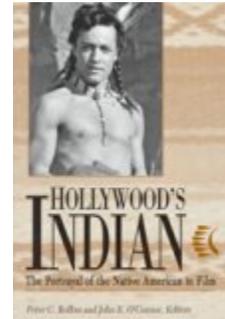


Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor, eds. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998. xiv + 226 pp. \$20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8131-0952-7; \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2044-7.

Reviewed by Marshall Fishwick (Virginia Tech)
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Only Good Indian

This book holds a mirror to an important cultural study. As a major writer of early American history, Wilcomb Washburn, points out—in the Foreword—motion pictures have shaped the American Indian's image, but the stereotypes predate film, stemming from the captivity narratives of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here, the contrasting views are evident: honor and nobility on one hand, cruelty and savagery on the other.

As the twentieth century ends, we are still asking the crucial questions. What is the historical reality? Will it always remain elusive, complex, and controversial? The essays in this book support this conclusively, shedding new light on the whole subject of ethnicity and human freedom. In the Introduction, the editors ask if the study of Hollywood's Indian is still a frontier worthy of exploration. The answer is a resounding "yes," offering many opinions and insights to ponder.

When Thomas A. Edison premiered his kinoscope at the 1893 Chicago Columbian World's Exposition, he chose the exotic Hopi Snake Dance as his subject. Here we have the stereotypical depiction of natives. Children of my generation grew up with the bloodthirsty savage, out to scalp and burn; when we played "Cowboys and Indians," the White cowboys were the good guys, the Red Indians, the bad. A long intellectual and artistic tradition was in place. There was a frontier cliché: the only good Indian is a dead Indian.

When did Hollywood first show this kind of stereotype on the screen? A poster of an early silent movie—

now in the Oklahoma Historical Society—suggests an answer. It features William Desmond in *A Broadway Cowboy*, described as a "pippin comedy drama, peppy, spicy, and zippy." Certainly it was not zippy for Native Americans, for the heroic Desmond "kills six Indians after breakfast every day."

Ken Nolley gives us more details on image-making in his fine essay "The Representation of Conquest," and Frank Manchel in "Cultural Confusion." Of particular note is the contribution of Hannu Salmi, Professor of Cultural History at Finland's University of Turku. He points out that the American film tradition has made an impact there, but with a different ethnic minority—the Lapps. In America, the tension is between the tame East and the Wild West. In Finland, the dichotomy is North versus South. But the inherent ethnic conflict is the same.

A reaction against the stereotypes appeared in 1968 with the establishment of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and things began to change. Native Americans struck back with the occupation of Alcatraz Prison (1968); the Bureau of Indian Affairs Headquarters (1972); and the battlefield at Wounded Knee (1973). They found support in many places, including Hollywood. A whole series of revisionist movies were well-received. Native Americans were shown as environmentally sensitive "noble savages" with much to teach a culture burdened with technology and pollution. In his opening essay, Ted Jojola picks *Little Big Man* as "a milestone in Hollywood cinema," which includes one of the finest acting roles

ever by an Indian actor, Dan George, who portrayed Old Lodge Skins.

Pauline Turner Strong contributes the final essay, "Playing Indian in the 1990s: *Pocahontas* and *The Indian in the Cupboard*." Despite certain flaws, and unabashed commercialism, she finds that "the dream of tolerance and respect for all life" is clear in these films. She hopes that "playing Indian may offer genuine possibilities for unlearning these (old) processes and imagining new ones—for learning things we never knew we never knew" (p. 203).

This thought sums up the real achievement of this fine book, which will now be basic for anyone working in this area. The excellent bibliography will be helpful in that process too.

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