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**Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film.** By Jacquelyn Kilpatrick. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. 261 pages. \$19.95 paper.

Born to a father who modeled himself after John Wayne's film persona, I grew up in a world of Westerns. By the time I was a child in the 1960s, Westerns had hit their box office apex after fifty or more years of first dominating silent film and early talkies, later growing to epic proportions in *The Way the West Was Won*, *Fort Apache*, and *Stagecoach*. Television was, of course, saturated with Westerns. If I have seen Monument Valley once, I have seen it a hundred times as the camera pans across endless terrain, jutting rocks and scrubby undergrowth. The Indians always arrived on cue to some variation of the Hamm's beer jingle, and lined up on the ridge like ducks at a shooting gallery. Indeed, the Indians rarely rose above the level of scenery; they were just another hostile element of the local environment, like rattlesnakes or dust storms. When they did come into focus, the results were rarely flattering.

Perhaps the film images and their ideology will never be fully erased from my mind or the minds of millions of others for whom this was daily fare. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick hopes, however, that Hollywood will learn to make more responsible, conscientious choices about how they portray Native American peoples. She takes Hollywood to task for creating and perpetuating the basic stereotypes of the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, the wise, old chief, and the Indian princess. Indian and white characters alike should be complex, well-developed, and historically accurate. Interracial matches should not routinely end in the death or desertion of one or both partners. Film images must also be made contemporary in order to dispel the notion that Natives are a vanishing people or people who only exist in some Euro-American fantasy of the Old West.

Unfortunately, this idealism, for some readers, will be the cactus in their path. Hollywood has never pretended to have high ideals, beyond lining peoples' pockets with the keys to luxury cars and seaside mansions. Filmmaking is a profit-oriented business, and appealing to viewers' baser instincts is usually profitable. Interestingly, Kilpatrick does not broach this subject until the very end of the book in a one-page chapter entitled "Coming Attractions?" She writes that the film industry must "accept the responsibility of clearing away the cobwebs of misinformation it has strung through the last century, webs that have wrapped the American Indian in a cocoon of misunderstanding, derision, hatred, and nostalgic guilt" (p. 233). Those who find this an acceptable premise will probably admire the rest of the book.

*Celluloid Indians* joins a fairly lengthy list of publications on the same or a similar topic, including Ward Churchill's *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians* (1998), Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor's *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (1998), Elizabeth Bird's *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (1996), Michael Hilger's *From Savage to Nobleman: Images of Native Americans in Film* (1995), and other volumes from the 1970s and 1980s. There is very little disagreement among these authors on problems within the culture industry; minor conflict arises only occasionally over

the readings of individual films. What Kilpatrick has done in her volume, however, is to distill much of the material in the essay collections into a single-voiced, historical narrative that is accessible to more general readers. Her prose is clear, direct, and personable; if anything, it may be too casual for some scholars. This coupled with her reasonable tone of voice should make the text more attractive to the curious reader who as yet lacks a political commitment to Native American issues.

The book also differs from others mentioned in following one central thesis through from beginning to end. In essence it tells the story of popular cinema's exploitation and adaptation of the stereotypical Indian to mirror political climates and attitudes in mainstream culture. Kilpatrick neatly and convincingly ties World War II, for instance, to movies like *They Died With Their Boots On* (1942), in that the movie provided a valiant hero for American men "about to charge through another world war" (p. 53). *Little Big Man* (1970) effectively offered a vehicle for Vietnam War protestors in its view of military leadership as insane and its gut-wrenching portrayal of an indigenous village decimated. The multiculturalism of the late 1980s and 1990s contributed to Kevin Costner's attempt to revise history in *Dances With Wolves* (1990). Kilpatrick ties historical, political, and cultural trends to these and fifty-seven other films dating from 1912 to the present. In doing so, she offers some limited formalist film criticism but focuses primarily on thematic issues. Though not a historian, Kilpatrick presents basic information necessary to anyone's understanding of the past one hundred years of American Indian history, the effects of the 1887 Dawes Allotment Act, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Termination Act of 1953, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, to name several topics covered. While not marked by any particular legislation, the current moment in film is ripe for change as is evidenced by emerging American Indian filmmakers and the failure of Hollywood's liberal guilt to produce satisfying film images (read: *Pocahontas*).

Kilpatrick's story ends with a new generation of filmmakers, including Victor Masayeva, Jr., Aaron Carr, George Burdeau, Chris Eyre, and Valerie Red-Horse. In them she sees the promise of films that begin to provide the complexities of the past and the diversity still present today. She seems most encouraged by Burdeau's film *The Witness* and Eyre's *Smoke Signals*. The former is encouraging because it "overturns stereotypes, it tells a historically accurate story, and it depicts a Native existence from a Native point of view, and that depiction is complete and balanced—no racism and no white guilt" (p. 228). *Smoke Signals*, although troubling to Kilpatrick for its bleakness and its universal appeal (as opposed to appealing to a much smaller, Native audience), does offer complex, contemporary characters. More importantly, because of its wide distribution and popularity, *Smoke Signals* "represents an Indian entry into the world of mainstream filmmaking" (p. 232). Clearly, what would stand in the way of a hopeful future is lack of serious investors. Even a quick look around at the organizations devoted to Native film, however, as well as a look at the films currently showing at Sundance Film Festival, leads to cautious optimism.

As is often the case with a good story, the beginning and the end of this one are its strengths. I found the discussions of James Fenimore Cooper, dime novels, and Buffalo Bill's film *The Indian Wars* both surprising and well written. The final discussion of contemporary Native filmmakers was informative and provocative. The interceding analyses of fifty-some films, while useful, sometimes read slowly. I found myself imagining Kilpatrick watching hundreds of hours of offensive film footage and wishing she had stopped sooner. The films certainly provide ample evidence, however, for her claims. I knew I could not be wearier of the discussion than she was of the harm these films had been doing for so many years.

*Celluloid Indians* is not just a good book. It is a good book with multiple uses. Assign it in your classes. Buy it for your father. Recommend it to your local libraries. Better still, send a copy to your favorite Hollywood production company.

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**The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich.** Edited by Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999. 213 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

A collection of critical essays examining Louise Erdrich's fiction and poetry is long overdue. The Chippewa/German author's contribution to American and American Indian literature is enormous and her ability to create tremendously complex novels and story cycles is unprecedented. Still, critiques of her work have until now been limited to journal articles and book chapters that oftentimes focus on larger literary themes.

In *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*, Allan Chavkin (whose work includes *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, a collection of interviews) brings together several in-depth analyses of Erdrich's work by critics such as Robert F. Gish, Catherine Rainwater, Nancy J. Peterson, and A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, whose afterword brings the book to a well-rounded conclusion. While the collection covers a wide variety of issues regarding Erdrich's writings, the focus and frame make the book palatable and easy to digest. And while there are no bridges transiting between sometimes difficult to connect topics (carnival and hunting in Erdrich's novels, for example), the book leaves the critical theory lover with feelings similar to those of the fiction aficionado at the conclusion of *Love Medicine*: slightly overwhelmed by the breadth of the text but cognizant of its significance.

The book's most obvious downfall is its failure to consider the topic promoted on its cover—Erdrich's use of the Chippewa landscape. A detailed analysis of Erdrich's use and representation of Chippewa landscape, world-view, mythology, and folklore does not exist in this book. Furthermore, the Turtle Mountain Reservation in particular (where Erdrich's Chippewa roots lie) is mentioned a mere four times in the text (pp. 10, 37, 112, 178 n.3).