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The Perpetual Other: Native American Representation in Documentaries

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The Perpetual Other:
Native American Representation in Documentaries
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When an individual uses an Internet search engine to find images of Native Americans, the person will most likely find that most of the images are paintings of the Native American warrior or are older black and white portraits. After searching for other races, such as Asian American or African American, the search is more likely to come up with contemporary images of people playing sports, in school, or with their families. Why is there such a stark difference? Why are Native Americans so often thought about as only in the past? From the early days of books and portraits to the television shows and films, Native Americans have always been portrayed as warriors and as obstacles with the view point of the various media from the “White Man’s” perspective.

This paper comes to be out of the need to study the representation of Native Americans in documentaries. There have been many articles (Denzin, 2002; Vrasidas, 1997), books (Huhndorf, 2001; Bataille, 2001; Marubbio & Buffalohead, 2014), and films (*Reel Injun*, 2009) about the representation (relating to both gender and/or race) in the general media, primarily focusing on fictional media (i.e., Westerns, historical-based fiction, and cartoons), but few have focused on how Native Americans are portrayed specifically in documentaries. Due to this lack of study, this paper analyzes three documentaries, one by a Native American filmmaker, and the other two by Non-Native filmmakers, to see what type of differences are present. The paper ends with a discussion about the increase in Native American made documentaries, films, and creative projects.

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