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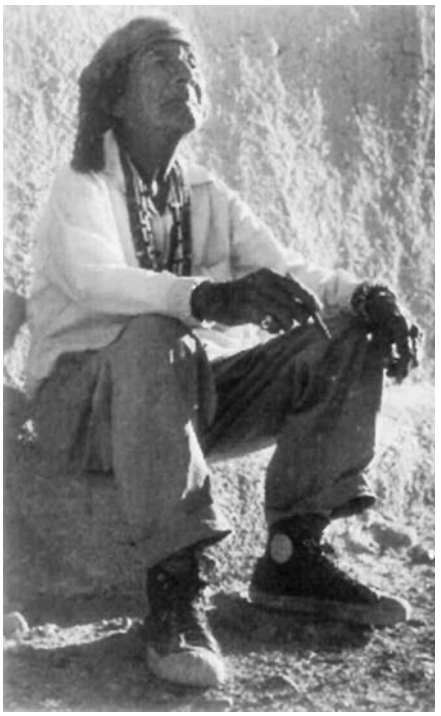
Native American Culture: *Smoke Signals*

Setting the Scene: Freewriting and Discussion



Courtesy of Oxford University Press

This photograph is from the book *Indi'n Humor* (1993) by Kenneth Lincoln. Taken by Lee Marmon from the Laguna Pueblo tribe in New Mexico, it is called "White Man's Moccasins." What thoughts and feelings does it evoke for you? Think about the setting, the mood, and the point of view. Consider the following questions: How do you think this man feels about his clothing and footwear (sneakers)? Why do you suppose he is not wearing traditional moccasins? Does wearing white man's shoes make him more assimilated? Freewrite in your film notebook, and then turn to a classmate and share ideas.

Sneak Preview

About the Film

Smoke Signals (1998) is a film about Indians,[1] but it may not be what you expect, especially since the title suggests that it could be just another standard Western so popular in cinematic history. If you've seen even a few of the more than 2,000 Westerns made since the early 1900s, you know that Indians are usually depicted in stereotypical fashion—as bloodthirsty renegades, stoic warriors, noble savages, or buckskin-clad princesses. Except for historical figures such as Geronimo and Cochise, Indians in western films rarely have names or individual personalities; they speak neither English nor any other language (though they do grunt and whoop), and they spend a lot of time ambushing whites. In the typical cowboy-and-Indian scenario, handsome, rugged heroes like John Wayne play the parts of men charged with bringing civilization to the Wild West and protecting women and children settlers from the warriors' arrows and tomahawks.

But *Smoke Signals* is not about warriors, nor is it set on the 19th-century Western frontier. It distinguishes itself as a full-length feature film written, directed, coproduced, and acted (in all major roles) by Native Americans. Based loosely on Sherman Alexie's short novel entitled *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1994), it won two awards at the Sundance Film Festival. By all measures it is a landmark film that, in Alexie's words, "challenges the cinematic history of Indians" (Summa 1998). It does so by bringing new Indian characters to the screen who, as Alexie says, are not the silent, stoic types we're used to, nor are they depressed victims. In real life, Alexie tells us, "Indians are the most joyous people in the world" (D4).

In fact, notice when you watch the film how humor plays a central role. As early as 1969, Native legal scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., tried to correct misconceptions about stone-faced Indians in his book *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969). He begins his chapter on "Indian Humor" by stating that "One of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh" (148). Not only is the popular image of Indians all wrong, he says, but even experts on Indian affairs have failed to mention how humor pervades Indian life.

1. As is often common practice, we use *Indians* and *Native Americans* interchangeably. See **Terms to Know** for further explanation.

In his fascinating *Indi'n Humor,* author Kenneth Lincoln says that Indians respond to life with "sharp humor, a good dose of sarcasm, resigned laughter, and a flurry of ironic 'rez' (reservation) jokes" (5). For many Native people, humor is a way of enjoying life and also a means of psychological survival. Lincoln provides a quote from John (Fire) Lame Deer of the Lakota Sioux to help clarify what Indian humor is about: "For a people who are as poor as us, who have lost everything, who had to endure so much death and sadness, laughter is a precious gift . . . We Indians like to laugh" (58).

When you watch the film, you'll see how real, ordinary people living in the present time go about their daily lives with humor and dignity. As you get to know the characters, you may wonder why it took so long for this unromanticized, demythologized presentation of Indians to come to the big screen. The main reason is that feature films are expensive to make and thus have been produced, directed, and written by those with sufficient means to do so—which has usually meant white men. For more than a century, directors like John Ford (of Irish-American descent) were the ones making decisions about how to present Indians to primarily white audiences.

Furthermore, because authenticity has been less important than drawing big crowds to movie theaters, the more important, more glamorous Indian roles of the past have commonly been played by heavily made-up non–Native American actors familiar to the moviegoing public. Rock Hudson, Elvis Presley, Raquel Welch, and Audrey Hepburn are a few of the Hollywood stars who have been cast as Indians. You can imagine that from an Indian p.o.v., it can be insulting (not to mention rather ridiculous) to see made-up white actors playing major Indian roles.

This is not to say that enlightened filmmakers never deviated from the old patterns prior to *Smoke Signals*. A few early movies are sympathetic to Indians, such as *Broken Arrow* (1950) and *Little Big Man* (1970); in addition, the more recent *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and *House Made of Dawn* (1987) break new ground (as do the movies recommended at the end of the chapter). But the p.o.v. of Indians themselves has been found almost exclusively in documentaries. Created by a large number of active, dedicated Indian filmmakers such as Alanis Obomsawin (of the Abenaki tribe) and Victor Masayesva (of the Hopi tribe), these splendid, usually low-budget works are evidence of a richness that as yet has not reached a wide audience. Since it can be difficult to find the documentaries, you might keep an eye out for Native American film festivals.

Check the website at *www.imaginenative.org* to see what kinds of exciting things are going on.

About the Filmmakers and Actors of *Smoke Signals*

One of six siblings, Sherman Alexie (born 1966) grew up in poverty on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. His mother is part Spokane, and his father is full-blooded Coeur d'Alene. Both of his parents were alcoholics, but his mother was able to break her addiction when her son was seven years old, and she subsequently became a tribal drug and alcohol abuse counselor.

A frail and sickly child, Alexie realized early that humor was an effective way to stave off bullies.

> People like to laugh, and when you make them laugh, they listen to you. That's how I get people to listen to me now. . . . I'm saying things people don't like for me to say. I'm saying very aggressive, controversial things, I suppose, about race and gender and sexuality. I'm way left [in my viewpoints], but if you say it funny, people listen. If you don't make 'em laugh, they'll walk away. (Blewster 1999, 26–27)

Alexie also avoided being picked on by spending a lot of time in the reservation school library. He later attended junior high and high school off the reservation in the nearby predominately white town of Reardon, where, he recalls with humor, he and the school mascot were the only Indians. Successful as a high school basketball player, honor society member, class president, and debater, he received a scholarship to Gonzaga University in Spokane.

After two years at Gonzaga, where he struggled with a drinking problem, he discontinued his studies, finishing later at Washington State University in Pullman. He credits Alex Kuo, his professor in a poetry class, with helping him discover his talent as a writer. Several poems written for Kuo's class were published in his first book, *The Business of Fancydancing* (1991). While still living in Pullman, Alexie, now sober, became a popular figure at local poetry readings.

Since 1991, Alexie's literary career has been remarkable. Though he considers himself primarily a poet and has published more than ten volumes of poetry, his widespread popularity has come from his fiction and screenplays. His frequent readings and literary presenta-

tions are well attended and hugely successful. Quick-witted and a natural comic, he does not simply read from his works but engages the audience in a freewheeling style that keeps people captivated and laughing throughout. He has a large and loyal following among Indians and non-Indians alike.

You can find interesting information about Alexie, including his schedule of upcoming presentations, on his website *http://fallsapart.com*. Don't miss the opportunity to hear him speak.

Director Chris Eyre (born 1969) is of Cheyenne/Arapaho descent. He was adopted by a white family and grew up in Klamath Falls, Oregon, later attending school in Portland. Since receiving his master's degree in filmmaking at New York University, he has directed an impressive number of films. You might visit his website *www.chriseyre.org*.

The cast of experienced and accomplished Native American actors includes Gary Farmer, who won a loyal following for his role as Philbert Bono in *Powwow Highway* (1989); Tantoo Cardinal, who has played dozens of fine roles, including that of Black Shawl in *Dances with Wolves* (1990); Adam Beach, who speaks to native youth throughout the United States and Canada; Evan Adams, who plays the lead role in Sherman Alexie's directorial debut, *The Business of Fancydancing* (2002), and who is an obstetrician in Vancouver, British Columbia; Irene Bedard, who was the physical model for, and the voice of, the Disney character Pocahontas; and John Trudell *(www.johntrudell.com)*, who is a poet, musician, and political activist known especially for his leadership of AIM (American Indian Movement) and his participation in the takeover of Alcatraz Island (see pages 15–16). For further information on the actors, check *www.imdb.com*.

Who's Who in the Film

Victor Joseph (Adam Beach)—young man abandoned by his father

Thomas Builds-the-Fire (Evan Adams)—Victor's storyteller companion

Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer)—Victor's father who leaves for Phoenix

Arlene Joseph (Tantoo Cardinal)—Victor's mother

Grandma Builds-the-Fire (Monique Mojica)—relative who raises Thomas

Randy Peone (John Trudell)—K-Rez announcer

Suzy Song (Irene Bedard)—woman who befriends Arnold Joseph in Phoenix

Director—Chris Eyre

Screenwriter—Sherman Alexie

Ten Indian Culture Areas in North America

Terms to Know

aboriginal peoples—Used primarily to refer to the original inhabitants of Australia, but sometimes also used in reference to other Native peoples.

Alaska Natives—Used to refer to the **indigenous peoples** of Alaska, such as Aleuts and Inuits (Eskimos).

American Indian—Similar to **Indian;** often used in everyday speech and in legal documents.

First Nations—Used in Canada to refer to sovereign Native people. **Native Canadian** and **Native people** are also used in Canada.

Hawaiian Natives, Native Hawaiians, Hawaiians—Indigenous people of Hawaii.

Indian—Widely used to refer to the many different **indigenous peoples** who inhabited this country before the European conquest and to their descendants. The word itself is attributed to Christopher Columbus, who, falsely believing he had landed in India, used the Spanish word *indios* to refer to the people he encountered. **Indian** is not used with relation to the original inhabitants of Alaska or Hawaii.

indigenous people—Often used by anthropologists and others to refer to groups native to a region; avoids the word **native,** which sometimes has pejorative associations with the idea of being primitive.

nation—Similar to *tribe* and suggesting political independence. (In the legal terms of the dominant white society, not all tribes are actually nations.)

Native American—First came into widespread use in the 1960s in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Devised as a respectful way of referring to Indians, it is used more by others than by Indians themselves.

Native people—Has gained international acceptance as a way of referring to **indigenous people.**

powwow—Probably derived from an Algonquian word for a healer or spiritual leader who could see the future in dreams. The term is commonly used to refer to a talk or meeting ("Let's powwow . . ."), but to Native Americans, powwows are opportunities to express and celebrate their heritage. Often open to the public, powwows are occasions for socializing, singing, dancing, and feasting.

red man—Reference to the skin color of Native Americans, which is not really red. Though generally considered dated and offensive, the term is sometimes used neutrally in phrases like, *I don't care if his skin is black, white, red, or purple.* **Red Power** was a slogan used by Indian activists during the Civil Rights Movement.

redskin, squaw, injun—Highly derogatory terms.

res or rez—Short for *reservation;* may seem disrespectful if used by non-Indians.

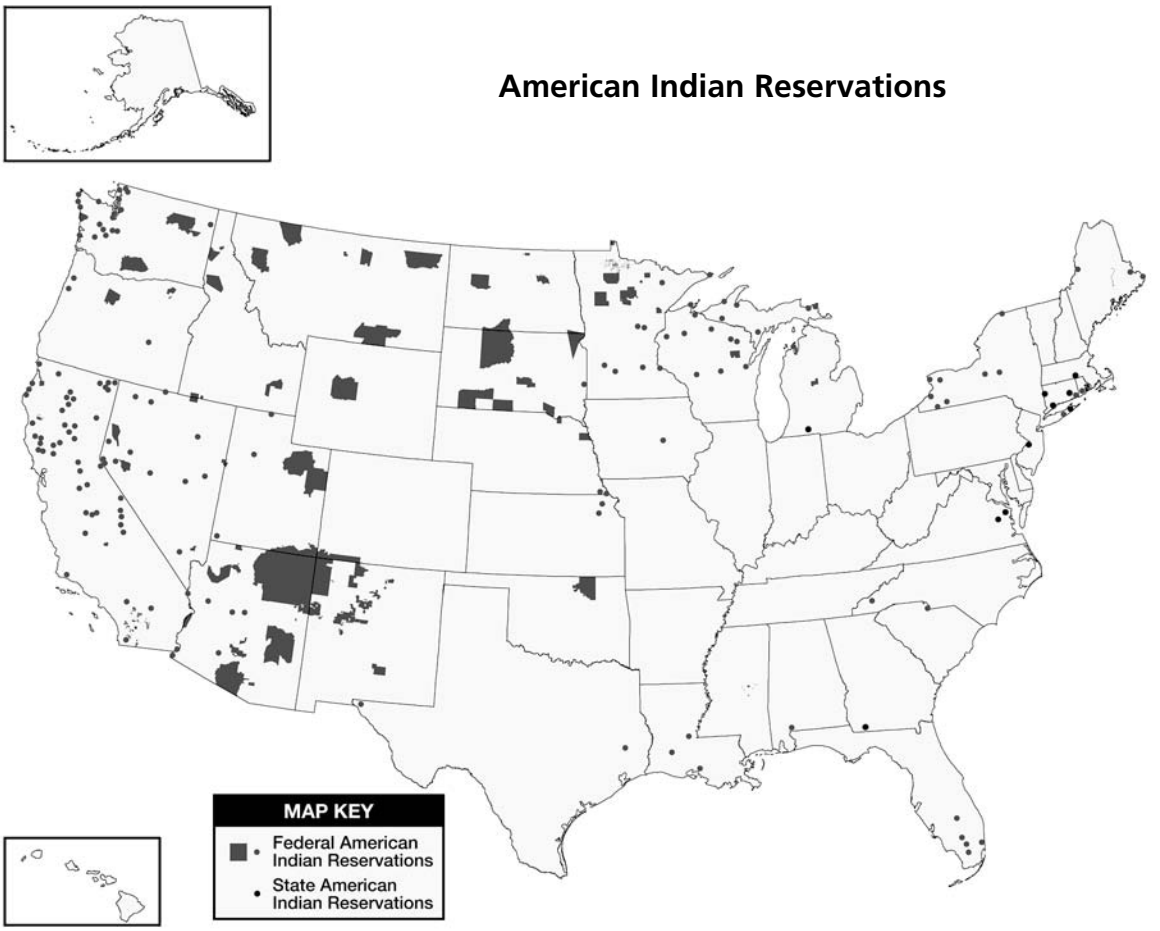
reservation—Fixed areas of land in the western part of the United States where Indians were forced to settle and reside beginning in the mid-1800s.

tribe—Group of Indians sharing a common heritage.

History Flashback

Victor, Thomas, and most of the other Indians we meet in *Smoke Signals* are living on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation in Washington State, one of approximately 300 reservations in 29 states. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about 538,000 Indians, or one-fifth of the total Indian population, are living on reservations. Refer to the map.

How did reservations come about? Who created them, and when and why did they come into existence? What are they like, and what do they offer to modern-day Native Americans?



Indians as Original Inhabitants

To answer these questions, let's flash back more than 500 years to the time of Columbus's landing in the New World in 1492, when Indians were the sole inhabitants of the hemisphere. At that time hundreds of tribes occupied a vast stretch of territory equivalent to one-fourth of the earth's habitable land, extending from northern Alaska to Cape Horn. There is no way to know the size of the population at the time of Columbus; among scholars much controversy surrounds the figure, with estimates ranging from two to twelve million indigenous people living in North America (north of present-day Mexico).

The landing of Columbus marks the beginning of a brutal takeover of the continent by the European powers of Spain, England, and France, as well as by Russia and the Netherlands. During the following centuries, as colonizers waged their campaigns for land, religious converts, and riches, Indians were almost always the losers. Though many Europeans were originally received with hospitality, and notwithstanding some good relations and intermittent periods of relative peace, contact with the newcomers overwhelmingly demonstrated to Indians that the white man's presence ultimately meant betrayal, destruction, and death. You may recall that in *Smoke Signals,* Columbus is still a presence in everyday conversation and a source of ironic humor. For example, Thomas says, "I wish we were this organized when Columbus landed."

Generation after generation, Indian individuals and groups tried to oppose the white man's attempts to convert, assimilate, deceive, subjugate, and dispossess them. They fought ongoing skirmishes, battles, and wars. To learn more about the power of the invaders on the one hand, and the resistance of the indigenous peoples on the other, consider looking at three episodes of terrible destruction that took place in successive centuries: the Pueblo Revolt (1680), Little Turtle's War (1790–95), and the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890).

Ultimately, the Indians could not win. They were outnumbered, deceived countless times, and unable to match the advanced weaponry of their foes. By the late 18th century, European-borne disease and continuous warfare had decimated or in some cases completely wiped out entire groups of Indians. In the movie, when an angry Thomas wants to prove to Victor that his father won't return, he has examples quick at hand, like the Mohicans and the Winnebago. Even as a young boy, Thomas has learned that "when Indians go away, they don't come back." (For the sake of historical

accuracy, neither tribe is extinct today, although James Fenimore Cooper's famous 1826 novel *The Last of the Mohicans* certainly created that false impression about the Mohicans, and the Winnebago were once reduced from 25,000 to only 150 people.)

As Indians struggled to avoid extinction, a new nation of primarily white Americans was being constituted on their lands. This new nation was "born" when it declared its independence from England on July 4, 1776, a day enshrined in U.S. history and celebrated annually with displays of patriotism. For many non-Indians, it may come as a shock to hear in *Smoke Signals* that not everyone feels the same way about the holiday that Arnold Joseph irreverently calls "White Man's Independence Day." Does it make sense to you that the tragic event of the film is set on July 4, 1976—the very day when elaborate, jubilant bicentennial celebrations took place across America?

Of course, simply declaring independence in 1776 did not mean that the rebellious European Americans' claims to the new land were recognized by the mother country of England. It took a great conflict, the Revolutionary War of 1776 to 1783, to end British rule over the entire territory (excluding Florida) that extended from the eastern seaboard to the Mississippi River (see map on page 11) and to legitimize the right of the Americans—at least from their point of view—to own and govern their new country.

Indians "Removed"

But what about the fact that Indians with prior rights were still living on the land? Though greatly reduced in territory and numbers, most eastern Indian nations still occupied portions of their original homelands—until President Andrew Jackson forcibly relocated them west of the Mississippi. In 1830 Jackson, whom historian Howard Zinn (2005) calls "the most aggressive enemy of the Indians in early American history," pressed Congress to pass the infamous Indian Removal Act (127).

Under this act, more than 50 tribes (approximately 80,000 Indians) were driven from their homelands in an attempt to remove them entirely from the country as it existed at the time. The stories are heartbreaking. For example, on their forced 1,000-mile trek from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838–39, one of every four Cherokees perished from hunger, cold, and exhaustion. Read more about the period that Cherokees call The Trail of Tears at *www.*

Growth of the United States by Region and Appropriation of Indian Lands (1776–1867)

powersource.com/cherokee/history.html. Another amazing story you might investigate is that of the Florida Seminoles, who refused to leave and who fought a brilliant and prolonged war against the United States from the swamps and marshes of the Everglades (see the excellent website at *www.seminoletribe.com*).

Jackson's government assured the exiled Indian nations that in return for being relocated, they would receive an "ample district west of the Mississippi . . . to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes, as long as they shall occupy it" (Richardson 1896, 458). But this promise of a permanent solution ("as long as they shall occupy it") was broken almost immediately. What happened? Why did the government fail to uphold its legal and moral commitments?

Insight can be gained from President Jackson's second annual message to Congress on December 6, 1830. He said:

> What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion? (521)

This idea of a noble, civilizing mission is often referred to as Manifest Destiny, a term coined later that decade by a journalist named John L. O'Sullivan. It expresses the belief held by most whites that they were entitled to the land by virtue of their innate superiority and religious mission. They believed it was their God-given right, and their sacred obligation, to expand the nation westward to its furthermost borders and to rule over it. As O'Sullivan writes: "We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?" *(www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/osulliva.htm).*

In light of this unquestioned destiny, promises made to Indians were simply not that important. Between 1778 and 1871, the federal government signed 371 legal documents, or treaties, with Indian nations, every one of which was violated or abrogated. Today, non-Indians tend to look at treaties as relics of the past, as mere pieces of paper signed so far back in history that it would be absurd, not to mention highly impractical, to think of resurrecting them.

Many Indians feel differently. As Deloria (1969) explains, "It is this blatant violation of treaties that causes such frustration among the Indian people. Many wonder exactly what their rights are, for no matter where they turn, treaties are disregarded and laws are used to deprive them of what little land remains to them" (38). From an Indian point of view, the issue of broken treaties has not been resolved, and battles are still being fought in the courts. You may recall from the film that treaties are a source of ironic humor.

If you look again at the map on page 11, you can see how quickly the U.S. government acted to fulfill its "destiny" by appropriating tribal land. This history of expansion through theft, deceit, and war is not what non-Indian Americans think of when they recall with pride the history of western settlement. As the map shows, in 1803 the new country purchased the huge Louisiana Territory from France, and in 1819 it acquired Florida from Spain. By mid-century, the missing pieces in America's continental building scheme were all obtained, most notably by annexing Texas from Mexico in 1845 and by virtually stealing from Mexico one-third of its country in the Mexican American War of 1846–48 (see pages 77–78). Thus, in fewer than 100 years after breaking away from England, the Americans had acquired sole "possession" of a nation that reached from coast to coast and included Alaska.

Still, the far West might have remained remote, inhospitable, and uninteresting to white settlers if gold had not been discovered in

California in 1848. That event decided the fate of Western Indians forever. Whereas trappers, traders, and missionaries had long roamed the distant territories, and some wagon trains of settlers had been rolling westward on the Oregon Trail across Indian lands since the early 1840s, suddenly tens of thousands of fortune hunters moved west through territories Native people held—either as original inhabitants or by treaty. This relentless migration and the accompanying growth of railroad and communication lines severely disrupted native hunting and fishing practices, destroyed food-gathering grounds, depleted natural resources, and spread white men's diseases.

The Reservation System

> I have heard that you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies. There I feel free and happy, but when we settle down we grow pale and die.
>
> —Chief Satana (Kiowa)

When the Indians could no longer be "removed" any further west to unwanted lands, they posed a tough problem. In the mid-1800s, sentiment began to grow among U.S. government policymakers that Native Americans should be gathered together and forced to reside on permanent, fixed areas of land known as reservations. This plan had three important goals: to concentrate Indian populations, to isolate them from whites, and to train them in agriculture as a means of moving them toward assimilation.

The reservation plan was clearly illegal, immoral, and unworkable. It ignored and violated treaties signed by the U.S. government and various Indian nations detailing precise conditions by which Indians would be guaranteed ownership of certain lands. It set out to enclose and, in effect, imprison people on lands they had not agreed to occupy and turn them into farmers against their will. (Even if the Indians had been willing to undertake farming, it would have been a useless enterprise, since the specific lands reserved for agricultural purposes were for the most part barren wastelands that were not tillable.) And, finally, the reservation plan was corrupted by its administrators, who were mostly political appointees lacking qualifications and integrity.

The latter half of the 19th century is marked by major battles fought

by whites to claim "their" new Western lands and by Indians to oppose being dispossessed and forced onto reservations. In popular culture, this is known as the era of the Wild West, the frontier, the cowboys and Indians. It has given rise to enduring and cherished national myths about the heroism of white settlers who "tamed" the West.

Though much less is widely known or acknowledged about heroism on the part of Indians in general, the powerful Sioux have long captured the imagination of non-Indians. In fact, many of the cultural features now associated (often mistakenly) with all Indians are characteristic of the former Sioux way of life: teepees, war bonnets and eagle feathers, buffalo hunting, and superior horsemanship. The great Sioux leaders—Little Crow, Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Black Elk, Crazy Horse, and Spotted Tail—have achieved legendary status in American history.

Not until recently, however, has the mainstream society begun to see the decisive Sioux victory over George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn (1876) in a way that places the cavalry commander in a critical light (see *www.hanksville.org/daniel/misc/Custer.html*). Although widely celebrated as a hero for more than a century, he was, in fact, known to Indians for his extreme brutality. At the Little Bighorn, Custer miscalculated and was killed, along with his entire 7th cavalry, by the Sioux and their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies. After his death, he was elevated to the status of a tragic figure who sacrificed his life for his country, and the battle was viewed as evidence of Indian treachery and barbarism. Indians, by contrast, have never had a doubt about who Custer was, and his ruthless reputation lives on. In the film, characters refer to him mockingly, and they keep the famous battle alive in clever ways. For example, playing on the fact that Crazy Horse was said to have uttered the famous Sioux battle cry "Hoka Hey" ("Today is a good day to die") as he led the attack, the K-Rez announcer tells his listeners that "it's a good day to be indigenous," and Thomas says, "It's a good day to eat breakfast."

Indian Nations within the United States

Having had little choice but to try to survive for decades in desperate conditions on reservations, Indians are now using their outsider status to achieve new goals. Still largely unwilling to assimilate—which to them means losing their cultures and heritage and buying into a

white system they do not respect—they are determined to maintain their independence, or so-called sovereignty. In 1886, Chief Pound Maker (Cree) expressed this idea prophetically: "Our old way of life is gone but that does not mean we should sit back and become imitation white men" (Wearne 1996, 15).

Sovereignty (also called self-determination or self-governance) is the most significant issue facing Indians today. Even if you have not heard the word itself, you have most likely encountered struggles over sovereignty in the form of rights to hunting, fishing, or casino gambling. Or, if you have visited an Indian reservation, you may have been greeted at the entrance by a sign welcoming visitors to that particular Indian *nation.*

The words *nation* and *sovereignty* refer to monumental changes that have been taking place in recent decades in the status of Indian territories and the definition of Indian rights. Significantly, many non–Native Americans do not realize that approximately 150 sovereign, or separate, Indian nations are now legally established within the United States. Why have we not learned more about this in school and the media? Without knowing about sovereignty, we cannot understand one of the most profound developments in our nation's history. Most Indians, of course, are fully aware of sovereignty. In the film, when Lucy and Velma give their two friends a ride, they joke about passports and vaccinations being necessary to leave the reservation and enter a "foreign country." Though Thomas and Victor don't need passports, they actually are going to a different nation when they leave the reservation.

How did Native Americans begin to reclaim their rights and power? Inspired by the civil rights and Black Power movements, in 1968 a group of activists led by Chippewa Indians Dennis Banks and George Mitchell founded AIM (American Indian Movement), whose slogan "Red Power" expressed their political goal of self-determination. The following year, a small group of Indians sympathetic to AIM occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, claiming it for Indian use. Why Alcatraz, the site of a former federal prison? As Deloria (1992) explains in *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion,* the militants "compared Alcatraz to most Indian reservations: no water, no good housing, land unfit for cultivation, no employment; in short, a prison" (9).

During the year and a half occupation of Alcatraz, the Indians' cause gained nationwide publicity. This particular protest ended when federal marshals invaded the island and arrested the occupants, but

the Alcatraz occupation sparked further acts of resistance throughout the country, including a number of spectacular events planned to raise public awareness of Indian grievances. To learn more about these, search the Internet for information on the occupation of Mount Rushmore (1971), the Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan to Washington, DC (1972), and the protest at Wounded Knee (1973).

While the reasons for choosing Mount Rushmore and the nation's capital are fairly evident, not everyone is aware of the significance of Wounded Knee. It was here, at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota, that a dreadful massacre by U.S. soldiers of nearly 300 unarmed Sioux men, women, and children took place on December 29, 1890. The massacre was not forgotten by future generations of Indians. In 1973, demonstrators decided to return to this site to stage a peaceful protest. But warfare broke out between a small group of protesters (including women and children) and hundreds of federal agents armed with the most sophisticated weaponry. The armed siege, which lasted more than two months, brought national and international attention to Wounded Knee II, as it came to be called.

Eventually, the pressure applied by activists both in public protests and in the courts bore fruit. The major turning point came in 1975 under President Richard Nixon's administration with the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. As the concept of self-government continued to evolve, other landmark pieces of legislation promoting and elucidating Indian sovereignty were passed, including, for example, the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978), and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988).

But what does it really mean for an Indian tribe to be a sovereign nation within the United States? The issues are highly complex, and there is no simple answer. Moreover, the concept is undergoing constant change. In truth, all Americans—Native and non-Native alike—are involved in an experiment that is reshaping our understanding of the United States and its government. What does it mean to have semiautonomous units within the borders of a larger nation—in effect, nations within a nation? Where do federal laws and tribal laws collide? What about the relationship between individual states and the nations within them? Can they coexist peacefully and prosperously? Finally, will the dominant society hold to its new legislation or overturn recent laws promoting Indian sovereignty as it has broken so many treaties in the past?

Insiders' Points of View on Sovereignty

We have our own governments. Sovereignty means the right to define the present and the future as a people. I do not feel included in the U.S. founding documents.

—Faith Smith, Ojibway educator

Sovereignty is a state of mind, or should I say, a state of heart. . . . [It] means the ability to say who you are and what you are and to think for yourself. It means the ability to run your own schools and to move about in the world with dignity, as your own nation.

—Joy Harjo, Creek/Cherokee poet and musician

Many people don't understand the word sovereignty. Sovereignty is the ability to carry out your own direction. If you think sovereign, you can be sovereign. . . . Part of sovereignty is being able to see the things you know are right and fight for them.

—Audrey Shenandoah, Onondaga Clan Mother

From *Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*

Indians Today

For many Native Americans, this is an exciting time of renewal and hope. Whereas in 1900 the census counted what may have been an historic low of 237,196 Native Americans, the 2000 census revealed more than a four-fold growth—with 2.47 million people declaring American Indian or Alaska Native as their only race, and an additional 1.9 million stating they were part Indian, for a total of 4.3 million.

Drawing on a seemingly inexhaustible spirit and on a history of strength and resilience, Native people nationwide are dedicating themselves to protecting the environment, to preserving their languages and heritage (see *www.ewebtribe.com/NAC ulture/lang.htm* and *www.indians.org/welker/americas.htm*), and to educating themselves in their own tribal colleges. Simultaneously, Indian lawyers and advocates are working to regain and safeguard Native rights. On reservations and in urban areas, Indians are finding their own solutions to endemic problems of poverty, crime, despair, and alcoholism. While the

difficulties cannot be minimized, neither should they overshadow the tremendous optimism that many Native people express for their future.

This optimism can be seen, for example, in the arts. Indigenous artists (traditional and modern), writers, museum curators, and filmmakers are experiencing a renaissance, bringing renewed pride to their communities and changing the public perception of who Native people are. The recently dedicated National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, is a symbol to some of a dynamic and more positive landscape *(www.nmai.si.edu)*.

Director's P.O.V.

Well, we call ourselves "Indians," because it's not a bad term. I understand respecting people, but it's like people say, what do you want to be called? I say, how about Chris, you know? And if you want to know what my tribe is, I'm Cheyenne and Arapaho. So it's not really that big an issue. "Indian" is what we call ourselves, and it's not a derogatory term. And I guess everybody else will have to figure out what they want to call you, if they don't want to use your first name.

—Chris Eyre
www.minireviews.com/interviews/eyre.htm

Insider's P.O.V.

I enjoyed *Smoke Signals* because it was the first time I saw things in a movie that I might see at home. Some of the scenes that people saw as comedy actually show what we see and live with on a daily basis. Remember the girls with the car that only drove backwards? Their transmission was out. We see that here and think nothing about it, because our laws are such that we have young people driving without licenses and people driving with no windshields or forward gears in their cars. Those are the rez cars. The car never leaves the rez but it allows people to get around within our small community.

—Fay Hurtado, member of the Confederated Tribes living on the Warm Springs Reservation, Oregon

Cultural Backpacking: Native America

> To find Native America, you have to glimpse the world of Native American people, their history and traditions, thoughts and beliefs, visions and realities. You have to give a piece of yourself over to the insistent beat of a powwow camp; surrender to the prayerful rhythms of a kachina dance; experience the beauty of Pueblo pottery or Shoshone beadwork; grasp the subtle wisdom of a Navajo coyote story; feel the timeless presence of ancient cliff-dwellings, temple mounds, historic battlefields and massacre sites; hike the grasslands, canyons, deserts, and forests of Indian country; and try to understand a people who regard the earth as their mother and the sky as their father. (Gattuso 1993, 24)

In this spirit, put on your "backpack" to discover a part of Native America that is meaningful to you. Wherever you choose to travel, try to "give a piece of yourself" over to the experience. You may, for example, visit a reservation, museum, memorial, or historic site, or you could attend a powwow or other similar event. Alternatively, you may choose to do your backpacking in the library or at your computer. In this case, your task is to find one place you would like to visit or one event you would like to attend. Whether your backpacking is real or virtual, be sure to choose something that gives you new insight into, and appreciation for, Native people and cultures.

When you have completed your backpacking, write a page to describe what you chose and why. What was your experience like, both emotionally and intellectually? What gave you a glimpse into Native culture?

If you're struggling to come up with an idea, you can consult guidebooks (such as the *Insight Guide* described at the end of the chapter) or sites such as *www.powwows.com* and *www.500nations.com/500_Powwows.asp*. You may be surprised to learn how many places and events of interest are nearby, regardless of where you live.

A word of caution: In your write-up, be sure to narrow your focus. For example, if you visit a museum in real life or on the Internet, zoom in on one painting or basket that seems of special interest to you. If you attend a powwow, select one dance or costume. Try to

attach a picture or photograph to your essay. If you choose a website, book, or magazine, include the relevant URL or other information.

Before undertaking your backpacking, especially to powwows or reservations, check guidebooks and websites for recommendations on etiquette.

Diversity Detective: Who Are Well-Known Native People Today?

Your detective firm has been given a major assignment to investigate modern Indians in an attempt to move beyond the image of Indians "frozen in time" in the era of the Wild West, replacing it with a more realistic, accurate view of contemporary Native people and life. Use your ingenuity to crack the case, tracking down leads from print or electronic media, consulting knowledgeable people, or sleuthing in any other legal way. You may work individually, with partners, or in small groups.

Indian heroes, leaders, and legends of earlier times include names like Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Black Elk, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea. But how many present-day Indians are known to the general public? Locate one man and one woman who are alive today and who, in your opinion, deserve more widespread recognition. They may be from any walk of life, such as politics, the arts, sports, media, or education. Introduce your two people to the class, explaining why you have chosen them, and include information on the sources you used. If possible, show relevant pictures as part of your presentation.

Spotlight: Indians Are Not "Just Like Us"

Values differ, sometimes radically, from culture to culture. Worldwide, we see again and again the tragic results of conflicts that arise when one national, ethnic, or religious group attempts to force another to accept its values. In its current position of economic and military dominance, the United States is seen by many peoples in the world as imposing its values beyond its borders, as refusing to learn the lesson that different ways of life are as legitimate and sacred to others as our ways are to us.

In truth, Americans do not have to look overseas for this lesson.

Here within our own borders, Native people have been telling the dominant society for 500 years that they have a way of life different from that of the mainstream society and that they do not want to change, join up, or assimilate. The message could not be clearer. Even at the high price they have paid—and are still paying—many Native people today retain their right to hold their own values and beliefs, as summarized in the chart on page 22.

As you study the chart, try not to be disturbed about the fact that it is vastly oversimplified. There are *obviously* many exceptions and gradations, and parts of the Native American side of the chart are perhaps more descriptive of the past than of today. The chart serves only as a rough guide and a stimulus to further study.

Your task is to find a scene in the movie that illustrates one of the differences between the values of the dominant society and of Native peoples as shown on the chart. Once you have written a paragraph or two in your film notebook explaining your choice, present it to the class. Time permitting, you might show the scene.

What's Cooking? Fry Bread

"Making fry bread is simple. But making good fry bread is an art," reporter Barbara Durbin concludes after interviewing Native American experts. Few people realize that fry bread comes from hard times. Fry-bread specialist Tanya Sanchez (Shoshone/Bannock/Ute tribes) explains that when Native Americans were confined to reservations, they received white flour, lard, and baking powder from the U.S. government so that they wouldn't starve. These unfamiliar ingredients did not resemble the Native peoples' healthy natural foods. As Sanchez relates, "They handed it to us and said 'Figure out what to do with it.' So we figured out what to do" (Starke 2001, FD1).

There are only four or five basic ingredients for fry bread, but it's not easy to find an exact recipe. Everyone makes it a little differently, and there are many variations, somewhat like muffins.

Mix 3 cups flour, 1 tablespoon baking powder, and 1 teaspoon salt. Add 1 cup warm water and knead until dough is soft but not sticky. (Sanchez advises not to play or fight with the dough and to make sure there are no dry spots in it.) Tear off a small piece, stretch and pat dough until thin, and poke a hole through the middle. Carefully drop

U.S. Mainstream, Dominant Society	Native Peoples (Mainland, Alaska, Hawaii)
Fundamental belief in private ownership of land and resources	Fundamental belief in impossibility of private ownership of land or other resources
Materialistic	Nonmaterialistic
Leadership often by command or authority; "top-down"	Leadership by example and consensus
Written tradition important	Oral tradition important
Immediate (nuclear) families	Extended families and clans
Reverence for the young	Reverence for the old
Earth viewed as "dead," inanimate object; mastery over nature	Earth viewed as living; harmony with nature
Humans seen as superior to other life forms	Humans viewed as equal and integral part of web of life
The dead seen as gone	The dead seen as present
Saving and acquiring emphasized	Sharing and giving emphasized
High-impact technology	Low-impact technology
Futuristic/linear concept of time	Circular, flexible concept of time
Speaking valued	Silence and listening valued
Confident and assertive	Modest and noninterfering
As much as possible desired	As little as possible desired
Principle of independence	Principle of interdependence
Competition valued	Cooperation valued
Impatient	Patient
Skeptical	Mystical
Seeking converts to own religion	Respecting others' religions
Separation of church and state; religion a part of life	Spirituality embodied everywhere and at all times; religion a way of life

*Adapted in part from Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992), 214–21.

into sizzling hot corn oil (an electric fry pan can work in a classroom). Cook 3–5 minutes, turning only once. Brown on both sides. Remove from oil with tongs or a slotted spoon. Drain on paper towels.

Serve while still warm. Fry bread can be eaten with stew or chili. With jam, powdered sugar, cinnamon sugar, or honey, it's a sweet treat.

See other Native recipes at *http://nativetech.nativeweb.org/food/index.php* or *www.kstrom.net/isk/food/recipes.html*.

Lights! Camera! ACTION!

The knowledge and skills you are gaining from this course will enable you to take action in your life, perhaps even resulting in your long-term involvement with something you find worthwhile. The suggestions given here and in the **Lights! Camera! ACTION!** sections of other chapters are optional. Please pursue them if you are so motivated, or feel free to propose your own ideas for taking action and to brainstorm others with your class.

Go to the website for NARF (Native American Rights Fund) at *www.narf.org*, AIM at *www.aimovement.org*, or the International Indian Treaty Council at *www.treatycouncil.org/home.htm*, and identify a cause you might like to support.

Your P.O.V.

The **Your P.O.V.** exercises here and at the end of each chapter are intended to stimulate your imagination and provide you with exciting ways to expand your learning. Choose an assignment that allows you to express your point of view in a creative way—e.g., by writing a poem, essay, or film review; by drawing or sketching; or by designing a poster, button, or bumper sticker. Whatever you do, consider gaining a wider audience by submitting your work to your campus newspaper or literary magazine, or by posting a film review on the Internet. Information on the filmmaking assignments proposed at the end of each **Your P.O.V.** section is provided in Appendix D.

1. Some bumper stickers you might see on vehicles driven by Indians are:
   - Of course you can trust the government! Just ask any Indian!
   - Proud to be Native American
   - I brake for powwows
   - America: love it or give it back
   - I was Indian before being Indian was cool
   - We don't want a bigger piece of the pie—we want a different pie (Winona LaDuke)

   Design a bumper sticker that expresses something you have learned from this chapter.
2. Write a review of *Smoke Signals* and post it on Amazon at *www.amazon.com* or the Internet Movie Database at *www.imdb.com*.
3. Flash forward to ten years in the future, and imagine that Victor and Thomas (or Victor and Suzy) meet. Under what circumstances do you think they might meet? What would they discuss? Write a script of their dialogue. Or write an outline of a plot for a sequel to *Smoke Signals*.
4. Imagine that as a reporter for the newspaper *Indian Country Today* you are writing an investigative article to see how enlightened your school or university is about Indian peoples and issues. What would you include in your article and whom

would you interview? Time permitting, write the article and submit it to your campus or local newspaper.

5. Assume the p.o.v. of an elder in your nation and the last speaker of your language. Write a letter to your grandchildren describing your thoughts and emotions as you face the loss of your language.
6. Imagine that you and your crew are making a film on present-day Native American life. Consult the guidelines in Appendix D for further information. Here are some potential topics for consideration:
   a. the role of basketball on reservations
   b. the survival of Native American languages
   c. Winona LaDuke and other environmental activists
   d. the good and bad of reservation casinos
   e. the role of powwows today
   f. the story of Leonard Peltier

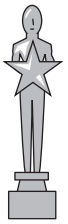
And Our Native American Book Awards Go To . . .

Every Day Is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women by Wilma Mankiller (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2004). A "rare opportunity for outsiders to sit in on the candid conversations of indigenous women as they speak about love, life, their families, and their communities" (xxv–xxvi). Mankiller's innovative book has the power to change lives. In her splendid introduction, Gloria Steinem says this "could be the most important [book] of this new century if it were to get the mindfulness it deserves" (xiii).

Insight Guides: Native America (2nd ed.), edited by John Gattuso (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998). A comprehensive guide including helpful cultural information, great illustrations and maps, and valuable etiquette tips. This book takes us to Indian country—to "communities, ceremonies, powwows, historic places, trading posts, art shows, archaeological sites, and special events" (24).

The Native Americans: An Illustrated History, edited by Betty and Ian Ballantine (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1993). Our favorite introduction to Native American history. Within the covers of this one volume, containing 449 captivating illustrations, mostly in color, the reader gains an overview of Indian history and culture. This is a book you can turn to again and again.

Prison Writings: My Life Is My Sun Dance by Leonard Peltier (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). The p.o.v. of an extraordinary man seen by many as a Native American equivalent of Nelson Mandela. Believed by millions of supporters to have been wrongfully imprisoned by the U.S. government three decades ago, Peltier has become a symbol of the oppression and injustices experienced by indigenous peoples worldwide. His passion for his people and remarkable forgiveness and compassion for all—including his captors—shine through.



And Our Native American Film Awards Go To . . .

Powwow Highway (1989)—The offbeat tale of two Indian friends on the road to New Mexico in a dilapidated Buick. Based on David Seals's novel of the same title and directed by Jonathan Wacks, this film has achieved cult status among many Native Americans.

Thunderheart (1992)—A thriller that gives insight into the situation of Native American environmental activists and reveals the injustices perpetrated against Leonard Peltier. Inspired by true events that took place on Indian reservations in the 1970s, the film is directed by Michael Apted, who also directed the fine documentary *Incident at Oglala* (1992) that examines the same events.

Where the Spirit Lives (1989)—A painful story of a brother and sister kidnapped from their homes by the government. Directed by Bruce Pittman, this film brings to life the suffering caused by removal of Indian children to boarding schools.