

Native American and Indigenous Films

List of films by American Indian creators and telling American Indian stories prepared by the Media & Design Center at the University Libraries (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Amá

Amá is the story of the abuses committed against Native American women by the US Government during the 1960s and 70s. The women were removed from their families and sent to boarding schools. They were subjected to forced relocation away from their traditional lands and, perhaps worst of all, they were subjected to involuntary sterilization. Directed by Lorna Tucker.

America's Lost Landscape: the tallgrass prairie

Tells the story of one of the world's great ecosystems and its transformation from natural landscape to farmland. The tallgrass prairie was once a prominent feature of the North American continent that was reduced, in less than a century, to the vanishing point. Directed by Daryl Smith.

American Red & Black: Stories of Afro-Native Identity

“This intimate film follows six Afro-native Americans from around the U.S. as they reflect upon the personal and complex issues of Native and African heritage, ethnic identity and racism within communities of color. This award-winning film is ideal for classroom discussion of Afro-Native history, ethnic identity, and the complex nature of Native American Identity.” — Container.

Directed by Alicia Woods.

Barking Water

A wonderful and liberating film about a dying Native American's final journey with a loving companion by his side. Directed by Sterlin Harjo.

Black Robe

In the rugged 17th century Canadian wilderness, Father Laforgue, a young and idealistic Jesuit priest, is assigned to go up river into the wilderness on a perilous journey to convert the Huron Indians. His Algonquin Indian guides nickname him “Black Robe.” His young aide and

translator, Daniel, falls in love with Annuka, the beautiful daughter of the Algonquin chief. Torn between his own desires and ideals of the priesthood, Laforgue's faith is tested as the expedition faces the elements. Attacked, captured and brutalized by hostile Indians, the traumatic experience challenges everything the young priest believes. Together with his young companions, he escapes to complete his mission and comes to understand the true spirit of the land and the spirit he sought to convert. Directed by Bruce Beresford.

By Blood

Americans are familiar with the removal of Cherokees in the infamous "Trail of Tears," but the involvement of African-American slaves is far less known. When the US Indian Removal Act forced Native Americans to relinquish their native land and move west, countless slaves followed them into the frontier, bound and shackled. Directed by Marcos Barbery and Samuel S. Russell.

Conversion

In this short fiction, Ms. Becker's second short film, missionaries visit Navajo Nation leaving devastating footprints on the life of a family. Directed by Nanobah Becker.

Curios

"Curios was the first film of Sandy Johnson Osawa created while she was a first-year graduate film student at UCLA. ... One of the large museums in Los Angeles was displaying an American Indian skeleton and during the 70's it was still not uncommon for major museums across the country to do so. The filmmaker witnessed many families visiting this museum and realized that many people learned about American Indians through glass cases where artifacts and objects and even bones were displayed. ... The first part of this one-minute film is devoted to documenting how others see American Indians and the second half is devoted to how an American Indian filmmaker sees Indians living contemporary lives in & around the city of LA." –Container.

Directed by Sandy Sunrising Osawa

Dances With Wolves

A suicidal former Union soldier ends up joining a Sioux tribe. He then takes up arms to defend them when the Army attacks. Directed by Kevin Costner.

Deep Time

A kaleidoscopic study of the recent oil boom in North Dakota, Deep Time is an award-winning documentary that focuses on the impact the fossil fuel business has on the environment and on how it affects local landowners, state officials and the Indigenous Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation. A complex take on a timely issue by the director of Crude Independence. Directed by Noah Hutton.

Dislocation Blues

“An incomplete and imperfect portrait of reflections from Standing Rock. Cleo Keahna recounts his experiences entering, being at, and leaving the camp and the difficulties and the reluctance in looking back with a clear and critical eye. Terry Running Wild describes what his camp is like, and what he hopes it will become”—VDB website.

Directed by Sky Hopinka.

The Exiles

“[C]hronicles one night in the lives of young Native American men and women living in the Bunker Hill district of Los Angeles. Based entirely on interviews with the participants and their friends, the film follows a group of exiles — transplants from Southwest reservations — as they flirt, drink, party, fight, and dance.” — Container.

Directed by Kent Mackenzie.

Forgotten Warriors

Although they could not be conscripted when World War II was declared, thousands of Canadian Aboriginal men enlisted. Unlike other veterans, they were not offered the chance to buy cheap land as a reward for fighting—on the contrary, many returned to find that parts of their reserve land had been given away. In this video, Aboriginal veterans share their war memories and their healing process. Directed by Loretta Todd.

Four Sheets to the Wind

An endearing, comic and eternally universal love and death story set among the modern traditions of Oklahoma India. Starring Cody Lightning as Cufe Smallhill who finds his usually silent father quieter than usual...dead from an overdose of medication. Without fanfare or hesitation, Cufe sinks his father's body in a pond according to his father's wishes. Without an autopsy or funeral, Cufe's deed creates a crisis in his family as he tries to understand who his father was and what kind of man he himself wants to become. It seems that only one girl really understands Cufe and may hold the key to understanding the bonds holding a family together. Directed by Sterlin Harjo.

Hands of History

This documentary follows four female First Nations artists – Doreen Jensen, Rena Point Bolton, Jane Ash Poitras and Joane Cardinal-Schubert – who seek to find a continuum from traditional to contemporary forms of expression. These exceptional artists reveal their aesthetic philosophies, their techniques and personal styles, and the exaltation they feel when they are immersed in the act of creation. This film is a moving testimony to the role that female Aboriginal artists have played in maintaining the voice of Aboriginal culture. Directed by Loretta Todd.

Honey Moccasin

Investigates the authenticity, cultural identity, and the articulation of modern Native American experience in cinematic language and pop culture. Directed by Shelly Niro.

In the Light of Reverence

Chronicles three indigenous Native American communities and the lands they struggle to protect: the Lakota of the Great Plains, the Hopi of the Four Corners area and the Wintu of northern California. Directed by Christopher McLeod.

Indians, Outlaws, and Angie Debo

A profile of historian Angie Debo. Focuses on her research in the 1930s uncovering a statewide conspiracy that deprived the Oklahoma Indians of their oil-rich lands and the efforts of officials and business interests to suppress her findings. Directed by Martha Sandlin.

Indigo

Hand-crafted, stop-motion figures come to life in this dreamlike world inspired by Native stories, in which a confined woman is liberated by grandmother spider while opaque memories are projected in an effort to restore her spirit as life nears its end. Directed by Amanda Strong.

The Last of the Mohicans

This 1936 adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper's classic early American novel tells of the 1756 siege of Fort William by the French and Huron Indians. The hero Hawkeye, a colonial scout, is played by Randolph Scott. Also starring Binnie Barnes, Henry Wilcoxon, and Bruce Cabot. Directed by George B. Seitz.

Lenape Hunters

How the Lenape made a bow, arrows and a quiver, the implements necessary for hunting deer and other creatures. See how buckskin was produced to be used for clothing and other items. William D. Guthrie also tells the ancient Lenape story of "The hunter and the owl." Directed by Ursula Rue.

Mia'

A young Indigenous female street artist named Mia' walks through the city streets painting scenes rooted in the supernatural history of her people. Lacking cultural resources and familial connection within the city, she paints these images from intuition and blood memory. She has not heard the stories from her Elders lips, but has found her own methods to rediscover them. The alleyways become her sanctuary and secret gallery, and her art comes to life. Mia' is pulled into her own transformation via the vessel of a salmon. In the struggle to return home, she traverses through polluted waters and skies, witnessing various forms of industrial violence and imprint that have occurred upon the land. Directed by Amanda Strong.

Miss Navajo

For most of us, pageants conjure up smiling beauty-queen hopefuls parading around in bathing suits or glittery gowns. But most of us have never witnessed the Miss Navajo Nation competition. Inaugurated in 1952, this unique competition redefines "pageant" as an opportunity for young women to honor and strengthen Navajo culture. Directed by Billy Luther.

Moccasin Flats

“Justin is a good-looking young native man who has just been accepted to University away from home but doesn’t want to leave his friends and family in the harsh ghetto neighborhood called Moccasin Flats. His fears of leaving them are compounded by the recent release of his archrival Jonathan who was once the pimp of Justin’s girlfriend Kristin. Jonathan’s release causes upheaval in Justin’s relationship and also leads to some violent and even fatal confrontations. It is a realistic portrayal of life in the inner city Native community in Regina, Saskatchewan, called Moccasin Flats and the issues faced by the Aboriginal youth who live there.” — Container.

Directed by Randy Redroad.

Mohawk Girls

The massive Mercier Bridge looms over the eastern end of the Kahnawake Native reserve carrying commuters into the city of Montreal. For Amy, Lauren and Felicia, three Mohawk teens living in its shadow, the bridge also serves as a constant reminder of the bustling world just beyond the borders of their tiny community. Like typical teenagers, all three are wrestling with critical decisions about their futures. But for these girls, there is more at stake. The rules on the reserve can be strict and unforgiving. Move away and you risk losing your credibility, or worse, your rights as a Mohawk. Stay and you forego untold experiences and opportunities in the “outside world.” With insight, humour and compassion, Deer takes us inside the lives of these three teenagers as they tackle the same issues of identity, culture and family she faced a decade earlier. Directed by Tracy Deer.

The Mountain of SGaana

The Mountain of SGaana spins a magical tale of a young man who is stolen away to the spirit world, and the young woman who rescues him. As a young fisherman cruises along a rugged shoreline, a tiny mouse in Haida regalia appears and starts to knit a blanket. A story unfolds on the blanket as it grows longer, illustrating the ancient tale of Haida master sea hunter Naa-Naa-Simgat and his beloved, Kuuga Kuns. When a sGaana (the Haida word for “killer whale”) captures the hunter and drags him down into a supernatural world, the courageous Kuuga Kuns sets off to save him. Will the lovers manage to escape the undersea Mountain of SGaana, or will they, too, become part of the Haida spirit world forever? Directed by Chris Auchter.

Native American Tech

To white settlers Native Americans were savages standing in the path of manifest destiny. Explore the tools, weapons, and wisdom of these people who were displaced by Europeans. Discover the secrets of healers and medicine men and examine the weapons and tactics of battles like Little Big Horn. Ride into battle with braves wielding tomahawks, lances, slingshots, bows and arrows, and clubs, then take a look into the lives of their leaders including Geronimo, Crazy Horse, Red Cloud, and Sitting Bull.

Naturally Native

Follows the lives and relationships of three sisters as they attempt to start their own business. Of American Indian ancestry, but adopted by white foster parents as young children, each sister has her own identity issues and each has chosen a very different career path. Now dedicated to starting a Native cosmetic business, they attempt to overcome obstacles both in the business world and in the home. A touching love story of family and culture, the film also interweaves a subtle but strong wake-up call regarding the treatment of Native people in corporate America, and provides some insight into tribal infrastructure and gaming issues. This is the first film about Native American women written, directed, produced and starring Native American women. Directed by Jennifer Wynne Farmer and Valerie Red-Horse.

Navajo Warriors: The Great Secret

Navajo soldiers in World War II used their unwritten Native American tongue as an unbreakable code language. Ironically the U.S. military used the Native American language as a potent instrument of war. Successive generations of young Navajo men who fought in the elite division of the U.S. Marine Corps, relate their stories in this film. Reveals how their strong Navajo cultural identity and spiritual references correlated with traditional Marine Corps values and a passionate patriotism. Directed by Michel Viotte.

The New World

The apocryphal story of the meeting of British explorer John Smith and Powhatan native Pocahontas as a romantic idyll between spiritual equals. It then follows Pocahontas through her marriage to John Rolfe and her life in England. Directed by Terrence Malick.

Older than America

An Indian woman's visions and a geologist's investigation of an earthquake come together to reveal secrets about the atrocities that took place at a Native American boarding school. Directed by Georgina Lightning.

Powerlands

In Powerland, Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso, a young Navajo filmmaker, investigates the displacement of Indigenous people and the devastation of the environment caused by the same chemical companies that have exploited the land where she was born. She travels to the La Guajira region in rural Colombia, the Tampakán region of the Philippines, the Tehuantepec Isthmus of Mexico, and the protests at Standing Rock. In each case, she meets Indigenous women leading the struggle against the same corporations that are causing displacement and environmental catastrophe in her own home. Inspired by these women, Ivey Camille brings home the lessons from these struggles to the Navajo Nation. Directed by Ivey Camille Manybeads Tso.

The Return of Navajo Boy (and epilogue)

The Return of Navajo Boy, an official selection of the Sundance Film Festival and PBS, is an internationally acclaimed documentary that reunited a Navajo family and triggered a federal investigation into uranium contamination. It tells the story of Elsie Mae Begay, whose history in pictures reveals an incredible and ongoing struggle for environmental justice. Directed by Jeff Spitz.

A powerful new epilogue (produced in 2008) shows how the film and Groundswell Educational Films' outreach campaign create news and rally supporters including Congressman Henry Waxman (D-CA). The Chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform mandated a clean-up plan by the five agencies that are responsible for uranium contamination. Ironically, the US EPA's Comprehensive Five-Year Plan did not include Ms. Begay's backyard, until she traveled with this film to Washington, DC and screened it on Capitol Hill in September 2008.

Sisters Rising

Sisters Rising is the story of six Native American women fighting to restore personal and tribal sovereignty in the face of ongoing sexual violence against Indigenous women in the United States. Native American women are 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual assault than all other American women. 1 in 3 Native women report having been raped during her lifetime and 86% of the offenses are committed by non-Native men. These perpetrators exploit gaps in tribal jurisdictional authority and target Native women as ‘safe victims’ with near-impunity. Sisters rising is an urgent call to action, a gorgeous portrait of powerful women acting in solidarity, and a demand for tribal sovereignty and self-determination as the necessary step to ending violence against Native women. Directed by Willow O’Feral and Brad Heck.

Smoke Signals

Depicts two young Native Americans, Victor and Thomas, who leave their small town to retrieve the remains of Victor’s father. Directed by Chris Eyre.

Spirit in Glass: Plateau Native Beadwork

‘Art has always been a way to showcase what is going on in a community. We have adapted beads to being our artform. It is definitely a part of our identity.’ – Ervanna Little Eagle (Warm Springs)

Celebrate the spectacular beadwork and culture of the Columbia River Plateau People through the eyes and hearts of the artists. Together, they share their history, motivation and the beadwork that plays an important role in binding their culture together. Native Plateau beadwork and culture is unique and its story of survival is a part of the rich tapestry of America. Narrated by Nez Perce storyteller Nakia Williamson, Spirit in Glass: Plateau Native Beadwork features artists from the Warm Springs, Yakama, and Umatilla Reservations. Directed by Penelope Phillips.

This May Be the Last Time

This May Be the Last Time traces the heartfelt journey of award-winning filmmaker Sterlin Harjo as he interweaves the tale of a mysterious death in 1962 with the rich history of the powerful hymns that have united Native American communities in times of worship, joy, tragedy, and hope. Investigating the stories of these songs, this illuminating film takes us on an epic tour as we travel with the power of the music through Southwest America, slavery in the

deep South, and as far away as the Scottish Highlands. Directed by Sterlin Harjo.

Water Warriors

Water Warriors is the story of a community's successful resistance against the oil and gas industry. When an energy company begins searching for natural gas in New Brunswick, Canada, indigenous and white families unite to drive out the company in a campaign to protect their water and way of life. Directed by Michael Premo.

Weaving Worlds

In this compelling and intimate portrait of economic and cultural survival through art, Navajo filmmaker Bennie Klain takes viewers into the world of contemporary Navajo weavers and their struggles for self-sufficiency. Highlighting untold stories and colorful characters involved in the making and selling of Navajo rugs, Weaving Worlds explores the lives of Navajo artisans and their unique—and often controversial—relationship with Reservation traders. The film artfully relates the Navajo concepts of kinship and reciprocity with the human and cultural connections to sheep, wool, water and the land, showing how indigenous artisans strive for cultural vitality and environmental sustainability in the face of globalization by 'reweaving the world.' Directed by Bennie Klain.

Who Owns the Past?

Explores the conflict between anthropologists and Indian people over the control of human remains found on ancestral Indian land. Directed by N. Jed Riffe.