

VIDEO REVIEW

Without Reservations: Some Notes on Racism in Montana. Bozeman, Montana: Montana Public Television (Native Voices Public Television Workshop), 1995. 28 minutes. 1/2"

Skilfully constructed around three personal histories of racism in Montana, *Without Reservations* is able to fully actualize the phrase "the personal is political." Over the Native music of the Bobcat Singers and K. Christopher Dosch, the first scenes pan across stark landscapes of golden prairies with foreboding dark clouds, juxtaposed by gently sloping foothills, green pastures and blue skies. Awkward amidst the serene Rocky mountains, a large billboard both welcomes and repels: the sign announces the Glacier Mountain Cheese Company, whose mascot "Heap Good Cheese" is an idiosyncratic stylized image of a Native. This "comic" image is followed by a host of local and general images, to borrow Daniel Francis' (1992) term, of "the Imaginary Indian." Mis-advertisements focus on two primary components: anatomical, the one dimensional Indian head nickel for instance; and cultural, usually expropriated fluffs and feathers such as a war bonnet taken far out of context. A visit to a gas station convenience store easily evokes commonplace images: mythical representations of disembodied nameless Native faces floating with eagles in the clouds for the tourist trade; the mocking Washington Redskins ball cap, endorsed by baseball's National League, on the egg shell heads of children; and pornographic covers of romance novels with names like *Comanche* fashioned with computer-generated Fabioesque Native men dominating not-so-Native looking computer-generated women. The paradox created by these racist representations is an othering of what it means to be Native, and tells us much about what it means to be non-Native. The more exotic "othering" is interspersed with local reminders, for example, the Sheriff's department of Gallatin County whose emblem is a star entrapping a "Whiteman's" Native, including feathers.

Without Reservations provides a brief, yet effective introduction to the issues of racism captured in the video and integral to most programs of study. After some anonymous interviews with "White folk" denying racism in their community (one woman quips, "personally I haven't come into contact with it because there are hardly isn't any people who aren't White")

the video searches for the roots of racism in general. Orlan Svingen's article "Jim Crow, Indian Style" points out that in Montana "a pattern of separation had become firmly entrenched in the minds of non-Indians—a mind-set fostered by years of acceptance of the ideology of white racial superiority" (1987:278). Bridging each of the three sections of the video are segues produced by Sonia Whitter, Sam Olbekson, Shane Ross and Lance Dreamer; my favorite shows two (likely Salish) children watching television images of the "great American myth". The only differences north of the border are the old allusions to igloos, Mountie uniforms, and mocking Métis/French side-kicks. While racism is taught and reinforced in schools, with poorly constructed history texts used by careless and uneducated non-Native teachers, TV westerns and cartoons are significant seeds. Hollywood has imagined Indians and had a much more prominent imprint on the collective consciousness of both Natives and non-Natives than any other source.

The first section of the video, entitled "Julie Cajune: Healing Can Start", produced by Daniel W. Hurt and Chris Bumside, is the story of a Salish school teacher, one of seven Native teachers out of 450 on the Flat Head Reservation in western Montana. Hers is a story of bringing ethnic diversity to her school curriculum by including Reservation history as a counter balance to institutionalized racism. Classroom learning about the leaders of the Flat Head tribe is, for Julie Cajune, a "process of learning together to foster some understanding." This section begins with archival footage of residential schools at Fort Shaw and a now familiar none-the-less poignant litany of assimilationist tactics of hair cutting, coercion for speaking "Indian", and abuse, Cajune discussed how Indian students, minority students and poor students are lumped together and discriminated against by teachers. When asked to draw a picture of an Indian, Cajune's class drew stereotypical pictures of a person with a tomahawk and Sioux war bonnet and spoke of child stealing, scalping and other Hollywood inspired tropes.

The problem of respectful and responsible treatment of the issues of racism from the perspectives of an inter-racial couple is discussed in the section, "Eva and Ray: Two Views", produced by Paula Mozen and Dave Wheelock. The bridge to this segment is accomplished through a mix of romance novel covers of inter-racial ____ (fill in the blank because I don't know what to call those photos) and the painfully problematic scene where Pocahontas meets John Smith in the mist of the falls in Disney's Pocahontas. Eva and Ray Bigcrane's story is a complex and personal story of how racism shapes the way we live, how racism is internalized and played out. Eva mentioned that being pregnant in Estonia she was isolated whereas on the Flat Head Reservation she was supported. Ray observed that many

different cultures have peoples who have maintained links to their traditions whereas, even in the Native community, there are people only interested in climbing to the top. The family values which are in turn expressed in our communities prove to be a good test of what matters most, and in the final analysis Ray Bigcrane believes that if his children grow up to be good people, spiritual people, that's all that matters.

Colonization theory fully situates the history of racism as creating a culture of silence. In the video, racism is discussed as having forced people to accept what they believe they cannot change. And indeed, in a very real way, changing the way people think is not something all cultures support. In fact, before the social awareness/movements of the 1960s most "minority" groups spoke softly about the inequalities and abuses, and when they did they and their leaders were met with reprisals that did not stop at murder. Surprisingly, the video carries a very hopeful message of anticipated strides towards understanding and diversity. The third section of the video, entitled "Bill Williamson: Taking a Stand", produced by Shane Ross and Lance Dreamer, follows the story of Bill Williamson who fought discrimination and won. Williamson had applied and been recommended by a hiring board for a promotion to deputy sheriff. A Human Rights Commission found that Williamson was not promoted by the Hill County Sheriffs department because of racist actions and comments. While Williamson's victory represents a weakening of the institutionalized racism inherent in Montana, Svingen (1987:285) argues "old patterns of distrust, suspicion, and harassment will continue until Indian peoples are no longer viewed and treated as political refugees in a white man's world."

The video is short and to the point. Perhaps idealistic in its analysis, the message "racism can be wiped out in one generation if everyone teaches children to respect other peoples and other cultures", misses that racism has become a silent and lucrative industry. For an advanced Native studies class, this video is lacking in referencing the source materials. The video provides an introduction to the many faces of racism; however, it is a one-sided primer, providing little to deepen understanding of both the historical and living realities of racism. As an aside, after I shut off the VCR, the TV ironically switched to the 1995 movie *The Indian in my Cupboard*. The scene was of one of the main characters, the little boy, who transforms a model of an old man for his bow and in the process kills him. The other main character—the "little Indian," an Onandaga named "Little Bear" warns him, "you should not do magic you don't understand..." Indeed, the

interesting contrast best translated seems to be that much more understanding is needed for any of us to truly understand each other.

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