfacing, and the leveraging of hard-won screen visibility to support political resistance movements such as #MMIW (missing and murdered Indigenous women) and #NoDAPL (No to the Dakota Access Pipeline).

Building on Dakota scholar Philip Deloria’s work, we find “Indians in unexpected places” in film and media.⁴ Faced with screen images of “vanishing Indians,” we see evidence of Indigenous presence, from early cinema to the Hollywood studio system to independent media arts to contemporary television and digital media. Through historical recovery and print, digital, and interview research, we “re-credit” the work of Indigenous performers, filmmakers, and digital media artists, making visible their pathways across professional and political networks.⁵ In recognizing and documenting these artists’ Indigenousizing strategies, we Indigenousize the historical record and expand the field to include new readerships. When we Indigenousize film and media history, we are able to ask new questions: What were the stories of the uncredited extras seen in film backgrounds or alongside white stars performing in redface? Who were they and what were the conditions of their participation? What behind-the-scenes negotiations took place between directors and producers and the Indigenous consultants they hired for productions? When Indigenous performers were embedded in productions or exhibitions, how did they use the limited power and visibility they had within the system—or, through publicity, outside of it—to further agendas related to labor, representation, or community concerns? How did Indigenous filmmakers, performers, audiences, and other participants form their own professional or fan communities around shared concerns such as casting, training, and activist interventions in systems such as Canadian media arts organizations or social media platforms? How did they translate concerns with political sovereignty to aesthetic choices for the screen? The scholars in this dossier address these questions by centering Indigenous media genealogies—and more broadly, Indigenous ethics of care and relationality—in both content and methodology.

This In Focus analyzes Indigenous performance networks as forms of offscreen community building and activism in relation to screen media. Indigenous participation in mainstream and independent film industries has been the subject of significant historical recovery, even as scholars also address the emergent forms of Indigenous media activism arising with new digital

3 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 6.

4 Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

5 Joanna Hearne, *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 181.

platforms. The essays collected here investigate Indigenous offscreen practices either independently or alongside Indigenous media's onscreen aesthetics and represent a turn from previous emphases on images of Indians and critiques of onscreen stereotypes, while they also recognize historical accommodations, pushbacks, and callouts of those misrepresentations. We take up this focus to more closely examine the lives and work of Indigenous performers, consultants, writers, directors, fans, and others who have participated in the systems that produce screen images. This dossier is part of a larger movement in Indigenous media studies toward recovering and reassessing offscreen practices, from community-based media projects to historical scholarship documenting Indigenous actors in Los Angeles. Our focus here on performers, such as Molly Spotted Elk, Mary and Daniel Simmons, Sacheen Littlefeather, Lois Red Elk, Misty Upham, and others, joins a surge of recent scholarship on the careers of individual actors and understanding the connections they facilitated between Indigenous communities and film and media industries.⁶

In addition to chronicling individual stories, the work in this dossier also attends to infrastructures of media production, from casting agencies and organizations supporting Indigenous actors to state arts funding initiatives. The authors collected here extend to historical analysis the industry phenomenon that media scholar John Caldwell calls "production culture"—the practices by which workers at all levels of production make sense of their labor—and build upon what Seneca film scholar Michelle Raheja calls "visual sovereignty," or the "space between resistance and compliance" within which Indigenous filmmakers engage and reshape film conventions.⁷ Visual sovereignty, the conceptual center of gravity for Indigenous media studies, expands the framework of Indigenous nations' *political* sovereignty—their self-determination as nations within a larger nation-state—to intellectual and artistic analysis. These concepts translate pre- and post-contact understandings of Indigenous governance and territorial jurisdictions to media representation. Dustin Tahmahkera's term "representational jurisdiction" stresses this link to territory to indicate "the storied geopolitics of how Indigenous representations impact social and political landscapes and mediascapes and how nationalistic narrations of territories impact the development of representing Indigeneity."⁸

- 6 See, for example, new work on Cherokee humorist Will Rogers, Winnebago performer and activist Lilian St. Cyr, and Yakama consultant Nipo Strongheart, among others: Amy M. Ware, *The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of an American Icon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015); Linda M. Waggoner, *Starring Red Wing! The Incredible Career of Lilian St. Cyr, the First Native American Film Star* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); and Andrew H. Fisher, "Tinseltown Tye: Nipo Strongheart and the Making of Braveheart," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 3 (2018): 93–118. See also Nicolas G. Rosenthal, "Representing Indians: Native American Actors on Hollywood's Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2005): 328–352; and Nicolas G. Rosenthal and Liza Black, eds., "Representing Native Peoples: Native Narratives of Indigenous History and Culture," special issue, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 3 (2018). See also Liza Black, *Picturing Indians: Native Americans in Film, 1941–1960* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).
- 7 John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 193.
- 8 Dustin Tahmahkera, "Hakaru Maruamatu Kwitaka? Seeking Representational Jurisdiction in Comancheria Cinema," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 100–135.

Raheja emphasizes the distinctiveness of Indigenous polity, noting that “[s]overeignty in its manifold manifestations sets Native American studies apart from other critical race discourses,” as it both honors Indigenous governance and also foregrounds treaties as manifestations of the nation-to-nation agreements between autonomous Indigenous nations and the United States, which are the basis for assertions of Indigenous legal rights within Western jurisprudence.⁹ Drawing on the work of foundational thinkers in Indigenous media studies, particularly Faye Ginsburg, Kristin Dowell traces visual sovereignty through offscreen relationships, reminding us that because of the “inherently social process” of filmmaking, we can “locate Aboriginal visual sovereignty in the *act of production*.”¹⁰ Indigenous filmmakers “often rely upon friends and family” and generate, either through media production itself or alongside screen aesthetics, “a process through which Aboriginal social relationships can be created, negotiated, and nurtured.”¹¹

The first essays in the dossier address historical case studies in the recovery of Indigenous performance networks. Interviews and collaborative work with Indigenous artists around family histories, along with information painstakingly assembled from photographs and fragments of studio budgets, memos, contracts and legal documents, publicity material and pressbooks, and other print files, reveal stories that have not been told before about Indigenous Hollywood. These stories include new details about the casting, labor conditions, and economic livelihoods of Native performers, their treatment on set, their own initiatives and networking, their contributions to organizations and institutions, and their interventions or shaping of rhetorics around publicity and promotion. They show us new contours of the production system, including its working environments, representational boundaries, and conditions of possibility. These stories are vital to understanding how Indigenous performers were both incorporated and marginalized within the economies and hierarchies of the studio system; how they accommodated, resisted, or otherwise leveraged or responded to that system; and how their work as entertainers was interwoven with political activism.

We then turn from the historical recovery of Indigenous Hollywood to consider broader networks in other national contexts and other media circuits, including arts organizations such as Canada’s Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance (AFVAA) and digital and social media forms and platforms for Indigenous fan communities, such as Instagram memes. Attention to contemporary institutional histories and funding cycles reveal connections between Indigenous social movements and structures of opportunity for Indigenous media makers, whether in rural reservation areas or cosmopolitan hubs. The final essay on the late Blackfeet actress Misty Upham draws from Indigenous honor song traditions to craft a series of “honor scenes” that reveal how Upham intervened in cinematic narratives of Indigenous tragedy, steering her screen career away from limited and one-dimensional roles toward stronger and more complex representations of Indigenous women.

9 Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 196.

10 Kristin L. Dowell, *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 2.

11 Dowell, 2–3.

Our approach is suggestive rather than polemical. Each In Focus contribution teases out what recovery work makes visible in terms of Indigenous community-making, activism, and sovereignty both on screen and off. Taken together, these essays demonstrate the chronological reach of Indigenous media studies, from late-nineteenth-century vaudeville through mid- and late-twentieth-century Hollywood to the Indigenous social movements and newer media forms of the early twenty-first century. They also model methodologies for ongoing work at the intersection of Indigenous studies and cinema and media studies. Returning to Waititi's 2020 Academy Awards speech, it is worth noting that he combined a land acknowledgment with a dedication of his Oscar to Indigenous youth. While gesturing to ancient and ongoing Indigenous presence on the land—still there, despite centuries of erasure—Waititi also insists on Indigenous futurity and its great promise: “to all the Indigenous kids in the world who want to do art and dance and write stories,” he said, “we are the original storytellers, and we can make it here as well.”¹²

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12 Martin, “Dissonance.”

Christine Bold

Indigenous Presence in Vaudeville and Early Cinema

From the 1880s to the 1930s—a period often considered the height of genocidal onslaughts on the Native peoples of Turtle Island (North America)—a large network of Indigenous performers made vaudeville into a site of Indigenous continuance, resilience, and resurgence. As a settler scholar of popular culture, I aim to contribute to the recovery of this network by following archival traces and building relations of research exchange with contemporary Indigenous theater artists.¹ Repeatedly, these artists emphasize Indigenous relationality and community in remembering and honoring their theatrical and familial predecessors on popular stages. These principles guide my efforts at historical reconstruction.

This essay considers one way in which Indigenous vaudevillians contributed to early cinematic space. Much illuminating scholarship has established the importance of Indigenous creativity to the making of early moving pictures and of vaudeville's role in shaping their exhibition and reception. Here I consider the space between: the role of Indigenous performers in bridging vaudeville and early moving pictures, in acclimatizing spectators to the

1 The larger project is particularly indebted to Monique Mojica (Guna and Rappahannock Nations) and Michelle St. John (Wampanoag Nation) as well as to Muriel Miguel (Guna and Rappahannock Nations) and Gloria Miguel (Guna and Rappahannock Nations) of Spiderwoman Theater. I also gratefully acknowledge funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and from the Canada Council for the Arts Killam Research Fellowship.

Christine Bold, "Indigenous Presence in Vaudeville and Early Cinema," *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 157–162.

shift from liveness to cinematic representation. As they performed virtuoso vaudeville acts during reel changes, accompanied showings of early Westerns, and ballyhooed for audiences, what kinds of community did vaudeville Indians make and how did they contribute to training spectators in two central entertainment technologies of Western modernity—vaudeville and motion pictures—at the moment when they came together?

The public projection of moving pictures began in Berlin *Variété* in 1895 and New York vaudeville in 1896. Vaudeville houses were a prime exhibition outlet for early one-reelers, having already brought together mass audiences and established national distribution circuits. Variety playbills responded and accommodated audiences to the rhythms of urban modernity with their atomized bursts of novelty into which short films could be slotted, dovetailing vaudeville time and filmic time. Many early films recorded vaudeville acts, thereby transferring live rhythms and audience address to celluloid and creating what Tom Gunning famously dubbed “the cinema of attractions” to train audiences in new spectatorship practices.² Even when early exhibitors shifted to predominantly filmic programs, following the introduction of nickelodeons in 1905 and picture palaces in the 1910s, liveness remained a significant force in mediating audience experience. Feature films continued to be accompanied by vaudeville acts and later floor shows; what Henry Jenkins calls “the vaudeville aesthetic” continued to imprint filmic pacing; and live ballyhooing continued to constitute cinematic audiences by gathering their attention, directing their gaze, and framing their expectations.³

Although Indigenous communities remember, popular culture scholarship has largely forgotten how often this live vaudevillian presence was Indigenous. In this venue, Indigenous performers participated in closer, more reciprocal performer-audience relationships, could take greater creative control in shaping their self-presentation, and developed more public voice than in commercial ethnographic exhibits and Wild West shows. These latter forms are often assumed to be the sum of popular Indigenous presence—in the one venue, voyeuristically exposed to spectators and, in the other, distanced across large arenas from them—at the turn of the twentieth century, and they both insisted on primitivism as Indigenous people’s defining feature. In combination vaudeville-film houses, Indigenous performers’ direct audience address suggests otherwise.

The archive of this moment in entertainment history is so fragmented and incomplete that some reconstructions remain, for now, glimmerings of thought-provoking possibility. When, for example, the first motion picture Western, *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), appeared on vaudeville playbills, it was intermittently juxtaposed with the live Indigenous spectacle it suppressed onscreen, in the form of Indigenous vaudevillians’ virtuosic dancing, singing, oratory, juggling, and acrobatics.⁴ It is possible

2 Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3–4 (1986): 63–70.

3 Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

4 Christine Bold, “Early Cinematic Westerns,” in *A History of Western American Literature*, ed. Susan Kollin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 225–241. One example is “The Novelty,” *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, May 9, 1905.

(though not yet proven) that the very family on whose talents the film silently drew—the Deer family of Mohawk performers from Caughnawaga and St. Regis (now Kahnawà:ke and Ahkwesáhsne, respectively), who traveled vaudeville circuits in the same period—could have appeared along with the film.⁵ Whether literally or more symbolically, such a juxtaposition would underscore how the live stage functioned as one site of Indigenous persistence and resurgence. Some live Indigenous performances explicitly commented on film offerings. In 1909, for example, famous Lakota activist and author Luther Standing Bear performed as Charging Hawk with Capt. H. A. Brunswick's Great Wild West Indian Vaudeville. The troupe's program included "A complete lecture on the Western pictures (which change each night)."⁶ Through the 1910s and into the 1920s, live "Indian Prologues" began to accompany silent films of many genres.

Vibrant Indigenous stage presence particularly contradicted the onscreen vanishing Indian tropes that heavily informed Westerns and supported US nationalist narratives. Take, for example, the live Indigenous accompaniment, by members of several Native nations and generations, to the exhibition of John Ford's silent Western *The Iron Horse* (1924). The film's narrative follows the joining of the US railroad in the 1860s. The nation's settlement "impelled westward by the strong urge of progress" (as the title card reads) is reinforced by a white heterosexual romance that overcomes its misunderstandings at the same moment as the silver spike is hammered in at Promontory Point, Utah. The most visible Indians on screen are the huge numbers of Cheyenne warriors in full feather headdress shown to be vainly attempting to resist "the inevitable" (as the title card reads) with their attacks on the railroad. When the film first ran in Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Los Angeles, it was accompanied by a live prologue by Arapahoes and Shoshonis from Wind River Reservation—some of whom also acted in the film. Performers addressed the audience in sign language translated by the prologue's organizer, the rancher-turned-Hollywood-actor Tim McCoy. McCoy requested that the performers dress to "show the white man audience how they looked when they felt beautiful."⁷ The result, chosen by the performers themselves, included "[e]agle feathers, war bonnets, dentalium shell chokers, golden ear-rings, hair-pipe breastplates, Washington peace medallions, fringed buckskin shirts, beaded leggings and quilled moccasins erupted into a volcano of pure, joyous color."⁸ Some audience members may well have found that live Arapaho and Shoshoni presence authenticated the movie's representation of Cheyenne warriors, but the live performers' visual vibrancy surely also exceeded any black-and-white filmic effects.

When *The Iron Horse* went into national release, it continued to be accompanied by live Indian acts. In 1926, Molly Spotted Elk (Mary Alice Nelson

5 For Deer family memories of their role in *The Great Train Robbery*, see Patricia O. Galperin, *In Search of Princess White Deer: The Biography of Esther Deer* (Sparta, NJ: Flint and Feather Press, 2012), 55.

6 Advertisement, *New Philadelphia (OH) Daily Times*, September 30, 1909, 2. See also Linda Waggoner, *Starring Red Wing! The Incredible Career of Lillian M. St. Cyr, the First Native American Film Star* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

7 Tim McCoy, with Ronald McCoy, *Tim McCoy Remembers the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 183.

8 McCoy, 183.

Archambaud), an accomplished artist of the Penobscot Nation, accompanied the film to Loew's Vendom picture palace in Nashville, Tennessee, along with Chief Sheet Lightning (Walter Battice), a well-known Sac and Fox performer and activist of an older generation. The advertising fitted their stage act to the Plains Indian stereotypes on which the movie trades by identifying them as "Full-Blooded Sioux Indians." However, what audiences saw in live performance were not the primitivist enemies of progress shown on screen; Sheet Lightning's oratory was part of new pan-Indian political initiatives, and the audience was invited to "HEAR THE PRINCESS SING. SEE HER DO THE CHARLESTON."⁹ Observing the contrast between Molly Spotted Elk, in Plains-style buckskin, beaded dress, headband, and single feather, and the much less kinetic and more crinolined figure of Madge Bellamy on screen, starring as the film's heroine, viewers might have wondered who represented the traditional and who the modern. Even more directly than the Grauman's prologue, Sheet Lightning's political vision and Molly Spotted Elk's performance of Western modernity challenged the film's denial of what Michelle Raheja (Seneca descent) calls a "viable future" for Indigenous people.¹⁰

When Alison Fields traces the movement between Wild West shows and films in shaping the performer-spectator relationship, she argues, "As Native performers traveled circuits of western spectacle and negotiated space within each performance venue, they contributed to turn-of-the-century practices of looking."¹¹ Here I am pointing to the possibility of following that argument into the intersection of vaudeville and film and into the 1920s, a period which followed a "paradigmatic shift," in Miriam Hansen's words, in the creation of the "classical spectator."¹² Multi-reel filmic narratives worked to produce a "self-contained fictional world on screen, the diegesis" that would absorb spectators; feature film distribution became more standardized; and exhibition spaces became larger.¹³ In this context, live acts—including increasing numbers of Indigenous acts and revues—are understood to have remained important in localizing audiences' sense of themselves, sustaining active relations of looking, and resisting the passivity encouraged by diegetic absorption. Thus, some of what have been theorized as central cinematic practices of looking became entangled in Indigenous self-presentation on the popular stage.

Contemporary Indigenous artists' memories and archival traces also point to Indigenous communities sustaining themselves across and beyond the commercial structures of vaudeville-film houses. On stage, performers wielded the act of looking not only toward the audience but toward one another, sometimes enacting the kinds of loving Indigenous relations that Western films' representation and both US and Canadian government policies denied. "Princess Watawaso & Co.," for example, who toured the big-time Keith-Albee

9 Advertisement, *Nashville Tennessean*, January 17, 1926.

10 Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), x.

11 Alison Fields, "Circuits of Spectacle: The Miller Brothers' 101 Ranch Real Wild West," *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2012): 463.

12 Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 16.

13 Hansen, 37.

circuit from 1927 to 1929, brought together different generations of Penobscot, Kiowa, Cherokee, and Mohawk performers.¹⁴ The troupe's program included "The Courtship of Rippling Water," "a romantic, musical piece presented in the revue style," during which Princess Watawaso (Lucy Nicolar Poolaw; Penobscot Nation) and Young Chief Poolaw (Bruce Poolaw; Kiowa Nation) played a romantic couple, exchanging gazes of desire and duetting their own version of "Indian Love Call."¹⁵ When this performance accompanied *The Flaming Frontier* (Edward Sedgwick, 1926), it had the potential to break viewers' diegetic absorption into the film's narratives of violent Indians attacking the white American nation ("on the War Path" as part of "Gen. Custer's Last Stand") and the "romantic love story" reserved for white men and women.¹⁶ This onstage relationship also extended into the sustenance of offstage community: Lucy Nicolar Poolaw and Bruce Poolaw became marital and business partners, subsequently returning to the home of the Penobscot Nation, on Indian Island, Maine, where she and her family are honored for doing important educational, community, and political work.¹⁷

The threat of exploitation by dominant commercial entertainment structures was always, of course, present. I'll end this essay with another way in which Indigenous live performance entered cinematic space: in the ballyhooing in and around movie houses that always involved Indian spectacle—and often Indigenous performers—for Western films. When Molly Spotted Elk reflects on her experience in her 1922 diary, as excerpted and published by Bunny McBride, she emphasizes feeling exploited and exposed: "Played at the Scenic, a small beach theatre at Oakland Beach, Rhode Island, July 3-4. . . . Poor crowd. . . . Rode around. Had to ballyhoo in my costume. So tiresome I could leave the company. They're making a regular little monkey out of me."¹⁸ About a decade later, in the 1930s, Gloria Miguel, senior Guna-Rappahannock theater artist who performed as a show Indian as a youngster, also ballyhooed. When she reflected on this experience in 2017, her emphasis was quite different. She remembered that she and her family "did John Wayne ballyhooing for the John Wayne movies. It was in Brooklyn, we were on a big float, and the whole family was on the float, and the family posing and saying, 'Go to see John Wayne . . . !' [laughter] Ah, we did crazy things—we used to have Indian Day celebrations and the social clubs and the Cowboy and Indian Club—we all really knew each other."¹⁹ Miguel's final statement—"we all really knew each other"—speaks of community that Molly Spotted Elk's reflections reveal was not always easy in the making.

14 The troupe was also known as "Princess Watawaso and Her Royal Americans" and "Princess Wantura and Her Tribesmen."

15 "The Stage," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 3, 1927.

16 Advertisement, *Hazleton (PA) Standard-Sentinel*, March 12, 1927.

17 For a fuller accounting of Lucy Nicolar Poolaw's career and political work, see Bunny McBride, *Princess Watawaso: Bright Star of the Penobscot* (Old Town, ME: Charles Norman Shay, 2002); and "Princess Watawaso's Teepee," Penobscot Nation website, <http://www.penobscotculture.com/index.php/princess-watawaso-s-teepee>.

18 Bunny McBride, *Molly Spotted Elk: A Penobscot in Paris* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 36.

19 Gloria Miguel, interview by Christine Bold, May 9, 2017, in Christine Bold, with Monique Mojica, Gloria Miguel, Muriel Miguel, "Outbreak from the Vaudeville Archive," *Western American Literature* 53, no. 1 (2018): 123.

These variously remembered and reconstructed scenes point to the plurality of possibilities, effects, and processes at work in the Indigenous shaping of cinematic space. With Indians in the house, gazes and relations could travel in multiple directions, and the spectacles and rhythms of live Indigenous vaudeville performance could expose and counter the attempts of filmic time at once to speed up and kill off so-called primitive figures. While Indigenous presence was mediating the experience of cinematic modernity for audiences, Indigenous performers were also continuing to make community for themselves beyond the structures and constraints of “settler time.”²⁰

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20 The implications of this phrase are elaborated on in Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

On Hollywood Boulevard: Native Community in Classical Hollywood

On August 1, 1927, Grauman's Chinese Theatre hosted an "Indian Chief's Festival" to celebrate its 150th screening of Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927). As an added attraction, the theater held its first public ceremony in which an actor, Norma Shearer, placed her footprints into the theater's Forecourt of the Stars, which would become one of Hollywood's iconic landmarks. The event advertised chiefs from "a score of different tribes" and entertainment from a performer named White Bird.¹ White Bird (Mary Simmons) arrived in Hollywood as a performer in 1924 and shortly thereafter married Chief Yowlachie (Daniel Simmons), a Yakama actor whose career spanned five decades.² The two became key figures in the Native community in Hollywood during the 1920s and early 1930s. White Bird's performance at the festival was not her only connection to Grauman's; at one time, she owned and operated the American Indian Art Shop located across the

1 "Special Nights Set," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1927, part 2, 9; and "Star to Print Feet," *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1927, part 2, 7.

2 Mary Simmons (née Oliver) claimed to be and is identified in contemporary reporting as Cherokee. She is listed as "Indian" and "Mixed Blood 32-4" on the 1930 and 1940 Censuses but not the 1920 Census, and so far I have not found evidence that she was an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation. Because of this, and the stakes in attributing tribal affiliation, I do not refer to her here as Cherokee but do include her as part of the Native community in Hollywood, in which she played a significant role. For more on the complexities in discussing ancestry and identity among the historical Hollywood Indian community, see Liza Black, *Picturing Indians: Native Americans in Film, 1941-1960* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

Jacob Floyd, "On Hollywood Boulevard: Native Community in Classical Hollywood," *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 163-168.

street, a store that served as a community hub for the Native performers in Hollywood.³ Due to her efforts in supporting this community, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Lee Shippey wrote in 1930 that “someday, we imagine, the regenerated Indians of the Southwest will erect a monument to White Bird for what she is doing for her race now.”⁴

The Simmonses’ story illustrates how Native film workers built a community in classical Hollywood, both inside and adjacent to the industry. Actors leveraged their positions within the industry to build community and—through offscreen performances, community service, fundraisers, educational programs, and social functions—to publicize their presence, the resilience of Native life, and the value of Native culture in urban modernity.⁵ While the word *Hollywood* generally connotes the US film industry or its filmic output, Hollywood is also a place, and a view of all three “Hollywoods” is essential to better understand the work of Native Americans in film. The films in which these actors participated present Native tragedies and romanticize Native erasure, yet examining offscreen community work by these actors and their families in the 1920s and 1930s reveals stories of resilience in which Native performers from diverse tribal cultures came together from around the continent to form one of the most significant Native hubs in the country.

In the early twentieth century, public expectations about Native life and culture informed not only the western film genre and the opportunities for Native Americans in the film industry but also civic narratives about Los Angeles and the future of Native Americans in American society.⁶ Non-Natives believed Native peoples and cultures were unequipped to survive modernity and expected them to vanish. Through community building made visible in the press and LA society circles, the Native community in Hollywood asserted a presence and cultural viability while modeling a Native modernity that suggested contemporary Native artists had much to offer society. Evidence of Native activism remains from this community not through films but as traces left in social history: in this case, the writing of Lee Shippey, a *Los Angeles Times* society columnist who became a close friend to the Simmonses.⁷

While the film industry attracted Native performers and their families to Hollywood, it was only part of their performance world. They worked across media and, while often limited to roles as anonymous extras on screen, found success as pageant performers, singers, dancers, lecturers, and vaudeville players. Native performers also toured the country on performance cir-

3 The store appears to have moved at some point in the early 1930s. Articles from 1929 and 1930 locate it at 5461 Hollywood Boulevard, some two miles from the theater, while Romero’s 1934 profile places the store directly across the street from Grauman’s. See Ramon Romero, “White Bird—Hollywood’s Indian Casting Director,” *New Movie Magazine*, November 1934, 94.

4 Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1930, morning edition, part 2, 4.

5 See Nicolas G. Rosenthal’s *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

6 For more on race in civic narratives in early LA, see Mark Shiel, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

7 Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1939, part 2, 4.

cuits, sometimes traveling to other Native communities to film.⁸ Their travel between Hollywood and Indian Country, communities located on reservations or allotment lands, suggests what Renya K. Ramirez calls a “Native Hub.” Ramirez builds on a metaphor provided by Paiute community organizer Laverne Roberts in order to correct the view that urban Natives are disconnected from their tribal communities and cultures.⁹ Instead, she argues, cities and tribal communities are connected “like a hub on a wheel” with the city at its center and “social networks” connecting it to Indian Country “represented by the wheel’s spokes.” In Ramirez’s model, “the city . . . acts a collecting center, a hub of Indian peoples’ new ideas, information, culture, community, and imagination that when shared back ‘home’ on the reservation can impact thousands of Native Americans.”¹⁰ Hubs may include physical locations where Native Americans gather or “cultural events, such as powwows, sweat lodge ceremonies, as well as social and political activities, such as meetings and family gatherings.”¹¹ While hubs refer to spaces that connect Native communities separated by geographic distance, I am inspired by Ramirez’s emphasis on the fluid and adaptable nature of Native hubs to expand the term to include hubs that act as local area networks. In Hollywood, the Native community connected through several organizations and locations that served as hubs, and White Bird was crucial to forming both an organizational and physical hub.

Upon arriving in Hollywood in 1924, White Bird “marveled that most of the Indians being used in pictures were imitation Indians.” Casting directors told her that they could not find Native actors in Hollywood and believed too few of them existed. Skeptical of this claim, she decided to cast a call for six “real Indians” for an upcoming feature. During the course of her search, she “found practically none had telephones and many had moved to other addresses.” In response, “she built up a list of active telephone numbers and a ‘scout’ system for reaching those who had no telephone. Gradually the home of White-Bird and Yowlach[i]e became a sort of central casting bureau for Indians.”¹²

This event led to the formation of the War Paint Club, initially centered in the Simmonses’ home and later at White Bird’s American Indian Art Shop. Oglala activist and actor Luther Standing Bear became the club’s “Chief Counselor,” and the club was governed by a council of twelve “Chiefs.” While these Chiefs would not allow White Bird to sit on the council—as a matter of “tradition”—she was its “Executive Secretary,” managing the club, its finances, and events.¹³ While others have written about the War Paint Club’s advocacy

8 For example, John Ford brought Native actors, including Seneca actor Chief John Big Tree, with him from Hollywood on location to film *The Iron Horse* (1924). David Kiehn, “*The Iron Horse*,” Library of Congress, accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-film-preservation-board/documents/iron_horse.pdf. See also “John Ford’s *The Iron Horse*,” New York University, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.nyu.edu/projects/wke/press/ironhorse/ironhorse.pdf>.

9 Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

10 Ramirez, 2.

11 Ramirez, 3.

12 Wade Werner, “Real Indians Still Scarce in Hollywood,” *Oakland Tribune*, September 30, 1927, evening edition, 30.

13 Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1932, part 2, 4. For more on the Simmonses’ relationship with Luther Standing Bear, see Kiara M. Vigil, *Indige-*

in representation, it appears its primary function was to assist Native actors within the industry, to operate as a casting agency for Native talent, with White Bird as its casting director.¹⁴ The Club wanted to make it easier for studios to contact Native film workers with experience in the industry. White Bird argued that using Native actors was not only “for the protection of the Indian in the picture” but also “for the protection of the studios.” This claim appears to be her selling point to the studios: she would provide them with experienced Native actors, and they would then be able to publicize their authenticity and presumably save themselves from potential embarrassment.¹⁵

The emphasis on authenticity in this negotiation, juxtaposed with the stereotypical roles these actors played, evokes Michelle H. Raheja’s concept of “redfacing,” or “the cultural and ideological work of playing Indian.”¹⁶ Lisa K. Neuman further describes a form of “Indian Play” based on her study of public performances by students at a Baptist Indian school in Oklahoma. Appealing to the stereotypical expectations of their non-Native audiences, performers used “some aspects of dominant cultural ideologies” to create “a space for counter-hegemonic discourse” while leveraging their public appearances to advocate for Native causes, garner support for the Native community, and subvert the vanishing Indian myth by means of their very physical presence.¹⁷ While films perpetuated settler colonial narratives and stereotypes, Native actors participating in redface “countered the national narrative that Indigenous people had vanished, and they also subverted representations of Indians in colonial discourses through their divergence from stereotype.”¹⁸ As an organization of Native actors that offered “real Hollywood Indians,” the War Paint Club also provided White Bird with leverage to negotiate better contracts for its members.¹⁹ Casting was so central to the War Paint Club’s efforts that it appears in the 1928 *Film Daily Yearbook* as a casting service under “Indians.”²⁰

In addition to operating as the headquarters of her casting service, White Bird’s store served as a Native hub in other ways, such as introducing artists in Indian Country to buyers in Hollywood. The Simmonses traveled to festivals to buy wares from Native artists, and Hopi and Navajo artists brought their “surplus product” to the store.²¹ In 1929, the shop captured the attention of Hollywood fashion circles, and a *Los Angeles Times* fashion reporter called it a “fascinating place where every article is hand made by Indian students. Their

nous Intellectuals: Sovereignty, Citizenship, and the American Imagination, 1880–1930 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

14 Romero, “White Bird.”

15 See Jacob Floyd, “Negotiating Publicity and Persona: The Work of Native Actors in Studio Hollywood,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 42, no. 3 (2018): 119–135, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicrj.42.3.floyd>.

16 Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 20.

17 Lisa K. Neuman, *Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone College* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 23. See also Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country*, 46–47.

18 Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 73.

19 Raheja, 73. On contracts, see “White Bird Dons Paint and Feather; Make Those Injuns Stick Together,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, April 15, 1931, 3.

20 Wid’s Films and Film Folk, Inc., “Casting Agencies,” *Film Daily Yearbook*, 1928, 753.

21 Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1929, part 2, 4.

hand-woven coats . . . are attracting a great deal of attention among discriminating women who strive for the original, though beautiful in dress.”

The store provided a means of material support for members of the Native community in Hollywood and served as a hub for LA-based artists as well as students whom White Bird occasionally tried to turn into artists. She would tell Native youth frustrated by their economic prospects in the city, “Look at Chief Yowlach[i]e and Chief Standing Bear! Look at Will Rogers . . . Go and make some moccasins or beads or baskets or ollas or tom-toms or bows and arrows and I’ll sell them for you and give you every penny. Or I can show you where Indian singers and dancers make money.”²² This passage suggests that White Bird saw cultural production, economic success, and cultural uplift as linked and that she understood how the store served the Native community by providing a showcase for artists and networking for performers. Accounts of the store describe a lively atmosphere filled with Native actors and artists: “Any day one may find half a dozen Indians sitting around—Modern Indians who wear golf trousers and drive motor cars . . . They are singers, dancers, artists—all Indians with aspirations along artistic lines. . . . This artistic Indian colony is as bohemian as any artistic group in the Quarter Latin.”²³

White Bird’s shop also functioned as a Native community center by hosting powwows that Shippey called “the most interesting of all the social events in Los Angeles.” He describes one attended by forty-two people, when after two hours, “some of the young Indians slipped into another room, turned on the radio and began dancing modern dances.” In response, a frustrated Standing Bear “seized his tomtom and drowned out the music.”²⁴ In addition to holding powwows and hosting artists, White Bird and Yowlachie raised their profiles and brought attention to the store by performing at Indian pageants, social clubs, and churches and by participating in other civic events. These appearances typically drew upon romanticized stereotypes about Native life and cultures and, as with their similarly stereotypical performances on screen, were part of a larger negotiation involving performance, expectation, and identity.

The location of the American Indian Art Shop serves as a metaphor for the Native experience in Hollywood. On one side of Hollywood Boulevard stood an Orientalist movie palace, a monument to the modern industry that appropriated the romanticized tradition of a racialized other. Across the street was a Native art and community center that helped support and unite film workers from another romanticized, racialized other. Unlike Grauman’s theater, White Bird’s shop no longer exists, yet its location is a reminder of a vibrant Native community in Hollywood. Among the well-known figures who walked the red carpets at the theater were Native Americans, many marginalized or forgotten by film history, some involved in the festivities, and others who faced them from across Hollywood Boulevard. Los Angeles, like all of North America, is built on Indigenous land. Within this home to an industry built in part on narratives that justified the dispossession of Native lands, the

22 White Bird quoted in Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1930, part 2, 4.

23 Lee Shippey, “The Lee Side o’LA,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1929, part 2, 4.

24 Lee Shippey.

American Indian Art Shop was a physical and social hub that stood as a notice that Native people were still there.

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Kiara M. Vigil

Warrior Women: Recovering Indigenous Visions across Film and Activism

On March 28, 1973, the *Desert Sun* criticized Marlon Brando for sending “an Indian woman” to refuse his award for Best Supporting Actor for *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972) from the Academy of Motion Pictures. Celebrities in the audience and television viewers around the world were shocked when Sacheen Littlefeather (Apache) appeared in “fringed-leather and beaded moccasins” to announce Brando would “not accept the Oscar.” Together they wanted to draw attention to the long history of mistreatment of Native Americans by the film industry as well as the American Indian Movement’s (AIM) occupation of Wounded Knee.¹ The alliance between Brando and Littlefeather was an act of protest, a show of solidarity, and a call for change. Over forty years later, I had the honor of interviewing Littlefeather about this moment from her past.² She spoke candidly about the stakes of her appearance as an actor and as an activist. On stage that evening, Littlefeather worried about the prospect of violence, as a threatened and threatening John Wayne angrily paced backstage, and whether she might be arrested since police officers waited in the wings in case she upset the show’s organizers.

1 *Desert Sun*, March 28, 1973, California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu> (hereafter cited as CDNC).

2 Sacheen Littlefeather, oral history interview by the author, July 5, 2016.

Kiara M. Vigil, “Warrior Women: Recovering Indigenous Visions across Film and Activism,” *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 169–174.

I learned about these chilling details, and the tense atmosphere surrounding this moment of activism, through oral history work, and I am indebted to Littlefeather for gifting me with time, stories, and teachings. As we spoke, I was reminded of Kwe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *As We Have Always Done*, in which she writes, of Nishnaabeg intellectualism, that "meaning is derived from both repetition and context."³ Nishnaabeg intelligence cannot be decontextualized, as it must be understood "through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships."⁴ These relationships value difference and the agency of individuals to generate their own meaning. Teachings emerge out of particular lived experiences and must be understood within this context. As I built relationships with Sacheen Littlefeather and also with Lois Red Elk (Fort Peck Sioux), I remained attuned to how I learned from them as elders as well as actors and activists.

I came to this project through another web of relations as well, in search of new understandings about the life and activism of my great-grandfather, the Dakota actor Shooting Star. My research as a Native cultural historian depends upon building ethical relationships with my subjects, whether living or not. I approach research with a deep sense of respect and responsibility for the Native voices and stories I recover. Like Simpson, I am invested in complex learning that takes place within a network of Indigenous intelligence.⁵ Indigenous knowledge systems are "networked because the modes of communication and interaction between beings occur in complex nonlinear forms, across time and space."⁶ I highlight the networked contributions of Native people to American society to account for complexity and contradiction and to offer a fuller understanding of settler colonialism and Indigenous constellations of co-resistance since colonizers come to stay, to destroy in order to replace.⁷ As Patrick Wolfe argues, "invasion is a structure, not an event."⁸ Therefore, I look for the strategies Indigenous peoples use to resist the imposition of colonial structures onto and into their lives, from the past to the present.

For Littlefeather and Red Elk, the warrior women in this essay, there were arenas—social spaces, cultural performances, and work sites—through which they generated knowledge as acts of *survivance*, Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor's term for "an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories."⁹ Through their engagement with Indigenous networks of actors and activists, they shaped counter-narratives as acts of refusal. For Audra Simpson, "the politics of refusal" depend upon Indigenous refusals to engage with modern citizenship as defined by the settler nation.¹⁰ Both Littlefeather and Red Elk refused to comply with Hollywood's

3 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 32.

4 Simpson, 156.

5 Simpson, 14.

6 Simpson, 23.

7 Simpson, 231.

8 Patrick E. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

9 Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 5.

10 Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

imagined Indians. They were central in the “native hubs” constituting Los Angeles’s pan-tribal community, which were sites of social activity, community building, job training, and political activism for urban Indians living in diaspora.¹¹ Jay Silverheels (Mohawk) and Eddie Little Sky (Oglala Lakota) created one such critical hub for entertainers in the late 1960s—their Indian Actors Workshop was designed to support Native actors looking to perfect their craft and secure jobs beyond the stereotypical Western. Both Littlefeather and Red Elk found a sense of belonging in this space. There were other “hubs of networked relationships,” which emerged in Los Angeles during the mid-twentieth century, through fiestas, Indian clubs and centers, powwows, and expositions that empowered urban Indian people.¹² These “hubs,” as Renya Ramirez shows, helped to “transmit culture, create community, and maintain identity,” enabling an Indigenous internationalism to circulate throughout LA. Working across such “hubs,” urban Natives reimagined systemic alternatives to colonial approaches to work, culture, and politics.¹³ For Littlefeather and Red Elk, a career in the entertainment industry was about Hollywood as Indian Country.

I position these Native women as warriors because films and histories of Native resistance tend to celebrate the accomplishments of male-identified leaders within the American Indian Movement and other areas of Red Power. Historically, women warriors participated in fights for survival, such as the Battle for Greasy Grass, making this association both powerful and true.¹⁴ Working as performers, both Littlefeather and Red Elk turned to representation as a form of activism. Oral history constitutes another site of resistance, a mode of remembering and retelling that enables me to highlight Littlefeather’s and Red Elk’s voices and to deepen how we think about the intersections between entertainment and activism.

By 1973, most Americans had heard news about the Occupation of Alcatraz island by the Indians of All Tribes, which found support from white celebrities like Brando, Anthony Quinn, Jane Fonda, and the rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival.¹⁵ Littlefeather was no stranger to social activism, visiting Alcatraz during the Occupation when she was just a college student. Therefore, when Littlefeather used the Oscars to criticize the choices of moviemakers and non-Native actors—and by extension the “imperialist nostalgia” of moviegoers—she intimately linked her critique to a growing Red Power movement and connected the world of acting to activism in a profound way.¹⁶ When Littlefeather first moved to Hollywood, she found support and fellowship through the Indian Actors Workshop, under Jay Silverheels’s leadership. Silverheels was well known for portraying Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (ABC,

11 Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

12 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 44.

13 Ramirez, *Native Hubs*, 2.

14 Most settlers refer to this as the Battle of Little Bighorn.

15 Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*, 2nd ed. (New York: New Press, 1997).

16 Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” in “Memory and Counter-Memory,” ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, special issue, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 107–122.

1949–1957), and he worked with friends from the LA Indian Center to found the workshop while also serving on the Ethnic Minorities Committee for the Screen Actors Guild to influence how Hollywood imagined Indians.¹⁷

As Littlefeather got to know Silverheels, she asked him about why he agreed to play Tonto in the first place because it was such a demeaning role. She was both surprised and guided by his response: “Because, Sacheen, there were no other roles available for an Indian. If I didn’t take that role, and do the best I could, a White man would take it, and I thought it ought to be played by an Indian.” Littlefeather reflected on this comment and felt he was right.¹⁸ From the workshop to Littlefeather’s appearance at the Academy Awards, Native entertainers used a variety of strategies to challenge an American cultural imaginary that cast them as victims and savage primitives while also mourning their passing as an unfortunate, if inevitable, aspect of progress. Within this cultural milieu, they crafted new avenues for activism, leveraging what Kevin Bruyneel calls the “third space of sovereignty,” in which Indigenous political actors contest colonial rule by moving across spatial and temporal boundaries.¹⁹

Littlefeather’s remarks at the Oscars highlighted the fact that she was the President of the National Native American Affirmative Image Committee (AIC), which demonstrated some anticipated pushback to her protest and a desire to anchor her criticism in the study of film itself. The work of this committee entailed watching both television and film in order to report “about the stereotypes from the dominant society’s point of view.” In addition to underrepresentation in film and television, Littlefeather noted, “there was practically nothing that represented Native people in a positive light.”²⁰ As we talked, Littlefeather reflected on the importance of role models for Native women, given that most films privilege male actors. Ballerina Maria Tallchief was her “idol” and the “one person that I really looked up to because she was one of the only people that was really out there” as a model for Native women until Buffy Sainte-Marie.²¹ For Littlefeather, the work of the AIC was compelling because they collaborated with Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinx Americans to study mass media and make recommendations regarding affirmative action policies for both behind-the-camera and onscreen roles. She traveled to Washington, DC, to present their findings to the Federal Communications Commission, which “seemed interested” in what the group had to say, although what ultimately came of this visit is less clear.²² Still, Littlefeather learned a lot as the only Native woman involved with the group. She became a spokesperson for Indian Country to represent the needs and desires of Natives as both entertainers and consumers who wanted to see positive representations of themselves in Hollywood.

Like Littlefeather, Lois Red Elk remembered the importance of Native women as role models, and she too was involved in the Red Power movement,

17 “TV’s Tonto Insulted,” *Desert Sun*, July 27, 1973, CDNC.

18 Littlefeather, oral history interview.

19 Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xiii.

20 Littlefeather, oral history interview.

21 Littlefeather.

22 Littlefeather.

specifically at Wounded Knee. Through her participation in the Indian Actors Workshop, she was inspired and supported by Buffy Sainte-Marie, a leading figure in the group, who “stipulated that only Native American people be cast in . . . *The Virginian* [NBC, 1962–1971],” for which Red Elk got her first role.²³ Littlefeather and Red Elk were not close friends but shared confidants and traveled in the same social circles—Red Elk came to Los Angeles before Littlefeather, arriving in 1968 through the Federal Indian Relocation program.²⁴ Red Elk understood Relocation as an assimilative process, which “didn’t work for me.”²⁵ Instead, she found community through singing and dancing on the weekends with other Natives in Los Angeles. Initially, she was “relocated” to San Jose, with some other 40,000 Natives, before eventually moving to LA where 68,000 Indian people lived. There she worked to launch the LA Indian Center: “I was instrumental in helping with that [by] sitting on the board.” The center was a hub for Native activists, a place to organize everything from powwow groups to an Indian health center. Red Elk wanted to play a large part in the pan-tribal community in LA: “I was absolutely [one of the] strongest and biggest supporters of anything that was urban Indian back in the 60s to early 70s.”²⁶

Red Elk’s initial foray into entertainment began as a radio and talk show host in the late 1960s. From then until 1983, she lived in LA and was a member of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. In addition to acting jobs in film and television, Red Elk worked as a technical advisor. Now, at eighty, she occasionally sees herself on TV and is bemused by the endurance of her career. She seems proudest of the film *Lakota Woman* (Frank Pierson, 1994), which merged her real life story with Hollywood’s portrayal of Native activism in the 1970s (her character, Gladys Bissonette, was at Wounded Knee). Although *Lakota Woman* was filmed over twenty years after the occupation of Wounded Knee, many of the Native activists who were there appear in it. Red Elk recalled, “it was like an old home week for a lot of them. They were just all glad to see each other. The casting was wonderful.”²⁷ She also worked as a technical advisor for the film after meeting Jane Fonda (the film’s producer) during the Occupation of Alcatraz.²⁸

Despite the success of *Lakota Woman*, Red Elk remains critical of her early experiences in the film industry. She notes, “you have to first realize that the old-time cowboy and Indian movies were horrible. You would have an Apache riding on a Shoshone horse, wearing a Crow headdress, speaking Lakota—and, it’s supposed to be done on the Plains, and all you see in the background is Canyon de Chelly and the Arizona landscape.”²⁹ Her activism extended beyond the LA Indian Center, Alcatraz, and Wounded Knee to correcting

23 Lois Red Elk, oral history interview by the author, May 3, 2019.

24 Kenneth R. Philp, “Stride toward Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952–1960,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1985): 175–190. Relocation encouraged assimilation through participation in a wage-labor economy and followed termination as a federal policy that severed the relationship between the US government and many Indian nations.

25 Red Elk, oral history interview.

26 Red Elk.

27 Red Elk.

28 Red Elk.

29 Red Elk.

Hollywood's misrepresentations through her work as a technical advisor. She helped directors and producers become more thoughtful about cultural depictions of Native characters and story lines: "It was important to talk to some of the directors, [so] they realized that we were not characters, that we were human beings with a language and a culture and a philosophy of taking care of the earth and the land."³⁰

Talking with Littlefeather and Red Elk, tracing their stories as warrior women who represented Indian Country in Hollywood, I engage with reciprocity as an Indigenous value and transformative act. It is a methodology that emphasizes the development of relationships based on co-resistance in the Indigenous communities they inhabited. For Natives in diaspora, creating islands of Indigeneity outside of the spatial constructs of settler colonialism is essential to both survival and resurgence.³¹ The exchange of stories between Littlefeather, Red Elk, and myself, as Native women, is a "(re)mapping" of the history of entertainment, Indigenous activism, and urbanity.³² By recording and circulating their stories, we collectively practice solidarity, offering Indigenous visions for the future.³³ I built my relationships with them based on an ethic of care, respect, and a deep understanding that "[w]e are all related, and this is all Indigenous land."³⁴ In so doing, I gained new connections and insights to add to an Indigenous body of knowledge concerning Native acting and activism.

For Red Elk and Littlefeather, Indigenous networked relations mattered, and Indigenous representations mattered. They still matter. Both remain engaged with Indigenous sovereignty and culture. In an interview with NBC in 2016, Littlefeather was asked about Johnny Depp playing the role of Tonto in Disney's *The Lone Ranger* (Gore Verbinski, 2013). She recalled her response, an act of refusal and survivance, to me: "Why don't we move on from the stereotype? . . . It's already been done."³⁵ Accounting for the interconnected web of relations that brought me into the same orbit with Littlefeather and Red Elk is a way of imagining a future in which Native experiences and stories are valued, respected, and celebrated. This will be a future in which no one really cares to see the Lone Ranger anymore, let alone Tonto.

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30 Red Elk.

31 Michael Asch, John Borrows, and James Tully, eds., *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 4.

32 Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 45.

33 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 66.

34 Simpson, 81.

35 Littlefeather, oral history interview.

Karrmen Crey

The Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance: Indigenous Self- Government in Moving Image Media

In 2014, the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival hosted “indigiTALKS: Following that Moment,” a session that focused on experimental video projects created by Indigenous artists in Canada in the early 1990s. Their work was framed as an origin point for the ideological and formal strategies developed by subsequent generations of Indigenous artists who not only challenge colonial representations of Indigenous people but also test and reflect on the video apparatus and its role in these meaning-making activities.¹ This session emphasized the role that the Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance (AFVAA), an Indigenous media- and arts-based organization, played in this history as a catalyst for the rise of Indigenous media in Canada. Four years later, at the 2018 festival, this sentiment was reinforced through a retrospective for one of the AFVAA’s original and core organizers, Marjorie Beaucage (Métis), an accomplished experimental filmmaker, activist, and community leader in Canada.² Lisa Myers (Anishinaabe), the curator of both sessions, is

1 Lisa Myers, *Of the Moment in the Moment* (Toronto: VTape, 2014).

2 Lisa Myers, “Marjorie Beaucage: Retrospective,” imagineNATIVE, accessed March 2,

Karrmen Crey, “The Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance: Indigenous Self-Government in Moving Image Media,” *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 175–180.

not alone in recognizing the AFVAA's contributions to the Indigenous media wave that began in Canada in the early 1990s.³ However, its public acknowledgment at imagineNATIVE, the largest Indigenous media festival in the world, recuperates the AFVAA's role in this phenomenon and in the development of contemporary understandings of Indigenous media as a creative practice and a cultural category.

One of the AFVAA's goals was to support the development of an Indigenous media language that links Indigenous cultural politics of the era with the formal features of screen representation. The AFVAA operated on the principle of Indigenous self-government, a term arising from Indigenous sovereignty movements of the latter part of the twentieth century in North America. Indigenous self-government refers to the inherent right of Indigenous peoples to govern themselves according to their own nation- and community-specific political traditions and structures.⁴ Consistent with this principle, the AFVAA advocated for Indigenously controlled programs and resources within Canadian cultural institutions. The AFVAA's mission was to enact institutional self-government by "visioning new partnerships, based on Self Government [*sic*] principles, with cultural institutions and funding agents."⁵ These partnerships were intended to support the development of an infrastructure for Indigenous media and arts by creating dedicated resources and Indigenously controlled spaces within these institutions to sustain Indigenous creative production. The exact design and operations of these spaces were necessarily open and undefined in order to parallel the principle of self-government: Indigenous self-government does not have content per se, or, in other words, there is not one prescriptive form of self-government that can be applied to different Indigenous communities and nations; instead, self-government must be developed and tested on the ground as the right and purview of Indigenous communities.⁶ The AFVAA's partnerships echoed these premises but also sought to extend them into art and media production, where the politics of self-government was to be exercised and represented through experiments with the formal features of media technologies. The AFVAA thereby contributed to the production of an influential and widespread discourse of Indigenous media that weds cultural politics to the textual and technological features of moving image media, as I will discuss in a small sample of the organization's activities.

The roots of the AFVAA were established in April 1991 at a meeting that brought together forty-five Indigenous filmmakers, performers, artists, and journalists to create an organization that would promote and practice

2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180924094844/https://imaginenative.org/2018-marjorie-beaucage-retrospective>.

- 3 Maria de Rosa, "Studio One: Of Storytellers and Stories," in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 328–341; and Cheryl L'Hirondelle, "Re:lating Necessity and Invention: How Sara Diamond and The Banff Centre Aided Indigenous New Media Production (1992–2005)," *Public* 54 (2016): 25–35.
- 4 Dan Russell, *A People's Dream: Aboriginal Self-Government in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 11.
- 5 Marjorie Beaucage, "Aboriginal Film & Video Art Alliance: Background History" (Duck Lake, Saskatchewan: Marjorie Beaucage Personal Archives, 1991).
- 6 Russell, *A People's Dream*, 11.

Aboriginal self-government in the arts.⁷ The AFVAA subsequently took shape as a group consisting of a thirteen-member Steering Committee with representatives from regions across Canada and established artists and media practitioners as advisors, including Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki), Wil Campbell (Cree-Métis), Bernelda Wheeler (Cree, Assiniboine, Salteaux), and Maria Campbell (Métis).⁸ The AFVAA's mission was to bring Indigenous politics into the cultural sphere by "promot[ing] and encourag[ing] the interdisciplinary art form of film and video production" along with creating "new cultural storytelling forms within the principles, values and traditions of Aboriginal Self Government."⁹ This statement set the terms of the AFVAA's art-based activism by invoking storytelling to affirm the continuity of Indigenous cultural forms into the present; it also conveys the group's intention of testing the applications and limitations of media technologies for representing Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and issues. Such testing is an expression of self-government, a dominant Indigenous political discourse of the 1990s that affirmed that Indigenous rights and sovereignty remain unextinguished in Canada.

The AFVAA envisioned itself as a national organization operating on self-government principles as well as a hub for the collection and distribution of information and resources relating to Indigenous artists and filmmakers.¹⁰ Its scope echoes that of a national cultural institution, suggesting that it would operate parallel to such institutions in keeping with a national partnership model but within terms determined by those Indigenous people participating in its creation. Commenting on the founding of the AFVAA, Loretta Todd (Cree/Métis), one of its key organizers, stated, "[w]e hold as a philosophy the practice of self-government and the exercise of Aboriginal rights in the building of our own cinema and television industry/community."¹¹ Todd's characterization of "Indigenous self-government" has to do with control over the means of production, though she does not envision this work in isolation from other institutions or groups. Rather, Todd asserts that "[w]e want to work with other film and video industries and communities, but we want to do so from a site of power, and not as part of someone else's power, always on the margins."¹² Todd makes clear that while Indigenous people's access to and autonomy over media resources is a cornerstone of Indigenous media, Indigenous production does not occur in isolation from other arenas of cultural production.

In order to develop its organizational capacity, the AFVAA sought partnerships with mainstream cultural institutions in which space for Indigenous participation could be created and supported. AFVAA representatives also reached out to federal cultural institutions and funding bodies, including the Canada Council for the Arts (CCF), to advocate for similar partnerships. As

7 Beaucage, "Background History," 1991.

8 Beaucage, 1991.

9 Beaucage, 1991.

10 Marjorie Beaucage and Delegates, *Storytellers and Media: A Gathering* (Banff, Alta. Banff Centre for the Arts, 1993), 4.

11 Loretta Todd, "We Dream Who We Are," *Talking Stick* (1994): 7–8.

12 Todd, 7–8.

Beaucage explains, “this organizational restructuring would be an exercise of Indigenous self-government because it would transfer control over Indigenous resources and decision-making to Indigenous people, and involve Indigenous people in mainstream processes: None of us had ever been invited to sit on media arts juries. We weren’t a part of any of that mainstream process, or eligible as independent artists. The other disciplines only had the superstars of visual arts. Now every single department at the Canada Council has an Aboriginal arts component.”¹³ The CCF was responsive, and in 1994, it founded the Aboriginal Arts Secretariat, which oversees grants to support Aboriginal artists and later funded and participated in AFVAA initiatives.¹⁴

One of the AFVAA’s first initiatives was to take over the Pincher Creek Film Festival in Edmonton, Alberta.¹⁵ At the time, the Alberta government was looking to transfer management of the festival to a non-Indigenous film-based organization, but the Alliance intervened, arguing that the festival should serve Indigenous interests.¹⁶ Beaucage explained that the Pincher Creek festival was highly problematic, often programming films with colonial representations of Indigenous people and deterring Indigenous filmmakers with unaffordable submission fees. When the AFVAA took over the film festival and renamed it the Dreamspeakers Film Festival, they reorganized the administrative mechanisms that limited Indigenous participation, which included dispensing with submission fees for Indigenous filmmakers.¹⁷ Such changes reflected one of the founding principles of the AFVAA, which was to remove barriers to Indigenous participation in the arts by forging relationships with sympathetic organizations and institutions. The value of affiliation between groups, Beaucage explains, was an extension of Indigenous values that emphasize cultivating and sustaining community relations. In this model, the festival welcomed the submission of any Indigenous-produced film and video production. Their work was screened under the principle of giving back, which refers to a reciprocal practice in which Indigenous artists share their work and receive feedback from festival organizers and audience members. Dreamspeakers Film Festival can be seen as an early test of Indigenous governance in the cultural sphere, which the AFVAA continued to explore with other institutions, including its three-year partnership with the Banff Centre.

In 1992, Sara Diamond, then-director of the Banff Centre’s Television and Video Program, approached Todd with an invitation to participate in the Banff Centre’s artists programs.¹⁸ The Banff Centre, located in the scenic town of Banff, Alberta, is one of Canada’s oldest and most renowned art-based institutions. Affiliated with Alberta’s postsecondary system, the Banff Centre offers

13 Marjorie Beaucage, interview by the author, July 4, 2014.

14 Canada Council for the Arts, “Arts & Culture in Canada Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Arts in Canada,” Canada Council for the Arts, 2009, <http://canadacouncil.ca/-/media/Files/CCA/Research/2009/08/InuitFactSheetEN.pdf>; and Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, “The Moccasin Telegraph Goes High-Tech,” *Talking Stick* (Spring 1994).

15 First Nations Filmmakers Alliance, “Discussion Paper for ‘Making It’: Issues and Recent Developments in the First Nations Film and Video Community,” in ‘Making It’: A Symposium for First Nations Filmmakers and Videographers, Regina, Alberta, October 8, 1992.

16 Michelle d’Auray, “Aboriginal Film and Video Makers’ Symposium,” National Film Board of Canada, April 12, 1991.

17 Beaucage, interview.

18 Loretta Todd, interview by the author, August 8, 2014.

professionalization programs for artists in all disciplines and is known for the Banff Method, a nine-week residency program designed to immerse participants for several weeks in a creative environment in order to spur innovation. Both Beaucage and Todd had participated in these residencies and therefore had existing relationships with the institution. They envisioned that the AFVAA would form a partnership with the Banff Centre wherein the AFVAA would develop autonomous programs and spaces for Indigenous media and art experimentation. The residency program provided a template for testing these kinds of initiatives, adapted and transformed under the direction of the AFVAA to operate in the service of Indigenous creative and political interests.

The AFVAA's adaptation of the residency program was their first experiment in self-government, institutionally *and* aesthetically. The activities of the residency program attempted to wed Indigenous cultural politics to aesthetics, specifically to express self-government through the production and textual features of screen content. Though the AFVAA's scope was interdisciplinary, Beaucage relates that the AFVAA focused on film and video because Indigenous artists did not have widespread access to moving image industries.¹⁹ Furthermore, Beaucage explains that film and video have unique properties that are relevant to other art disciplines: "[w]hether you're a writer or a visual artist . . . you can all be a part of that film and video process . . . and music and sound, and all of those things are all in film. It's like the seventh art . . . it's all in film and video . . . and it's story."²⁰ Here Beaucage makes a formalist argument about moving image media in which the technology can be shaped to the ideological and political concerns of Indigenous peoples. The formal properties of media technologies become a consideration of Indigenously produced representation, a link that was tested through the AFVAA's residency program.

This program resulted in the Public Service Announcement (PSA) project, which consisted of six video-recorded PSAs produced by a cohort of Indigenous artists over the nine-week residency program in 1993. Following the national scope on which the AFVAA was premised, PSA participants were drawn from across Canada and included Joane Cardinal-Schubert (Kainai), Gary Farmer (Cayuga), Ruby-Marie Dennis (Dakelh), Isabelle Knockwood (Mi'kmaq), Crissy Redcrow (Blackfoot), and Angie Campbell (Dene). The PSA project aligned the conceptual with the formal; because "self-government" was being debated and interpreted in political and social arenas, the project asked participants to debate the concept as a part of the production development process. This involved in-depth group discussions that ultimately shaped each PSA. The project emphasized collaboration, with all participants taking part in one another's productions. Simultaneously, the process

19 The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which was established in 1991, identified that Indigenous people's access to film and media was a priority, stating that "access to mainstream media is critical to achieving wider understanding of Aboriginal identity and realities" because the mainstream media "often contain misinformation, sweeping generalizations, and galling stereotypes about Natives and Native affairs." The commission identified that Indigenously controlled media—which includes film, communications, and journalism—play a critical role in "the pursuit of Aboriginal self-determination and self-government." *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3—Gathering Strength*, Ottawa, 1996, 3.6.11–3.6.16, <https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/6874>.

20 Beaucage, interview.

sought to maintain the individual “vision” of each participant’s PSA in order to recognize the specificity of each person’s Indigenous heritage and nation, a design echoing the principles of Indigenous self-government. To different degrees, each of the PSAs takes an experimental approach; as a result, they are remarkably different stylistically, though they are of a common genre and share a political agenda. Thus, the AFVAA modeled a form of collaborative creativity, generating interpretations of self-government represented in and by the PSAs themselves. The PSAs manifest one realization of Faye Ginsburg’s concept of “embedded aesthetics,” which seeks to “draw attention to a system of evaluation that refuses a separation of textual production and circulation from broader arenas of social relations.”²¹ Embedded aesthetics points to the material contexts of Indigenous media production as sites of meaning that come to bear on screen content, of which cultural institutions are a part.

While the AFVAA organizationally dissolved in 1996, its members went to their respective regions to continue their work on Indigenous self-government. Beaucage observes that “we still continued to work locally in our respective areas, like Saskatchewan, Ontario, B.C. . . . everyone worked wherever they were to continue to work against appropriation of our stories and work towards telling our own and having our workshops in different areas with gatherings of our own on a smaller scale . . . to try to continue that vision in other ways.”²² Beaucage underscores the AFVAA’s broad national and institutional legacy, which was borne out by their deserved recognition at the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival. Their activities, and the cultural politics and cultural theory driving them, mark an origin point of a model for a specifically Indigenous mode of media production and simultaneously historicize their contribution to an influential discourse in which sociocultural context must be taken into account for understanding the representational strategies of an Indigenous media text, a figure-and-ground model that is pivotal for contemporary approaches to understanding the production and interpretation of Indigenous moving images.

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21 Faye Ginsburg, “Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 365–382.

22 Beaucage, interview.

Jacqueline Land

“Since Time Im-MEME-morial”!: Indigenous Meme Networks and Fan-Activism

Indigenous digital meme networks on Instagram have skyrocketed in recent years, starting when Blackfoot visual artist and activist Arnell Tailfeathers began posting original memes to his Instagram account @arnell.tf in 2016.¹ Today there are over two hundred active Indigenous meme accounts on Instagram, with more popping up daily. These accounts constitute a relational though heterogeneous digital community made up of users from tribal communities across the United States and Canada. Combining mainstream film and television imagery with popular meme templates and digital culture, Indigenous meme artists on Instagram deliver Indigenous critique through fannish engagements with mainstream media and digital culture. While US media industry logics devalue Indigenous audiences, Indigenous-controlled digital spaces cater to Indigenous users and popularize Indigenous fan sensibilities. I argue that the Indigenous meme community on Instagram creates a supportive space for Indigenous users, despite their erasure and exclusion from mainstream fan platforms.

In the digital era, new tactics of media activism have emerged that allow everyday media consumers not only to create what Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles call “networked counterpublics” by circulating

¹ Arnell Tailfeathers (@arnell.tf), Instagram, 2016–2019. Tailfeathers deactivated his account in September 2019, and the majority of his memes are no longer easily retrievable online, although I have screenshots saved in my personal archive.

Jacqueline Land, “‘Since Time Im-MEME-morial’!: Indigenous Meme Networks and Fan-Activism,” *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 181–186.

counter-discourses to mainstream representations but also to speak directly to media industries.² Furthermore, fandom, digital culture, and media activism have become closely associated. Lori Kido Lopez theorizes fan-activism as a strategy that uses the skills and language of fandom to launch targeted activist campaigns and put pressure on the media industries, such as in the 2009 fan-led protest launched by Racebending.com against the whitewashed casting of *The Last Air Bender* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2010).³ Fan of color communities deploy digital forms such as hashtags, videos, and memes to express their love for and frustrations with mainstream media texts, foster critical discussions, raise awareness about issues of representation among other fan-allies, and launch public-facing protests.

Fan studies has been redefined in the digital age and has further shifted in response to interventions by critical race theorists that have deepened understandings of fan of color communities as well as the role of racialization and whiteness as structuring logics within fandom.⁴ Such studies have addressed how digital media has facilitated new visibility for fans of color, the exclusion and erasure of fans of color from fan spaces, and the relationship between fan-activists and industry efforts around diversity. Additionally, race and fandom scholars have begun to debate how essentialized identity comes into play within fan of color communities. They raise questions about how scholars might reinforce stereotypes of fans of color by associating them only with certain characters, texts, and genres as well as the ways that fans of color themselves might inadvertently perpetuate fixed notions of racial identity through the use of certain racial signifiers in fan fiction/art, fan commentaries, or fan protests.

Responding to such questions, Rukmini Pande uses John L. Jackson's notion of racial sincerity as a framework to explore how fans of color use racial scripts to "build their own relationships with texts they acknowledge are flawed but that still offer a sincere articulation of their social realities."⁵ Fans of color thus develop their own culturally specific ways of relating to texts, even as Pande reminds us that African American, Asian American, Latinx fans, or "fans of color," are not monolithic categories. Rather, such identities are strategic assemblages "informed by a shared experience of marginalization and misrepresentation within white character-centric fandom texts and communities."⁶ Pande's reframing highlights the agency of marginalized fans to define themselves and engage in fandom through and beyond racial expectations.

2 Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, "Hijacking #myNYPD: Social Media Dissent and Networked Counterpublics," *Journal of Communication* 65, no. 6 (2015): 932–952, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12185>.

3 Lori Kido Lopez, "Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in *The Last Airbender*," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 5 (2011): 431–445, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877911422862>.

4 See Benjamin Woo, "The Invisible Bag of Holding: Whiteness and Media Fandom," and Jillian M. Báez, "Charting Latinx Fandom," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, ed. Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott (New York: Routledge, 2018).

5 Rukmini Pande, *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 88. See also John L. Jackson Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

6 Pande, *Squee from the Margins*, 89.

One of my primary contentions in this essay is that attending to the experiences and practices of Indigenous digital fan networks can complicate discourses within fan scholarship and offer insight into the current position of Indigenous consumers within mainstream media culture. My approach draws on the work of critical Indigenous theorist Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Goenpul), who has criticized Indigenous studies' reluctance to engage with the role of race and racism in the lives of Indigenous peoples and to prioritize instead discourses tied to Indigenous sovereignty and cultural difference. This decision, she argues, has inadvertently reified cultural difference and foreclosed theorizing the ways in which race operates in the daily struggles of Indigenous communities.⁷ Moreton-Robinson's framework does not negate the continued importance of Indigenous nations, tribal citizenship, or cultural continuity in how Indigenous communities understand themselves. Rather, she highlights how the colonial project constructs Indigeneity as a racial category to manage Indigenous presence and disavow Indigenous sovereignty.

Applied to Indigenous fans and fandom, this framework reveals the commonalities between Indigenous fans and other fans of color as racialized subjects whose experiences with fandom are structured by whiteness. It can also help us to understand the autonomy of Indigenous fans to engage with one another, their love objects, and dominant fan spaces in ways that both reveal and resist racialized expectations. Finally, I am interested in the ways that some assumptions about fan-activism change when we explore how Indigenous fans operationalize discourses around cultural resurgence, sovereignty, and decolonization through popular culture. In the remainder of this essay, I analyze how the Indigenous meme community on Instagram operates as a networked counterpublic in which users apply the skills and sensibilities of media fandom and internet meme production for Indigenous consciousness-raising and political organizing. I focus on the ways that Indigenous memes represent a unique model of fan-activism that posits the compatibility and mutually constitutive relationship between the seemingly contradictory efforts of radical Indigenous resurgence movements and more conservative struggles for visibility within neoliberal media culture.

Memes proliferate within digital fan spaces and can be understood as "the continuation of norms that are rooted in the history of pop culture genres and fan cultures."⁸ They reflect individual creativity while asserting affiliation within a specific digital meme subculture. For example, Lori Morimoto identifies how meme subcultures allow anime fans to operate on two registers of cultural affinity.⁹ Creators prove themselves as legitimate voices by correctly using an existing meme formula while also displaying their savviness and taste

7 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

8 Limor Shifman, "A Meme Is a Terrible Thing to Waste: An Interview with Limor Shifman," interview by Henry Jenkins, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, February 19, 2014, <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2014/02/a-meme-is-a-terrible-thing-to-waste-an-interview-with-limor-shifman-part-two.html>.

9 Lori Morimoto, "The 'Totoro Meme' and the Politics of Transfandom Pleasure," *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 4, no. 1 (2018): 77–92, https://doi.org/10.1386/eaqc.4.1.77_1.

as an anime-ophile. Though these overlapping literacies may appear overly niche to outsiders, they can be extremely satisfying to insiders who experience “the unspeakable bliss” of intertextual recognition.¹⁰ Furthermore, Morimoto underlines that digital meme communities, emerging in response to globalized media and convergence culture, can best be understood as examples of “transfandom.”¹¹ Whereas digital fan communities were long associated with message boards, groups, and conventions dedicated to a single fan object, transfandom communities circulate a vast repertoire of popular culture references that mirrors the ways individual community members migrate from one fan object to the next. Understanding Indigenous meme networks on Instagram as an example of transfandom, we can see that Indigenous users find community and take immense pleasure in the interplay between Indigenous identity and politics, internet memes, and fandom.

Mohawk digital Indigenous studies theorist Steven Loft describes the ways that Indigenous users claim digital space as Indigenous territory and forge connections between digital tools and Indigenous epistemologies through relationality.¹² Indigenous meme artists lay claim to meme-making as Indigenous practice tied to traditional culture and decolonial action and use the form to map Indigenous presence within digital platforms. The title of this essay comes from a meme posted to the account @since.time.immemorial titled “my origin story.”¹³ The meme uses the popular “Pun Dog” meme template, a three-panel image series of a husky puppy playing with a toy that, according to its entry on Know Your Meme, is most often used for bad puns and anticlimactic punch lines.¹⁴ In @since.time.immemorial’s version, the puppy says “Indigenous ppl making memes have been doing it since . . . time im-meme-morial.” The self-amused puppy stares back expectantly, waiting for you to laugh. The phrase “since time immemorial” appears in the Supreme Court case *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), a foundational case in US federal Indian law, wherein Chief Justice Marshall formally defined Indian nations as “distinct political communities” with inherent sovereignty to govern themselves derived from “their original natural rights as the undisputed possessors of the soil from time immemorial.”¹⁵ While the US legal system has inconsistently recognized tribal sovereignty, the phrase continues to be used by Indigenous intellectuals and activists engaged in the struggle for Indigenous rights. Reclaimed from the legal context, @since.time.immemorial uses the phrase to claim memes as an Indigenous practice and, in so doing, asserts Indigenous rights to occupy digital space.

10 Morimoto, 78.

11 Morimoto, 78.

12 Steven Loft, “Mediacosmology,” in *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art*, ed. Steven Loft and Kerry Swanson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2014), 175.

13 @since.time.immemorial, “my origin story,” Instagram photo, October 3, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Boe3fKKHcue/>.

14 “Pun Dog,” *Know Your Meme*, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pun-dog>.

15 *Worcester v. Georgia*, 31 U.S. (6 Pet.) 515 (1832), 8 L.Ed. 483.

Indigenous meme artists' self-theorizations ground their work in the language of Indigenous decolonization. Such memes circulate alongside and through expressions of fandom and set the terms of Indigenous fan-activism that draws on decolonial goals but also works on a more basic level to increase the visibility of Indigenous communities as active media consumers fighting for better representations and treatment by the media industries. Thus we might compare Indigenous fan-activism to the ways that people of color engage in consumer culture and fandom as a means of legitimation within US racial hierarchies.¹⁶ Indigenous fans are in a similar position of vying for recognition, with fandom becoming a useful avenue for consumer-citizenship within contemporary neoliberal media culture.

Meme artists challenge Indigenous erasure by creating a collective digital archive of Indigenous audiences' active consumption and reactions to mainstream media. This network exists despite the structuring logics of whiteness that have controlled the images of Indigenous people in popular media, neglected the needs and desires of Indigenous audiences, and relied on racialized fan labor. Like other fan of color communities, Indigenous fans put considerable time and effort into transformative fan practices that make existing media content more relevant and interesting for themselves instead of pressuring media companies to implement changes. Dallas Smythe would describe this practice as making their own "free lunch."¹⁷ This frequently takes the form of artists making memes that center on background or minor Indigenous characters from mainstream texts and reinscribing them as characters with added nuance, biting humor, and agency. Meme artists also work with images of Indigenous celebrities such as Adam Beach (Anishinaabe) and Taika Waititi (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui).

Yet Indigenous memes also demonstrate how Indigenous fans "make do" beyond mainstream representations of Indigeneity. In an interview with *CBC News*, Arnell Tailfeathers stated, "Unfortunately there's not enough Indigenous movies and TV shows . . . we're stuck using people from other ethnicities to represent us."¹⁸ Given the limited supply, Indigenous meme artists have established shared visual norms and experiments in race-bending, a practice "where a media content creator has changed the race or ethnicity of a character."¹⁹ Kristen Warner identifies race-bending as an empowering practice for fans of color, who "racebend to reinsert versions of themselves into texts within which they have long been ignored."²⁰ Indigenous fans participate in

16 See Rebecca Wanzo, "African American Acafandom and Other Strangers: New Genealogies of Fan Studies," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 20 (2015), para. 2.1, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2015.0699>.

17 Dallas W. Smythe, "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1, no. 3 (1977): 1–27.

18 Lenard Monkman, "Indigenous Meme Creators Point out Harsh Truths with Dark Humour," *CBC News*, September 19, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/indigenous-meme-creators-instagram-1.4828555>.

19 "What Is Racebending?," *Racebending.com*, 2020, <https://racebending.tumblr.com/what-is-racebending>.

20 Kristen J. Warner, "ABC's *Scandal* and Black Women's Fandom," in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*, ed. Elana Levine (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 40–41.

race-bending by photoshopping braids, beaded earrings, or traditional regalia such as ribbon skirts to reimagine canonically non-Indigenous characters as Indigenous, with characters ranging from George Costanza to Pikachu.²¹

Despite performing this fan labor, Indigenous meme creators are not content to remain an afterthought to media companies. One meme artist recreated the *Avengers: Endgame* (Joseph and Anthony Russo, 2019) poster with an all-Native cast, inviting users to comment with ideas for other movie genres and franchises they would want to see with a focus on Indigenous characters.²² Similarly, fans like @emo_ndngirl666 used memes to express anger after Netflix announced its plan to cancel the original series *Chambers* (2019)—the first show to cast an Indigenous actress, Sivan Alyra Rose (San Carlos Apache), in a leading role—after one season.²³ The desires and frustrations of Indigenous fans can help us to see how the community seeks recognition from media industries.

Memes provide a source of immense pleasure shared across many fan communities, including Indigenous fandom. Baby Yoda from the series *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* (Disney+, 2019) became an internet sensation in the fall of 2019, and Indigenous fan communities claimed the character as their own, producing hundreds of memes that depict “NDN Baby Yoda” learning from elders and aunts, dressed in regalia and dancing at powwows, and honing “the force” to fight against colonialism. The outpouring of love across Indigenous social media networks and the spread of these memes garnered attention from prominent Indigenous bloggers as well as news outlets.²⁴ The galvanization of Indigenous *Star Wars* fans around Baby Yoda brought new visibility to this community and reveals the power of memes and fannish organizing to speak back against exclusion and build momentum from the digital ground up.

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21 See @knockout.kokum, Instagram photo, October 16, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/B3s1Lk7F_8t/.

22 See @rez.n8tive.memes, “Movie is a legend,” Instagram photo, April 26, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwtSaGrhOcj/>.

23 See @emo_ndngirl666, “@netflix pulls and cancels first Native American woman centered show after 1 season,” Instagram photo, June 19, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/By5nf15FTu7/>.

24 Rhiannon Johnson, “‘So Darn Cute’: Indigenous Artists and Memers Embrace Star Wars series’ Baby Yoda,” *CBC News*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/baby-yoda-indigenous-art-memes-1.5382902>.

Dustin Tahmahkera

Honor Scenes: Honoring Misty Upham's Critical Interventions

In the Numu tekwapu, the Comanche language, I say I Itsa tupuuni u pahna?aitu. This is an honor scene. Like honor songs for Native Peoples that recognize, respect, and relate Indigenous history, events, and accomplishments, honor scenes engage Natives' relations with film and media to tell Indigenous-centric stories. Honor scenes are both on- and offscreen narrative compilations expressed through films, academic essays (like this one), and other storytelling media. As a dual framework of reciprocal relations in honoring, such scenes recognize, read, and honor the work of Natives who use media to recognize, represent, and honor Native America.

Continuing this legacy of honoring in Indian Country, this essay represents a heartfelt homage and hermeneutic for reading cinematic scenes featuring the late Blackfeet actress Misty Upham, thirty-two years young when she passed in October 2013 on the Muckleshoot Reservation southeast of Seattle. Upham's parents are making a film about their daughter and her death, *11 Days: The Search for Misty Upham*, in reference to the number of days she was missing before relatives, not local police, found her body. Upham's family relate her death to #MMIW, a hashtag that references the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women in North America, and her father's "one request in speaking up was to ensure that Misty is not simply seen as a tragic figure but as a real person with

Dustin Tahmahkera, "Honor Scenes: Honoring Misty Upham's Critical Interventions," *JCMS* 60, no. 2 (Winter 2021): 187–193.

ambition, hopes and dreams, and as a beautiful human being.”¹ This is my attempt to honor some of Upham’s critical onscreen interventions in cinema cultures not always accustomed to recognizing Natives in the here and now or to honoring our individual and tribal medicines, our strengths and talents. This is to honor a creative Native whose filmic scenes resulted from years of intense labor honing her craft as an actor and—among other gigs to pay the bills—a housekeeper. This also is to honor her related offscreen activism for the rights of elders (Caring Across Generations), domestic workers (National Domestic Workers Alliance), reservation youth (Indigo Children Troupe), and animals (PETA).²

Upham began studying theater in the early 1990s in Seattle after she and her family left her first home, the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. “I needed to leave,” she said, “I had no dreams and no way to make a dream.”³ At the age of thirteen, she joined a summer workshop on Native acting and began working, as she wrote, “from the very bottom of the local community theaters” to “starring roles in . . . prestigious classical theater companies,” often as “the first Native” on the companies’ cast lists.⁴

Misty Upham’s honor scenes comprise offscreen *and* onscreen acts of intervention that break down the representational restrictions in American filmmaking. After receiving stereotypical “Pocahontas” and “rez girl” roles early in her career, Upham resisted them and proactively sought out roles of complexity and multidimensionality that she made her own in a cinematic climate nearly void of recognizably Native characters.⁵ Honor scenes also recognize Upham’s work to honor us, Native America, and our ongoing struggles for social justice. To get beyond “leathers and feathers or drunk on a reservation,” she wrote, “I’ve worked my hardest to show how diverse and wonderful our people are.” Upham believed that films were Native America’s “greatest ambassadors”; analyzing her film work provides insight into the relationship between her offscreen struggles and onscreen roles.⁶

My intent is to honor her efforts to have a say in what’s at stake: Native women’s human rights to be who they are, to be sovereign agents in what I have called the “representational jurisdiction” over the contested racialized

- 1 The trailer for *11 Days* opens with this MMIW-related slide: “Comprehensive data on violence against Native American women, on tribal lands, in the United States, does not exist since no federal, state Indian agency or organization systematically collects this information.” See Charles Upham, “Documentary Film Fund: 11 Days,” October 20, 2016, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/11DAYS>. For more on MMIW, see Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women, <https://www.csvanw.org/rmmiw/>; and Native Women’s Wilderness, <https://www.nativewomenswilderness.org/rmmiw>.
- 2 Maranda Pleasant, “Misty Upham Interview,” *Origin*, December 31, 2013, <http://www.marandapleasantmedia.com/2013/12/31/misty-upham-interview/>; Upham’s article in *The Daily Beast*, reprinted at *Portside*, January 21, 2014, <https://portside.org/2014-01-21/she-worked-hard-money>; and “Misty Upham for PETA,” PETA.org, video, October 17, 2014, <https://www.peta.org/videos/misty-upham/>.
- 3 Quoted in Ryan Gilbey, “Misty Upham Obituary,” *Guardian* (US), October 22, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/22/misty-upham>.
- 4 Misty Upham, “The Word,” *Native American Indigenous Cinema and Arts*, 2006, no longer available online.
- 5 On “recognizably Native” representations, see Dustin Tahmahkera, *Tribal Television: Viewing Native People in Sitcoms* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 24–32.
- 6 Upham, “Word.”

and gendered economies of casting. Representational jurisdiction concerns the competing claims over representing how Native actresses and the characters they portray should *be* and what they can *become* as recognizably Native and recognizably human beings. Such jurisdiction is at the core of productions, policings, and perceptions of Indigenous ways of knowing and representing.⁷ As Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn theorizes, “The role of Indians, themselves, in the storytelling of Indian America is as much a matter of ‘jurisdiction’ as is anything else in Indian Country. . . . how the Indian narrative is told, how it is nourished, who tells it, who nourishes it, and the consequences of its telling are among the most fascinating—and, at the same time, chilling—stories of our time.”⁸ The scenes of captivating and chilling contestations over the representational jurisdiction of Native roles have been playing out since the beginning of cinema.⁹

Through onscreen roles from 2002 to 2014, writings, interviews, and social media, Upham strived for performative exchanges between actors and fans that conveyed a humanizing Indigenous aesthetic in opposition to static and stiff Hollywood Indian roles. As she once put it, “You don’t have to say a word or make an expression.” Rather, “you project energy and that’s what reaches people.”¹⁰ Upham’s performances are critical interventions in the storyworlds of Hollywood and popular imagery of Indigeneity, tactics that Mapuche scholar Luis Cárcamo-Huechante calls “indigenous interference” in mainstream channels of colonialism.¹¹ As Upham explained in her move from theater to film, “I started focusing on the little reactions that . . . hardly anybody would notice, but were so important to me, like moving your eyebrow or licking your lips.”¹² To illustrate, in a scene from Harrison Sanborn’s 2012 low-budget independent short *Every Other Second*, Upham plays Nurse Kelley, who tells a patient awaking from a car accident that his girlfriend did not survive the wreck. Frame by frame, her changing eye movements toward and away from the patient convey deep empathy. Rather than dismiss the inaudible motions as throw-away moments, the subtle performance Indigenously humanizes visualities of connection, in which every movement matters to the actor, which she wants, in turn, to matter to the audience. Such creative and critical tactics and nuances constitute honor scenes, which counter the

7 For more on “representational jurisdiction,” see Dustin Tahmahkera, “Hakaru Maruematu Kwitaka? Seeking Representational Jurisdiction in Comancheria Cinema,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 100–135, <https://doi.org/10.5749/natiindistudj.5.1.0100>.

8 Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1996): 57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1184942>.

9 See Joanna Hearne, *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Michelle H. Raheja, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); and Beverly Singer, *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

10 Quoted in Brian D’Ambrosio, “Misty Upham’s Torment,” *HuffPost*, October 17, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/misty-uphams-torment_b_6001170.

11 Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, “Indigenous Interference: Mapuche Use of Radio in Times of Acoustic Colonialism,” *Latin American Research Review* 48 (2013): 50–68, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2013.0056>.

12 “Acting in Independent Films,” Panel Discussion, YouTube video, posted by “WGBHForum,” May 12, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_LiviVrHQqak.

dishonorable scenes in Hollywood's misguided efforts to govern the ungovernable: Indigenous modernity, agency, and affect.

Misty Upham called out not only Hollywood Indians but also Native independent cinema. In 2006, she recounted a conversation with another Native actor: "I don't want to keep doing these roles where I'm pregnant and crying. I want more diversity. What do you want?' They smiled and said, 'I don't care. I'm just doing this for the money. I'll play any alcoholic role I receive 'cause it'll give me a fat paycheck.'" Upham then reflected, "I felt dirty after hearing this. Was I a film whore as well? Is money more important than integrity? Was I perpetuating the 'rez-indian' stereo-types I hated so much?"¹³

Upham does not specify which movie she was working on during this on-set break. Perhaps it was her 2002 debut film performance in Cheyenne-Arapaho director Chris Eyre's *Skins*, in which Zahn McClarnon's character beats and screams at her as he "justifies" his violence by telling tribal police she cheated on him. Or Eyre's *Edge of America* (2003), in which her character, a kick-ass pre-Schimmel sisters high school basketball player with college dreams, suddenly and rather miraculously becomes pregnant, with no narrative explanation, and is publicly screamed at and kicked off the team by the coach as she cries and apologizes for "messing up."¹⁴ Or the TV miniseries *Dreamkeeper* (ABC, 2003), for which director Steve Barron was astounded when Upham did her own stunts, including climbing a seven-hundred-foot cliff that the director would not go near. Her character, called "chief's daughter" in the credits but once called "honor woman" by her onscreen husband, stands on a mountain and cries and cries, preparing to sacrifice herself so that her people will be rid of non-Native-inflicted smallpox. Or there is the 2002 episode of *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* (BBC1, 2002–2004), a popular British series that filmed a few episodes in Navajo Country. She plays a young pregnant Native woman in labor, with again no sight or mention of a partner, screaming in a distant shot from her bed, her sole line on-camera: "I think the baby's coming!"

Long after the Native and non-Native male directors of these projects wrapped and moved on, Upham enacted Audra Simpson's Indigenous sovereign practice of "refusal" to collaborate with these marginal roles and the on-camera abuse that could shape real-world perceptions of Indigenous women.¹⁵ She honored herself, and Indian Country, by refusing to play what M. Elise Marubbio calls "celluloid maidens," associated with sexualized perceptions of LaMalinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea, figures that Michelle Raheja calls the "unholy traitor-whore trinity in the American imagination."¹⁶ She was seeking to break free from what Raheja has called (referring to Native actresses like Molly Spotted Elk in early cinema) "ideologies of (in)visibility."¹⁷

13 Upham, "Word."

14 On sisters Shoni and Jude Schimmel (Umatilla), see "Two Sisters Bring Native American Pride to Women's NCAA," *All Things Considered*, NPR, April 8, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/04/08/176597459/two-sisters-bring-native-america-bride-to-womens-ncaa>.

15 Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 9 (2007): 67–80, <https://junctures.org/index.php/junctures/article/view/66/60>.

16 M. Elise Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); and Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*, 254.

17 Raheja, "Ideologies of (In)Visibility: Refacing, Gender, and Moving Images," in *Reservation Reelism*.

As Upham explains in her 2006 essay, “I went home seeking solitude in hopes of getting back to the person I was in the beginning. I took myself away from work and the scene completely [as] . . . I knew I had to shed all parts of the biz and start from scratch.”¹⁸ “I promised myself,” she reflected years later, “that if I wanted to update our image, change perceptions, and diversify, I would have to stop playing stereotypes. I lost out on easy money, had to turn down friends’ projects and made some enemies for refusing to continue down that path.”¹⁹

During this time in the early 2000s, director Courtney Hunt found Upham on NativeCelebs.com because Hunt wanted a “Native American instead of an Italian” to co-star as Lila Littlewolf in a short film, which, five years later, became the feature film *Frozen River* (Courtney Hunt, 2008).²⁰ After two years of rejecting roles in Native independent cinema, Upham signed on for Hunt’s feature film and prepared by gaining forty pounds and cutting her hair very short to embody an anti-“Pocahontas aesthetic” for the character’s look. With the role of Lila, she claimed jurisdiction in representing “the modern Native woman.”²¹ Later, as an honored guest who accepted the “Best Feature” honor for *Frozen River* at the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival, Upham said her “goal” was “to paint Natives in a modern perspective” and “change the roles,” rhetoric representing Indigenous modernity and agency.²²

The impact of Upham’s decisions to leave the Blackfeet Reservation and Pocahontas and rez-girl roles, and the critical praise for Upham’s breakthrough performance in *Frozen River*, brought increased exposure, honors, and opportunities for her to enact her goal. Subsequent modern roles include Upham’s performance as the Cheyenne caretaker Johnna Monevata in *August: Osage County* (John Wells, 2013) in scenes with Meryl Streep and others (see Figure 1). When she received the call to audition for Monevata, Upham was cleaning a house for extra money. “From the first script read through,” Upham later explained, “I decided she would be trained like a care-taker. I am a housecleaner and the first thing we learn is how to go unnoticed.”²³ French director Arnaud Desplechin more than noticed Upham in *Frozen River* and cast her in his 2013 feature *Jimmy P: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian*, starring Benicio Del Toro, Gary Farmer (Cayuga), Michelle Thrush (Cree), Lily Gladstone (Blackfeet), and other Indigenous actors. Desplechin told *Indian Country Today*, “When I saw the movie *Frozen River*, I understood that Native Americans could represent themselves.”²⁴ His words are a trans-Atlantic testament to her impact on French and Indigenous cinema.

18 Upham, “Word.”

19 Laureano Ralón, “A Conversation with Misty Upham,” *Figure/Ground*, July 25, 2014, <http://figureground.org/a-conversation-with-misty-upham/>.

20 “Acting in Independent Films.”

21 “Acting in Independent Films.”

22 “Tribute to Misty Upham—Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival,” YouTube video, posted by “Ellie Bulow,” November 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFqBnD2iuIE>.

23 Ralón, “Conversation with Misty Upham.”

24 Quoted in Dominique Godreche, “Jimmy P: Director: ‘I Was Obsessed with Not Betraying the Community,’” *Indian Country Today Media Network*, October 1, 2013, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/2013/10/01/jimmy-p-director-i-was-obsessed-not-betraying-community-151523>.

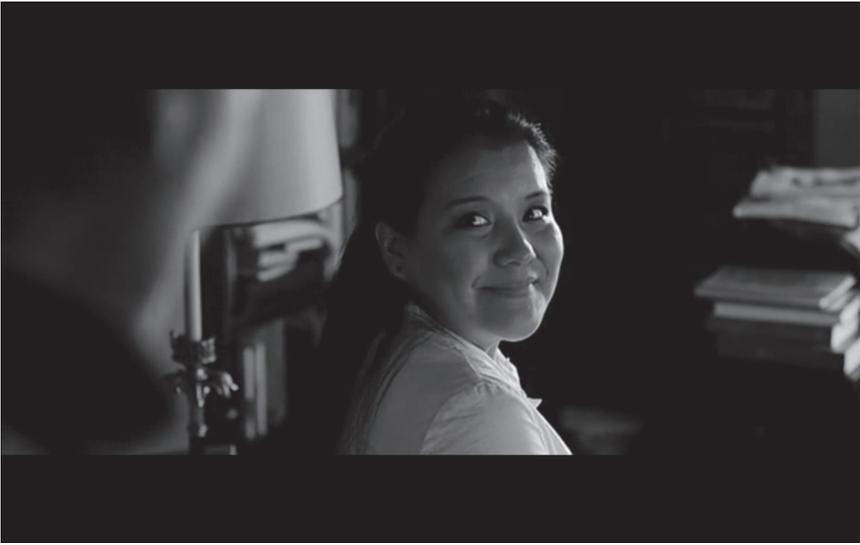


Figure 1. Blackfeet actress Misty Upham as Johnna Monevata in *August: Osage County* (Weinstein Company et al., 2013).

Because Desplechin also filmed some of *Jimmy P* in Blackfeet Country in Browning, Montana, the director helped to bring Upham back to the reservation where her life began, which activated a dialectic of reciprocity. As she explained on the *Jimmy P* set, “Coming back to Browning to work on the film was probably the strangest experience I’ve ever had because the beginning of my journey was here. And to come back with this type of production . . . It’s like coming home on a golden chariot!”²⁵ She was, as she says, “coming full circle to the reservation I left to fulfill my dream.”²⁶ Having traveled the world with her films, having found her empowering extended tribal relations in new cinematic comrades and teachers, and having renewed and honed her craft of performative medicine, she could give back and share some of her medicine to inspire an Indigenous community. Reciprocally, the reservation could provide a site of filming, a site of Upham family history and Blackfeet history, and a site of *feeling* what “it’s like coming home on a golden chariot.”

Itsa tapuuni u pahna?aitu. *This* is an honor scene, a powerful honor scene of Blackfeet reciprocity, with a French guy thrown in for good measure, resulting from Misty Upham’s critical interventions in representational jurisdiction. This is an honor scene, among others, that may continue to unfold and develop for generations to come because honor scenes never end. They are always becoming, and the Indigenous performance networks of critics, viewers, directors, writers, and casts and crews in Indian Country and beyond—we are always here watching, writing, singing, speaking, listening, feeling, and honoring the storied scenes set before us and affectively with us.

25 “Making of” DVD Extra, *Jimmy P*, directed by Arnaud Desplechin (IFC Films, 2013), DVD.

26 Quoted in Gilbey, “Misty Upham Obituary.”

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