



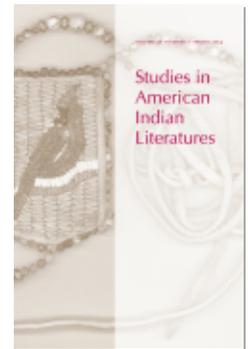
PROJECT MUSE®

Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching, and Theory edited by M. Elise Marubbio and Eric L. Buffalohead
(review)

Erin J. Cotter

Studies in American Indian Literatures, Volume 26, Number 1, Spring 2014,
pp. 125-127 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/539880>

tural artifact memorializing a revolutionary gambit well worth preserving in cultural memory and textual history. The outcome of November's referendum makes *Ratification* a roadmap to success and a source of celebratory memory. However, whatever the outcome of the White Earth vote, the process recorded in *Ratification* is itself witness to a landmark moment and a triumph in the ongoing struggle for Native sovereignty.

M. Elise Marubbio and Eric L. Buffalohead, eds. *Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching, and Theory*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-8131-3665-3. 390 pp.

Erin J. Cotter, *University of Texas–Austin*

Native Americans on Film compiles essays and interviews from various scholars and Native filmmakers in order to discuss Native film from a Native perspective. The anthology posits how alternative ideas and visions of Native-ness within Native film serve to combat the stereotypical depictions of Native people and culture found in most mainstream films. The three sections of the anthology, “Theoretical Conversations,” “Pedagogical Conversations,” and “Conversations with Filmmakers,” organize the information in broad, accessible categories for both scholars and nonscholars alike. These conversations capture the contemporary moment of Native film while both looking backward and forward, allowing the anthology to demonstrate that discussions about Native film have been, and will continue to be, a process involving all members of the Native film community.

The beginning section, “Theoretical Conversations,” contains essays outlining major theories surrounding Native film and filmmaking. Houston Wood opens the section by comparing and contrasting Native and Euro-American filmmaking but maintains that what can be understood as Native film and filmmaking is in itself quite diverse and cannot be reduced to a single category. Wood's essay is an excellent introduction to the primary debates and issues in Native film, particularly the tensions between Native and non-Native depictions of Indigenous people. Visual sovereignty is the topic of Michelle H. Raheja's essay. She introduces and discusses the concept in relation to two films, the non-Native-made *Nanook of the North* and the Native-made *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Both films have the Inuit people as their subject but rep-

resent them quite differently. For Raheja, visual sovereignty involves freeing the Native subject from racist mainstream depictions of Native identity and community. Jennifer L. Gauthier discusses two female documentary makers, Alanis Obomsawin and Loretta Todd, and their documentaries depicting the challenges confronting Canadian Native people in their quests for sovereignty and state recognition through a feminist aesthetic. Hunkpapa Lakota artist Dana Claxton and her live and video-produced Indigenous installation art is Carla Taunton's topic of interest. She argues that such art can reclaim bodies, lands, and stories subjugated by colonial powers and return them to a place of Indigenous sovereignty.

Section 2, "Pedagogical Conversations," explores what Native film can do for Native people and discusses how educators can introduce students to many of the theories referenced in section 1 and help them obtain a visual literacy for Native film. The problematic creation and re-creation of reified images of Native people in Hollywood concerns Carole Gerster, who offers a reading of several Native films with alternative depictions of Native people, all while providing advice on how to introduce these ideas and films to students. Amy Corbin argues that Sherman Alexie employs a nomadic point of view—that is, a point of view that places the viewer as both an insider and an outsider in the film's landscape—to show the irreconcilable nature of his Native protagonist's identity as both cosmopolitan and Native in his film *The Business of Fancydancing*. The flexibility of the nomadic point of view contests the touristic point of view used by many non-Native filmmakers when filming Native people. The practicality of creating lesson plans is addressed by Angelica Lawson, who offers classroom units organized around individual films to teach Native film from a Native perspective. Issues of representation and self-representation are paramount in her classroom units. Sam Pack conducts two reception studies among white and Native audiences by screening a Native and a non-Native made film to each audience and then asking each audience to observe the differences, similarities, and their individual impressions of the films. Filmmaker Beverly Singer reflects on her experiences teaching students about Native film and the need to privilege the complexities of Native history and stories for students rather than to discuss Hollywood constructions of Native identity. She argues that re-appropriating a non-Native technology like film can combat the influence of colonialism on

contemporary life, link Native people to their ancestral past, and enable them to imagine historical ways of Native life.

“Conversations with Filmmakers” is the third and final section in the anthology. Here, “the theoretical and analytical are reframed by the practical and personal” through interviews with Sterlin Harjo, Blackhorse Lowe, Shelley Niro, Sandy Osasa, Randy Redroad, and Mono Smith (261). Through discussions of their methods, personal interests, and goals as filmmakers, the conversations present in the rest of the anthology come together to sketch the dynamic and multifaceted reality of Native film and filmmaking. In particular, many filmmakers in this section debate use of the term *Native filmmaker* itself and whether the term empowers or disenfranchises Native film at a universal level. In the first interview Randy Redroad likens Native filmmaking to a “greased pig” whose meaning remains slippery and evasive, and the ensuing interviews expound upon the slipperiness of the term (298).

M. Elise Marubbio and Eric L. Buffalohead have succeeded in depicting the complexities in studying, teaching, and creating Native film. The anthology’s organization and content are accessible for neophytes to Native cinema while still proving useful for more seasoned veterans. Due to the extensive and informative notes at the end of each article, interested readers can easily further their knowledge of a particular topic of interest. Within the eclectic range of materials in the contributors’ essays, several themes emerge as key to Native film: sovereignty, the ever-evolving meaning of Native film itself, and what qualifies as Native film. Regardless of an individual’s level of knowledge and expertise in Native film, *Native Americans on Film* is a valuable read for anyone interested in this topic.

M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama, eds. *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2012. ISBN: 978-0816521012. 376 pp.

Mario N. Castro, *University of Texas–Austin*

What are the challenges for the field of ethnic studies? The antagonistic discourse of conservative groups in the United States against minority groups only marks the urgency of ethnic studies as a field of political