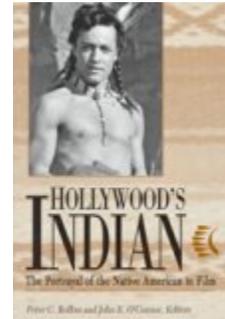


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Peter C. Rollins, John E. O'Connor, eds. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998. xiv + 226 pp. \$20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8131-0952-7; \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2044-7.

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Dances with Critics

In the 1992 film *Thunderheart*, Sam Shepard checks out Val Kilmer's profile and tells him he looks like Sal Mineo—the point being that Kilmer's character, who is one-quarter Lakota, will suit the FBI's purposes as token Indian in a reservation investigation the two are about to conduct. This is a good self-referential Hollywood joke: Sal Mineo was one of Hollywood's most convincing phony Indians, and it is his shirtless, braided, and feathered persona that appears on the cover of *Hollywood's Indian*.

A number of excellent Indian actors appear in major roles in *Thunderheart* and it is unfortunate that the film did not get more extensive attention in Rollins and O'Connor's collection of critical essays. The editors tell us in the acknowledgments that the collection began as a 1993 issue of *Film and History* and was fleshed out with additional material in response to widespread use of the journal issue in college classes. Though only one of the contributors offers a perspective from an explicitly Indian point of view, the end product nevertheless offers an engaging and timely update to previous critical anthologies.

The two bibliographies by Ted Jojola and Steven Mintz, the former of major Indian episodes in film and television since 1970 and the latter of critical treatments, are probably the single most valuable aspect of the anthology. There are also excellent historicist critiques of *Broken Arrow*, *Tell Them Willie Boy Was Here*, and John Ford's films that offer fresh insights into the causes and

effects of distortion of historical fact. Another essay addresses the distortion of historical text in a much-needed criticism of the erasure of the miscegenation theme in the 1992 remake of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. Jeffrey Walker points out that even if miscegenation was a forbidden topic when previous versions of the novel were filmed, the same excuse hardly exists in the nineties.

The most unexpected essay in the collection, "The Indian of the North: Western Traditions and Finnish Indians," discusses the conflation of Lappish, Old Finnish, and other ethnic minorities in Finland into "valley people" at "the margins" of Finnish identity (p. 52). Hannu Salmi draws parallels in these films with both the American western and the American adventure film.

Essays also appear on *Little Big Man*, *Powwow Highway*, *Dances with Wolves*, and the very recent children's releases *Pocahontas* and *The Indian in the Cupboard*. But the thing that seems to be missing in this collection is a well-considered treatment of Hollywood's response to post-1970 Indian activism. Some authors overestimate the influence of the American Indian Movement on early seventies films; the rash of pro-Indian movies in 1970 may have been a response to the 1969 Alcatraz occupation, but AIM did not arise to prominence until the BIA occupation in 1972. If, as Ted Jojola asserts, *Powwow Highway* "suffered from a predictable activist storyline that froze solid sometime in the early 1970s" (p. 15), there are historical reasons for that stasis which bear dis-

cussion. Jojola calls *Thunderheart*, the other film about AIM, a “rehash[ing] of a basic plot” (p. 15). He describes Kilmer as a “non-Native actor cast as a ‘wannabe’ who walks away completely unscathed” (p. 16), a statement hyperbolic on three counts: Kilmer is part Cherokee, his character does not “wannabe” an Indian at all but rather resists it until the end of the film, and by that time (though he walks away uninjured) he has lost his career as an FBI agent.

The interrelationship between the counterculture and post-sixties Hollywood representations of Indians is likewise complex and deserving of more discussion. As

Robert Baird points out, *Dances with Wolves* suffered criticism for its overtones of “Hollywood liberalism” and the “New Age Indian wannabe syndrome” (p. 167), but the American myth of “going native” is a powerful one—apparently reaching all the way to Finland.

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