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special appropriations were seen as needed to keep the recently educated Indian rights advocates at bay? Additionally, how American Indians in urban spaces understood, appropriated and used (or did not use) the activists' message for their own benefit needs amplification. The intercommunications (negotiations) between the activists, Indians throughout Indian country, and government officials that led to the funding and development of the urban Indian services programs during this period also need further exploration and explication.

The reasons for the more recent shift (since the 1980s) from an earlier governmental perspective about urban Indian communities and the subsequent funding policies that had unwittingly helped to create those urban Indian communities also need further illumination. Given the 2012 presidential campaign dialectic about the rightness of increasing versus decreasing entitlement programs due to the current fragile state of the national economy, will the funding agencies at all levels of governmental authority continue to encompass American Indian urban communities as part of Indian country? And, as a corollary to that, will the rightness of extending Indian entitlements to existing urban Indian programs continue to be funded in the next decade? Or will governmental funding agencies' notion of Indian country, once again, be reimagined and, in the twenty-first century, survive only as originally and narrowly conceived? Rosenthal suggests that federal, state, local, and reservation-based tribal governments may have already begun this reimagining process (161–164).

Nonetheless, Rosenthal remains optimistic. He concludes that resilient American Indians in urban places will continue to find innovative ways to continue to build “social and cultural connections between Indians on reservations and cities and towns” (167–168). Finally, he asserts that “In the end, it is Indian people who have created an Indian Country reimagined; judging by the past 100 years of North American history, they will continue to do so, well into the twenty-first century.”

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Skydancer (film). By Katja Esson. Brooklyn: Penelope Pictures, 2011. 75 minutes.

An ethnic group, even an entire country, will sometimes privilege a skill within its culture to the point where it fuses with identity: the Javanese enjoy a global reputation for their dazzling batik cloths, the Kamba tribe of Kenya is renowned for ornate woodcarving, and in sports, Jamaicans have nearly

cornered the market on sprinters, while Dominicans have contributed a disproportionate share of exceptional baseball players, from 1960s high-kicking flamethrower Juan Marichal to contemporary power hitters David Ortiz and Albert Pujols. Katja Esson's fascinating documentary *Skydancer* illuminates a skill and identity most Americans will be unfamiliar with: Mohawk prowess at perilous skyscraper ironwork.

Ironworkers are grouped into five-person teams that consist of two connectors, two hookers, and a foreman. In a 2001 *New York Times* article titled "Cowboys of the Sky," Jim Rasenberger anoints connectors as the alpha dogs of high steel. They walk along six-inch-wide steel beams some forty or sixty or eighty stories above the city sidewalk loaded with equipment, and assemble each beam as a crane swings it into position. The pay is high, the union is strong, and the danger is great.

A particular strength of this film is its ability to outflank expectations. The first words we hear spoken are those of Jerry McDonald Thundercloud, a compelling, charismatic Native connector with a movie star voice. He acknowledges that contrary to the myth of Mohawk fearlessness, he does, in fact, get scared as he works dozens of stories high without benefit of chain or safety harness. We immediately like this guy, and we jump to a quick conclusion: *Skydancer* is using a particular point of view that Michael Rabiger's *Directing the Documentary* calls a character within the film, in which we follow a person around while he does something dangerous or inspiring, like a contemporary *Nanook of the North*. But soon Thundercloud introduces us to another Mohawk ironworker, Sky Fox, whom he praises as one of the best iron connectors in the business, graced with an almost miraculous sense of balance. Fox's perspectives are interwoven with Thundercloud's, and their work is contextualized within a half-century tradition of Mohawk ironworking, one that Esson enlivens through fascinating archival photographs. Again, we're sure we've drawn a bead on this film: it's a celebratory paean to Mohawk supremacy in the air.

But again, assumptions are torpedoed. Sky Fox notes that he loves the work, but he doesn't like the life that goes with it, living in a Brooklyn lodging house during the work week and drinking with fellow workers at night to keep each other going (00:10:43). When 3:00 on Friday finally rolls around, Thundercloud compares his fellow Natives to sailors jumping off ships; they can't wait to get home. Thundercloud and Fox can't wait either, and Esson follows them on their marathon six-hour drive up north to the Ahkwesáhsne Reservation, on the United States/Canada border. There, they are reunited with their wives and children.

With apologies to Charles Dickens, what unfolds could plausibly be christened, *A Tale of Two Universes*, as the spartan world of New York City gives way to the warmer, more vibrant world of the reservation. The perspectives of

the spouses of the two subjects, Jeannie McDonald and Bear Fox, are added to the mix, and we meet retired ironworkers and other reservation members, including tribal elder Tom Porter, whom Thundercloud refers to as the Dalai Lama of Ahkwesáhsne. Porter talks about trying to preserve linguistic and cultural and spiritual traditions in the face of assimilation attempts. One secret weapon in that quest is all that iron money, which has helped to fund the reservation's own school. Away from New York, ironwork is gilded with a romantic aura. Every family has had an ironworker, and some families sustain a multigeneration tradition. Meanwhile, retirees reminisce, while children absorb the laudatory books and *Life Magazine* spread attesting to Mohawk death-defying abilities. Thundercloud reveals that when he was young, he and his friends would practice walking on the iron rail of a river-spanning bridge.

Once he is back home, Sky Fox is a transformed man. He engages with his children, his nephews, and with other children at the reservation school; he makes a difference. Thundercloud, meanwhile, recharges at the reservation longhouse where Mohawk rituals are practiced. In riveting footage, he performs an Eagle dance in tandem with Jeannie.

Considerable craft is marshaled on behalf of Esson's movie. Sound design, for instance, is exceptional. Instead of utilizing only one music composer, Esson opts for several. Matthias Falkenau's pulsating, rhythmic, reverberating guitar effectively underscores the skyscraper scenes, while Robby Baier's warm, rich, harmonica-drenched music accompanies the return home. In addition, Esson incorporates music composed by Thundercloud and Bear Fox. Both are talented, and the inclusion of their songs underscores the centrality of music in Mohawk culture. Bear Fox's "Ironworking Hubby" (00:42:10) rooted deep into at least one viewer, and remained there long after the film's screening. The infectious song is infused with a cocktail of emotions: affection, pride, and worry ("When he gets home on a Friday night, I'm relieved to see that he's all right.") Knowing an asset when she hears it, Esson wisely reprises the song for the end credits.

The cinematography, principally by Martina Radwan (with additional photography by Esson, Ferne Pearlstein, and Wojciech Szepel), offers a feast for any hard-core New Yorker. Strategic composition places the Mohawk protagonists up high against a colorful backdrop of Broadway billboards. Also included are vertigo-inducing point-of-view shots of a worker walking along a sky-high rail. These shots slam home worker danger in a visceral way; they might remind film buffs of the dizzying trapeze point-of-view shots created by Karl Freund for the 1925 thriller *Jealousy* (aka *Variety*). And when Esson shifts from New York City to Ahkwesáhsne, she distinguishes between the two worlds cinematically: longer lenses claustrophobically compress New York traffic, while Ahkwesáhsne is opened up via space-expanding wide lenses.

Initially, the viewer makes yet another assumption while watching *Skydancer*: New York City is bad and functions as the villain of the piece, a godless Sodom and Gomorrah that sucks denizens into its alcoholic vortex, while Ahkwesáhsne, in contrast, is Eden, or at least Shangri-La, where tradition still thrives and where residents are revitalized through Native spiritualism. Mohawk tradition does, in fact, still thrive, and there is much to admire in the reservation's culture, but Esson refuses to buy into a simplistic dichotomy. It turns out Ahkwesáhsne has its own dark side: unemployment runs high, pay is low, and too many young people choose to make a quick buck through drug smuggling. When Sky's own son falls prey to bad influences, which Bear Fox calls "mind-changers," his wife asks Sky to give up his lucrative job and come home, which he does. Perhaps the most disturbing moment in the documentary takes place while Bear Fox is being interviewed. Her words are suddenly disrupted by an outburst of distant automatic gunfire. She listens with concern, notes that it sounds like an assault rifle, and then simply states, "I don't know why there is so much gunfire" (00:53:55).

If a father's absence throughout most of the week can contribute to a son's wayward path, skydancing can also lead to more permanent disruptions. Thundercloud reveals that his own father plummeted to his death when he was three days old. His mother responded by latching onto alcohol, and by the time he was twelve, she had drunk herself to death. Given his childhood and the long absences necessitated by his job, perhaps it is not surprising that Thundercloud has struggled on the home front. Jeannie is his third wife.

As *Skydancer* progresses, the viewer gradually realizes the film is about neither preternatural balancing feats upon a sky-high beam, nor Edenic alternatives to modern urban madness. Instead, it's about the tough choices that tear one's life. Skydancing may offer lucrative pay and cultural identity, but it is also at odds with the old teachings that stress family unity (00:38:55). Bear Fox, for one, would prefer to keep her family intact—even if it means having to scrape by financially. Near the end, even Sky Fox questions his own priorities: "You're spending your whole life slaving—for what? For money. How did it end up like this? Who's telling us we have to be like this?" (1:09:01). It's this moral quandary that instills *Skydancer* with universality. While a screening will unquestionably enlighten each viewer on skyscraper construction, Mohawk traditions, and Native pride, it will also inspire long, hard reflection on what matters most in life.

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