AIS 364: Indigenous Filmmakers

Instructor: M. Elise Marubbio
Time: Wednesday 6-9 pm.
Office Hours: M-W-F 1:30-2:30 or by appointment
Office Location: Memorial 213
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Purpose & Goals of the Course: Indigenous Filmmakers is a retrospective survey course designed to introduce students to the exciting and expanding field of indigenous media—specifically films made by Native Americans. Throughout the semester, we will explore the political and social forces at work behind the American Indigenous film movement, which is not only a response to mainstream film’s portrayal of Native Americans but also an active voicing of the extraordinary ranges in perspectives and views that inform Native American cultures. While the course centers particularly on Native North American (U.S. and Canadian) filmmakers, Indigenous films from other countries may be included.

Because Native American filmmakers often draw from dual cultures—Native American and mainstream American—for their subject matter, they often have distinctly different aesthetic, social, and political concerns surfacing in their work than we find in mainstream U.S. films. Our goals of this class are to identify some of these differences, understand why they exist, learn to appreciate these differences, and attempt to find the patterns and differences that overlap the various filmmakers, genres, and styles of filmmaking. Over the course of the semester, the Augsburg Native American Film Series may host a number of films on and off campus that will allow students to participate in a variety of film activities and to apply what we are learning.

Some questions that guide our inquiry include:
- What issues of agency are at play behind the film production?
- What larger politics have influenced these filmmakers and their choices?
- Where do Native American/Indigenous filmmakers situate themselves in relationship to popular culture and community?
- Who is the audience?
- How do some of these films speak to a variety of audiences?
- Is there a particular aesthetic at play in these films that differs from Hollywood aesthetic?
- How does storytelling emerge in these films?
- Is there such a thing as cinema of sovereignty or visual sovereignty?

This course is open to Juniors and Seniors or by special agreement with the instructor. It is a class that uses American Indian Studies, Cultural Studies, and Film Studies approaches to analyzing and understanding films, film concepts, and popular cultural uses of films.

Students Rights and Responsibilities:
All students have the right to use the College Counseling and Student Development staff services, as well as to receive tutoring assistance from the writing lab program. The Augsburg College policy on academic honesty applies to this course.
Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the CLASS Office at x1053 or the Access Center at x1749, as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely manner. Also please notify the professor at the beginning of the semester if you will need CLASS Office accommodations.

Course Requirements: Many of the assignments and written requirements for this class are geared to building your writing and critical thinking skills in various ways. Each assignment is designed differently from the others in order to approach filmic materials from a particular angle or method. You can think of each as a building block for deeper and more critical thinking about the films, the politics of representation and filmmaking, and the reading of film.

- **Attendance:** Students are required to attend all classes and take part in class discussions and activities in an informed manner reflective of assigned readings and in-class materials. Unexcused or multiple absences will result in a lower course grade.

- **Readings:** Reading assignments are listed daily. You must complete these readings prior to class period so that we can discuss the writer and the material during class. A number of readings include looking and exploring web sites so read the syllabus carefully.

- **Watching films outside of class.** You should be watching a variety of the films listed at the end of the syllabus as they fit into the area topics for this class. Many are available in the library or at your local video store. One of your homework assignments involves watching a film for a class discussion—see syllabus for these. Watching as many as possible and including them in your class discussions, even when they are not assigned, will illustrate real dedication to this class and will be rewarded.

- **Homework Assignments:** You will be asked to do 2 written homework assignments. These assignments will be based on library or web research, or on in-class material. They are designed to facilitate particular approaches to discussions of the films during class and to get you to explore an angle of film analysis that you might not otherwise engage, so please do follow the instructions carefully. See Homework Assignment Handout on Moodle for details.

- **Critical Essay:** You will have two essays to write that are geared toward helping you think critically about film, genre or approaches, common issues, and aesthetic choices made by Native filmmakers. You may draw on the questions framing our course to help you deepen your inquiry and you should look back on your journals for insight and ideas about the films. See Critical Essay Handout on Moodle

- **Quizzes:** You will have two quizzes to measure your grasp of concepts and terms. There is no final, but you will be expected to illustrate your ability to use the terms, concepts, and theories discussed in class in a proficient manner through your essays and journals. If I feel that the class is not demonstrating this skill, I reserve the right to add a final exam to our schedule.

*All late assignments will be docked one grade per day late.*
Course Grades:

Readings/Participation 20
Assignments (2 @ 50 points each) 100
Critical Essays (2 @ 50 points each) 100
Quizzes (2 at 40 points each) 80

Each assignment, test, and presentation will be given a number grade ranging from 0-100. These number grades are listed below with the letter grade equivalent and the Augsburg final course grade:

279-300 = A = 4.0
265-278 = A-/B+ = 3.5
250-264 = B = 3
234-249 = B-/C+ = 2.5
221-233 = C = 2
204-220 = C-/D+ = 1.5
190-203 = D = 1
176-189 = D- = .5
0-175 = F = 0

Texts:


You will also have a number of on-line readings on e-reserve, which you access through the link on our moodle page.
Course Outline

Area One: Action/reaction Native Film Overview
Jan. 16 Introduction to Indigenous Film, Representation, and the Silent Period
- Overview of Indigenous Film History
  - What is Indigenous Film
  - First-, Second-, Third-, and Fourth-Cinema
- The early period of Native film
  - James Young Deer and Hollywood Films
    - “White Fawn’s Devotion” (1910) vs. "The Kentuckian" (1908)
    - Clips from Last of the Mohicans 1920

Jan. 23 History of Indigenous Filmmaking
- Overview of Native American Film History Since the 1960s
- What are “visual sovereignty” and “cinema of sovereignty”?
- Media Literacy—learning with clips

Readings: NAF: Introduction; VIS, Introduction

Jan. 30 Non-native “Ethnographic Documentaries” and Mythmaking:
- Native Americans as Spectacle
- Documentary” and “anthropological films”
  - Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922) 79 min.
- Discussion of Film and concepts and prep for Atanarjurat: The Fast Runner

Readings: NAF: Houston Wood’s “Dimensions of Difference in Indigenous Film”

Feb. 6 Native Responses to Ethnographic Film History
- Atanarjurat: The Fast Runner (Kunuk, 2001) 161 min


Area Two: Native American Documentary Filmmakers & Perspectives on Cultural Sovereignty
Feb. 13 Discussion of readings, Atanarjurat, the web site, and the films you watched.
- Questions to guide our discussion
What issues of agency seem to be at play behind the film production?
What larger politics seem to have influenced these filmmakers and their choices?
Where do Native American/Indigenous filmmakers situate themselves in relationship to popular culture and community?
Who is the audience?
How do some of these films speak to a variety of audiences?
Are there a particular aesthetics at play in these films that differs from or corresponds to Hollywood aesthetic?
How does storytelling emerge in these films?

Readings: Review *NAF* Houston Wood article; Begin reading on-line reserve Nichols’ *Why are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking?*: 1-19.


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**Feb. 20**  
**Key People in Native Film**
- What is Documentary?
- Ethics and Aesthetics
- George Burdeau, Alanis Obomsawin, Victor Masayesva & Sandy Osawa
- Discussion readings, *Itam Hakim Hopiit, Manoomin*


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**Feb. 27**  
**Alanis Obomsawin**
- *Kanehsatake—270 Years of Resistance* (Obomsawin, 1993) 119 min.
- Discussion

Readings: *NAF* : Gauthier’s “Dismantling the Master’s House: The Feminist Fourth Cinema Documentaries of Alanis Obomsawin and Loretta Todd”

Homework: Begin Homework #2 on Documentary.

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**March 6**  
**Sadra Osawa**
- *Lighting the 7th Fire* (Osawa, 1999) 48 min.
- Discussion of film and readings.

Readings: *NAF* Saza Osawa’s “Sandra Osawa: An Upstream Journey”
March 13  
Documentary Group Discussion  
• Discussion of readings and the films you watched.

Homework #2 Due

Online Quiz opens today through Monday March 21

SPRING BREAK: March 18-22

Area Three: Fiction Film and Independent and Short films  
March 27  
Introduction to Native American Fiction Film  
• Introduction Hollywood Genres  
• Harold of Orange (Vizenor, 1984) 32 min.  
• Honey Moccasin (Niro, 1998) 52 min.  
• Discussion  

Readings: NAF Weatherford’s “The Journey’s Discovery: An Interview with Shelley Niro”; VIS Kelsy’s “Condolence Tropes and Haudenosaunee Visuality: It Starts with a Whisper and Mohawk Girls.” Watch one of the Niro films on our list.

Film Paper 1 Due

April 3  
Breaking the Hollywood Barrier  
• Smoke Signals (1998, Eyre) 98 min.  
• Discussion of Smoke Signals and Skins  


April 10  
Native Cosmopolitanism and Alexie  
• The Business of Fancydancing (Alexie, 2003) 103 min.  
• Discussion The Business of Fancydancing  

Readings: NAF: Corbin’s “Geographies of Identity and Belonging in Sherman Alexie’s The Business of Fancydancing”; VIS Alst’s “Sherman Shoots Alexie: Working with and without Reservation(s) in The Business of Fancydancing”
April 17  
**Narrative Fiction with Native Pan- & Tribal Focus**  
- *Four Sheets to the Wind* (Harjo, 2006) 81 min.  
- Discussion  

Readings: *NAF* Hearne and Shlachter’s “‘Pockets Full of Stories’: An Interview with Sterlin Harjo and Blackhorse Lowe”. Watch *5th World* (Blackhorse Lowe, 2004) at home.

**Quiz opens April 20 due by 9 am Monday**

April 24  
**Shorts & Independent Films**  
- Discussion of New Media  
- Screenings of Shorts  
  - *Claxton*  
  - *Skyway 123*  
  - *Aboriginal World View* (Tsinhnahjinnie, 2002)  

Readings: *VIS* Joseph Bauerkemper’s “Videographic Sovereignty: Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie’s *Aboriginal World View*”; *NAF* Marubbio’s “Wrestling the Greased Pig: An Interview with Randy Redroad”.

**Film Paper 2 due Monday in my office by 9 am.**

**Films for Assignments:**  
You can choose from this list, include a film from the Augsburg Native American Film Series, or find another Native produced film and talk with the instructor about using it to fulfill this assignment.

**Documentaries:**  
*Amisk* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1977)  
*Backbone of the World: Blackfeet* (George Burdeau, 1998)  
*Honoring Our Voices* (Judy Jeffrey, 1992)  
*Hozo of Native Women* (Beverly Singer, 1997)  
*In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* (Milo Yellow Hair, 1990)  
*In Whose Honor* (Roenstein, 1996)  
*Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1994)  
*Kinaalda, Navajo Rite of Passage* (Carr, 2000)  
*Mother of Many Children* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1977)  
*My Name is Kahentiiosta* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1995)  
*Navajo Talking Picture* (Beverly Singer, 1986)  
*The Place of Falling Water* (Bigcrane and Smith, 1990)
Usual and Accustom Places (Sandy Osawa, 2000)
Wapikoni Mobile (2007, NFB Canada and Corporation Wapikoni mobile)

Fiction: (You will need to identify the genre)
5th World (Blackhorse Lowe, 2004)
Christmas in the Clouds (Vahle, 2005)
Clearcut (Buhgajski, 1992)
Dance Me Outside (McDonald, 1994)
Doe Boy (Randy Redroad, 2001)
Imprint (Chris Eyre, 2009)
Johnny Greyeyes (Jorge Manzano, 2001)
Kissed By Lightning (Niro, 2009) 89 min
Medicine River (Margolin, 1994)
Naturally Native (Red Horse, 1997)
Once We Were Warriors (Tamahori, 1994)
Skins (Chris Eyre, 2002)