

VIDEO REVIEWS

Bigcrane, Roy and Thompson Smith: *The Place of the Falling Waters*. Bozeman, Montana: Montana Public Television (Native Voices Public Television Workshop), 1991. Video: 90 minutes (3 x 30 minute parts). Colour and black and white. 1/2" VHS (educational use USA \$99.95; 3/4" VHS (educational use) USA \$149.95. Study guide: USA \$4.00.

Videos which examine the relationship between hydro-electric dam development and Native communities are rare indeed, although there have been some new documentaries on the impact of hydro-electric development in, for example, northern Manitoba. So when a video comes along which tells something of a people's experience with non-Native development, there are great expectations for it. It may be ironic, but the last film review I could find in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* was Lise Hansen's 1983 review (CJNS 3[1]:234-235) of the James Bay hydro-electric project and the devastation wreaked by non-Native development on Native lands. While *James Bay: 5,000 Years of History* resulted from ten years of salvage archaeology, *The Place of The Falling Waters* also talks about the impact of non-Native development and a hydro-electric dam. However, the video is not a response to potential loss, as was the case in James Bay, but rather examines a dam built in 1939, and considers control by the Salish and Kootenai of the dam in the future.

For teachers of Native Studies, there are very few videos, especially Native produced videos, available for the classroom. Documentary videos from Native perspectives go beyond Hollywood representations such as those portrayed in *Dances with Wolves*. I can think of only two other videos which have examined Native peoples' perspectives on changes to their worlds: Alanais Obomsawin's *Kanasetake: 200 years of Resistance*, and an Australian made film, *Barbacuarua*. Roy Bigcrane and Thompson Smith's *The Place of The Falling Waters*, is a video which goes beyond fluff and feathers, to examine Native historical perspectives.

The video is based on the experiences of the Salish and Kootenai people on the Flathead Reservation in western Montana. The focus is on the development of the Kerr dam on the Flathead river as a symbol of colonization and dominance. Bigcrane and Smith tell the story with live interviews and footage of panoramic landscapes, interspersed with archival

photo and film footage. The strong, deep voice of the narrator carries the viewer from one part of the story to the next, from how the people were before the dam, to how the dam came to be, and what the future holds for the people of the Flathead Reservation in their attempts to gain control over the dam.

In part one, "Before the Dam," the history of the area, from the perspective of the Kootenai, Pend d'Oreille, and Salish or Flathead, is told through Elders in camera interviews, archival photographs, newsreel footage and other film clips. Traditional music underlies much of the visually impressive representations and reinforces the strength and character of the people. Juxtaposed are historical photos of the building of Kerr dam with traditional style gathering. The perspective presented in this video is that there existed two distinct views of the natural world, Native and non-Native. The history recounts the dislocation to the Flathead Reservation of the Kootenai, pressed south from the Tobacco plains, and the Salish, removed from their ancestral Bigroot Valley. The dispossession of land occurs through successive assaults on the people by non-Natives.

Part two, "The Road to the Dam," begins with a summary of part one and reconstructs how the sacred falls on the Flathead river became the site of cultural exchange. The story of the Kootenai and Salish is reminiscent of similar stories in Canada: Native economies based on sharing and gift giving, of communal hunting and gathering, of yearly cycles of life based on a rich spiritual calendar, were displaced by the cash economy. As we notice now with NAFTA, the move towards a capitalist cash economy results in poverty for the many and riches for the few. Kerr dam, claims the narrator, resulted from a scheme by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to clear the debt on the Flathead Irrigation Project. The video is powerful for the simple fact that it uses the many historical photos and film available. One telling piece of historical footage is a formal address by Frank Kerr, president of Rocky Mountain Power/Montana Power, and Salish Chief Koostahtah. Kerr, reading out of his hat, tells the Natives that the dam is being built for them, while Chief Charlo says nothing and Chief Koostahtah tells everyone that he is giving Kerr a big name, *Light*.

Part three, "The Dam and the Future," asks the question: can the dam, a symbol of the destruction of tribal sovereignty, be used to rebuild the Confederated Kootenai and Salish tribal culture? For those interested in process, the narrator, through interviews of people involved with the process, tells how the Kootenai and Salish were able to gain rents for the dam until they take it over in 2015. For good or bad, states one of the interviewees, changes to the Kootenai and Salish are inevitable. How deeply the community has been split and the effects upon the future remain mute

shadows. Halfbreeds are blamed for a lack of tribalism by one Elder, while another muses that the dam should be dismantled, a symbol of man's disrespect for the land. The video is left, appropriately, open-ended.

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Kipp, Darrell and Joe Fisher: *Transitions*. Bozeman, Montana: Montana Public Television (Native Voices Public Television Workshop), 1991. Video: 30 minutes. Colour. 1/2" VHS (home use USA \$39.95; educational use: USA \$99.95); 3/4" (educational use: USA \$149.95); Study guide: USA \$4.00.

Kipp and Fisher's video, *Transitions*, illustrates how non-Native colonisation has led to the near destruction of the Blackfeet language on the fifty-mile square Blackfeet Reservation next to the Rocky Mountains. The result of this language loss has been both a sense of cultural shame among many of the Reservation inhabitants and a widespread feeling of lost identity. The video contributes greatly to an understanding of the severe damage done to this community, especially in the years from 1890 to 1936 when the Holy Family Catholic Mission Boarding School was responsible for up to one hundred Native children at a time. Those were years when a new social order was imposed as well as a new religion and a new government. The colonisers assumed that they and they alone knew what was good for the Native population, and acted according to this premise. Today the Blackfeet perceive that many non-Native people continue to think and act in this colonising manner.

In this sense, the non-Native colonisers created a new image for the tribe based upon English as the language to be spoken and Catholicism as the prescribed religion to believe and practice. This was coupled with the destruction of any trace of their ancestral traditions, that is, such external features as their traditional clothes and their hairstyle, which included long hair for boys as a sign of dignity. Past and present, the common non-Native attitude towards the Blackfeet seems to entail not listening to what they have to say and imposing a strange and alien lifestyle.