

The Portrayal of the Native American in Film: A Complex and Evolving History

Native Americans have a long and complex history with the film industry. For decades, they were portrayed in a stereotypical and often negative way. However, in recent years, there has been a growing movement to create more accurate and respectful representations of Native Americans in film.

The Early Days of Native American Film

The first films to feature Native Americans were made in the early 1900s. These films were often Westerns, and they typically depicted Native Americans as savages who were hostile to white settlers. This negative portrayal of Native Americans continued for many years, and it helped to shape the way that the general public viewed them.



Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film by Peter C. Rollins

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One of the most famous early Westerns is "The Birth of a Nation" (1915). This film was a massive box office success, but it was also highly controversial for its racist depiction of African Americans. The film also featured a number of negative stereotypes of Native Americans, including the idea that they were bloodthirsty savages who were incapable of civilization.

Another early Western that had a significant impact on the public's perception of Native Americans was "Stagecoach" (1939). This film starred John Wayne as a stagecoach driver who is tasked with transporting a group of passengers through hostile Apache territory. The film depicts the Apache as being a ruthless and savage enemy, and it helped to reinforce the negative stereotypes that were already in place.

The Rise of the Revisionist Western

In the 1960s, there was a growing movement to create more accurate and respectful representations of Native Americans in film. This movement was led by a number of Native American activists and filmmakers, who were determined to challenge the negative stereotypes that had been in place for so long.

One of the most important films of this era was "Little Big Man" (1970). This film starred Dustin Hoffman as a white man who is raised by a Cheyenne tribe. The film depicts the Cheyenne as being a complex and humane people, and it helped to challenge the traditional stereotypes that had been in place for so long.

Another important revisionist Western of this era was "Dances with Wolves" (1990). This film starred Kevin Costner as a white Army officer who learns

about the Lakota people and their way of life. The film was a critical and commercial success, and it helped to further change the public's perception of Native Americans.

Contemporary Portrayals of Native Americans in Film

In recent years, there has been a continued trend towards more accurate and respectful representations of Native Americans in film. This is due in part to the work of Native American filmmakers, who are increasingly telling their own stories and sharing their own perspectives.

One of the most important recent films about Native Americans is "Wind River" (2017). This film stars Jeremy Renner as a white FBI agent who is investigating the murder of a young Native American woman on a reservation. The film is a powerful and moving portrayal of the challenges that Native Americans face today, and it has been praised for its authenticity and respect.

Another important recent film about Native Americans is "The Revenant" (2015). This film stars Leonardo DiCaprio as a frontiersman who is left for dead after being attacked by a bear. He is then helped by a group of Native Americans, who nurse him back to health and teach him about their way of life. The film is a beautiful and powerful portrayal of the relationship between Native Americans and the natural world, and it has been praised for its stunning cinematography and performances.

The portrayal of Native Americans in film has come a long way since the early days of the industry. While there is still room for improvement, there has been a significant shift towards more accurate and respectful representations. This is due in part to the work of Native American

filmmakers, who are increasingly telling their own stories and sharing their own perspectives.

As we continue to learn more about the history and culture of Native Americans, we will continue to see more nuanced and accurate portrayals of them in film. This is important because it helps to break down stereotypes and build understanding between different cultures.

Further Reading

- Native Americans in Film
- How Hollywood Portrayed Native Americans
- A History of Native American Representation in Film

Image Credits

- Image of "The Birth of a Nation" (1915) from IMDb
- Image of "Stagecoach" (1939) from IMDb
- Image of "Little Big Man" (1970) from IMDb
- Image of "Dances with Wolves" (1990) from IMDb
- Image of "Wind River" (2017) from IMDb



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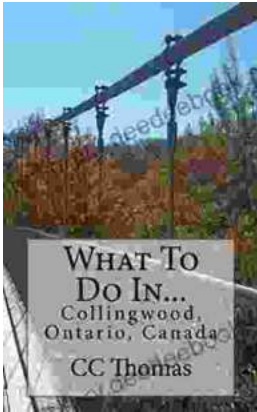
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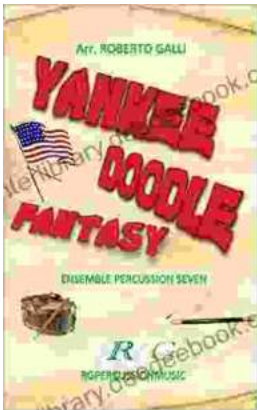
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