

# Native American Representation Matters:

An intersectional study of the confluence of playwrighting, casting practices, and progressive productions as they relate to diversity and inclusion in theatre.

Created for the students of the McLennan College Theatre Department

Kathleen Laundry, Professor of Costume Design

# Acknowledgements

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# Why do we need to know this?

American theatre, film, and television have a long and problematic history with systemic racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and ableism:

Although BIPOC make up 70% of the world's population (and 67% of the world's non-Christians), white performers held 76% of the roles during the decade between 2006-2016 on Broadway. Of the 24% of the roles that went to minority actors (which includes all non-whites plus actors with disabilities) only 10.7% of those were non-traditionally cast. In other words, roles that could have been filled by a performer of any ethnic background, nearly always went to a white actor. White actors also earn higher wages than BIPOC actors.

In 2017, this group comprised 1.7% of the US population which is 5.6 million people representing 566 recognized tribes. Studies of film representation by USC Annenberg's Inclusion Initiative have found an absence in particular of female Native American characters in top U.S. films. SAG casting data cited the number of Native American performers in lead and supporting roles was only 87 in 1985, peaked at 436 in 1993, but fell off after that. Less than 1% of a total of 3,895 speaking or named characters across the 100 top films of 2018 were American Indian or Alaska Native people.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we should know better and do better. We hope through education and deliberate action toward inclusivity in our productions as well as our classes, to increase the representation of these under-represented groups in both our student population and the plays we produce.

<https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=3&lvlid=62>

<https://time.com/3916680/native-american-hollywood-film/>

<https://howlround.com/how-liberal-arts-theatre-programs-are-failing-their-students-color>

<https://variety.com/2016/film/news/movie-tv-diversity-study-hollywood-straight-white-male-1201711586/>

[http://www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/aapac\\_2015-2016\\_10year\\_report.pdf](http://www.aapacnyc.org/uploads/1/1/9/4/11949532/aapac_2015-2016_10year_report.pdf)

<https://allarts.org/2019/03/study-finds-decrease-in-broadway-diversity-following-a-record-breaking-year/>

# Native Lands

In the initial Spanish conquest of the Americas it is estimated that 8 million indigenous people died. It was the first large scale genocide in the modern era.

In South America, there are more than 350 indigenous groups that total more than 18 million people.

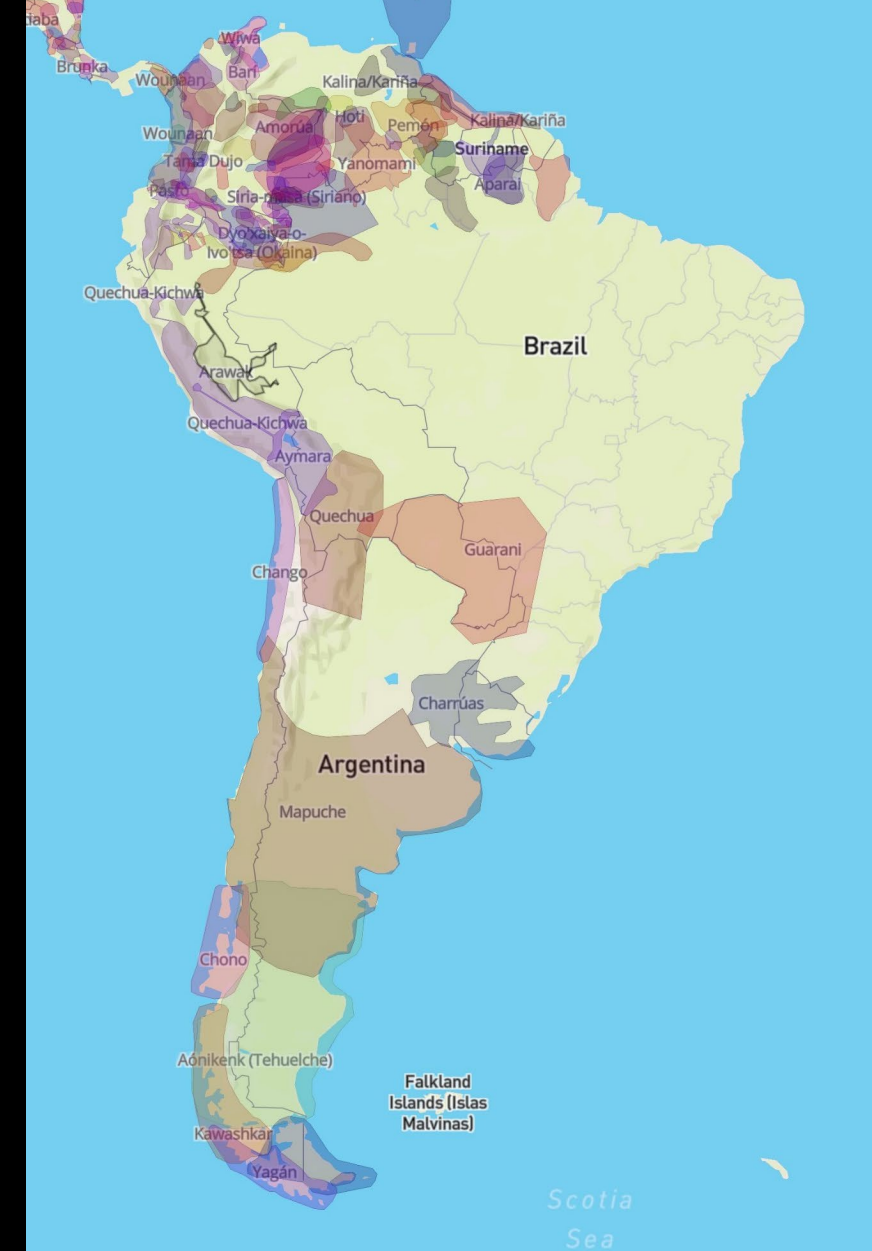
In Central America there are 29 indigenous groups comprising almost 7 million people which make up 16.24% of the total population.

In the US there are 574 indigenous groups comprising 2.9 million people or .9% of the total population.

In Canada there are 50 First Nations groups comprising more than 1.5 million people or 4.9% of the total population.

If you click on the link below, it will take you to an interactive map where you can zoom in on each area so that you can read the names of each tribe that was originally living on the land. Tribes were migratory and territories overlapped.

[http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes#:~:text=An%20Overview,villages\)%20in%20the%20United%20States.www.native-land.ca](http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes#:~:text=An%20Overview,villages)%20in%20the%20United%20States.www.native-land.ca)

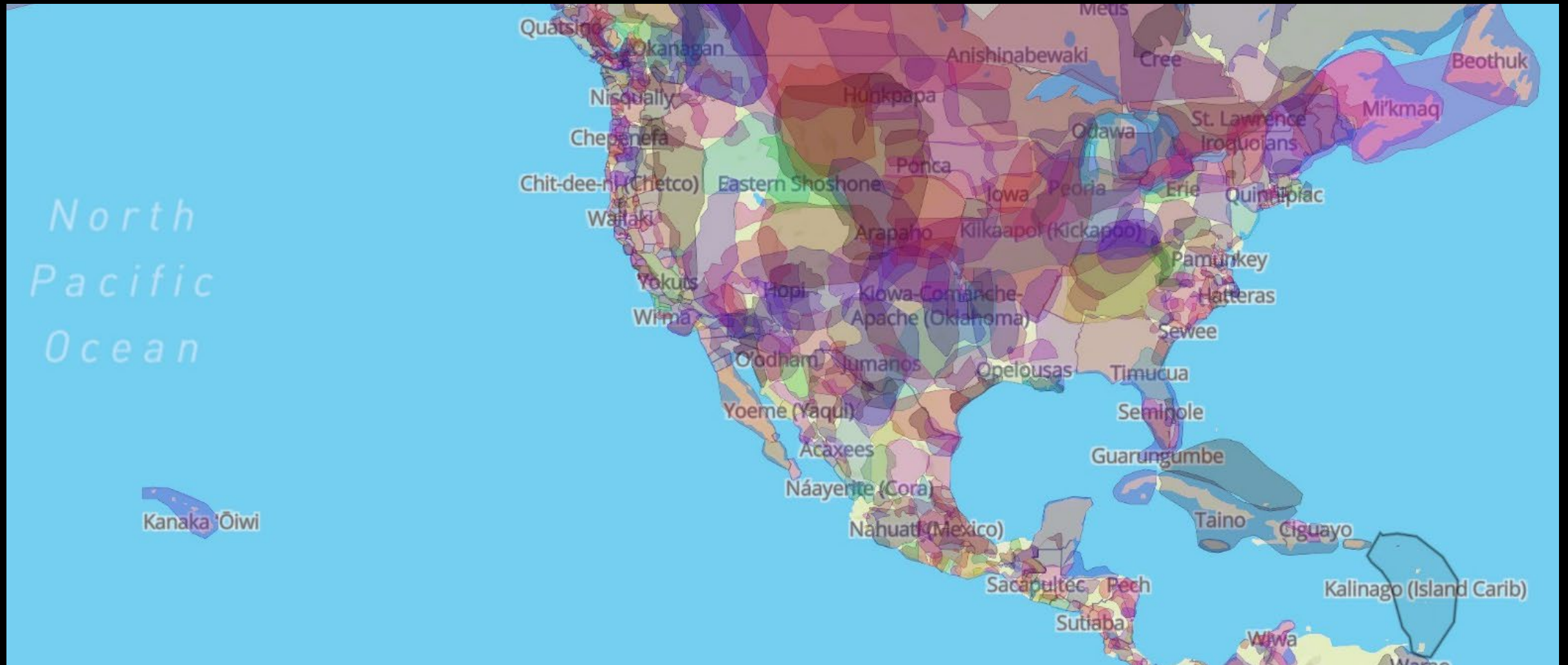


## South America

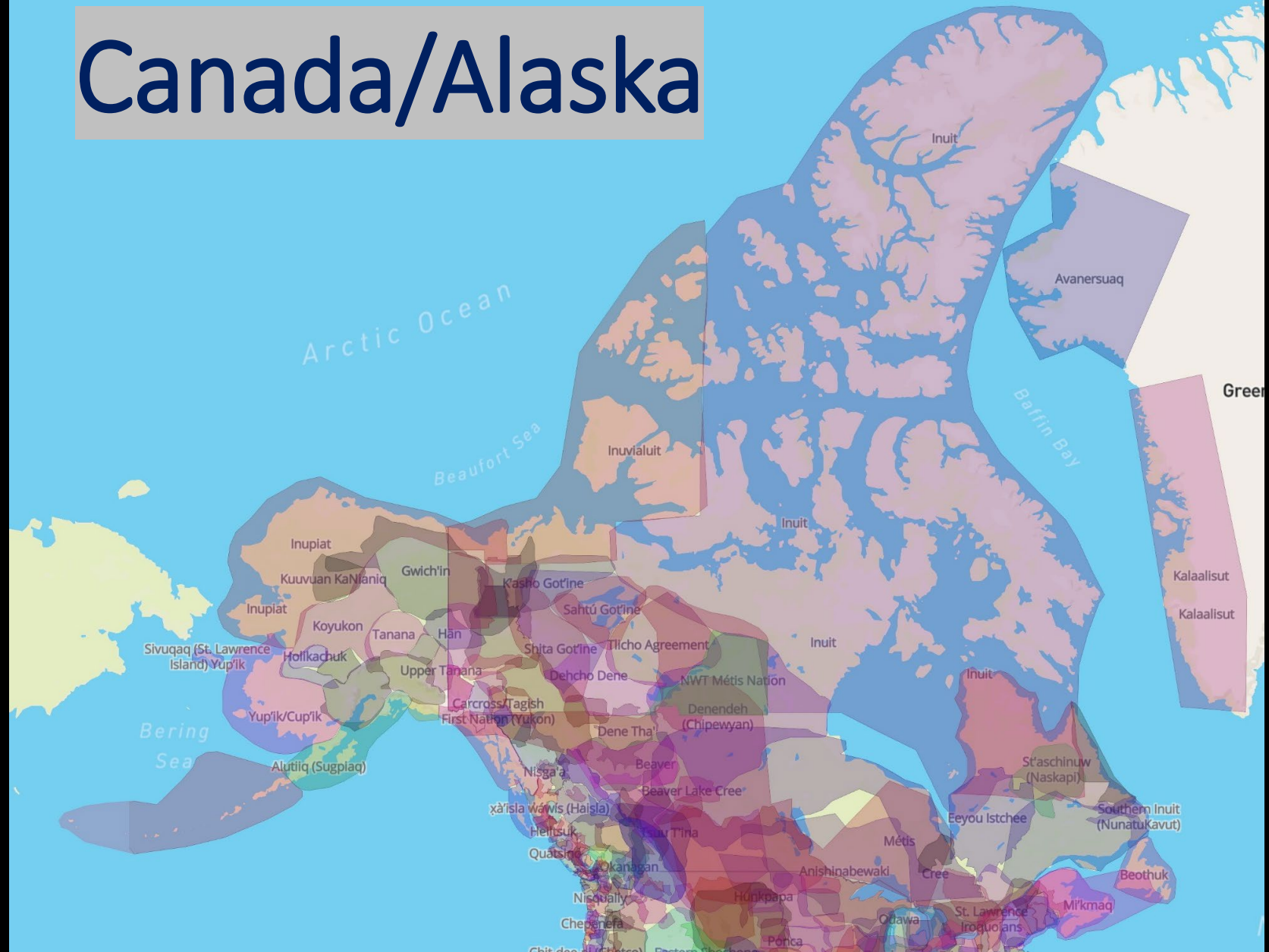




# United States of America



# Canada/Alaska



# Indigenous Reservations

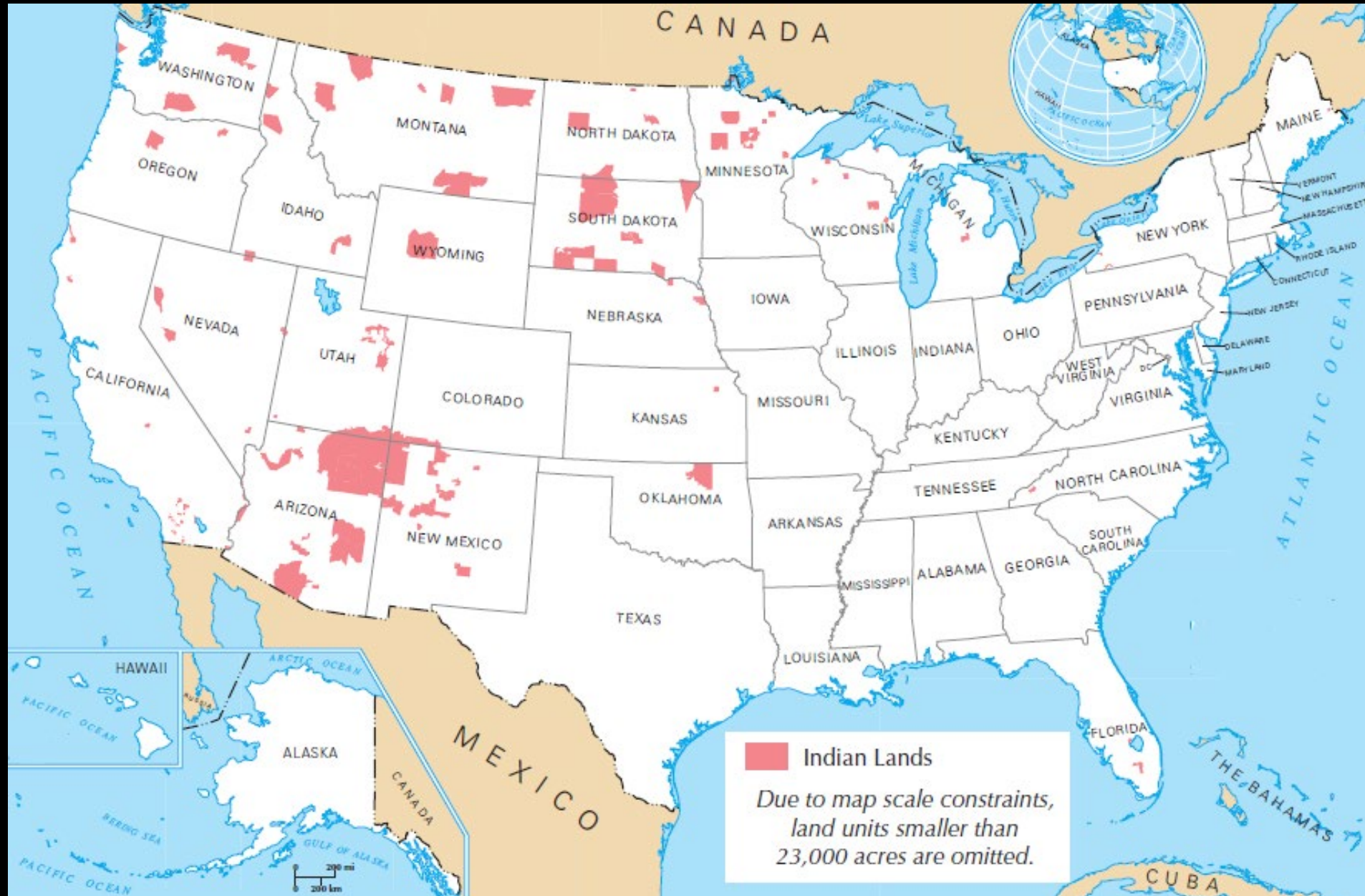
The Indigenous Reservation system in the US, resulted in the forceful removal of Indigenous peoples from their native lands. In 2012, there were over 2.5 million Native Americans, with about 1 million living on reservations. There are 574 recognized tribes and only 326 Indian reservations. The collective geographical area of all reservations is 56,200,000 acres, approximately the size of Idaho. “Most tribes have experienced economic, education, housing, health, and other problems at levels of severity rarely seen in most other American communities.”

- Unemployment on many Reservations ranges from 40 to 80 percent.
- Fewer than 9 percent of Native Americans earn a bachelor's degree or higher (compared with more than 20 percent for all races).
- 32 percent of Native Americans had incomes below the poverty level (compared with 13 percent for all races).
- American Indian death rates from accidents, diabetes, liver disease, and tuberculosis are between three and five times that for all races, and the years of productive life lost are more than 1.5 times that of all races in the United States.
- Forty percent of Reservation housing is considered substandard, compared with 5.9 percent of housing generally; 21 percent of reservation dwellings are overcrowded, and 16 percent lack adequate plumbing.

[https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/evaluation-tribal-welfare-work-grants-program-initial-implementation-findings/socioeconomic-circumstances-indiancountry#:~:text=Examples%20of%20the%20difficult%20socioeconomic,from%2040%20to%2080%20percent.&text=Almost%20one%2Dthird%20\(32%20percent,13%20percent%20for%20all%20races\).](https://aspe.hhs.gov/report/evaluation-tribal-welfare-work-grants-program-initial-implementation-findings/socioeconomic-circumstances-indiancountry#:~:text=Examples%20of%20the%20difficult%20socioeconomic,from%2040%20to%2080%20percent.&text=Almost%20one%2Dthird%20(32%20percent,13%20percent%20for%20all%20races).)



# Reservations in the United States



# Reservations in Canada

In the 2016 census there were 1,673,785 First Nations people living in Canada.

- The **unemployment** rate was 18.5% (compared to non-Aboriginals at 3.8%)
- 30.4% have a **Bachelor's degree**, compared to 64.7% of non-Aboriginals.
- 81% of reservation households have **income** below the poverty level.
- First Nations people **die** at rates from 1.5 (men) to 3.75 (women) higher than non-Indigenous people of the same age and gender.
- In 2014 **housing** on Reservations had reached a “crisis level” including a shortage of units, overcrowding, mold contamination, and a high proportion of homes in need of repair.



# The Hueco (Waco) Indians

From the [Waco History website](#):

“The city of Waco derives its name from the agrarian Indian tribe that originally resided in the area. The Hueco, or Waco Indians were a band of the Wichita tribe that arrived in Central Texas in the 1700s. Life in Waco Indian Village centered upon the tribe’s agrarian pursuits. The Wacos farmed crops such as melons, pumpkins, lima beans, and corn. During planting and harvesting seasons, they resided in their permanent village, which consisted of beehive-shaped dwellings that were constructed from poles and thatched with grasses and willow. After harvesting the crops in the fall, the Waco Indians traveled the plains, hunting deer and buffalo in order to feed the tribe. While hunting, they lived in makeshift, temporary teepees. Accounts differ on the disappearance of the Waco Indian village either to smallpox or a Cherokee raiding party, but a permanent Waco Indian village no longer existed upon the Brazos River after 1830. The loss of the village dealt a serious blow to the Waco Indians. Encroaching settlers forced them to move slowly farther and farther up the Brazos River.

The tribe signed several treaties in the mid-nineteenth century with the US government. Each treaty referred to the Waco, Tawakoni, and Wichita people by the name “Wichita.” The first treaty gathered the Wichita at the Brazos Indian Reservation in North Texas, on the Brazos River, a few miles south of Fort Belknap. After a treaty in 1859, federal troops moved the Wichita to a reservation in Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. In 1900, the government broke up the reservation territory into individual plots, ending the Wichita Indians’ communal way of life. The Waco Indians became a part of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes and continued to reside in Anadarko, Oklahoma. In 1912, Clint Padgitt brought a group of the Waco Indians back to Waco in order to participate in an exhibition at the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition. Escorted by Indian fighter John Ross, the Waco Indians resided in a fabricated village, exciting much interest and drawing record crowds. They lived in teepees, did war dances taught to them at the beginning of the exposition, and wore native “costumes,” curious combinations of modern and native clothing.”

Amanda Sawyer, “Waco Indian Village,” *Waco History*, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://wacohistory.org/items/show/46>.

The land that MCC sits on, as well as our homes, schools, churches, and businesses was stolen from the Hueco people. If you've been to the Cameron Park Zoo, you can still see the replicas of their huts in the Brazos River Exhibit.

**Wichita Grass Hut** c. 1927: The Waco Indians lived in grass huts similar to the one in this photograph. These large dwellings—composed of a wooden frame covered in thatched grass—typically housed ten to twelve beds and were common in areas with warmer climates, such as Central Texas.

Source: Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. Creator: Edward S. Curtis, 1927.







In 1912, organizers of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition brought a “village of genuine Waco Indians” to the event. These members of the Wichita Affiliated Tribes were descendants of the Waco Indians who resided in Waco before 1849. The tense, uncomfortable expressions of the Waco Indians in this photograph are evidence of the ways in which the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition failed to honor the culture of Waco’s original inhabitants. Cotton Palace organizers designed the “Waco Indian Village” on the fairground’s War Path to entertain white visitors and cater to their imaginations fed by crude racial stereotypes.

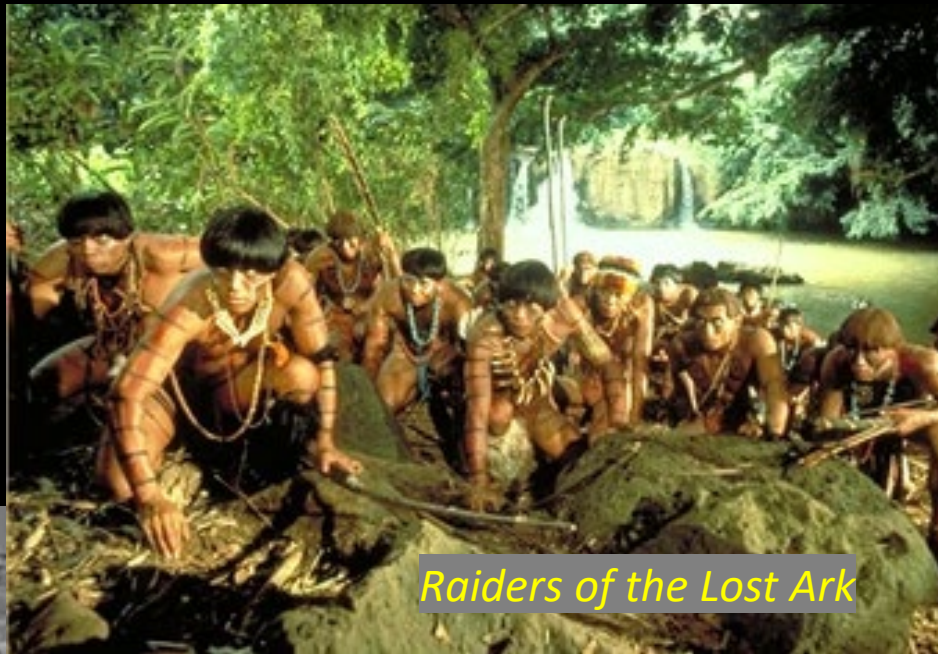
Source: Image courtesy of the Texas Collection, Baylor University. Creator: Fred R. Gildersleeve.



# Native American Tropes

- **Savage Redskin:** Bloodthirsty Native Americans who only want to kill white people. The Apaches in *Stagecoach and Calamity Jane*, the Hurons in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Hovitos and Ugha tribes from *Indiana Jones*, Pelegostos tribe from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, The Pawnee in *Dances with Wolves*, The Apache in *The Deserter*, all the Headhunter tribes on *Gilligan's Island*.
- **Noble Savage:** a character who is a member of a barbaric tribe and because of that identity is perceived as being more in tune with nature and therefore of higher moral fiber than white people. Tonto in *Lone Ranger*, all the "Indians" in *Davy Crockett*, Disney's mini-series, every Lakota in *Dances with Wolves*. Chingachgook in *Last of the Mohicans*.
- **Indian Maiden:** slender young woman who travels with father/brothers on journeys as well as help mother/sisters in the tent. Accidentally falls in love with a white man Tiger Lily in *Peter Pan* is the quintessential example. Chon Wang's wife in *Shanghai Noon*, Lily Joseph in *White Fang 2*, Sokanon in *Frontier*, Pocahontas, Stands with a Fist in *Dances with Wolves*.
- **Hollywood Indians:** These characters have tipis, totem poles, tomahawks, and talk like Tonto. They wear braids, beads, and buckskins, and feathers are part of everyday dress. If they encounter white people they think they are gods.
- **Magical Native American:** See Magical Negro. Mani from *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, almost naked guy from *The Doors*, Wolfen, Old Lodge Skins in *Little Big Man*, Johnny Sixtoes in *Desert Heat*, Johnny Depp's Tonto in *The Lone Ranger*, every role that Floyd Red Crow Westerman every played, *Walker, Texas Ranger*, and Chief in *Wonder Woman*.
- **Talks Like Tonto:** pidgin English with phrases like-- how, heap big, ugh, paleface who speaks with forked tongue, papoose, peace pipe, pow-wow, Big Chief, wompum, firewater, etc...

# Savage Redskin



*Raiders of the Lost Ark*



*Dances with Wolves*



*Stagecoach*

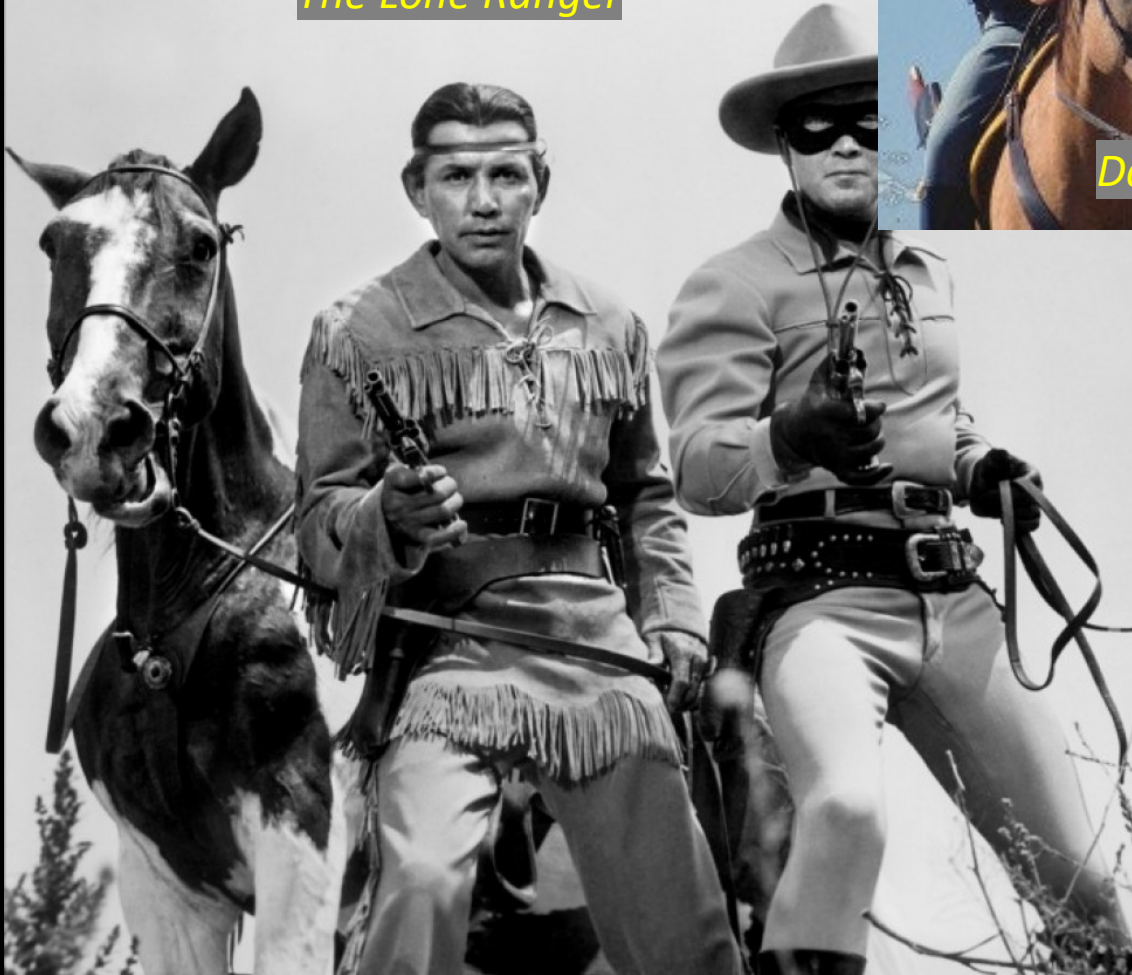


*Pirates of the Caribbean*



# Noble Savages

*The Lone Ranger*



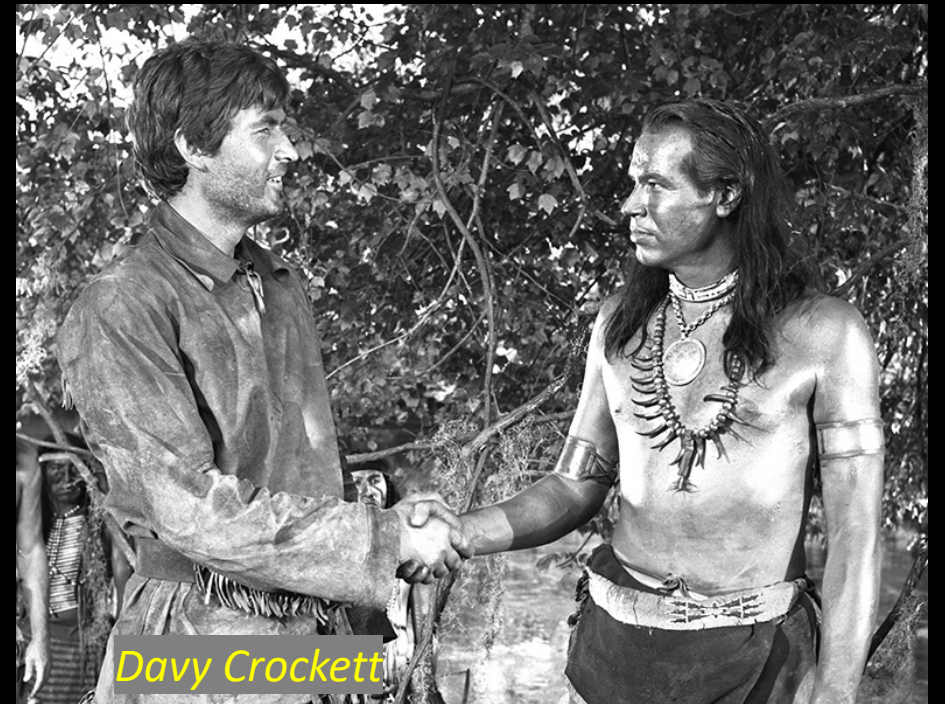
*Dances with Wolves*



*Last of the Mohicans*



*Davy Crockett*

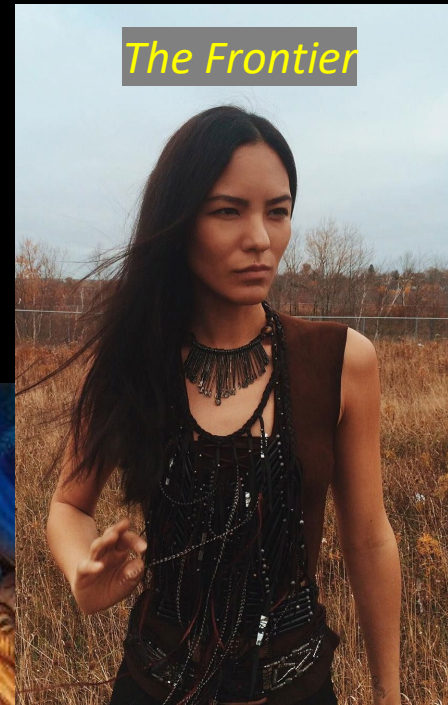




# Indian Maiden



Peter Pan



The Frontier



White Fang



Shanghai Noon



# Hollywood Indians



*F-Troop*



*Gilligan's Island*



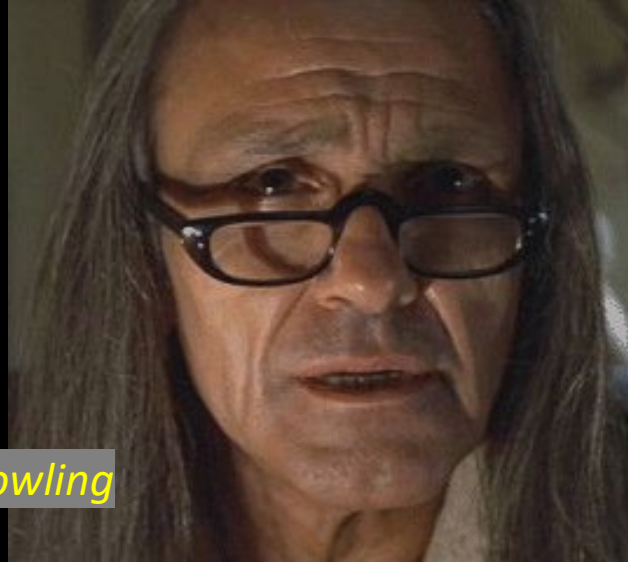
*Gilligan's Island*



# Magical Native Americans



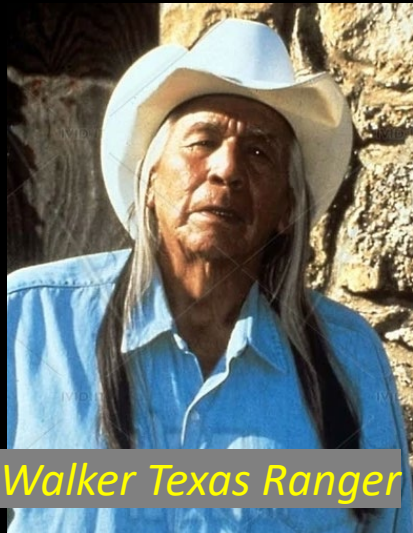
*The Howling*



*Brotherhood of the Wolf*



*Little Big Man*



*Walker Texas Ranger*



*Desert Heat*



*The Lone Ranger*



*Wonder Woman*





## *Twilight Movies*



# What now?

Without bringing attention to the mistreatment of Native American characters, it makes it difficult for writers to change how they write these characters. By learning about stereotypes, we grow to appreciate quality storytelling. We always have to ask ourselves certain questions: Are these stereotypes damaging? How should show-runners and writers improve their storytelling when it comes to Native American characters? Can we like certain pieces of media while simultaneously recognizing their mistreatment of Native American characters?



# Chief John Big Tree: the first Native American actor

A member of the Seneca Nation, Born in 1877 as Isaac Johnny John in Buffalo, New York. Big Tree posed for the Indian head nickel which was minted 1913-38 and Fraser's "End of the Trail" sculpture. His first film was in 1915 as an Indian Brave in *The White Scar*. He went on to have 65 film credits over a 35 year career, mostly uncredited. Best known for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, 1949 as Chief Pony That Walks it was one of his last movies. He died at 90 in 1967.



# *Tiger Lily: A Case Study*

## London, 1904

In the original production of *Peter Pan*, Tiger Lily is the Princess of the Piccaninny tribe, another “Other” character trope, presented as “savage red Indians” and completely different to the very British Lost Boys and Pirates. The characters of Tiger Lily and the rest of her “redskins”, as presented then, would be considered a completely racist stereotype now. Even in 1904 a reviewer wrote, “Mr. Barrie presents not the pirate or Indian of grown-up fiction but the creations seen by childish eyes.” The representation of Tiger Lily and her tribe has plagued directors ever since.

Racist stereotypes aside, Barrie wrote Tiger Lily as a heroic woman, a symbol of feminist empowerment. She is the essence of courage under pressure, in control of her own sexuality, a natural leader, loyal to the death, a princess in her own right. In an attempt to add authenticity to the production, an American woman, Miriam Nesbitt, was cast in the role, rather than an English woman.



Miriam Nesbitt as Tiger Lily

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/racist-history-peter-pan-indian-tribe-180953500/>

<https://emsworth.wordpress.com/2010/05/22/political-correctness-takes-a-bite-out-of-peter-pan-at-the-stratford-shakespeare-festival/>



# More Tiger Lilys

- In the 1924 silent film, Chinese American actress Anna May Wong played Tiger Lily.
- Maria Pogue, Argentinian American actress and famous Hollywood Go-Go dancer, played Tiger Lily opposite Sandy Duncan in 1979 Broadway musical version.
- The 2003 film *Peter Pan* featured Carsen Gray of the Haida tribe in Canada, as Tiger Lily.
- In *Neverland*, a 2011 Syfy mini-series, Aaya (Tiger Lily) is played by Q'orianka Kilcher, an American Peruvian actor of Quechua-Huachipaeri descent.



Anna May Wong



Maria Pogue



Carsen Gray



Q'orianka Kilcher

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/racist-history-peter-pan-indian-tribe-180953500/>

<https://www.autostraddle.com/15-ladies-who-played-peter-pan-from-nina-boucicault-to-alison-williams-253416/>



# *Peter Pan*, 2010

## Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Canada

Director Tim Carroll: "The role of the Indians in the play is to be both exotic and a bit savage, but the use of the term (and the stereotyped language) could only cause offense to a North American audience. It seemed to me that 'Amazons' was a neat way of killing two birds with one stone: as mythic warriors they satisfied the 'exotic and savage' criterion; but it also allowed me to cast a group of women." He also chose to cast a youngish man as Peter, rather than a woman.

The costumes were designed by Carolyn M. Smith, but alas, I cannot find any photos of the Amazons. The photo provided is of an ancient Roman mosaic depicting an Amazon warrior fighting a Greek soldier.



<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/sensitivity-training-in-neverland/article4316114/>

<https://www.ancient.eu/image/11792/mosaic-of-amazon-warrior-fighting-greek-rider/>



# *Pan*, 2015

<https://www.cinemablend.com/new/Why-White-Actress-Playing-Tiger-Lily-Was-Right-Call-According-Pan-Director-86807.html>  
<http://www.btchflcks.com/2016/11/from-racist-stereotype-to-fully-whitewashed-tiger-lily-since-1904-2.html#.XvJUL2hKiUk>

Director Joe Wright: “ I thought about the idea of having a Native American tribe, and that worried me actually. What would I be saying with that choice? So then I thought, well, where should they be from? And I couldn't decide, so I felt like picking just one race would be an unwise choice. So then I thought about the potential of them being the indigenous people of the (entire) planet.” Director Joe Wright and producer Sarah Schechter expressed joy at having a strong female role-model character at play in this story saying “In fact, everything we learned about Tiger Lily, in *Pan* focused on her abilities, rather than her race”. But when Wright cast white actress Rooney Mara as Tiger Lily, it sparked thousands of protests and accusations of white washing. It may not have been as problematic if it hadn't come out right after the “Oscars So White” controversy in which every acting nominee was white, or if the rest of the leads in Pan were not also all white actors.

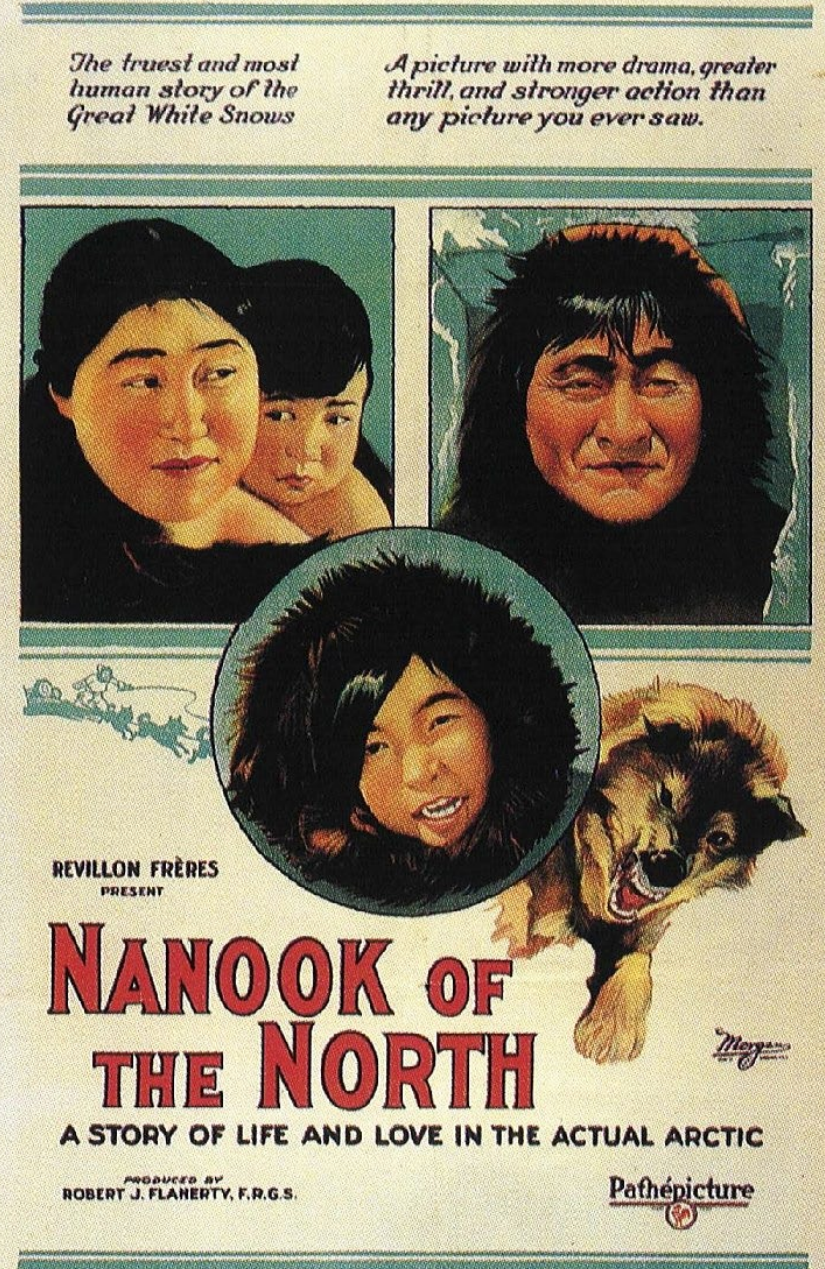


# Nanook of the North, 1922

Silent film by Robert J. Flaherty. Flaherty was hired as an explorer and prospector along the Hudson Bay by the Canadian Pacific Railway. On his third journey he decided to bring a camera with him to document the land and the people. He bought a camera and took a three week course on cinematography in New York. He spent 3 years shooting film and had enough material to edit together when he dropped a lit cigarette onto it and lost 30,000 feet of film. He spent four years raising more money to go back and spent a year between 1920-21 choosing to focus on filming just one man and his family.

The documentary follows the lives of an Inuk, Nanook, and his family as they travel, search for food, and trade in the Ungava Peninsula of northern Quebec, Canada. Nanook, his wife, Nyla, and their family are introduced as fearless heroes who endure rigors no other race could survive. The audience sees Nanook, often with his family, hunt a walrus, build an igloo, go about his day, and perform other tasks.

Flaherty has been criticized for staging some events and portraying them as reality. Roger Ebert said, "The film is not technically sophisticated; how could it be, with one camera, no lights, freezing cold, and everyone equally at the mercy of nature? But it has an authenticity that prevails over any complaints that some of the sequences were staged. If you stage a walrus hunt, it still involves hunting a walrus, and the walrus hasn't seen the script. What shines through is the humanity and optimism of the Inuit."





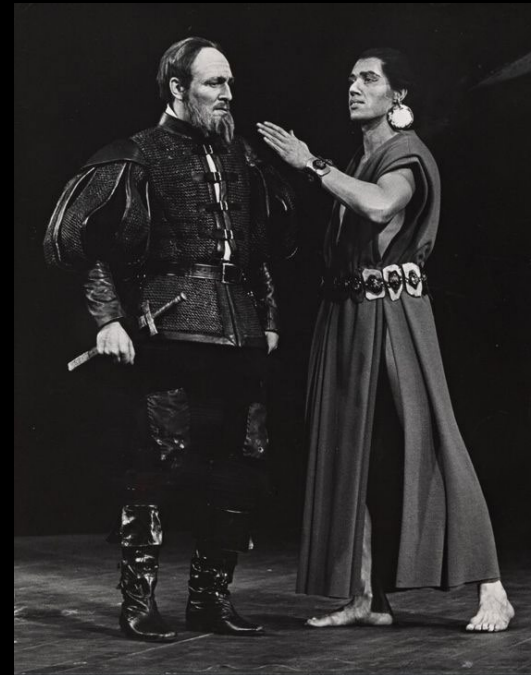
# *Royal Hunt of the Sun*, 1964

## National Theatre, UK

The play is about the conquest of Peru, the conversion of the Inca to Christianity, and the theft of their gold for Spain. Pizarro and his men capture the Incan King/God Atahualpa, hold him for ransom to be paid in gold by his people, and subsequently execute him when he refuses to promise that his people will not take revenge as soon as he is freed. The real Atahualpa reigned from 1532-1533 and was the last Incan Emperor. Pizarro's 169 men conquered Atahualpa's 80,000. Sir Robert Graham Stephens originated the role of Incan King, Atahualpa. The production transferred to Broadway in 1965, with David Carradine as Atahualpa, and was later adapted to film in 1969 with Christopher Plummer as Atahualpa. An opera version was produced by the English National Opera in 1977. It was most recently performed in Tokyo in March, 2020 with Ken Watanabe as Pizarro and Hio Miyazawa as Atahualpa. To the best of my knowledge, all of the actors playing Incas were white.



Robert Graham Stephens



David Carradine



Christopher Plummer



# *Black Elk Speaks*, 1977

## Folger Theatre, DC

*Black Elk Speaks* was a memoir written in 1932 by John G. Neihardt, at Black Elk's request when he was 68 years old. It recounts the history of the Native American people from the arrival of Columbus through escalating incidents like the Battle of Bighorn, and culminates in the Wounded Knee Massacre in which several hundred Lakota people were killed by the soldiers of the US Army in 1890. Almost half of the victims were women and children. Black Elk was considered a holy man by the Lakota and is considered one of the most influential Native American leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The book was adapted into a play by Christopher Sergel. With the exception of the five white characters in the play, eleven BIPOC actors played the other thirty-five roles. Clayton Corbin, a Black actor, played Black Elk.



# Windwalker, 1980

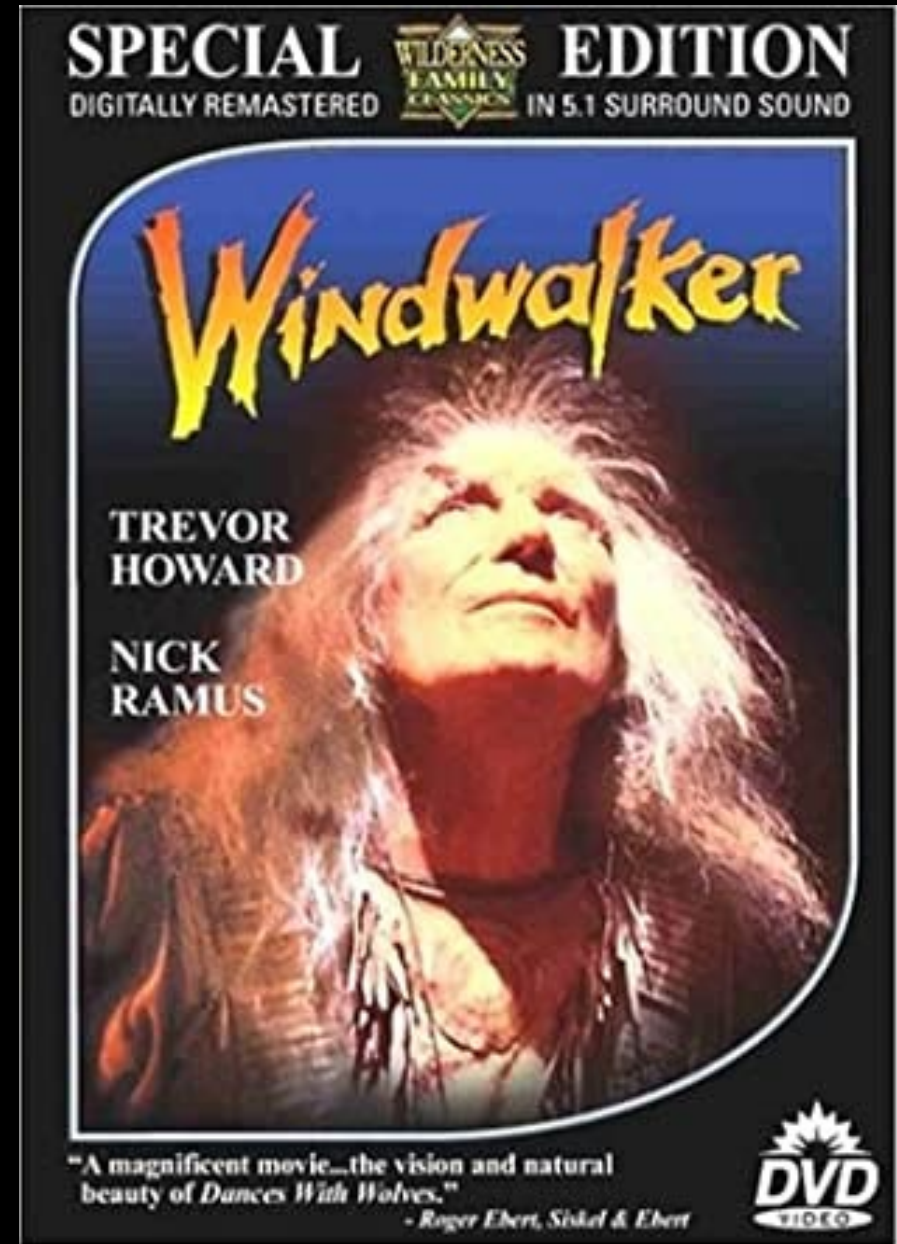
Based on the book of the same name, *Windwalker* is set in 1797 Utah, and tells the story of an aged Cheyenne patriarch whose wife had been killed years before by a raiding party of rival Crow warriors. After he dies, his son's family is attacked by another band of Crows and his son is badly wounded. The Great Spirit reawakens Windwalker to heal his son and help his family fight off the Crows.

Although it stars British actor Trevor Howard as the title character, the rest of the cast was Native American, including Blackfoot actor Nick Ramus, who played Windwalker's son. "In striving for authenticity, all dialogue in *Windwalker* is spoken in native Cheyenne and Crow languages with the exception of a sporadic English language voice over. To meet this challenge, Trevor Howard received coaching from a Cheyenne professor of Native American languages and was eventually able to deliver his Cheyenne dialogue perfectly." The film was shot on location in the Utah mountains, which was quite challenging for 60 year old Howard.

Due to missing the submission deadline for the Academy Awards, it was shut out of award consideration and ultimately was unable to secure wide distribution. "*Windwalker* found its audience through word of mouth. It was praised for its visual beauty and heartfelt story as well as its positive and respectful depiction of Native Americans."

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081760/>

<http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/296716%7C296734/Windwalker.html>



# *Emerald Forest*, 1985

Based on the 1972 LA Times story by Leonard Greenwood about a Peruvian engineer whose son, Ezequiel, was abducted by Native Amazonians and was assimilated into the tribe. First feature film for US markets that was made with native language dialogue. Filmed on location in Brazil with an almost entirely Brazilian cast.

Theme is technology encroaching on the rainforest. "Subversiveness, Boorman argues, is what defines art. If you don't change the way people feel about something in the process, then it's not art. Doing *Emerald Forest* for example, I was trying to highlight the destruction of the rain forest. Nothing great happened after that, it didn't change anything, but I do think that next time someone who has seen the film reads something about the destruction of the rain forest in a newspaper, they will feel differently, because the film involved them emotionally in the subject. "

Trope: Invisible people (noble savages) attacked by cannibal tribe, the Fierce people (savage redskins).







# *Dances with Wolves*, 1990

“The movie's honest, sympathetic portrayal of Native Americans is unlike any seen before on film” wrote Windspeaker correspondent Scott Ross, when *Dances with Wolves* was new. It was praised for its casting of actual Native American actors—Graham Greene, Tantoo Cardinal, Floyd Westerman, Rodney Grant, Steeve Reevis, and Wes Studi. Actors spoke the Lakota language. Native locals were cast as extras. It won the Oscar for Best Picture, and Best Film from the American Indian Film Festival. SAG casting data cited the number of Native American performers in lead and supporting roles was only 87 in 1985, peaked at 436 in 1993, but fell off after that.

*Native Appropriations* critic Adrienne K wrote in 2010, that it was “straight up imperialist nostalgia”. Santee Dakota John Trudell noted its white saviorism, “It’s a story about a white guy and Indians are just the T&A.”

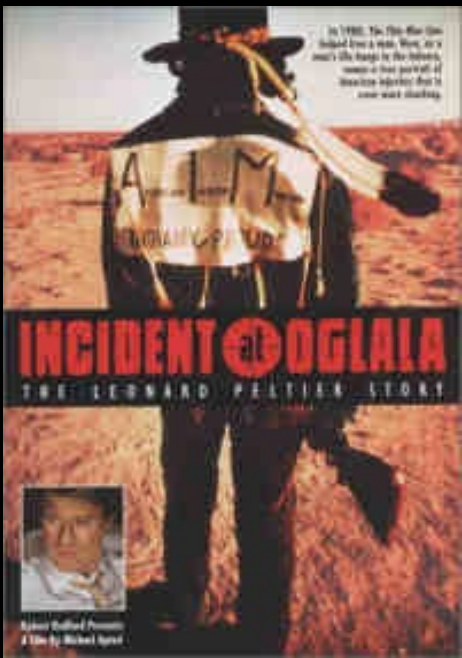
In 2015 extras casting director Rene Haynes believes that “we are still a long way from seeing a solid contemporary representation of Native faces on the screen.” Sioux Michael Smith, founder and president of the American Indian Film Festival points out that for all its acting accolades, *Dances with Wolves* didn’t employ any Native writers, directors, or producers.



<https://ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/dances-wolves-natives-portrayed-honestly-and-sympathetically>

<http://nativeappropriations.com/2010/07/im-a-true-indian-now-i-finally-saw-dances-with-wolves.html>

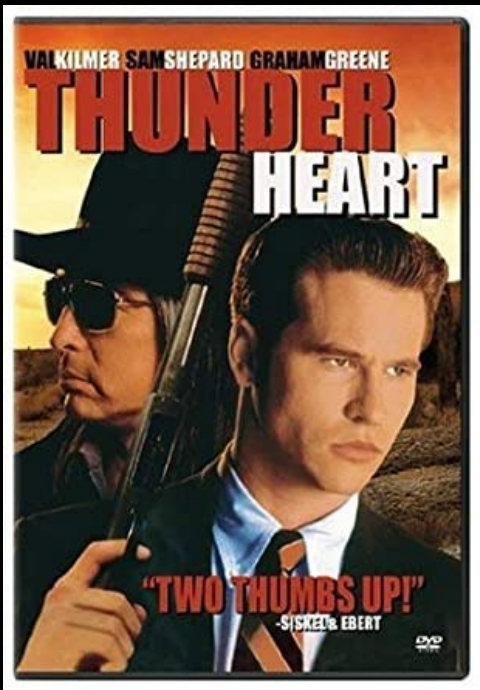
<https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/dances-with-wolves-25-years-later-has-hollywood-improved-on-its-portrayal-hPBjxobL1kKyoddYPoTXnw>



# *Incident at Oglala, 1992* *Thunderheart, 1992*

Director Michael Apted made two films related to the events of the Wounded Knee incident in 1973, a documentary titled *Incident at Oglala* and a fictional portrayal of those events in the form of a murder mystery titled *Thunderheart*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wounded\\_Knee\\_incident](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wounded_Knee_incident)

- *Incident at Oglala*. This film documents the two deaths of FBI agents Jack Coler and Ron Williams on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1975. It examines the legal case and subsequent trials of Robert Robideau and Darrell Butler and, later, Leonard Peltier after his extradition from Canada.
- *Thunderheart* stars Val Kilmer as an FBI agent of Lakota descent who is sent to investigate a murder on the Pine Ridge reservation. Graham Greene stars as the tribal police officer Walter Crow horse, who facilitates the FBI investigation. *Thunderheart* received two nominations from the Political Film Society Awards in the categories of Expose and Human Rights. Sean Axmaker of *Turner Classic Movies* boasted on the film's merits by declaring, "*Thunderheart* dispenses with clichés of Indian culture while respectfully showing the traditions kept alive on the reservation and exposing [the squalid] conditions on the reservation". <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/296736%7C0/Thunderheart.html>





# *Black Elk Speaks*, 1994

## Denver Center Theatre

Sixteen years later, Christopher Sergel approached Donovan Marley (the Denver Center's Artistic Director) with a revised version of the play, but Sergel died before it was completed, so Marley and Sergel's widow Gayle, collaborated with two of Black Elk's descendants to complete it.

"The many, many details of authenticity that Marley, his cast and designers (created) are ever present as a subtext for the story, giving the telling of the tale a thorough credibility. The cast was made up entirely of twenty American and Canadian actors with Apache, Kiowa, Navajo, Sioux, Mohawk, Huron, Aleut, Iroquois, Taino, Pueblo, Cherokee, Chippewa, and Saginaw ancestry. The actors play both Native American roles as well as the white characters that oppressed and murdered them.

There was a 45 minute blessing ceremony before curtain each night. Ned Romero as Black Elk, Peter Kelly Gaudreault as Crazy Horse. Including authentic music composed by Dennis Yerry and choreography by Jane Lind. Costumes by Andrew V. Yelusich.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1994-11-04-9411040047-story.html>





# Chris Eyre: Director, Producer

Chris Eyre is a member of both the Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes and he holds a Master's degree in Film from New York University. Chris' work displays portraits of contemporary Native Americans as individuals who are plagued by problems common to all people, but who react within the confines of their own particular circumstances.

Chris Eyre has been the Chair of The Film School at the Santa Fe University of Art and Design since 2012. He founded his own company, Riverhead Entertainment, that produced commercials, films, and documentaries.. and he is currently an advisor to Camel Rock Studios, the first ever Native American owned film studio, located in Santa Fe.

<http://ciaspeakers.com/home/?p=193>

<https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/director-chris-eyre-debating-tonto-was-a-ridiculous-use-of-our-time-Z8gcWNZsSkKJ18VCPAwHaw>

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2020-03-13/new-mexico-production-boom-gives-native-americans-first-stake-in-hollywood>

# *Smoke Signals*, 1998

*Smoke Signals* is a Canadian American independent film based on a short story by Sherman Alexie, who also wrote the screenplay and was directed by Chris Eyre. *Smoke Signals* was the first feature film written, directed, and produced by Native Americans.

The story is about two boys, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire who live on the Rez. They go on a journey of personal discovery while collecting Victor's dad's ashes. Starring Adam Beach and Evan Adams, *Smoke Signals* won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and Best Film from the American Indian Film Festival.

Chris Eyre said "But what's dispiriting to note is that there wasn't a big boom of Native-American filmmakers who got their chance to tell their stories after *Smoke Signals* helped to pave the way. The follow-up was very shallow in Hollywood. Audiences deserve the Native American *Black Panther*."



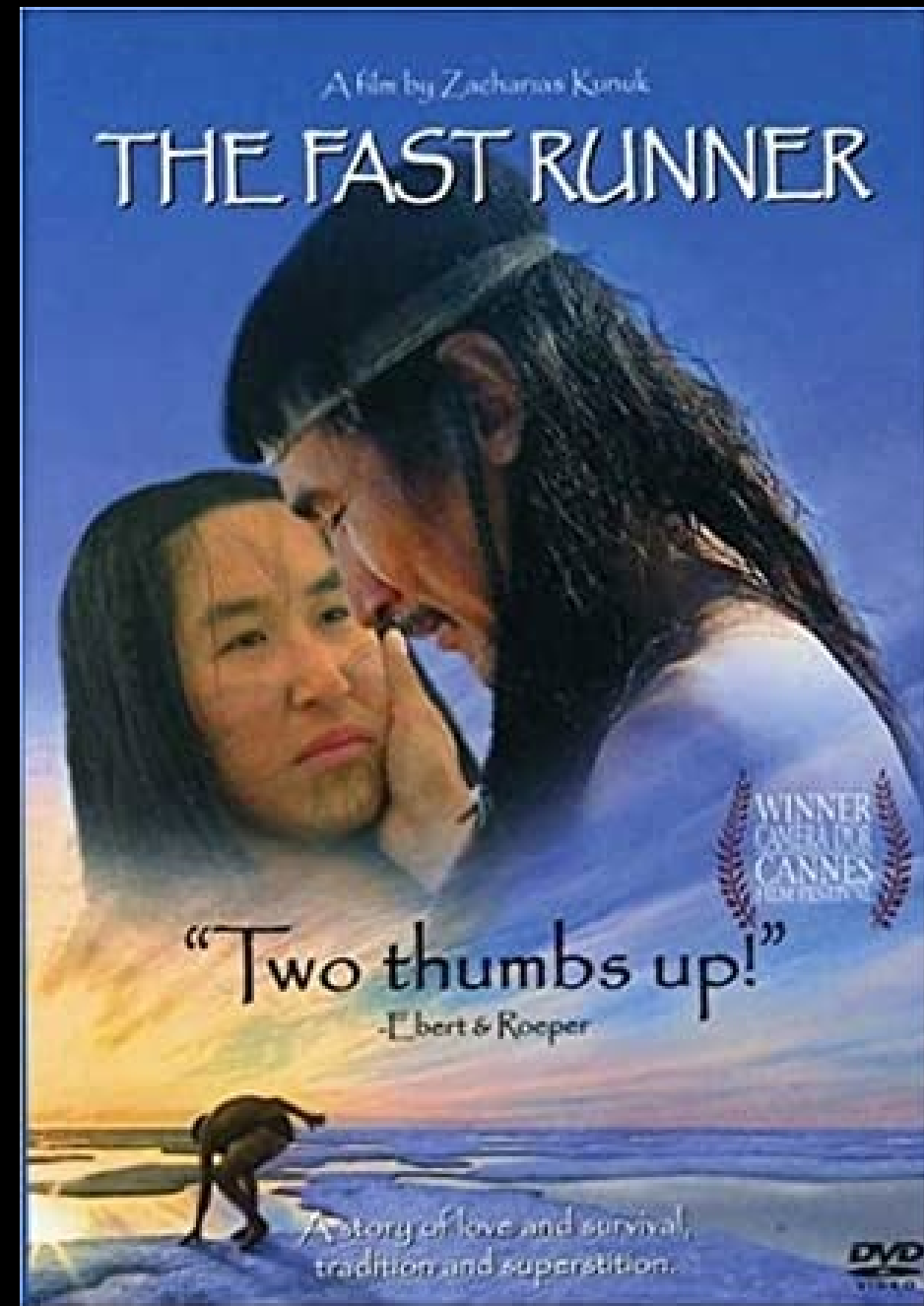
# Atanarjuat, 2001

Canadian film directed by Inuit Zacharias Kunuk. First feature film to be written, directed, and acted entirely in the Inuktitut language.

Set in the 1500's in the Arctic tundra, the film retells an Inuit legend passed down through oral tradition. It involves an Inuit community that is cursed to live in disharmony with each other. Atanarjuat, the fast runner, and his brother Amaqjuaq, the strong one are rivals of Oki, the tribe leader's son. Oki and his sister Puja are jealous of Atanarjuat and his family. Oki wants Atanarjuat's wife Atuat for himself, and Puja wants to be Atanarjuat's wife. Puja has sex with Atanarjuat to become his second wife and then with his brother to hurt him. She then betrays the brothers to Oki who attempts to kill them both, but only manages to kill Amaqjuaq, forcing Atanarjuat to run for his life away from the tribe naked and freezing. He finds sanctuary with a Shaman and they plan for his return. While he's gone, Oki rapes Atuat and murders his own father so that he can become the tribe leader. Once Atanarjuat's feet heal he goes back for revenge with the Shaman but instead captures Oki, Puja, and their brothers and they are banished from the tribe forever.

Won 4 awards for Best Film, Director, Actor, Actress from American Indian Film Festival.

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/4349/the-fast-runner>





# Windtalkers, 2002

*Windtalkers* was a box office flop starring Nicholas Cage. The title refers to the “Navajo code talkers”, Native Americans who were employed by the U.S. military to transmit messages coded in their own language during World War II. Directed by John Woo, starring Adam Beach as Ben Yahzee and Roger Willie as Charlie Whitehorse as the Navajo Code Talkers. The film centered Cage’s white soldier character and his PTSD. In *Windtalkers*, the Marines go through moral crucibles while the Navajos are simply stand-up guys to the nth degree. We don't even see how the complexities of their culture informed their creation of the code. The film ends with both Code Talkers being killed in battle, by the soldiers assigned to protect them, rather than let them be captured by the Japanese.

Fred Thom writing for *Plume Noire*: “The most obvious reproach of Woo's film is not spending enough time on the “Windtalkers”, concentrating instead on the combat scenes. Though it's true that the conscription and training of the Navajos is covered at lightning speed, one must concede that this is the first time a film tackles the subject and pays homage to these patriots ignored for far too long. *Windtalkers* also tackles the racism within the military suffered by Native Americans.”



Adam Beach as Ben Yahzee, Roger Willie as Charlie Whitehorse

[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245562/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0245562/?ref=fn_al_tt_1)

<http://www.plume-noire.com/movies/reviews/windtalkers.html>

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2002-06-14-0206140151-story.html>

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/7b7wqg/revisiting-an-insane-nicolas-cage-movie-to-memorialize-the-last-navajo-code-talker](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/7b7wqg/revisiting-an-insane-nicolas-cage-movie-to-memorialize-the-last-navajo-code-talker)

# *Black Elk Speaks*, 2016

## Aurora Fox Theatre, CO

This revival was directed by a member of the original 1994 company, Black actor Donnie I. Betts. For indigenous audiences, the performance is an empowering opportunity to have their stories told again. For white audiences, it is an opportunity to learn. This time the all Native American cast are entirely local actors from the Denver area. Actor Moses Brings Plenty describes *Black Elk* as “a living memory of who we once were and who we are today as a people, and who we can be again with love and compassion and a true understanding of coexistence.” *Black Elk* is played by Lakota actor Doug Good Feather. Good Feather served two tours of duty in Iraq, went on to father eight children, and is a recovering alcoholic. Good Feather said “if we keep carrying this animosity, it affects our children. If we carry that trauma and animosity, and we’re constantly angry, and we take that anger out on our children, then that continues to create dysfunction, and the cycle continues. So it has to be broken.”

This production opened when Trump was on the verge of achieving the presidency. Brings Plenty remembered when Reagan demanded that Russia bring down the Berlin Wall. He asked “How can the same country that demanded that another country take down a wall, now want to build one here?”

<http://www.denverurbanspectrum.com/articles/135365>

<https://www.denvercenter.org/news-center/two-decades-later-black-elk-speaks-again-in-aurora/>





# *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, 2015-20*

Jacqueline White, portrayed by Jane Krakowski (Polish American), is a supporting character on *Kimmy Schmidt*. In season 2, Jacqueline goes home to her parents and we find out that she's actually Native American who's denied her heritage to succeed in the world, saying "If you want to get anywhere in the world, you need to be blonde and white." Jacqueline's Lakota parents are played by Sheri Foster (Cherokee) and Virgil White (Comanche).

Later in Season 3, she's dating the son of the owner of the Washington Redskins. In an attempt to prove herself to her family, she and her fiancé plan a coup to take over the team and change the name to something less offensive, unfortunately her fiancé gets smooched and is in a coma before their plan goes into effect.

While running late for a board meeting, she runs into her parents at a protest burning the Redskins jerseys they just bought. That gives her the idea that the Board will change the name if it makes them more money. Controversy can be profitable, so she convinces them to change the name to the Washington Gun-Takers.

Life imitates art. On July 13, 2020 the IRL Washington Redskins finally have changed their name in response to pressure from their sponsors, led by FedEx. They will be going by The Washington Football Team until they pick a new name.

<https://fee.org/articles/kimmy-schmidt-uses-the-market-to-enact-social-change/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/05/19/unbreakable-kimmy-schmidt-continues-its-takedown-of-the-washington-redskins-name/>

<https://www.sportscasting.com/the-washington-redskins-new-name-wont-fool-anyone/>



# Kody Dayish Productions, NM

Siblings Kody, Kolin, and Kollete Dayish are Navajo Independent filmmakers from Shiprock, NM.

- *Spared*, 2017 a short film about bullying.
- *The Red Hogan*, 2017 a horror feature film about Navajo Skinwalkers.
- *Silent Medicine*, 2017 a deaf Navajo girl discovers her father is terminally ill and must bring her brothers back to the rez.
- *Boy Who Cried Wolf*, 2019 horror film
- *The Window*, 2019 horror film
- *Hitchhiker*, 2019 horror film
- *Parole*, 2019 a feature film about the effect of alcoholism and incarceration on a Navajo family.
- *Unbroken Code* still in pre-production about the Navajo code talkers in WWII.



2020 Rising Star from the New Mexico Film and Television Hall of Fame.  
2019 Best Director at Santa Fe Film Festival  
2016 Best Emerging Film Director at the Red Nation Film Festival in LA.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/DAYISHHH/>

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzeogwEPmxjShR5BHZNSCvw?fbclid=IwAR0BgPzV1Kg7nPuv\\_3HbSBnui0qu30YYPe407xGFz\\_HIAmIW-LWIS11WWcQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzeogwEPmxjShR5BHZNSCvw?fbclid=IwAR0BgPzV1Kg7nPuv_3HbSBnui0qu30YYPe407xGFz_HIAmIW-LWIS11WWcQ)



# Wes Studi: The first Native American actor to be awarded an Honorary Oscar

Wes Studi was born in 1947 in Oklahoma and was raised speaking Cherokee exclusively until he started elementary school. He enlisted in the Oklahoma National Guard and volunteered for active service during the Vietnam war. After he was discharged, he became an activist, joining the Trail of Broken Treaties March on Washington, occupying the Dept. of the Interior building, as well as the takeover of Wounded Knee in SD. He was on the FBI watchlist for almost a decade.

He enrolled in Tulsa Junior College where he first began acting. He honed his craft in Tulsa at The American Indian Theatre Company throughout the 1980's; his first paying gig was in *Black Elk Speaks*. He was already 42 when he moved to Los Angeles for his breakout role in *Dances with Wolves*. His next role was as Magua in *Last of the Mohicans*, then *Geronimo* in 1993. He has 100 film and TV credits over a 30 year career.

In 2019 he became the first Native American to be awarded an Honorary Oscar for Lifetime Achievement. The Academy has “made some progress since #OscarsSoWhite. They’ve made an effort and looked at it, and decided on a better approach,” Studi said, “and it’s one that recognizes the diversity of our country and its population.”

[https://www.tulsaworld.com/entertainment/interview-with-wes-studi-the-first-native-american-actor-to-receive-an-academy-award/article\\_15907c33-8207-5e6b-ba1b-1864d4943773.html#3](https://www.tulsaworld.com/entertainment/interview-with-wes-studi-the-first-native-american-actor-to-receive-an-academy-award/article_15907c33-8207-5e6b-ba1b-1864d4943773.html#3)

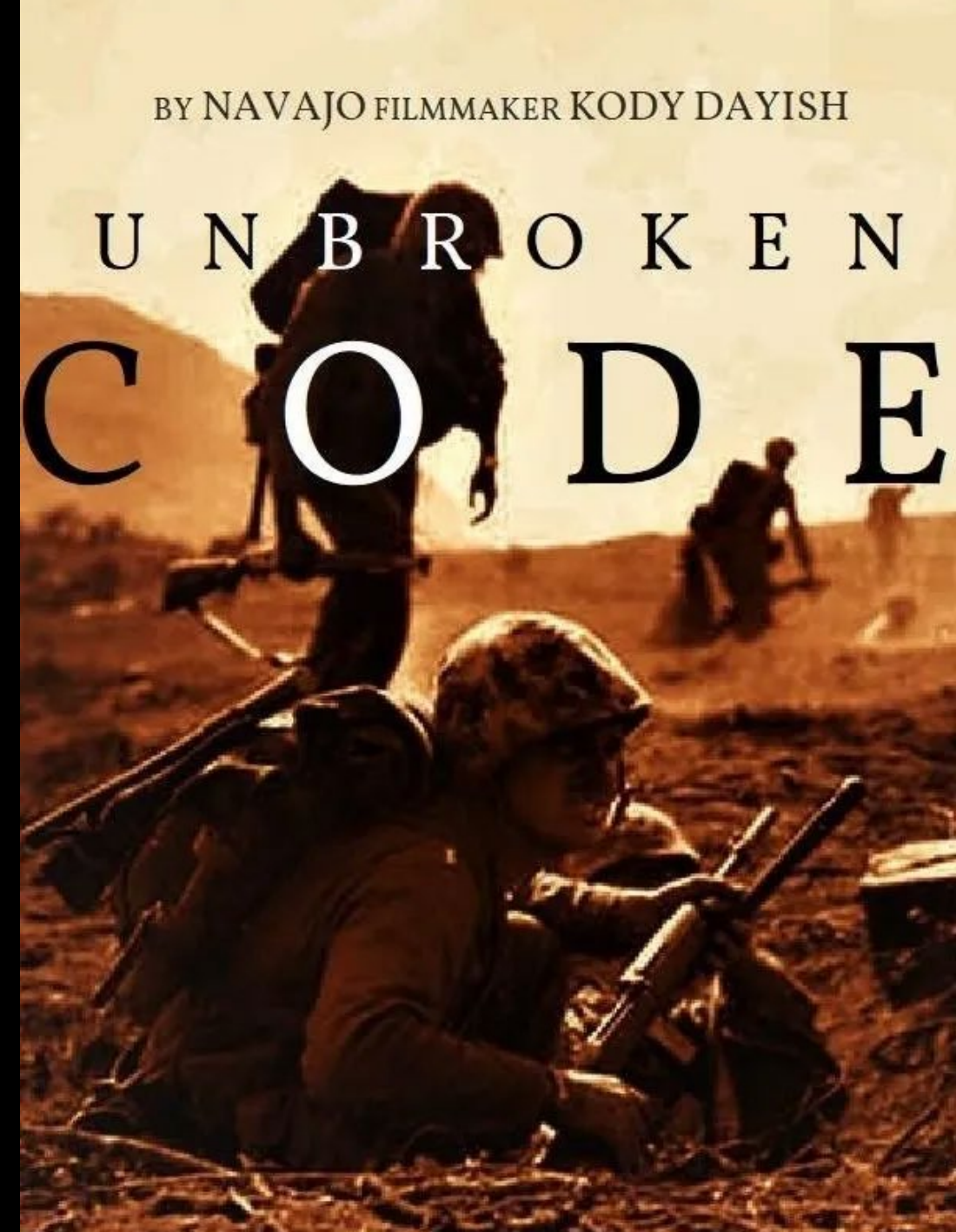


# *Unbroken Code*

Currently in production by Navajo Kody Dayish. It will tell the story of the Navajo Code Talkers during WWII. In 2011, Dayish met Chester Nez, who passed away in 2014 and was the last surviving member of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers. Dayish got to hang out at a book signing with Nez and talked with him about the idea of a movie.

“Back then it was just a conversation, but I was pretty serious about it. Not serious enough to start film production right then. But the idea, and the script that we have had and the story that we’re going to do has been around for several years now. The story of this one is going to be basically focused on the origin of the Navajo Code Talkers language. Our lead character will be Navajo and it will be based on him and his family. A lot of films are out there that are misinterpreting our culture and I basically think what we’re trying to do is set the record straight and that’s why we’re going to take on the Code Talker film.

<https://www.nhnews.com/news/2018/jan/09/unbroken-code-tells-story-navajo-code-talkers/>



# Native American Dance Theatre

The American Indian Dance Theatre (AIDT) was originally formed in May 1987, when more than 26 Native American dancers, singers and drummers, representing a variety of North American tribes, gathered in Colorado Springs to begin rehearsals with a revolutionary new theatrical dance company.

Brought together by Barbara Schwei, a New York-based concert and theatrical producer, and Hanay Geiogamah, a renowned Native American playwright/director and a member of the Kiowa and Delaware Tribes of Oklahoma, these dancers and musicians would form the nucleus of the American Indian Dance Theatre. The American Indian Dance Theatre has exceeded all expectations in becoming the first company to successfully present traditional Native American dances in a theatrical setting without sacrificing the basic integrity and meaning of the dances.

“During each performance, audiences experience many styles of American Indian dancing,” says Director Geiogamah. “All our dances are traditional and authentic but have been staged as theatrical pieces. In making this transition, however, we have been careful not to alter the basic structure of any of the dances.”

Ms. Schwei formed the American Indian Dance Theatre to fill a void in the dance world. “I wondered why every country except the United States had its own national dance companies representing the diverse segments of their cultures,” she says. “This company provides Native Americans with a chance to share their heritage and culture within the American public and the rest of the world.”

Their newest piece is entitled “Ceremony for Mother Earth: A Healing”.

<https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl/hidvl-int-native-theater/item/1353-ntfest-hgeiogamah.html>





# The American Indian Film Institute

The American Indian Film Festival is an annual non-profit film festival in San Francisco, California founded in 1975. It is the world's oldest venue dedicated solely to Native American/First Nations films and prepared the way for the 1979 formation of the American Indian Film Institute. Over 3,100 films have been screened from Native American/First Nations communities in the U.S. and Canada, and the festival includes events such as film screenings, panel discussions, an awards ceremony and networking events. They have been giving out awards for Best Film since 1987.



# Native American Theatre Companies

## Oklahoma

- American Indian Theatre Company of Oklahoma <https://www.facebook.com/AITCO/>
- Oklahoma Indigenous Theatre Company <https://okindigenoustheatre.com/>

## New Mexico

- Two Worlds Theatre <https://twoworldsnm.org/>
- Camel Rock Studios (film studio) <https://www.camelrockstudios.com/>

## California

- American Indian Dance Theatre <http://inarts.org/>
- Rainy Mountain Entertainment Group <http://www.rainymountainentertainment.com/home.html>

## New York

- Spiderwoman Theatre <https://www.spiderwomantheater.org/>

## Michigan

- Woodland Sky Native American Dance Company <https://www.facebook.com/nativeamericandancecompany/>



[From their website:](#)

“The 1491s are a sketch comedy group based in the wooded ghettos of Minnesota and buffalo grass of Oklahoma. They are a gaggle of Indians chock full of cynicism and splashed with a good dose of indigenous satire. They coined the *term All My Relations*, and are still waiting on the royalties. They were at Custer's Last Stand. They mooned Chris Columbus when he landed. They invented bubble gum. The 1491s teach young women to be strong. And teach young men how to seduce these strong women.

This group of indigenous misfits originally came together to make funny videos to put on YouTube. Since their first video in 2009, the group's work has gone viral - earning fans around the globe with their satirical and absurd comedy. From sold out performances to appearances on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and "TEDx Talks," the group continues to grow.”



# Native American Actors

- Floyd Red Crow Westerman
- Bill Hazlett
- Ned Romero
- Graham Greene
- Chief Dan George
- Jay Silverheels
- John Trudell
- Wes Studi
- Russell Means
- Will Sampson
- Eddie Spears
- Michael Greyeyes
- Tatanka Means
- Jay Tavaré
- Rudy Youngblood
- Rick Mora
- Buffalo Child
- Rodney A. Grant
- Gil Birmingham
- Apesanahkwat
- Evan Adams
- Cody Lightning
- Michael Spears
- Adam Beach
- Litefoot
- Larry Sellers
- Larry McMurtry
- Benjamin Bratt
- Danny Trejo
- Justin Rain
- David Midthunder
- Eric Schweig
- Steeve Reavis
- Alex Kruz
- Alex Meraz

# Native American Actresses

- Julia Jones
- Irene Bedard
- Q'orianka Kilcher
- Rene Michelle Aranda
- Tonantzin Carmelo
- Kimberly Guerrero
- Marisa Quintanilla
- Amber Midthunder
- Elizabeth Frances
- Michelle St. John
- Buffy Sainte-Marie
- Crystle Lightning
- Misty Upham
- Shauna Baker
- Kaniehtiio Horn
- Tanaya Beatty
- Jessica Matten
- Tantoo Cardinal
- Elaine Miles
- Monique Mojica