

A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATION IN FILM MUSIC:

*SMOKE SIGNALS AND DANCES WITH WOLVES*

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN MUSIC

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

APRIL 2020

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the representation of North American Indigenous cultures through film music of the 1990s. I use two films as case studies: a Hollywood-produced film – *Dances with Wolves* (1990) – and an independent film by an Indigenous filmmaker – *Smoke Signals* (1998). My analysis of the films examines elements of film, such as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and form, as well as musical cues, instrumentation and melodic/rhythmic motifs. The combination of these analyses allows me to consider how meanings about Indigenous cultures are communicated to viewers. I consider the following research questions: How are North American Indigenous cultures represented in film? How do Indigenous filmmakers choose to represent Indigenous culture in comparison to non-Indigenous filmmakers? What can be said about agency, representation, commercialization, and cultural expression through each filmmaker's visual and musical choices? I find that music is integral to constructing meaning in films, and that representations of Indigenous cultures, through both music and visual cues, differ significantly across time and film genres.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my Supervisory Committee, Professor Sherry Johnson and Professor Louise Wrazen, for their instrumental role in helping me to complete my thesis. This work was made possible through your dedication to my research over the years, insightful feedback, and incredible guidance throughout my candidacy. I would also like to thank the members of my examining committee, Professor Brenda Longfellow and Professor Randolph Peters. I am also grateful to the music department Graduate Program Assistants, Tere Tilban-Rios and Triporna Das, for answering my administrative questions during my post-secondary education at York University.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and co-workers who have offered me unwavering support during my studies. To my husband Peter and my sister Cassandra – words cannot express how appreciative I've been for your love and encouragement through this entire process.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

One of my favourite films as a child was *Dances with Wolves*; however, it was not until my undergraduate studies that I realized the meanings about Indigeneity that this film is imparting, and the significant role that the music plays in creating those meanings. This realization prompted my graduate research into the representation of North American Indigenous cultures through film music. My research uses *Smoke Signals* (independent film released in 1998) and *Dances with Wolves* (Hollywood film released in 1990) as case studies to explore how musical cues work with elements of film to represent Indigenous cultures of North America. My analysis of the films includes an examination of filmic form and style, specifically elements of *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and narrative form conventions,<sup>1</sup> as well as musical cues, instrumentation, and melodic/rhythmic motifs in the film scores. This combination of filmic and musical analyses allows me to consider how meanings about Indigeneity are communicated to the audience. Throughout this research, I do not intend to speak on behalf of Indigenous communities or the filmmakers and composers in question; rather I examine what is visually and aurally present in each film. I explore what these cues suggest to me, and therefore, how these cues may be understood by a broader audience, as the filmmakers' understandings of Indigenous cultures of North America.

I compare Hollywood and independent film traditions, and particularly the two films that I have chosen to represent the two traditions, in relation to the following research questions: How are North American Indigenous cultures being represented in each film? How do Indigenous filmmakers choose to represent Indigenous culture in

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<sup>1</sup> Pertinent terms are defined in Chapter Two: Film Theory, pp. 7-15.

comparison to non-Indigenous filmmakers? How do Indigenous media theories on cultural representation affect my understandings of the films? What can be said about agency, representation, commercialization, and cultural expression through each filmmaker's visual and musical choices? I argue that the musical score in *Dances with Wolves* perpetuates stereotyped representations of Indigenous cultures, specifically that of the Lakota and Pawnee characters. In contrast, *Smoke Signals* acknowledges existing stereotypes and rejects them through music and narrative in order to represent Indigenous culture that is in direct opposition to Hollywood ideas about Indigeneity. The role of the music in constructing meaning will be highlighted throughout this thesis.

In the remainder of this chapter I will present the context and methodology of my research. I highlight the key issues in my analysis of the two films, based on how agency and commercialism may influence a filmmaker's choices about the aural and visual components of a film. I provide historical and scholarly contexts for this research with specific reference to the study of North American Indigenous music and culture. I conclude the chapter by recognizing some limitations of this research and providing a chapter outline for the rest of my thesis.

### **Context of Research**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, North American Indigenous peoples have been represented in stereotyped ways in Hollywood film and television media, most notably in the Western genres. Tropes such as the Noble and Savage Indians, The Victim, and The Warrior appeared predominantly in popular movies and television shows of the 1940s-1960s<sup>2</sup> (Oshana 1981; Pisani 1998), and Hollywood continued to perpetuate

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<sup>2</sup> The meanings of these tropes will be discussed later in the paper.

these outdated ideologies and stereotyped images of Indigenous culture, not only on-screen but in film scores as well (Pisani 1996; Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Pisani 2005; Slobin 2008). This trend is indicative of how ingrained racism toward Indigenous peoples has remained in North American popular media and overall consciousness, whether intentional or not. Early ethnomusicological scholars typically discussed non-Western art music, including Indigenous music, in terms of whether it was traditional or historically authentic to the culture (Kunst; Hornbostel).<sup>3</sup> Earlier approaches to studying music have been, according to ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl, largely abandoned as the field of ethnomusicology has evolved since its inception in the late 1800s (2010, 179). Interpreting Indigenous music in such a binary manner stereotypes the culture and preserves it in the past. My research highlights the diverse and ever-changing nature of North American Indigenous musical expressions. For example, Indigenous music is not limited to powwow drumming and sung vocables; rather it includes a variety of classical and popular genres, which often contain nuanced commentary on contemporary Indigenous social issues.

My research requires a strong foundation in film theory approaches and terminology in order to enable me to observe and comment on aspects of filmic form and style in relation to musical cues (Sitney 2002; Cooke 2008; Grant 2012; Bordwell and Thompson 2013). I also draw on existing scholarship in ethnomusicology (Hearne; Slobin 2008; Bryant 2012) and Indigenous media studies (Ginsburg; Marubbio and Buffalohead 2013; Howe, Markowitz, and Cummings 2014) to guide my analysis of important moments in each film. A significant part of my thesis incorporates

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<sup>3</sup> I provide an overview of past and current ethnomusicological approaches to the study of North American Indigenous musics in Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp. 16-23.

perspectives from Indigenous media theorists and filmmakers on cultural representation in film. Including Indigenous perspectives on filmmaking is critical to understanding how Indigenous filmmakers choose to self-represent their cultures through film form, style, and musical score.

### **Methodology**

I analyse the films in a variety of different ways. I use time-stamped charts to map out how pertinent musical cues connect with filmic elements to create meaning. I also create an overall plot segmentation for each film, complete with key musical events (see Appendices A and B). These plot segmentations show how film music connects to major advancements in the storyline on a larger scale. The plot segmentations are also a useful tool for those who have not watched these specific films. I also include personal transcriptions of musical themes as required.<sup>4</sup> These charts highlight the relationship between the representations of Indigenous peoples and my understanding of meanings about Indigenous culture.

Although I reference scholars who have already examined the films in question, especially *Smoke Signals* (Charles 2001; Mihelich 2001; Hearne 2005; Horton 2009), I expand on the existing scholarship by offering a more in-depth explanation as to how the musical content interacts with filmic techniques in order to form representations and meanings about Indigenous culture for viewers. I also build on specific aspects of film theory to support my ideas about the musical representation of Indigenous peoples of North America. Each musical score analysis identifies cues, instrumentation, and

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<sup>4</sup> I include the time-stamped charts and musical theme transcriptions as tables and figures within Chapter Four: Film Score Analyses – Representations and Understandings of Indigenous Cultures.

rhythmic/melodic motifs as they appear within the context of the film. In this way, I undertake a multi-disciplinary approach to studying the film scores.

### **Research Limitations**

I recognize that there are some limitations to this research and methodology. My research is limited in that it focuses on the musical and filmic relationship in only two films: one non-Indigenous-directed, Hollywood blockbuster and the other an Indigenous-directed, independent film. It is also important to note that while Hollywood and independent-style films are stylistically different, I am specifically looking to compare films by Indigenous versus non-Indigenous directors. I do not intend to simplify filmmaking techniques or to generalize my findings to all films from the 20<sup>th</sup> century through my analysis of *Smoke Signals* and *Dances with Wolves*; however, I do believe that a careful analysis of two films can point to elements of interest that can be followed up on in other films. My research is narrow since my analyses focus on a few elements of each film and therefore does not address all music in each soundtrack.

Unlike the ethnography-centred approaches to the ethnomusicology of film music as highlighted by Mera and Morcom (2009),<sup>5</sup> I use primarily music and film analysis to explore the possible meanings that are created for an audience. I chose to focus on my own analysis for this first step of what could become a larger ethnography-centred project. I did not conduct interviews with the composers of the *Dances with Wolves* soundtrack (John Barry and Peter Buffett); therefore, I am uncertain if any Indigenous consultation was conducted while creating the music score. I also did not interview BC

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp. 16-17 for a brief summary of Mera and Morcom's self-reflexive ethnographic approach to studying film music.

Smith, the music supervisor for the *Smoke Signals* soundtrack, or the several Indigenous song writers featured in the film, to ask about their intentions with respect to Indigenous music. This is work that could be completed for a later project.

The film music analyses are based on my observations and interpretations as a cultural outsider, specifically that of a non-Indigenous university student and high school music teacher in my late-20s. I recognize there are distinctive nuances to Indigenous filmmaking and I hope to integrate them into my research as best as possible. I apologize in advance for any oversights in Indigenous film pedagogies and terminology different from those belonging to Hollywood traditions and practices. I reference and analyse the films using language adopted by scholars who predominantly focus on Hollywood films. This language is meant as a tool for analysis, the discovery of meaning between film and music, and how it communicates representations to audiences.

### **Chapter Outlines**

The next chapter, Film Theory, provides a basic overview of film theory and key concepts relating to filmic form and style. The third chapter, Literature Review, focuses on important scholarship in the following fields: ethnomusicological approaches to film music study, Indigenous cultural representation in film, and ethnomusicological issues in the study of North American Indigenous musics. In Chapter Four, Film Score Analyses – Representations and Understandings of Indigenous Cultures, I analyse the film and score of *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*. I end the thesis with Chapter Five, Conclusion, in which I summarize the findings from my film score analyses and outline potential approaches for future research on Indigenous cultural representations in film scores.

## CHAPTER TWO: FILM THEORY

In this chapter I provide a groundwork of knowledge in film theory in order to support the musical analyses later in the paper. I use *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell and Thompson 2013) as a central text to explain some fundamental filmic theory concepts, specifically form, narrative, genre, and elements of style. I later use this contextual knowledge of film theory to inform my film score analyses of *Smoke Signals* and *Dances with Wolves*.

In *Film Art: An Introduction*, film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe film as a long process of decision-making by a group of specialists who consider practical, budgetary, and artistic concerns (2013, 4). Films are crafted with intention by people within specific social contexts and often belonging to certain traditions, each with their own set of filmic preferences. Form and style are the basic areas of choice and control that filmmakers have over their films (Ibid., 3). For this thesis, I use form and style as the main foci of visual film theory to support my findings of representation in the film scores. I connect some complex and abstract concepts of filmic form – specifically how form directs and informs audience expectations – to basic music theory in order to clarify their functions in film. In this way, I demonstrate how aspects of film are intimately connected to music. I further emphasize the multi-disciplinary approach to my film score analyses.

### Filmic Form

Since film form is a broad topic, I highlight its most critical points, including the purpose of form, key definitions, its effect on viewer experiences, and its relationship to music. Form refers to the relationship between elements of a film to create an overall

effect which provides audiences with a structured film-viewing experience (Ibid., 51). The ways in which a filmmaker chooses to organize a film impact viewer expectation regarding plot development, emotions, and overall meaning. Filmmakers construct films in such a way as to encourage audiences to identify and expect overall patterns of relationships among various elements and devices in the film (Ibid., 52). For example, when audience expectations are set up and fulfilled through form, the filmmaker leads the viewer to a sense of satisfaction. Bordwell and Thompson cite *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), which follows a broad A-B-A form, as an example of overall form being fulfilled (Ibid., 55). Through patterns in narration and dialogue, the film implies protagonist Dorothy will return home after her adventures in Oz. Viewers feel a satisfactory sense of completion once this expectation is finally met in the end of the film. A musical metaphor to explain the function of form on the film-viewing experience is the concept of cadences. In music composition, a dominant seventh chord is aurally completed for the listener when it moves toward a tonic chord (V7 – I) and thus completes a perfect cadence. In both the filmic and musical examples, the filmmaker and composer establish viewer/listener expectations through formal patterns.

Filmmakers may sometimes choose to delay audience expectations for emotional effect or to conform to a certain set of stylistic conventions. Formal choices that delay or tamper with established expectations through incomplete form patterns may arouse feelings of suspense, surprise, or curiosity.<sup>6</sup> I once again compare this manipulation of formal expectations in film to cadences in music, specifically deceptive cadences (V – vi). Listeners often anticipate a return to the tonic chord after hearing a V

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on emotional delays in film, see Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 55.

chord. If a deceptive cadence is played instead, listeners will experience a sense of surprise, suspense, or incompleteness.

Filmic form also informs the viewer as to what is considered meaningful in the larger context of the film (perhaps just as repeated motifs and/or increased dynamics in music call attention to critical elements of a composition). Interpretations of what is meaningful in a film rely strongly on the viewer's individual social and cultural experiences.<sup>7</sup> Below, I provide a brief summary of two forms that possess unique plot patterns: narrative form and the Western genre. These filmic forms are most relevant to my later analyses of *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*.

### *Narrative Form*

Narrative form is one of the most common patterns of formal storytelling in fictional films and refers to the chain of events linked by cause and effect occurring in time and space (Ibid., 72-73). A viewer's engagement with the film's story is dependent on understanding the elements of narrative, such as patterns of change and stability, cause and effect, and time and space. The viewer is cued through narrative by the filmmaker to make connections and draw parallels between characters, settings, situations, and time.

Films that are based on narrative form often follow a specific sequencing of events that are familiar to many audiences since it has been used and relied upon by many Hollywood filmmakers for decades. Similar to fictional novels, narrative form films have a clear opening, development, climax, and closing. Such films achieve a sense of

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the different ways that meaning in film is presented to the viewer, see Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 57-60.

satisfaction and fulfillment for viewers because narrative form films often leave few questions about plot unanswered by the end of the film. The opening initiates viewers into the story by setting expectations early, otherwise known as “the setup.” The opening often includes an exposition, which either explicitly states or implicitly suggests a character or situation’s backstory. The development section of a narrative film introduces cause and effect as plot proceeds, which in turn creates patterns of development. A common plot development pattern is called “change in knowledge.” This refers to an instance when a character learns something new, therefore adding a new dimension to the storyline for viewers. Another popular plot pattern is known as the “goal-oriented” pattern. Goal-oriented patterns occur when a character takes steps to achieve a set objective, usually within a time constraint. Each of these patterns encourages viewers to develop expectations about what will happen next in the film. The climax (the emotional height of the film) is when causal issues can be resolved through only a few possible outcomes, which generate tension. Finally, the closing of a narrative film may be closed or open-ended. Audiences are often directed to imagine scenarios for an ending that satisfies previously-set expectations about character and plot development (Ibid.,72-96). Understanding the basics of narrative form is critical to my research as it is present in both film analyses.

### *Western Genre Conventions*

The Western is one of the oldest and most enduring film genres in Hollywood (Ibid., 339). *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), for example, was pivotal in defining the genre throughout the Golden Age of Hollywood and beyond. Western genre films often adhere to their own narrative structures, patterns, and idioms. Like any film genre, the

Western has a specific set of conventions as a way for filmmakers and audiences to share expectations about what type of experience they will have watching the film. Western films feature unique subjects, themes, filmic form and style techniques, and iconography that distinguish them from other film genres. Film scholar Douglas Pye (2012) also examines a few film elements and conventions of the genre that are recognizable by American film audiences as quintessentially Western. Westerns usually portray the historical American frontier, which blends aspects of reality with mythology. A common central theme is the civilized order versus the lawless frontier, and iconography throughout the film may reinforce this duality (for example, a wagon against railroads or the contrast between settler and “Indian” costumes). Western heroes typically find themselves in between this lawless and civilized binary and this conflict is often used as a plot device. Stereotypes of Indigenous and Hispanic peoples are also quite common across the genre, although some filmmakers are attempting to alter this overused and outdated convention (Ibid., 340-341). Pye speculates as to what influenced the standardization of certain narrative and filmic elements in the genre, such as early dime novels and American paintings, which led to “shades of invention, distortion, and interpretation” of American frontier life and Indigenous peoples (2012, 245). According to Bordwell and Thompson, a Western film may contain some or all the following standardized scenes:

- Indian attack on American fort or wagon
- Hero shyly courting a woman
- Discovery of burned down or destroyed white settler shacks
- Outlaw robberies
- Gunfight or final shoot out

A filmmaker may choose to reinvent conventional scenes and filmic elements in creative ways, work within the genre conventions, or simply omit these scenes all together if the filmmaker is trying to make an unconventional Western film. An example of how current filmmakers are trying to break the mould of Western genre film conventions is by altering narratives and themes to include more respectful and civilized depictions of Indigenous characters. Bordwell and Thompson cite *Little Big Man* (1970) and *Soldier Blue* (1970) as some of the first examples of this strategy (2013, 341). I cannot speak to whether these films truly represent Indigenous cultures in a respectful way as it is beyond the scope of this paper. Film critic Tag Gallagher's approach toward Western film genre studies differs significantly from other scholars, including Thomas Schatz and Philip French, who assert that the genre has evolved to be self-conscious and self-reflective since World War II.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Gallagher maintains that "every argument that evolution exists at all comes down not to evidence...but either to bald assertions or to invidious comparisons between a couple of titles – a "classic" western versus a "self-conscious" western..." (2012, 299-300). The above understandings and theoretical approaches to the study of Western films are important context for examining the representations of Indigenous characters in *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*.

### Filmic Style

Style is a component of film theory that is divided into four major categories: mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. In this section I will discuss mise-

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<sup>8</sup> Schatz's three major phases of modern western films are: a less optimistic and less flattering depiction of the West; hero was an agent of law and order who turned into a renegade and; more complex and self-critical narration within the film (Gallagher 2012, 299).

en-scène and sound as they are the most relevant aspects of style to my film score analyses in Chapter Four.<sup>9</sup>

### *Mise-en-scène*

Mise-en-scène, from the French stage term meaning “putting into the scene,” pertains to what appears in a frame and how it is oriented within the shot (Bordwell & Thompson 2013, 113). Aspects of mise-en-scène are divided into four major areas of control: setting, costume and make-up, lighting, and staging.<sup>10</sup> Setting can be in the forefront or background, existing in reality or fantasy, both of which can be over- or under-stated depending on the filmmaker’s desired effect. Setting also serves the purpose of guiding a viewer’s attention using props. Film props can serve an important purpose by becoming motifs that span across an entire film and therefore impact overall form (Ibid., 118-119). The costume and make-up of each character can serve a variety of roles in the film. Costume/make-up may contribute to filmic form, for example, or a character development significant to film plot. Costume/make-up can also serve functional purposes, for example, to match the graphic quality and/or setting of the film. Make-up affects the expressiveness of the actor and thus has impact on how the viewer interprets character (Ibid., 119-124). Costume/make-up are especially important to my analyses of how Indigenous characters are interpreted in *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on cinematography and editing, see Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 160-216 and 219-264 respectively.

<sup>10</sup> I focus on the setting and costume/make-up aspects of mise-en-scène as they are most relevant to my film analyses. For more information on lighting and staging, see Bordwell and Thompson (2013, 124-133, 136-140).

### *Editing*

Editing involves the filmmaker's decision about which shots to include in a film and in which order. There is a plethora of creative ways in which shots can be strung together and these editing choices create patterns, affect viewer experience, and shape the overall filmic form and style of a film.<sup>11</sup> Strategic shot editing choices can encourage viewers to make relationships between different shots. Manipulating graphic, rhythmic, spatial, and temporal relationships (Ibid., 221-232) between two shots can also achieve different effects depending on how the viewer interprets the shots' meanings within the larger context of the film.

### *Sound*

Sound is a major component of film and can be organized into three types, all of which may appear as diegetic or non-diegetic:<sup>12</sup> speech, sound effects, and music (Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 273). While speech and sound effects are critical aspects of sound that shape the viewing experience of a film, they are beyond the scope of my research, which focuses on the musical score. Filmic sound shapes viewer understanding of on and off-screen images, guides expectations, and directs a viewer's attention. Sound can be complementary or contradictory to the action depending on the filmmaker's desired emotional affect or genre. The film soundtrack has an active relationship to the image track of a film. Sound is also used functionally to join two shots seamlessly through editing or to create meaningful connections between shots. These

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<sup>11</sup> For information on and definitions of shot joining techniques, see Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Diegetic sound has a source within the film story, whereas non-diegetic sound originates from outside the film story (Ibid., 284).

connections can be made through rhythm, fidelity, spatial, and temporal dimensions.<sup>13</sup> Music forms associations with characters, settings, situations, and ideas. It also compares scenes, traces patterns of narrative development, and shapes overall filmic form (Ibid., 279-281). Film music, then, is central to forming and fulfilling audience expectations and understandings of Indigeneity.

In summary, elements of filmic form and style can be used by a filmmaker to guide a viewer's experience and expectations of a film, which connect to how a viewer understands visual and aural representations of Indigenous cultures in film. I also consider Bordwell and Thompson's general approach toward a basic film analysis, which I condense into the following guiding questions: What is the overall form? What primary techniques are used in the film and which are most prevalent? How does the use of cinematic techniques conform to stylistic expectations? What types of patterns do the stylistic elements form and what functions do the techniques and patterns fulfill in the film as a whole? (2013, 450-451) The next chapter will focus on reviewing texts that are important to framing my analyses of the film scores of *Smoke Signals* and *Dances with Wolves*. I focus on the following topics: ethnomusicology of film music, representations of Indigenous cultures in film, and issues in the ethnomusicological study of Indigenous musics.

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<sup>13</sup> For more details on the dimensions of film sound, see Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 281-298.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present pertinent literature to ground my film score analyses of *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*. I begin by examining ethnomusicological approaches to film music studies, with an emphasis on research by Joanna Hearne (2005), Mark Slobin (2008), and Wanda Bryant (2012). I then review three recent texts on Indigenous theories and perspectives on cultural representations in film media (Ginsburg 2002; Hafsteinsson et al 2010; Howe et al 2013). I conclude the chapter by reviewing some contemporary works in the field of North American Indigenous musics (Nettl 1965; Gooding 2000; Pisani 1996, 1998; Perlove 2000; Deloria 2004) as a basic context for my film music analyses.

### **Ethnomusicological Approaches to the Study of Film Music**

This section is a brief literature review of contemporary ethnomusicological approaches to studying film music (Hearne 2005; Slobin 2008; Mera and Morcom 2009; Bryant 2012; Solomon 2014; Racy 2016). I focus particularly on the works by Slobin, Bryant, and Hearne since they address film music from global perspectives, provide insight into the film industry, and explore the ways in which music expresses cultural identity in *Smoke Signals*. Two common themes across the literature include contextualisation and identity construction, both of which are central to my analyses in Chapter Four.

#### *Contextualisation*

Miguel Mera and Anna Morcom (2009) provide a broad overview of current issues in ethnomusicological approaches to what the authors refer to as “screened

musics.”<sup>14</sup> Providing adequate context for how a film score was composed is critical to studying film music through an ethnomusicological lens. Some questions to consider may include: How are images transformed with the juxtaposition of music? Where is the music from? What is the relationship between the soundtrack and image track and how does the music function to represent marginalized characters in the film? The de-, re-, and trans-contextualisation of music in film are important to the creation of meaning and understanding of representation in film music. These processes can be understood through viewing screened music as a) a text or b) a performance at a particular space in time. Below are examples of how scholars have applied contextualisation to the study of film music.

Ethnomusicologist Joanne Hearne provides an example of how re-contextualisation may be used as a tool to enhance the study of film music through her analysis of the song “John Wayne’s Teeth” featured in *Smoke Signals* (2005).<sup>15</sup> Hearne discusses how Indigenous films can reclaim and re-contextualise aspects of their history as told by Hollywood and the West through sound and music which, in turn, creates new representations of the self. The author deems sound to be a critical element in Indigenous media to assert voices in present-day contexts; she analyzes scenes from two Indigenous films: *Smoke Signals* (1998) and *Imagining Indians* (1992). For example, a scene in *Smoke Signals* requires contextual knowledge of the music in order to fully understand its nuanced commentary on historical and sociopolitical Indigenous issues in America. In this scene, the Coeur d’Alene protagonists are forced to relocate

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to film music, the term “screened musics” also encompasses music used in television, music videos, and video games (Mera and Morcom 2009, 4).

<sup>15</sup> I use ideas from this article further in my analysis of *Smoke Signals* in Chapter Four.

seats to the back of the bus by two men laden in cowboy gear who have taken their seats. At this point, a rendition of the Civil War cavalry tune called “Garry Owen” can be heard. The tune is taken out of context and transformed through its performance by Indigenous musicians, suggesting that Indigenous peoples continue to be pushed from their land as they were two hundred years ago. By re-contextualising the issue of relocation in a modern setting, as well as having a cavalry tune appropriated by Indigenous musical group Ulali, *Smoke Signals* filmmakers reclaim those aspects of Indigenous peoples’ history and retell the story through film music. By considering where the tune previously came from and examining how it was re-contextualised, Hearne enriches the film score analysis by adding a layer of complexity and thus attributes more meaning to the film music.

Ethnomusicologist A.J. Racy approaches contextualisation through the theory of “domesticating otherness” (2016). The article features a theoretical discussion about how symbols of other cultures are appropriated, re-defined, and re-contextualised within the new repertoire of cultural expression, similar to Hearne’s analysis of “Garry Owen” in *Smoke Signals*. Racy provides a complex example of how the domestication and re-contextualisation of belly dancing in the United States forced the transformation of the dance itself. The example illustrates how an art form can be de-ethnicized and rendered universally appealing to an American audience. Themes from an art form may also be extracted from their original source and implanted onto different mediums, inevitably transforming their meaning. Domesticating otherness also connects with the idea of identity construction because, through the process of re-contextualising and re-defining an art form, a new sense of Other identity is created.

Thomas Solomon provides a similar case study involving the musical and visual representations of marginalized groups, specifically African-Americans and Asians, in animated films (2014). Many of the aurally and visually depicted stereotypes in these animated television shows and films already existed in the general American consciousness due to political and historical events of the era, and this xenophobia translated into how characters were represented on-screen and in the musical score. Solomon proposes a relationship between language, music, and cartoon images that he calls a “multimedia racialization package,” further explaining that these characterizations “...powerfully reconstitute and perpetuate existing ideas not only about racial essences but about how an (implicitly white) subject should regard the racial others the cartoons construct” (2014, 160).

Hearne, Racy and Solomon all highlight the importance of context in connection to film music, otherness and cultural stereotypes. Each scholar also discusses the idea that meanings in art can be altered depending on its context. Hearne’s comprehensive study of the film music in *Smoke Signals* serves as a basis for my scene analysis in Chapter Four because it demonstrates how one musical scene may be analysed in numerous ways, thereby enhancing my understanding of the constructions of Indigenous sovereignty and cultural representation in *Smoke Signals*. Similar to Hearne, Racy’s evaluation of how appropriated ideas in art forms can create Othered identities supports my analysis in *Dances with Wolves*, specifically how the Pawnee and Lakota characters are Othered through film music. Solomon’s case study stresses that stereotyped assumptions of marginalized cultural identities in film are harmful and

render such peoples as less than human, again informing my assessment of how the Pawnee characters are represented in *Dances with Wolves*.

### *Identity Construction*

*Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (ed. Slobin 2008) is a compilation of scholarly works that highlights a variety of films from localized cinematic traditions around the world, each of which approach the theme of global cinemas from local perspectives in different ways. The reader features articles by eleven scholars (including Slobin) that focus on topics such as sovereignty in film, identity construction and representation. In the essay “Subcultural Filmways” (2008), Slobin examines how subcultural films offer a counter-narrative to the dominant ideologies present within the superculture’s mainstream media. Slobin defines subcultural films as “the work of insiders who take the camera into their own hands with the firm intention of telling stories about small groups embedded within larger societies” (2008, 63). Identity construction is intimately related to cultural sovereignty, which can be an important concept exercised by subcultural filmmakers to regain control over their history and destiny, thereby allowing American subcultural filmmakers to self-define and self-represent their identities on-screen and in the soundtrack. Slobin provides an example of how *The Doe Boy* (2001), an Indigenous-made film, blends different genres of music and instrumentation to communicate ideas about Indigeneity. For example, the film features traditional flute as a symbol of Indigenous ancestry while the film score composer “...move[s] the film from a small subcultural space to the larger world music scene” which echoes the protagonist’s journey navigating his mixed heritage (2008, 75-76). The mix of genres in *The Doe Boy* soundtrack is an example of how music can be

used by subcultural filmmakers to make a statement about identity against cultural stereotypes depicted by their supercultural counterparts.

Ethnomusicologist Eric Galm (2008) also examines the ways in which subcultures and local cinemas self-define cultural and national identities in contrast to Hollywood depictions of assumed and stereotyped identities of marginalized groups. Galm explores the misrepresentations of marginalized peoples in animated Hollywood films through the exoticification and stereotyping of Latino characters as seen in the Donald Duck feature film, *The Three Caballeros* (1945). Through his case study, Galm finds that while the film drew upon elements of Brazilian songs, "...most of the delicate phrases, concepts, and images evoked from the original texts were left behind on the cutting-room floor" (2008, 274). He also concludes that animated representations of marginalized cultures that make assumptions about cultural identities may be wholly inaccurate and even harmful.

As she reflects on her time as an ethnomusicology consultant for the Hollywood film score *Avatar* (2009, directed by James Cameron), Wanda Bryant (2012) explores the importance of ethnomusicological methodologies in the creation of the film's fictional Na'vi culture and identity through the soundtrack. Bryant provides several factors that should be considered by film music scholars beyond the written music, including how behind-the-scenes Hollywood industry customs affect the outcome of the score. Bryant and film composer James Horner worked with the director's vision for the Na'vi as well as in consultation with the film's artists and production designers who had sketched musical instruments used by the Na'vi (Ibid., n.p.). For example, they had to consider what activities the Na'vi might perform based on their environment – such as hunting –

and created music to match the function (Ibid., n.p.). Cameron's vision for the film was to have music that was not easily recognizable yet still be appealing to audiences. *Avatar's* film score relies on musical film conventions and aerophones to aurally create the exotic other (Ibid., n.p.). Although I cannot personally comment on the result of this strategy since it is beyond the scope of this paper, the musical choices made in the *Avatar* soundtrack to represent Na'vi culture supports my assertion that musical conventions in Hollywood films can be used to stereotype and exoticize film character identities. This article is also meaningful to my analysis as it reminds me that when writing a film score, the composer does not necessarily have full creative control since there are numerous other members of the production team to consult before the end product is approved.

The scholarship by the ethnomusicologists outlined above are integral to how I examine *Smoke Signals* and *Dances with Wolves*. Slobin and Galm draw to my attention the ways in which cultural identities may be assumed and imposed onto marginalized characters in films as well as how subcultural filmmakers use film music to express identity and offer a counter-narrative to Hollywood stereotypes, both of which deepen my analysis of *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*. In addition to Slobin's and Galm's discussions about identity construction in film, the *Global Soundtracks* reader provides multiple examples of how to connect other disciplines to film music studies in a way that is concise, comprehensive, and insightful. The approach to my analyses in Chapter Four are influenced by Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan's time-stamped audio and visual cues of *Kandukondian Kandukondian* (2000).<sup>16</sup> Finally,

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<sup>16</sup> For more details, see Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008, 136-144.

Bryant's case study not only highlights the importance of music in constructing on-screen identities, but also provides background insight into the Hollywood film-making industry, something which contextualises the decision-making process for the *Dances with Wolves* soundtrack.

### **The Representation of Indigenous Cultures in Film**

The study of Indigenous media is a broad field of research that extends beyond film to include various media such as television, commercials, news outlets, and music videos. I use recent texts by key scholars to summarize some current concepts of Indigenous cultural representations in film media as per Indigenous media theorists, scholars, and filmmakers. For this section, I overview the work of anthropologist Faye Ginsburg (2002) as well as scholars of Indigenous cultural representation in film (Hafsteinsson and Bredin 2010; and Howe, Markowitz, and Cummings 2013).

*Indigenous Screen Cultures in Canada* (Hafsteinsson and Bredin 2010) features essays on current issues in Canadian Indigenous media. The book focuses on the growing importance of Indigenous media and how it may transform relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. The essays include perspectives from multiple disciplines including anthropology, sociology, media studies, and Native studies. Since access to media technologies has increased since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (although access remains largely unequal), Indigenous filmmakers use the media to express concerns regarding key social, political, and cultural issues that have otherwise been neglected by mainstream media outlets. According to Hafsteinsson and Bredin, Indigenous media can “erode the power of the state to exercise its authority upon Indigenous peoples while articulating concerns about government threats to

Indigenous cultural, social, economic, and political sovereignty” (2010, 2). In contrast, Hafsteinsson and Bredin acknowledge other scholars who believe Indigenous media provides little benefit for Indigenous communities as governments still control broadcast information and impose limitations on the licensing, content, and ownership of Indigenous media.

Anthropologist Faye Ginsburg is one of the most prolific and widely respected scholars of Indigenous media studies. For nearly thirty years, Ginsburg has written extensively on Indigenous media studies and has offered new theoretical paradigms for understanding Indigenous media (1991; 1997; 2000; 2002). According to Hafsteinsson and Bredin, Ginsburg’s theories of cultural activism and transformative action are widely accepted by Indigenous media scholars (2010, 2). Ginsburg asserts that in terms of cultural activism, Indigenous media serves as a self-conscious way of preserving and producing Indigenous culture. It is in these ways that Indigenous communities who have been previously misrepresented by mainstream media outlets may regain a sense of power through various technologies. Ginsburg claims that Indigenous media can be used for “internal and external communication, for self-determination, and for resistance to outside cultural domination” (1991, 92). Studying Indigenous media as transformative action allows scholars to examine “new social and cultural possibilities on a continuum, from the activities of daily life out of which consciousness and intentionality are constructed, to more dramatic forms of expressive culture (such as media or social protests)” (1997, 122).

Ginsburg also examines media created by Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia through the concept of “screen memories,” something which is critical to

understanding Indigenous media through a localized perspective. Unlike Freud's original use of the term "screen memories" (to protect oneself from a traumatic past by obscuring memories), Indigenized media does not mask past traumas, but rather addresses them among other histories with their own authority (Ginsburg 2002, 40). Creating films, especially those that are ethnographic in nature, such as documentaries, can recuperate collective stories and histories that would otherwise be forgotten or censored by dominant ideologies. There are several roadblocks that Indigenous filmmakers may need to navigate when producing a film, including negotiations in aesthetic structures, political economy, commercial media, and compromises with editors and production companies. According to Ginsburg, through her case studies pertaining to Australian and Canadian Indigenous communities, the embrace of media has resulted in an increased sense of empowerment since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Media technologies have played a revitalising role in cultural preservation and production, political mobilization, and communication to remote Indigenous communities (2002, 41-42).

*Seeing Red! – Hollywood's Pixeled Skins* (eds. Howe, Markowitz, and Cummings 2013) includes thirty-six reviews of films featuring Indigenous culture from as early as 1925 through the 2000s. The scholars use humour and satire in part to express key points about cultural expression, representation, and appropriation. Each film review considers how Indigenous people have viewed the film and how they are represented. The reader contains reviews for the two films I use as the basis of this thesis: *Smoke Signals* (reviewed by LeAnne Howe of the Choctaw Nation) and *Dances with Wolves* (reviewed by James Riding In of the Pawnee Nation).

According to Howe, *Smoke Signals* scored three feathers, which, according to the rating sheet, translates into “this movie is not so-o-o-o bad. Several elements – its story, camera work, and/or its message – are working well together, but overall it’s just not equal to the sum of its parts” (2013, 215). Howe focused primarily on the way the film relies on tired stereotypes of Indigenous culture (i.e., the drunk Indian, abusive and absent fathers, and the exclusive consumption of fry bread). Howe believes this film will cause American audiences to view Indigenous characters as victims as opposed to focusing on the underlying commentary on past and current Indigenous socio-political issues in America. This article enriches my analysis in Chapter Four as it shows the differences in how the film’s main characters may be interpreted by audiences.

In contrast to Howe’s more positive review of *Smoke Signals*, *Riding In* scored *Dances with Wolves* with four tomahawks, the worst rating according to their system, which translates to “don’t bother with this one!” (2013, 215). As a member of the Pawnee community, *Riding In* takes exception to the way the film represents Pawnee characters as Savage Indians and the film’s blatant myth-making about Indigenous culture, saying “... *Wolves* deserves neither the praise nor the awards that have been heaped on it...if you delight in movies that portray Pawnees as psychopathic killers, then *Wolves* is for you” (2013, 90). Although *Riding In* acknowledges some positive aspects of the film, such as the presence of Indigenous actors and inclusion of the Lakota language, the good is outweighed by the misrepresentations of the Lakota and Pawnee cultures. *Riding In* supports my analysis of *Dances with Wolves* in Chapter Four as the Indigenous characters are stereotyped through film music.

The above readings demonstrate the complexity of Indigenous media studies and highlight the diverse perspectives of some of the field's notable scholars. Ginsburg, Howe, and Riding In influence my analyses the most with respect to Indigenous media studies and how meanings about Indigenous cultures are communicated to and understood by film audiences. An Indigenous perspective is critical to achieving a deeper film score analysis of both *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*. Integrating multiple perspectives from Indigenous scholars, theorists, and filmmakers is necessary to address Eurocentric and colonial attitudes. It is evident to me though the above readings that sovereignty, agency, and freedom of expression are essential themes when studying Indigenous media. Theories of representations in Indigenous media allow me to assess why certain directorial choices were made in filming *Smoke Signals*.

### **Ethnomusicological Issues in the Study of North American Indigenous Musics**

This section provides a preliminary overview of three ethnomusicological considerations in studying North American Indigenous music and culture that are most relevant to this thesis. First, I provide a brief historical overview of scholarship on the music of Indigenous people from the Plains region in order to support my later analysis of the music in *Dances with Wolves*.<sup>17</sup> Next, I discuss the issue of “musical Indianisms,” which becomes important when examining how non-Indigenous composers of any media appropriate Indigenous music. Finally, I highlight how approaches to studying Indigenous music in North America have changed through the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>17</sup> I overview Plains music since the Indigenous characters in *Dances with Wolves* belong to Lakota and Pawnee cultures; however, I do not want to discount the diversity present in musics and cultures of North American Plains nations.

### *19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Indigenous Plains Music*

There exists a vast body of literature on Indigenous music from the American colonial era. Here I select a few texts that highlight aspects of the early music of Indigenous Plains cultures. I then explain how they may be applied to the film analyses, especially *Dances with Wolves*, since the film is set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I found general information on Plains Indigenous traditions from notable works by Bruno Nettl (1965) and Erik Gooding (2000), both of which provide foundational understanding for my film score analyses. I listened to and analyzed a Sioux<sup>18</sup> recording in order to supplement my understanding of Plains music and to provide a musical example specific to the major Plains culture in question. I use these musical examples as guidelines and tools for film score analysis, not to generalize about Plains music. These musical examples are helpful for generating a general understanding about Indigenous representation in Hollywood. For the purposes of this discussion, I focus on examining typical qualities of Indigenous Plains music in North America during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Prior to European contact, Plains music was largely vocal-based in both the High Plains and Prairie regions. Sioux primarily live in the High Plains (Western portion of Plains) whereas Pawnee belonged to the Prairie region (Eastern portion of Plains). Singing was central to nearly all activities of everyday life including hunting, politics, and religion. Vocal music of the Plains is typically monophonic and varies in texture from solo singing to group singing. The lyrics may be sung in local dialects or vocables. A variety of percussive instruments such as rattles and bells were used to accompany

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<sup>18</sup> Sioux and Lakota are interchangeable names for the same community depending on context.

vocal songs in dances and other rituals. The flute was traditionally used in courting music (Gooding 2000, 475). Another critical aspect of Plains musical identity is the powwow, a tradition that originated in the Plains after Western contact in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European settlers began invading the Western frontier and eradicating Plains culture through church mission schools, warfare, and the creation of reservations. The government implemented laws designed to limit the cultural practices of Plains Indigenous people, including music and powwows. As the government tried to ban Indigenous dances and music from around 1890 through 1920, there was an increase in Indigenous cultural representations in other contexts such as Wild West shows.<sup>19</sup> When Indigenous peoples were allowed to perform their music again in the 1920s, the War Dance emerged to become “the focal point of contemporary powwows” (Levine 2013). According to Professor Victoria Lindsay Levine, powwow music is sung and drummed predominantly by male performers; however, female performers may sing the vocals an octave above. The singing style is typically nasal/tense and the vocal phrasing – which is rhythmically independent of the drumming – features gapped pentatonic scales with a descending melodic contour (Levine 2013).

Bruno Nettl (1965)<sup>20</sup> provides more musical details about Plains traditional music through examples from the Arapaho nation. Nettl notes that most Arapaho songs are in two parts, each of which descends in a “terrace-like” contour. The vocals are tense and high pitched in timbre and rhythmic pulsations are common on sung long tones (Nettl

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<sup>19</sup> Levine does not explain the relationship between the powwow ban and its growing appearance in Wild West shows. Perhaps this was a method for colonialists to maintain control over Indigenous cultural expression, thereby further eradicating Indigenous identity.

<sup>20</sup> Although the source is dated, Nettl is one of the most significant early ethnomusicologists of North American Plains music.

1965, 150). Nettl also notes that the “ability to sing many songs, and to sing high, is a mark of a good singer on the Plains” (1965, 152). Rhythmic patterns and isolated motifs are not evident in many Plains songs; however, they are more prominent in Pawnee music (Nettl 1965, 159-160).

Below is a transcription (see Figure 1) and brief analysis of a Sioux love song that was recorded by Willard Rhodes for a Folkways Records album titled *Music of the Sioux and the Navajo* (1949); the tune is played on the flute by Lakota artist John Coloff. According to the record liner notes, Rhodes indicates that the phrasing and melodic intervals point to the influence of European contact and thus dates the creation of the song from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 1:** “Love Song” Theme by John Coloff, Flute<sup>21</sup>

On a micro level, the melody appears to repeat the same rhythmic motif on different pitches with an overall descending contour. The melody is pentatonic and spans an octave. The theme ends on the lowest pitch (A), which is repeated at the end of the phrase, and the final two notes are preceded by descending grace notes. I use this example to illustrate some of the general characteristics of Plains music in a song specific to the Sioux nation. A general background understanding of traditional Plains music and its characteristics informs my analysis of how Indigenous characters are (mis)represented in *Dances with Wolves* as examined in the following discussion.

<sup>21</sup> All transcriptions by the author.

*“Musical Indianisms” and the “Sound of Indian”*

American flutist Nina Perlove (2000) refers to musical Indianisms as a set of compositional techniques used by 20<sup>th</sup> century composers to stereotype or exoticize Indigenous music and culture. Perlove builds her critique of musical Indianism using the scholarship of Michael Pisani (1996, 1998) and Tara Colleen Browner (1995). Perlove highlights the following musical idioms that are commonly used to represent Indigenous presence in American compositions (2000, 55-56):

- Open fifths
- Pentatonic/modal with flat seventh degree
- Gapped scales
- Melodic range of octave or tenth
- Descending phrase contour
- Descending grace notes/snap figures
- Repeated heavy accent figures (usually in four)
- Tongue-wagging imitations
- Consonant intervals in descending motion
- Meter changes
- Descending initial intervals that quickly return to starting pitch

These compositional techniques – or musical Indianisms – have been used in film scores throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as musical symbols of stereotyped North American Indigenous musical identity. Perlove emphasizes that “it is not the presence of each trait alone that gives a work ‘exotic’ meaning, but rather the surrounding context and combined impact of the material” (2000, 55). I argue that Hollywood Western film scores go further than the above list to enhance on-screen Indigenous stereotypes. I find the presence of specific instrumentation – such as low, hollow drums and auxiliary percussion – exoticize Indigenous music within certain film contexts. These percussive instruments can typically be heard either maintaining a constant beat or playing

sporadic, syncopated rhythms. I also argue that the presence of high-pitched flutes and panpipes may be decontextualized from their original sources to further propagate tropes of Indigeneity. Lastly, I find that Hollywood uses choirs singing rounded vocables and drone pitches to evoke Indigenous stereotypes as they are depicted on screen.

Indigenous historian Philip J. Deloria's book *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004) is a collection of essays that unpack the expectations of Indigenous culture and identity held by Americans since the early 1900s. The final essay of the book outlines the history of how stereotyped "Indian sounds" were created (most of which stem from around 1890 to 1930), became part of Western consciousness and were embedded into American popular culture and music.<sup>22</sup> Deloria highlights sounds that are often found in music to illustrate the "sound of Indian" (2004, 183-223). Some of these sounds include:

- Repetitive tom-tom style drumbeat accent as: "DUM dum dum dum"
- Beats of three
- Drone harmonies in open fifths and minor thirds
- Melody in minor key with threatening tone
- Short-long rhythmic motifs

This brief list shares many similarities to the musical Indianisms as outlined by Perlove, Pisani and Browner: open fifths, repeated heavy accent figures in groupings of four, and the idea of snap figures can all be seen in Deloria's above list. Threatening tone, minor keys and three beat patterns are unique to Deloria's list. Deloria (2004) also recognizes the importance of these sounds coupled with imagery in early films:

As we have seen, by the 1920s film had become a repository for many of the images of violence and savagery found in nineteenth-century dime novel literature and anti-Indian propaganda. As films grew less sympathetic toward Indian characters, so too did the accompanying music. (221)

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on this history, see pages Deloria 2004, 184-223.

These images of violence and savagery accompanied by a sinister soundtrack are key to the portrayal of the Pawnee characters in *Dances with Wolves*. The significance of such stereotyped representations of Indigenous culture is that “these are the ways – through the images and sounds of popular culture – that expectations work their way into lives and actions and, from those seemingly innocuous actions, into other, more damaging, forms of racism and oppression” (Deloria 2004, 223). In Chapter Four, I argue that these expectations are embedded in the images and sounds present in *Dances with Wolves*.

In Figure 2, I compare the musical Indianisms as identified by Pisani, Browner and Deloria with the characteristics of Plains traditional music as identified by Nettl and Gooding:

<b>Element of Music</b>	<b>Musical Indianisms (Pisani/Browner/Deloria)</b>	<b>Plains Musical Traditions (Gooding/Nettl)</b>
<b>Melodic Structure</b>	Pentatonic/modal	Pentatonic/hexatonic/tetratonic
	Descending melodic contour	Descending melodic contour
	Flat seventh scale degree	
	Large melodic intervals	Major 2 <sup>nd</sup> and minor 3 <sup>rd</sup> intervals common
	Range (octave-tenth)	Range (greater than octave or tenth)
	Minor keys	
		Phrase ends on long, low tone
	Two-part melodic structure	
<b>Texture</b>	Homophonic	Monophonic
<b>Harmonic Structure</b>	Open fifths and minor thirds	
	Drone harmonies	
<b>Rhythmic Structure</b>		Steady rhythms
	Meter changes	
	Beats of three	
	DUM – dum – dum – dum pattern	
	Short-long rhythmic motif	

<b>Articulations/Timbre</b>	Tongue-wagging imitations	
		High-pitched, nasal vocals
	Heavy accented figures	Pulsating vocables
	Descending, snapped grace notes	
		Glissandi at end of phrases and songs

**Figure 2:** List of Characteristics Comparing Stereotypes and Reality of Plains Music

The chart demonstrates the overlaps and differences between stereotyped musical sounds representing Indigenous cultures and traditional characteristics of Plains music. Melodic elements such as number of pitches and range are present in both traditional and stereotypical Plains music. It appears that the most inaccurate musical idioms belong to the rhythmic and harmonic structures. I refer to this chart in my film score analysis of *Dances with Wolves* in particular as it helps me identify elements of the music that may be considered a musical Indianism based on its connection to what is happening on screen.

In conclusion, identifying musical Indianism and the “sound of Indian” as well as assessing how these musical idioms are used within the context of the film is central to my interpretation of the *Dances with Wolves* film score. For this reason, I argue that the soundtrack in combination with the image track of the film stereotypes Indigenous cultures. A broad understanding of how Plains music sounded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century serves as a baseline for comparing the soundtrack of *Dances with Wolves* to the set list of musical Indianisms. I attempt to answer some of the following questions regarding the issue of Indigenous representation in the next chapter: Are there musical Indianisms present in the original soundtrack? What is happening on screen at this point in the

music? Does the musical analysis support Indigenous character tropes or does it accurately reflect Plains music and culture?

## CHAPTER FOUR: FILM SCORE ANALYSES – REPRESENTATIONS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES

In this section, I analyse, compare, and contrast two films: one Hollywood film by a non-Indigenous filmmaker and one independent by an Indigenous filmmaker. I use concepts from film theory studies to inform my examination of Indigenous cultural representations in the film scores. For each film, I created what is referred to by film theorists as a “plot segmentation.”<sup>23</sup> This is a film studies practice that maps out a broad overview of the film’s story and plot as it develops. I have also added significant musical cues in each film’s plot segmentation. The plot segmentations provide readers who have not watched the films with a comprehensive overview, including a main cast list of characters, actors, and their on-screen relationships. The film analyses also feature an in-depth examination of selected scenes, time-stamped with aural and visual cues. These charts provide context and familiarity with the films, which will aid in understanding how filmic and musical elements combine to communicate representations of Indigenous cultures of North America. In each analysis I address the research questions outlined in Chapter One and explain what I understand about Indigenous identities based on the relationship between elements of film theory and music. Each film analysis focuses on only a couple of exemplary filmic elements.

### ***Dances with Wolves***

For this analysis, I focus on how melodic/rhythmic motifs and instrumentation in the *Dances with Wolves* soundtrack intersect with the Western film genre and other Hollywood conventions, as well as costume and make-up, to communicate stereotyped

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<sup>23</sup> Plot segmentations are found in Appendices A and B.

depictions of Lakota and Pawnee cultures. I focus on the following tracks from the soundtrack, all of which contain elements of musical Indianisms: “Death of Timmons,” “Pawnee Attack,” and “Stands With A Fist Remembers.” I also consider the bonus track, “Fire Dance,” as well as the diegetic music in the film, all of which are omitted from the original soundtrack.<sup>24</sup> The diegetic and non-diegetic music communicate stereotyped ideas about past and present Indigenous cultures in North America.

### *Film Synopsis and Background*

Released in 1990, *Dances with Wolves* is an internationally recognized film that has received numerous accolades, including several Academy Award nominations and wins. It is based on a novel originally written by screenwriter Michael Blake (released in 1986). Kevin Costner directed the film and stars alongside Graham Greene and Mary McDonnell. The film is set in the late 1800s during the American Civil War in the Dakotas. Lieutenant John Dunbar (Costner) becomes curious about a neighbouring Lakota tribe and leaves his post to achieve contact with them. Dunbar helps Kicking Bird (Greene) and the rest of the Lakota defend themselves against frequent Pawnee and American attacks. Dunbar also falls in love with a woman named Stands With A Fist (McDonnell), a white woman who was adopted by the Lakota as a child after her family was murdered by the Pawnee. Dunbar eventually “goes Native” in the film and acquires his Lakota name, Dances With Wolves.<sup>25</sup>

*Dances with Wolves* was critically acclaimed as a progressive film for the early 1990s, mainly for the ways in which it incorporates and treats Indigenous cultures of the

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<sup>24</sup> The *Dances with Wolves* original soundtrack has been released multiple times since the film debuted in 1990. Subsequent releases of the soundtrack (1995 and 2004) included additional tracks.

<sup>25</sup> For more information on the plot, see Appendix B.

19<sup>th</sup> century (Riding In 2013, 90). For example, Indigenous actors were cast to portray the Pawnee and Lakota characters, something that had not been widely practiced in popular Western films or television of the past. Yet the film has also received its share of criticisms from scholars for the ways in which it depicts Indigenous communities, sometimes from the same critics who praised the film:

Within the Indian world, Costner's powerful directing debut is for certain the most talked about mainstream Hollywood Indian film in two decades. Despite some negative reviews by jaded Eurocentric urbanites, Costner's vision of an alternate Lakota encounter with Americans has captured the *imagination* [emphasis added] of Americans from a variety of social, economic, and racial backgrounds. From a native viewpoint, the film's primary virtue is its sensitive exploration of a native culture. The screenplay, without preaching, engenders understanding, acceptance, and sympathy for Lakota culture. (Castillo 1991, 14)

In the same article, however, Edward Castillo outlines the numerous historical inaccuracies from the original screenplay to the film, including the Indigenous communities in question,<sup>26</sup> setting, and use of traditional costume (1991, 17-18). For example, Castillo notes the Indigenous characters are almost always wearing fancy ceremonial clothing throughout the entire film, stating “while it makes for colorful and picturesque village life, it certainly would have been impractical” (1991, 18).

Similarly, Professor James Riding In (of the Pawnee nation) argues that the film is a distortion of historical Plains culture and depicts Indigenous peoples as mythical fabrications. For example, although the film depicts these 19<sup>th</sup> century Pawnee characters as aggressive war-makers, Riding In suggests that they were on the defensive at this point in history and not actively seeking violence with others unless it was to protect themselves from invasions (2013, 94). Furthermore, he questions the

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<sup>26</sup> The original novel by Michael Blake did not feature the Lakota, but rather the Comanche (Castillo 1991, 17).

accuracy of the sources used by screenwriter Michael Blake (Riding In 2013). At a Writer's Guild screening of *Dances with Wolves* in the 1990s, Michael Blake explained that his sources of inspiration for writing the screenplay came from first-person accounts from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: Mari Sandoz's biography of Crazy Horse (1942) and *Plains Indian Raiders* (1968) written by Colonel Wilbur S. Nye. Blake admitted that the original novel was written about the Comanche community, "but because of the locale, and other logistical problems, I changed [the film] to be about the Sioux...no matter what the differences between the Sioux and the Comanche, the spirituality of it is pretty much the same" (Field 2013, n.p.). In my opinion, these sorts of generalizations about North American Indigenous communities as being "essentially the same" and exchangeable in this way, and the romanticization of Indigenous cultures in general, is a problematic way of representing Indigenous peoples in various media, both in the past and present. The fact that Blake only incorporated non-Indigenous authors' perspectives of Indigenous communities is already a flawed way of learning about any culture, since it does not include a variety of sources and viewpoints.

The musical score was written by the late English composer John Barry. Barry was a highly active Hollywood film composer throughout his career spanning several decades. He is known for writing the theme of the James Bond film franchise, among others. Barry composed scores for ninety-five feature films in total over the course of his career (Hischak 2015, 48). A bonus track featured in the later releases of the soundtrack, titled "Fire Dance," was composed by American composer and musician Peter Buffett. All diegetic Lakota music was written and performed by the Indigenous

musical group based out of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, The Porcupine Singers, which I will discuss in more detail later in this analysis.

*“Death of Timmons” Theme and Mise-en-scène: Costume and Make-Up*

The first time the “Death of Timmons” theme occurs is when the audience is introduced to a group of Pawnee men toward the beginning of the film. The Pawnee are instantly villainized and stereotyped as “Savage Indians” through elements of mise-en-scène. The Pawnee have painted faces, extreme hair styles, and multiple piercings, all of which are stereotypically symbolic of Indigenous warfare. In this scene, the Pawnee are stalking a seemingly innocent white traveller named Timmons as he rests to eat at a temporary camp. Toughest Pawnee (played by Wes Studi), who appears to be the leader of the four, seems determined to murder Timmons at any cost, including the lives of his fellow Pawnee followers.<sup>27</sup> Toughest Pawnee fires multiple arrows into Timmons while the other Pawnee steal his horse and belongings. The scene ends with the Pawnee leader scalping Timmons and emitting a victorious, high pitched war cry.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 3 shows how the track begins with a prominent trumpet solo supported by a faint flute sounding an octave above the trumpet. This occurs while the Pawnee are discussing if they should murder Timmons. The trumpet uses a flutter tonguing technique, which I interpret to be a tongue-wagging imitation (or ululation) commonly associated with the “Savage Indian” trope and North American Indigenous warfare.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> There are two/three Pawnee who did not want to kill Timmons and tried to convince Toughest Pawnee not to kill Timmons. There is therefore a contradiction in how the Pawnee characters are portrayed, although they seem to be more of an outlier than the rule.

<sup>28</sup> This scene is further deconstructed in the Scene Analysis section of this subchapter.

<sup>29</sup> For more information on “Musical Indianisms,” see Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp. 31-35.



**Figure 3:** “Death of Timmons” Theme, Trumpet in C

As soon as Toughest Pawnee mounts his horse to approach Timmons, the upper strings enter with a high pitched and tense melodic theme that features descending intervals of a second (see Figure 4). I believe the string theme is intended to be reminiscent of the strained upper vocalizations that are typical of Plains music.



**Figure 4:** “Death of Timmons” Theme, Upper Strings

The stereotypical musical elements, in combination with the *mise-en-scène*, reinforces the “Savage Indian” tropes representing the Pawnee characters on screen. Both the trumpet and upper strings themes of the “Death of Timmons” track exhibit several musical Indianisms, including ululation imitations and descending melodic contour.

#### *Scene Analysis: Pawnee Attack on Timmons’ Camp*

The time-stamped scene analysis in Table 1 shows how the presence of *mise-en-scène* elements, Western genre conventions, and film score work together to communicate stereotyped ideas about Indigenous culture and identity. This is a visual and aural deconstruction of the Pawnee attack on Timmons. The inclusion of this scene is, itself, a by-product of Western film genre convention; an attack on an American camp

or wagon is a common trope in Western films. Based on the timing of the visual and musical cues in the table below, I argue that the Pawnee are characterized as “Savage Indians” for the unprovoked murder of Timmons, the American convoy. This is evident through the musical Indianisms present in the themes featured in Figures 3 and 4. The music also punctuates the arrow shots by Toughest Pawnee as a way of highlighting his savage and murderous traits. Finally, Timmons’ expression of humanity (reinforced by the “John Dunbar” Theme) is starkly contrasted with the Pawnee themes and thus makes the Pawnee appear even more savage to the audience.

<b>Time (min.sec)</b>	<b>Visual Cue</b>	<b>Musical Cue</b>
43.13	Smoke from Dunbar's camp clouding sun	Tremolo in strings, drum rolls
43.16	Four Pawnee with mohawks and paint with spears crouching and looking off screen	Quiet “Death of Timmons” theme (trumpet) echoed by flute cues as leader talks about stupidity of white men, plot to kill him
43.38	Shot from behind of Pawnee leader rising	Quiet trumpet theme continues
43.43	Three Pawnee talk cautiously about approaching the white man	Transition music between themes, strings with drone
43.49	Toughest Pawnee mounts horse while others try to convince him to forget about the white man	“Death of Timmons” theme (upper strings) cues loudly as leader mounts horse
44.05	Same shot	Second repetition of upper strings theme, top octave removed and quieter
44.12	Toughest Pawnee rides off, shot from behind	Upper strings theme continues
44.18	Focus on other Pawnee ("he won't quit until we are all dead")	Upper strings theme continues

44.22	Shot of leader riding off, slightly off-centre in shot	Transition music decrescendos
44.33	Close-up shot of Timmons cooking and eating bacon around a fire	No music
44.46	Timmons shot in the back with an arrow, falls face-forward	No music
44.49	Shot focuses on Timmons in centre of frame crawling toward camera	No music
44.51	Toughest Pawnee visible in frame from a distance, approaching Timmons from high ground with a bow and arrow loaded	Tremolo in strings, drum rolls
44.53	Focus on Timmons who notices Toughest Pawnee behind him; yelling and trying to get away	Tremolo in strings, drum rolls crescendos
44.58	Closer mid-shot of Toughest Pawnee holding bow ready for fire.	Trumpet theme cues
45.00	Arrow hits Timmons in back of right thigh, close-up shot; camera pans with Timmons as he crawls away	Trumpet theme continues
45.11	Third arrow hits Timmons in the chest	Downbeat of second iteration of trumpet theme timed with arrow impact
45.14	Timmons on ground in foreground, Toughest Pawnee behind him in mid-ground, other Pawnee in background atop hill	Trumpet theme continues.
45.18	Toughest Pawnee looms over Timmons, leader consumes most of frame, Timmons barely visible on the ground; high light contrast	Low drum/timpani shot heard as leader gets closer to Timmons

45.23	Toughest Pawnee draws arrow and shoots Timmons for fourth time	Upper strings theme cues loudly, 2nd beat of theme timed with arrow impact
45.24	Close-up shot of Timmons' horses rearing heads	Upper strings theme continues
45.25	Mid-shot of other Pawnee rising toward Timmons' camp	Upper strings theme crescendos through final note
45.29	Close-up of Timmons on ground with arrow in his chest	Final note of upper strings theme diminishes and releases
45.38	Toughest Pawnee over camera with arrow firing	Second iteration of upper strings theme cues
45.39	Timmons' face, gets shot for fifth time	Downbeat of second iteration of upper strings theme timed with arrow impact
45.40	Shot of other Pawnee around Timmons' camp and supplies	Upper strings theme continues
45.47	Pawnee stealing Timmons' horses	Upper strings theme continues
45.55	Close-up of Timmons' face on ground saying: "Don't hurt my mules"	Music transitions to quiet "John Dunbar" theme
46.11	One Pawnee smells a quilt	"John Dunbar" theme ends with low drum shot as Pawnee smells quilt
46.13	Pawnee throws quilt to ground	Low drum shot continues
46.15	Pawnee smells hands after touching quilt, squats down to rub hands in dirt	Low drum shot as Pawnee smells his hands
46.19	Pawnee looks at another as he rubs his hands	Low drum shot as Pawnee #1 looks at Pawnee #2
46.26	Shot change to focus on face of Pawnee #2; holds a rifle and eats a boiled egg as camera pans	Upper strings theme cues as Pawnee takes bite

46.32	Toughest Pawnee approaches Timmons with a knife and grabs Timmons' hair	Upper strings theme fades into rest
46.33	Close-up shot of Timmons' horses	Second iteration of upper strings theme cues
46.34	Timmons screams, shot change to other Pawnee atop Timmons' wagon looking off-screen	Second iteration of upper strings theme continues
46.38	Shot from Pawnee's perspective, silhouette of Toughest Pawnee in mid-ground (high light contrast) screams and holds something above his head, other Pawnee scream	Second iteration of upper strings theme continues then ends
46.41	Transition to next scene	New theme cues

**Table 1:** *Dances with Wolves* “Death of Timmons” Scene Analysis

What I find most interesting about this scene is the change in musical theme before Timmons is murdered at 45.55. The “John Dunbar” theme (Figure 5) can be heard throughout the film in association with John Dunbar’s heroic, noble or reality-defying/superhero-like actions. The theme typically appears as a trumpet solo, but in this scene, it appears as a flute solo. The more delicate timbre of the flute highlights Timmons’ fragile mortality and renders him more pathetic, as he lays dying and pleading for his horses to not be harmed, than he was previously portrayed in the film. Timmons’ assumption that the horses will be harmed emphasizes the point that the Pawnee are prejudged to be savages (otherwise why would he assume they would want to hurt his mules?).



force the audience to understand and prejudge Pawnee people as savage murderers. This entire scene provides insight into how filmic devices and music can work together to manipulate the viewer's understanding of Indigenous culture and identity.

### *"Pawnee Attack" Theme and Western Film Genre Conventions*

The track titled "Pawnee Attack" occurs a few times throughout the film, most prominently during battles between the Lakota, Americans, and Pawnee peoples. Like the "Death of Timmons" theme, the "Pawnee Attack" theme combines with Western film genre conventions to communicate a Savage Indian trope. An example of this film convention occurs during an extended battle sequence towards the end of the film. John Dunbar goes into battle with the Lakota against the Pawnee after he escapes the imprisonment of American troops for treason. This final show-down and gunfight is the climax of the film, a standardized scene in most Western films (Bordwell and Thompson 2013, 340). It also reinforces John Dunbar's shift in loyalty from the Americans to the Lakota. In Western genre films, it is common to have a duality in the hero's identity and/or loyalty that resolves by the end of the film (Bordwell and Thompson, 2013). The Lakota are clearly portrayed as the "good guys," the Noble Savages, in comparison to the Pawnee and the American soldiers. When John Dunbar associates himself with the Lakota, and therefore the good guys, it indirectly identifies the Americans and Pawnee with sinister and savage character traits.<sup>30</sup>

The "Pawnee Attack" theme is nearly identical to the "Death of Timmons" theme with a few exceptions in instrumentation and rhythmic motifs. For example, the theme (see Figure 3) is played by horns rather than a trumpet, and in augmentation. There is

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<sup>30</sup> For more information, see Gorbman 2000.

also a heavier drum presence. The timpani and low strings produce a steady beat in the background while a variety of what sounds like low and high-pitched toms play sporadic shot notes and rhythms reminiscent of gunfire. These rhythmic idioms signal a stereotypical powwow style to the audience (the steady beating of the powwow drum with interspersed accent beats, known as “honour beats”) (Hoefnagels 2016). Sections of the orchestra, such as the low brass, play more complex rhythms including triplets. There also appears to be random changes in meter, although this is difficult to discern without a physical score. These “Pawnee Attack” themes (Figures 3 and 4), in conjunction with the visual action of the film, are stereotyping the Savage Indian both visually and sonically. The Pawnee culture is therefore understood as blood-thirsty and thriving on violence and warfare.

Another prominent scene that features the “Pawnee Attack” track is when Stands With A Fist has a flashback to a childhood memory of her family being murdered by the Pawnee. “Stands With A Fist Remembers” is a combination of a plaintive vocal theme combined with the “Pawnee Attack” track. In this scene, her family is confronted by Pawnee men on horseback. There is a verbal altercation between the Pawnee and the family. An echoing, female vocal melody singing “aahs” supported by piano chords in a major key is heard as Stands With A Fist observes the Pawnee approach her family. The dissonances in the vocal melody as well as the sustained low strings foreshadow that something sinister is about to occur. When the Pawnee are asked to leave, they instead murder Stands With A Fist’s father. It is at this point in the scene when the “Pawnee Attack” track cues abruptly. The Pawnee then proceed to slaughter the family and burn their home as Stands With A Fist flees from the attacks unharmed. The entire

scene is an example of the “Good Americans” (represented by the plaintive vocals) versus the “Savage Indians” narrative that prevails in many Hollywood-produced Westerns. Once again, the Pawnee are depicted as Savage Indians both through music and Western genre film conventions.

*Diegetic Music and Bonus Track: Porcupine Singers and Peter Buffett*

Film music composer Christopher Letcher stresses the critical function of diegetic music in film as “provid[ing] an historical, geographical and atmospheric setting, whilst also depicting and identifying characters and positioning them in relation to the narrative” (2009, 27). Letcher concludes that diegetic music can be used to delineate a character’s race, religion, and cultural identity and is integral to creating meaning about characters in film. The diegetic music in *Dances with Wolves* is either in powwow style or featuring a solo drum and voice and is performed by the Porcupine Singers. According to their website ([porcupinesingers.tripod.com](http://porcupinesingers.tripod.com)), the Porcupine Singers are based in South Dakota and have been established since the early 1900s; they compose new songs in traditional Lakota singing styles and are currently under the direction of Melvin Young Bear and Severt Young Bear II.

The instances of diegetic music throughout *Dances with Wolves* are exclusively linked to the Lakota characters, prompting the following questions: Why is no diegetic music used for the Pawnee? How does it change the audience’s relationship to the Lakota and Pawnee? Does it humanize the Lakota more-so than the Pawnee characters? Furthermore, the diegetic music occurs within Lakota ceremonial contexts: death of Lakota warriors; buffalo dance; celebration of revenge against American

hunters; successful buffalo hunt; return of Lakota war party; and the wedding of Dunbar and Stands With A Fist. Is this historically accurate music to occur at these ceremonies?

The audience understands Lakota identity through their visual representations on screen, which is opposite to the understandings of Pawnee identity, as previously discussed. The Lakota are depicted as peace-keeping, noble and concerned with the animal waste in their community, in contrast to the Pawnee characters who are depicted as savage, brutal, and murderous. Unlike the Pawnee who are shown to attack white settlers unprovoked, the Lakota adopt Stands With A Fist and welcome her into their community. The Lakota are also portrayed to be the Victim as they are constantly defending themselves against the Pawnee; they are never shown to initiate violence with others. Finally, the Lakota can be understood as the “good guys” since the film’s main protagonist, John Dunbar, is able to identify with the Lakota and fight with them against the Pawnee and Americans; Dunbar does not appear to extend the same compassion toward any Pawnee characters. These subtle ways of constructing Lakota character identities in relation to Pawnee characters is problematic because it further emphasizes stereotypical tropes of Indigenous cultures.

There are several ways to interpret the diegetic Lakota music within the film, raising questions about the music’s function within the film and how it communicates ideas about Indigenous culture. For example, is the inclusion of diegetic Lakota music an attempt at authenticating Indigenous cultural expression or just tokenism and exoticism? The answer is not clear to me. On the one hand, having Indigenous musicians compose and record the diegetic music seems to be an attempt to authenticate the Indigenous characters. At the same time, the diegetic music seems to

be considered less important than the orchestral soundtrack since the Porcupine Singers are not featured on the original soundtrack, thus suggesting that the Indigenous music is not as important and establishing a Eurocentric hierarchy of cultural/musical expression.

In contrast to the diegetic music performed by the Porcupine Singers, the bonus track communicates a clearer message about North American Indigenous culture and identity. "Fire Dance" was composed by Peter Buffett, son of American billionaire Warren Buffett. The track was featured on the second and third releases of the original soundtrack in 1995 and 2004 (again, in contrast to the Porcupine Singers' tracks that have not been released on any edition of the soundtrack). The track prominently features several musical elements used in "Indianist" compositions of the early 1900s:<sup>31</sup> accented drum beats, auxiliary percussive rattles, high-pitched vocables, wailing, orchestral strings, and what sounds like a digeridoo. "Fire Dance" stereotypes Indigenous musical culture and, similar to the majority of the orchestral film score, can be reduced to musical Indianisms.

In the film, the "Fire Dance" track is featured immediately following the intermission, while Kevin Costner's character (Dunbar) independently hosts his own fire dance. This scene is pivotal because it demonstrates Dunbar "going Native," and is a clear exotification of Indigenous culture. It communicates to the audience that this character, after only a few months of sporadic contact with the Lakota, has either taken or been granted authority to perform their culture and expressions. *Riding In* highlights the absurdity that this central white character is constructed as superior to the Lakota

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<sup>31</sup> See Deloria 2004, 184-223 for more information.

and more Native than they are with his knowledge of the land and ability to master their cultural expressions; he jibes that, without Dunbar, the Lakota would have been helplessly lost on the frontier (2013, 90). In my opinion, the way “Fire Dance” is contextualised within the film implies that Indigeneity is something to be exotified and misappropriated and that Indigenous culture can be used simply as a film effect. It also fulfills audience expectations about Indigeneity, which are based on Hollywood stereotypes from the past.

### *Tropes of Indigenous Identity and Culture*

My analysis demonstrates how film and music work together to communicate stereotyped ideas about North American Indigenous cultures. I argue that musical Indianisms are predominant in the *Dances with Wolves* original soundtrack, particularly in the “Death of Timmons,” “Pawnee Attack,” and “Fire Dance” themes. These musical Indianisms are contextualised through elements of mise-en-scène and Western film genre conventions to impose the Savage Indian trope on Pawnee characters in the film. Similarly, the film and soundtrack stereotype Lakota characters as Noble Savages. Riding In questions if Hollywood “could make a sympathetic film about one group of Indians without demonizing another” (2013, 91). Finally, the Indigenous roles are secondary to Costner’s character and appear to be inserted primarily to serve the John Dunbar narrative. The following analysis of the independent film *Smoke Signals* (1998) is a stark contrast to *Dances with Wolves* in expressions of Indigeneity.

### ***Smoke Signals***

It's crazy that there's never been a movie that has been the voice of Indians. It's always about how the over-culture wants to portray Indians, and it's usually in the romantic vein -- and I definitely don't want to go there. The romantic stuff grosses me out! There's Native America, and then there's America's Native America. America's Native America is this place that mainstream America holds in a romantic place. Indians could be dead and gone and there would still be Indian-head icons on fruit boxes and Cherokee this and Cherokee that. I want to get away from the romantic stuff. Indian people are like anybody -- complicated people.

- Chris Eyre on *Smoke Signals*, interview with Michael Jones (1998, n.p.)

The following analysis of the *Smoke Signals* soundtrack examines how the film represents and communicates ideas about Indigenous culture that contest its stereotypical counterparts found in Hollywood cinema. Much of my evaluation is based on the extensive literature by film studies scholar Joanna Hearne (2005; 2012), who analyses how the film works to reclaim and re-define historical Indigenous narratives in a self-conscious way and to express ideas about what it means to be Indigenous at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in North America. Specifically, I examine how elements of music and film work together to communicate a dual sense of Indigenous identity. The film shows Indigenous characters straddling the past and present – the stereotyped identities that have been historically projected onto Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous Hollywood filmmakers, as well as the identities that Indigenous peoples want to self-express. The film recognizes these stereotypes of imagined Indigeneity through plot and narrative, thereby expressing a counter-narrative to films like *Dances with Wolves*. *Smoke Signals* maintains that Indigenous peoples are, as director Chris Eyre notes, “like anybody – complicated people” (Jones 1998, n.p.).

I first provide an overview of the film and score and introduce the idea of commercialism in communicating ideas about Indigeneity throughout the film. Plot, narrative and music are used at key points throughout the film to acknowledge stereotyped ideas and express new ideas about Indigenous identities. My analysis focuses on how one major scene – the relocation scene of Victor and Thomas on the coach bus – conveys meanings about Indigenous identity through film and music. In this scene, the filmmaker uses specific characters and plot to acknowledge the Hollywood tropes of what it means to be Indigenous, rejects these ideas, and expresses new ones. I will highlight how agency and commercialism are negotiated throughout the film, as well as reference the theoretical frameworks of cultural activism/transformational action and screen memories. Elements of Hollywood and independent cinema traditions work together to express cultural empowerment and contribute to a modern sense of Indigeneity.

### *Film Synopsis and Background*

*Smoke Signals* (1998), a critically acclaimed film directed by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne/Arapaho), is considered one of the most famous Native American-made films of all time (Hearne 2012, xv). According to screenwriter Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), as of 2009, *Smoke Signals* is "...the only film ever written and directed by Native Americans that received national and international distribution. It's the only film that ever went even remotely mainstream" (Hearne 2012, 179). The screenplay is based on Alexie's short story, "This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," from the collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993). The film stars Adam Beach (Saulteaux) as Victor Joseph, a young man who lives on a

Coeur d'Alene reservation in Idaho. The narrative centres around Victor's journey off the reservation to Phoenix with his childhood friend, Thomas Builds-The-Fire (Evan Adams, Tla'amin First Nation) to collect the remains of his estranged father Arnold (Gary Farmer, Cayuga Nation). Through his experiences with Thomas on the trip, Victor learns about himself and finally forgives his father for abandoning him as a child. The film explores several broad themes, some of which may be used to examine larger socio-political Indigenous issues.

The *Smoke Signals* soundtrack is not fully composed, rather a mixed soundtrack of different genres. A prominent aspect of the film score is the amount of sound mixing that occurs, all of which was done remotely in Seattle as per the end credits of the film. The soundtrack combines Western orchestra, instrumental rock music (including solo electric guitar crooning), Indigenous pop and traditional Indigenous music styles such as powwow. The music supervisor of *Smoke Signals* is BC Smith and the soundtrack features artists including Ulali, Jim Boyd, Eaglebear Singers, and Dar Williams, as well as the Northwest Sinfonia and Chorus. Several of the songs feature lyrics written by Sherman Alexie,<sup>32</sup> who explains that each song in *Smoke Signals* was chosen deliberately as a way to reach different audiences and contribute more meaning to the narrative beyond the screen (West and West 1998, 31). *Smoke Signals* received a mixed reception from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, primarily for the film's integration of racially-charged stereotypes. Some scholars believe the film victimizes Indigenous peoples and relies too heavily on the presence of stereotypes

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<sup>32</sup> Tracks with lyrics written by Alexie include the following: "Reservation Blues," "A Million Miles Away," "John Wayne's Teeth," and "Father and Father."

such as the Drunk and Vanishing Indian.<sup>33</sup> Sherman Alexie recalls the criticism he received from Indigenous scholars on *Smoke Signals*:

...I'm recalling specific reviews or interviews especially by Indian scholars that sort of treat my engagement with popular culture as some sort of betrayal...that I had failed to interrogate pop culture. That whole line of thinking always assumes that we Indians are outside of it. It also assumes that pop culture is somehow less than other parts of our culture. (Hearne 2012, 181)

Despite the negative reviews regarding the portrayal of Indigenous stereotypes and integration of popular culture, *Smoke Signals* remains a ground-breaking film in that it stars an Indigenous cast and features an Indigenous director, writer and producers.

Editor of *Cinéaste* magazine Dan Georgakas boasts about the film:

Every few years or so, press kits arrive at the offices of film magazines announcing that a forthcoming film about Native Americans decisively breaks with the stereotypes of the past. *Smoke Signals* is the latest film to advertise itself so, but, unlike most of its predecessors, *Smoke Signals* delivers on its promises. (West and West 1998, 28)

The following analysis will explore a few ways in which the film uses commercialism and music to reject old Hollywood stereotypes and present re-defined ideas about Indigeneity.

### *Negotiating Commercialism for Cultural Expression*

Chris Eyre employs both Hollywood and subcultural film style conventions.<sup>34</sup> One of the clear indicators of Hollywood cinematic traditions is its narrative form,<sup>35</sup> a formula that many American film audiences have come to expect since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps this common formal structure is part of the reason why *Smoke Signals*

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<sup>33</sup> See Howe's review in Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp. 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> For more information on subcultural filmmaking, see Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp. 20-21.

<sup>35</sup> See Plot Segmentation in Appendix A.

is more accessible to wider audiences in the United States outside of or unfamiliar with Indigenous communities; its use also highlights a filmmaker's agency to use any form they choose, rather than automatically eschewing Hollywood narrative conventions to counteract Hollywood stereotypes.

*Smoke Signals* also employs commercial filmmaking techniques such as product placements to not only help bolster the film's budget and reduce production costs, but also to help disseminate the film's representations of Indigenous identities to diverse audiences. There are multiple product placements in the film,<sup>36</sup> highlighted through strategic framing, which point to *Smoke Signals* being a commercialized film; however, the end credits mention that much of the film's profits were donated to two major Indigenous organizations: Honor Earth and American Indian College Fund. Even though there were several product placements in the film, the filmmakers invested the funds generated from the film to benefit Indigenous communities. Can this really be considered commercialism then, or is it an exercise in agency? I interpret this choice to use commercialism in independent story-telling to be a balancing act that some Indigenous filmmakers use in order to disseminate their work more broadly. In re-telling Indigenous stories through media, "...the work is simply not an assertion of existing identity, but also a means of cultural invention that refracts and recombines elements from both the dominant and minority societies" (Ginsburg 1991, 105). The product placements in *Smoke Signals* allow Indigenous filmmakers to exercise agency in communicating ideas about Indigeneity to non-Indigenous viewers, thereby combatting the stereotypical representations of Indigenous characters present in Hollywood films.

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<sup>36</sup> Brand-name companies featured in the film include: Coca-Cola, Casio, JanSport, Minolta Corporation, Nora Beverages, Nortel, and RAM Sports.

The film music also appears to draw upon commercialized Hollywood conventions such as studio mixing (a popular trend of the 1990s) in order to communicate ideas about Indigeneity to viewers. The soundtrack features various genres of music (pop, rock, country, instrumental) performed by Indigenous artists, as well as traditional orchestral works. The combination of popular and orchestral music makes the soundtrack more appealing to wider mainstream audiences. Slobin explains that film music relies on conventions that have audiences expect the music's emotional affect and that this "...complicated system of signs and subtexts goes down easily, so fluidly that it infiltrates virtually all the cinema systems of the world, regardless of local ideology" (2008, viii). Some instances in the film score replicate Hollywood traditions, such as the use of orchestral strings to heighten the emotional response as when the audience discovers Arnold has died. I question if the decision to use Hollywood score conventions in this case is more an expression of the filmmaker's agency than a fallback on expected music conventions? Are there any reasons why Hollywood film score conventions are chosen for certain scenes and not others? The film works in several ways to humanize the protagonists – such as appealing to the human condition and drawing upon American cultural stereotypes – so that non-Indigenous viewers may identify more easily with them (Mihelich 2001, 132). I argue that the music chosen in *Smoke Signals*, especially during emotional plot developments, as well as the use of familiar filmmaking conventions, work in similar ways to make the Indigenous characters more relatable to non-Indigenous audiences and therefore offer a counter-narrative to how Indigenous peoples are often depicted in Hollywood films.

Screenwriter Sherman Alexie confirms in an interview (West and West) that they intentionally incorporated elements of American popular culture in the film in order to reach a wider audience and better communicate their ideas to non-Indigenous viewers:

I'm a thirty-one year old American, as well...I think a lot of Indian artists like to pretend that they're not influenced by pop culture or Western culture, but I am, and I'm happy to admit it. A lot of independent filmmakers would look down their nose at their own pop influences, or at my pop influences. (1998, 37)

Alexie's quote highlights the complexities of Indigenous-made cinema. Some independent filmmakers find it necessary, perhaps even unavoidable, to integrate mainstream filmmaking techniques while others may strive to reject the Hollywood influence all together. The integration of mainstream popular culture and film conventions in *Smoke Signals* demonstrates a filmmaker's ability to make decisions regarding *how* to communicate re-defined ideas about Indigenous identities to wider audiences.

*Identity: Flashbacks to Victor's Childhood and Thomas' Transformation*

*Smoke Signals* focuses on the character development of protagonists and childhood friends, Victor and Thomas. Certain scenes featuring Victor and Thomas – namely in the flashbacks to Victor's childhood and Thomas' transformation scene – highlight an Indigenous experience; the use of music in these scenes contributes to the meaning-making of modern Indigenous expressions of identity. The film flashes back to Victor's memories as a child several times throughout the film and most of these flashbacks feature less-than-flattering images of Victor's father who is often portrayed as an abusive, alcoholic, and absent parent. While alcoholism and abuse are real issues on reservations throughout North America, they also represent stereotypes of

Indigenous peoples. Victor himself has never drunk alcohol, maintains a positive relationship with his mother, and often internalizes stress; in other words, Victor is the very opposite of who his father was. Arnold's character, then, can be interpreted as a symbol representing the way Indigenous peoples were portrayed in Hollywood films, whereas Victor's character is an example of how *Smoke Signals* recognizes the Hollywood stereotypes as embodied by Arnold and rejects them through Victor's words and actions.

Video editing plays an important role in expressing Victor's state of coexisting in the past and present. The shot transitions from present to past are sudden and unexpected; at the same time, they feel connected for the viewer since many elements of the *mise-en-scène* from the previous shot remain in the flashback. The shot transitions give viewers a sense of confusion as well as the impression of stepping into Victor's mind and seeing how the present is triggering his childhood memories. The fact that his wardrobe, hair, and other elements of the previous shot remain the same in his flashback may indicate that some part of Victor is still living in the past. Victor expresses a duality in his identity, unsure if he is in the past or present. Based on some of Victor's ideologies and dialogue throughout the film, I extend this concept further to speculate on his uncertainty about how to express himself as a Coeur d'Alene living in 1990s northern Idaho.

Similarly, the music chosen for Victor's flashbacks comments on the everyday life of an Indigenous person living on a reservation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In one flashback<sup>37</sup> to a party, the guests, including Victor's parents, are seen drinking heavily.

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<sup>37</sup> For further analysis of this scene, see Hearne 2005.

After being asked by Arnold who his favourite Indian is, Victor's response of "nobody" indicates that his "struggle against powerful and dominant stereotypes...has become self-hatred"; Arnold being identified as an absent father and a "nobody" then become "...metaphors for Euro-American colonizing strategies and disruption of Native identities and families" (Hearne 2005, 194). The lyrics of the song in this party scene, specifically "A Million Miles Away" (lyrics by Sherman Alexie, written and performed by Jim Boyd), contrast the on-screen action and connect to the concept of Indigenous stereotypes. Although Victor is in close proximity to his family and friends in this scene, the lyrics communicate a sense of distance and disconnect, perhaps indicating Victor's inner thoughts about his relationship with his father. Alexie notes the lyrics of the song are about "the distance between people" and describes the song as "a sort of battered and bruised love song...it's about recognizing human frailty and being in love with a person despite their frailties..." (West and West 1998, 31-32). The song may also illustrate how far removed Victor is from the Indigenous stereotypes that Arnold embodies. Even though Victor is beside his father in the flashback, he is distant from him in the sense that he rejects his father's alcohol abuse and therefore the Drunken Indian stereotype of Hollywood films.

Thomas' costume transformation mid-way through the film also plays an important role in the rejection of Hollywood stereotypes and reclaiming of Indigenous histories. En route to Phoenix, Thomas unbraids his hair and trades his three-piece suit for a superhero-style "fry bread" T-shirt after Victor tells Thomas to be "more stoic" like a proper Indian. Thomas' on-screen transformation is also echoed in the soundtrack. As Victor waits for Thomas to get changed at a rest stop, crooning vocables and "yeahs"

backed with electric bass, guitar and drum kit can be heard in the soundtrack. When it is revealed that Thomas has transformed himself to be more like Victor, the commercial rock style music, namely the electric guitar, becomes more prominent and tapers off as the scene transitions to Victor and Thomas boarding the bus to discover their seats have been taken. Through Thomas' costume transformation supported by musical cues, Thomas rejects the European assimilation of Indigenous peoples (represented by his Western-style suit) for a contemporary style much like Victor's clothing. In this scene, then, the director acknowledges Hollywood stereotypes and histories about Indigenous peoples, rejects them, and re-defines them through humour. The following scene analysis also examines how the film reclaims and re-defines Indigenous identity through elements of film and music.

*Scene Analysis: "John Wayne's Teeth" and Self-Conscious Expressions of Indigeneity*

One of the most powerful and layered scenes in the film is when Victor and Thomas are forced to relocate their seats on the bus. Victor and Thomas are en route to Phoenix to pick up Victor's father's remains. Prior to this scene, Victor and Thomas debate what it means to be Indigenous and how it should be expressed (during which they briefly discuss *Dances with Wolves*). Thomas is convinced to change his clothes at a rest stop to something "more Indian." Thomas appears happy and Victor is proud of him, shaking his hand before they re-board the bus as the next scene begins. Hearne provides an extensive and comprehensive analysis of the music in this scene.<sup>38</sup> I expand on Hearne's musical assessment in the following scene analysis by deconstructing the scene visually and aurally in a time-stamped table (see Table 2). I

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Three: Literature Review, pp.17-18 for more details.

also detail how the combination of filmic techniques and music communicates ideas about Indigeneity, as well as examine how this scene is linked to Ginsburg's theories of Indigenous media studies. Chris Eyre's choice of music exemplifies how the scene re-narrates Indigenous cultural history and defines modern Indigenous identities through agency and screen memories.

<b>Time (min.sec)</b>	<b>Visual Cue</b>	<b>Musical Cue</b>
37.34	Victor and Thomas walk onto bus after Thomas changes clothes in previous scene	Upbeat, instrumental rock with drum kit, electric bass and guitar song continues from previous scene
37.39	Victor and Thomas notice their seats are taken	Rock song ends
37.43	Close up shot of people in Victor and Thomas's seats – man on left in cowboy hat, man on right in bolo tie and camo trucker hat reading "My Gun Cleaning Hat"; man on right wakes up when Thomas confronts them about their seats	No music
37.47	Shot of Thomas mid frame in focus, back of trucker hat up close out of focus, and Victor behind Thomas	No music
37.48	Close-up of cowboys who claim seats no longer belong to Victor and Thomas	No music
37.51	Victor approaches closer to cowboys	No music
37.53	Close-up of cowboys; claim nothing they can do about seats	No music

38.03	Thomas looks down, Victor continues to stare at cowboys	No music
38.05	Close-up of cowboys; tell Victor and Thomas to go elsewhere to “have a powwow”	No music
38.08	Shot of Victor and Thomas looking upset	No music
38.13	Shot back to cowboys, cowboy on right goes back to sleep	No music
38.15	Thomas looks at Victor; voice of unknown/unseen passenger tells Victor and Thomas to just sit down	No music
38.18	Victor and Thomas begin to walk toward the back of the bus	No music
38.21	Victor takes bag out of overhead bin and walks toward vacant seats	No music
38.23	Same shot	“Garry Owen” (Ulali version) begins, quiet in background
38.28	Thomas seated toward back of bus; Victor puts bag above new seats	“Garry Owen” continues
38.30	Close-up of Victor and Thomas sitting together	“Garry Owen” continues
38.40	Thomas has first instance of dialogue in almost 30 sec	“Garry Owen” continues
38.48	Exterior shot of bus moving	“Garry Owen” ends
38.50	Close-up of crossroads sign showing 41 miles until Phoenix	No music
38.54	Close-up of Victor and Thomas debating if “cowboys always win”	No music

39.03	Shot of bus from Victor and Thomas perspectives; back of passenger heads and seats	No music
39.05	Close-up shot of bus driver through rear-view mirror; timed when Thomas mentions John Wayne	No music
39.08	Close-up of Victor and Thomas	No music
39.24	Victor begins to tap steady beat on thigh	Diegetic music – “John Wayne’s Teeth” (JWT) sung by Victor
39.33	Victor and Thomas perspective again; two passengers turn to stare at them	JWT continues
39.37	Shot pans right to show older couple now staring	Thomas heard joining in singing song
39.39	Shot of bus driver staring through rear view mirror	Song continues
39.42	Mid shot of bus driving with sunset and mountain scene	Song continues
39.47	Long shot of bus traveling on road	Song continues
39.55	Same shot	Diegetic music ends with Victor and Thomas heard chuckling and cheering; transitions to non-diegetic version of JWT (drum and vocal) by EagleBear Singers
40.05	New scene of Phoenix	JWT continues until 40.20

**Table 2:** *Smoke Signals* “John Wayne’s Teeth” Scene Analysis

The selection of music in this scene is critical in the way it recounts and reclaims history through an Indigenous perspective. The transformation of “Garry Owen” and “John Wayne’s Teeth” in the scene depict a rejection of stereotyped Indigenous identities in a self-conscious way (Hearne 2005, 203). Ulali’s version of “Garry Owen” was purposefully chosen by Sherman Alexie:

I always wanted to include Ulali's version of "Gary Owen," a traditional folk song, in this scene. "Gary Owen" was George Armstrong Custer's favourite song. He had it playing when he attacked Indian camps. So, I thought its use during this scene would be very ironic. (Hearne 2005, 195)

The appropriation of a folk tune, which according to Hearne is still associated with the American military (Ibid., 196), by an Indigenous music group is a powerful statement about Indigenous identities. John Wayne's authority and the stereotyped representations of Indigenous peoples in Westerns are undermined in the song "John Wayne's Teeth" (lyrics by Sherman Alexie) as well, sung in "49" style.<sup>39</sup> Hearne says the allusions to teeth not only represent the ways in which Hollywood talks about Indigenous peoples, they also "...become emblems for the experience of being silenced as well as for the right to speak...to transform the discourses about indigenous identities in the contested arena of popular culture" (Ibid., 203). This notion of silencing is heightened in the film through the absence of music as Victor and Thomas walk toward the back of the bus, thereby contributing to the symbolism of teeth in the song. Furthermore, "the figures of John Wayne and General Custer are defamiliarized, or made strange, through their re-constitution in indigenous song forms" (Ibid., 199).

Another theoretical layer that can be added to this scene is Ginsburg's theory of cultural activism/transformational action. The scene emphasizes the various issues Indigenous peoples endure daily in present day 1990s America. It shows how the film dismisses racialized stereotyping and, more importantly, how it can be dismissed through music. Thomas and Victor walk away to sing in powwow style as was suggested by the cowboys. Although Thomas and Victor are physically removed from

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<sup>39</sup> According to Hearne (2005, 198), "49" is a more informal style of singing and drumming.

their seats on the bus, they exercise their voices strongly through music. This act is a self-conscious way in which the filmmaker expresses Indigeneity, conveying the filmmaker's own understanding of what it means to be Indigenous today. The scene does not shy away from highlighting the blatant racism that was (and continues to be) inflicted upon Indigenous peoples for centuries; rather, it directly addresses the racism and reclaims history by allowing the characters to have the last say and create their own ending.

#### *Understandings about Indigeneity through Film and Music*

Through this analysis, it is evident that the choices in music as well as elements of film in *Smoke Signals* work together to communicate different expressions of Indigenous identities in a modern American setting. The representations of Indigenous identities in *Smoke Signals* are complex and may be interpreted in numerous ways, many of which go beyond the scope of this thesis. The Indigenous characters in *Smoke Signals* are more complex and developed, unlike the Indigenous characters in *Dances with Wolves* who are reduced to props used to fulfill certain roles or advance the narrative. The filmmaker chooses to highlight historical and present-day issues and bring them to the forefront of the film. By drawing attention to these issues and re-contextualising stereotypes from Hollywood films, the filmmaker challenges the viewer's pre-existing ideas of Indigeneity through the concept of screen memories.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION – HOW IS INDIGENEITY REPRESENTED IN FILM MUSIC?

Based on my research, I find that film music is used differently by Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers of the 1990s to communicate ideas about North American Indigeneity. The musical soundtracks function differently in each of these types of films to communicate ideas of North American Indigeneity. Specifically, the *Dances with Wolves* soundtrack largely reinforces Hollywood Indigenous stereotypes of the past whereas the music selection in *Smoke Signals* rejects those stereotypes and re-defines Indigenous identities. The *Smoke Signals* soundtrack is a collection of sounds that represents an overview of what it means to be Indigenous in North America in 1998.

I considered several factors in analysing *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*: agency; commercialization; genre conventions; internal pressures from film industry professionals; practical and budgetary considerations; and targeted film audience expectations. These factors all have an impact on the choices filmmakers and composers make when working on a film. I analysed the films through ideas from film theory, the ethnomusicology of film music, and Indigenous media studies. This case study was a more complex process than I initially anticipated as I found that I cannot use the same approach to analysing Indigenous representations created by non-Indigenous and Indigenous filmmakers. Since these types of films do not represent Indigenous cultures in the same way, a one-size-fits-all approach to analysing the music and films cannot be implemented.

Although stereotypes of Indigenous culture were represented in both *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals*, the stereotypes were contextualised in different ways

to communicate differing ideas about Indigeneity. *Dances with Wolves* portrays stereotyped Indigenous tropes in part to fulfill audience and Western film genre expectations, further plot advancements and enhance drama through cultural exoticification. I conclude that these Indigenous stereotypes are present in the film for commercial reasons. The film fulfills audience expectations of Western film genre conventions as well as what Indigenous culture means as defined and propagated by Hollywood Westerns over the past several decades; essentially, the film is “giving the people what they want.” Instead of challenging pre-existing stereotypes about Indigeneity, the film perpetuates them. The Indigenous characters are polarized and forced into binary roles of good or bad, noble or savage. Although *Dances with Wolves* attempts to include an Indigenous voice by casting Indigenous actors and musicians, I agree with Riding In (2013) that these attempts at inclusion are largely overshadowed by the overt use of crass and unnecessary stereotypes, particularly in reference to the portrayal of the Pawnee characters.

I interpret *Smoke Signals*' intentional inclusion of Indigenous stereotypes as a reflection of Ginsburg's Indigenous media studies' models of screen memories and cultural activism/transformational action. As an Indigenous filmmaker, Chris Eyre does not shy away from showing the Indigenous stereotypes as defined by Hollywood, rather he re-contextualises them in order to reclaim and retell Indigenous histories. This does not mean all critics of *Smoke Signals*, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, agree with the apparent focus on Indigenous stereotypes. The film was criticized for its inclusion of stereotypes out of concern it would encourage American audiences to view Indigenous peoples as victims (Howe 2013, 115). The Drunken

Indian stereotype drew focus for viewers in a study by sociologist John Mihelich (2001) who questions the overall impact of the film on audiences. According to Mihelich, several students in his sociology class saw Arnold's alcoholism as the most prominent portrayal of Indigenous peoples in the film. Hegemonic representations of Indigenous people are so deeply entrenched in multiple institutions that film and other forms of popular culture may not have a great enough impact on counteracting Indigenous stereotypes (Mihelich 2001, 134). I found the diegetic and non-diegetic music in *Smoke Signals* work in tandem with the re-contextualised stereotypes to redefine present-day ideas about Indigenous cultures in a powerful way. The composition of the film score itself, which features several genres of music, suggests a more complex understanding of what it means to be Indigenous in 1990s North America. Commercially-driven decisions, such as product placements and the use of Hollywood genre conventions, act as messengers to translate the above stories about Indigeneity to reach a wider audience.

### **Possible Future Research**

In the future, I would expand this research to include 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood and independent films, specifically *The Revenant* (2015) and *Four Sheets to the Wind* (2007), as they both received critical acclaim and awards in their respective genres. I would attempt to answer the following questions: Are the above findings on *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals* true for more recent films, such as those created in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Do more recent Hollywood films use music as a means of stereotyping Indigenous culture? Do independent films continue to use music to tell a story about Indigeneity and re-contextualise Indigenous histories? In what ways do Indigenous and

non-Indigenous filmmakers use music and film to represent Indigenous cultures that are similar and different than their *Dances with Wolves* and *Smoke Signals* counterparts? While I do not expect all Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers to have similar goals or use music in the same way with respect to representing Indigeneity, I do want to highlight issues surrounding how Indigenous peoples are portrayed in Indigenous and non-Indigenous made films.

*The Revenant* is an example of a Western genre Hollywood film that features a unique film score that differs significantly from *Dances with Wolves* and is less than conventional in its presentation. Although the film score does not seem to rely on as many musical Indianisms as *Dances with Wolves*, it does however juxtapose nature sounds with images of Indigenous characters, possibly evoking a “One With Nature” stereotype. The film makes me question whether any musical appropriation is acceptable in Hollywood films, especially if Indigenous musicians are not part of the process. At certain points in the film, the filmmaker appears to be aware of and plays with entrenched audience biases and expectations about how Indigenous characters are supposed to be portrayed in Western films by altering conventional plot development expectations and filmic form patterns. Although *The Revenant* humanizes the Arikara characters instead of showcasing them as stereotyped roles, I anticipate similar representation issues of victimization to arise in the film just as it did in *Smoke Signals*.

I am also interested to see how ideas about Indigeneity are communicated through film and music in *Four Sheets to the Wind (FSTTW)* in comparison to *Smoke Signals*. *FSTTW* contains similar plot elements to *Smoke Signals* in that the film follows

the life of a young Indigenous man after his father's death. The film comments on sociopolitical issues in Indigenous communities such as racism, suicide, drug abuse, unequal access to resources, stereotyping, and cultural exoticism. Similar to *Smoke Signals*, the film highlights these serious issues through satire and comedy. The music soundtrack appears to play a different, more symbolic role in this film compared to *Smoke Signals*. The film score serves on-screen action to progress narrative themes and the overall storyline.

In order to achieve a more complete picture of how Indigeneity is represented through film and film soundtrack, I would like to engage personally with the filmmakers to collect more detailed ethnographic data. I would also like to complete self-reflexive ethnographic research on the subject. According to Mera and Morcom (2009), self-reflexive ethnography is critical to advancing scholarship in this field. This research approach may include practitioner-scholar, participant-observer, and self-reflexive work. Mera and Morcom believe ethnographic methodology is critical to understanding how screened music creates meaning through studying the industrial and creative processes of film composition. They reference Letcher's use of reflexive self-ethnography in his article on composing music for a feature film titled *My Black Little Heart* (2007). It would also be interesting to engage with this research from a literary perspective. For example, instead of examining the relationship between filmic techniques and music, perhaps the relationship between music and film as storytelling would also be an important interdisciplinary angle since storytelling is central to cultures with oral traditions, such as Indigenous cultures. This interdisciplinary approach would require background research on Indigenous mythology as well as the structures and functions

of storytelling within specific North American Indigenous communities. Finally, engaging with “Indigenous modernity,” a fluid concept used to understand the complex and constantly changing roles of Indigenous cultures in relation to contemporary society, would broaden my future work to interact with that of multiple disciplines.

In conclusion, this thesis attempts to demonstrate how film music is critical in shaping a viewer’s interpretation of what they see on-screen. My intentions for this thesis are reflected in film music composer Christopher Letcher’s conclusion of his own study:

While this paper in no way attempts to prescribe what composers should or should not do when confronted with such richly complex issues as those raised in this film, it does advocate the importance of being alert to the many resonances that music has as an active force in the construction of a cinematic world, as well as to the broader social and political ramifications of music in film. (2009, 35)

The above quote is exactly what I hope this thesis achieves for the representation of Indigenous cultures in North American film music.

As this study has shown, the ethnomusicology of film music is a rich and developing branch of analysis through which scholars can develop sound theories about film music’s effect on how audiences understand and engage with on-screen Indigenous characters and cultures overall. It also provides insight into the impact of screened media and music on relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous North American communities. Ultimately, it can help foster better overall relationships between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous North Americans.

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## APPENDICES

The purpose of plot segmentation is to trace a film's overall development, which may highlight patterns and relationships between parts of the plot. This also gives readers a sense of the film, especially for those who have not watched the films before. Each scene is labelled numerically in chronological order. Scenes may also be divided into smaller parts to notate important plot developments that occur in each scene. I have also noted when significant instances of music occur in each scene.

### Appendix A: *Smoke Signals* Plot Segmentation

#### Primary Cast: Character (Actor), Relationship

- Victor Joseph (Adam Beach), Protagonist
- Thomas Builds-the-Fire (Evan Adams), Victor's friend
- Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer), Victor's father
- Arlene Joseph (Tantoo Cardinal), Victor's mother
- Suzy Song (Irene Bedard), Arnold's neighbour in Phoenix
- Grandma Builds-the-Fire (Monique Mojica), Thomas' grandmother

#### C. Credits

##### 1. *Coeur d'Alene Reservation*, 1976

- a) Flashback to July 4th when Arnold saves Thomas in a house fire as a baby
  - "On Fire Suite" track; frame drum, vocables crescendo then fade

##### 2. *Coeur d'Alene Reservation*, 1998

- a) Flashback to Victor and Thomas as children, learn Arnold left family to go to Phoenix
- b) Arlene gets a phone call at her house informing her Arnold is dead
  - Orchestral strings, chordal
- c) Thomas offers to pay for Victor's trip and accompany him to Phoenix to collect Arnold's ashes and belongings

d) Flashback to Victor as a child riding in truck with father; learn Arnold was abusive and an alcoholic

- “Reservation Blues” by Jim Boyd/Alexie Sherman

e) Victor accepts Thomas’ offer to accompany him to Phoenix

### **3. On the Road**

a) Friends offer Victor and Thomas ride to the bus stop in exchange for a story

- Pop music on radio - “Road Buddy” by Dar Williams
- Music during Thomas’ story: sparsely- textured harp, auxiliary percussion, rhythmic frame drum

### **4. On the Bus to Phoenix**

a) Victor and Thomas meet a former Olympic gymnast alternate; difference in Victor and Thomas’ attitudes toward the woman

b) Flashback to Victor’s childhood when Arnold and Arlene were drunk at a party; when asked by Arnold, Victor’s favourite Indian is “nobody”

- “A Million Miles Away” by Jim Boyd/Sherman Alexie

### **5. Diner**

a) Thomas tells Victor story when Arnold took Thomas to Denny’s

- Same music as 3.a

b) Flashback to Victor as a child, parents are passed out from drinking; Arlene decides to quit drinking; Arnold and Arlene fight and Arnold leaves

- Rhythmic music with electric guitar and auxiliary percussion when Arnold leaves home

### **6. On the Bus to Phoenix**

a) Victor lectures Thomas on how to be a “real Indian”

b) Thomas changes his appearance at a pit stop to reflect Victor’s wishes

- “Super Thomas” track

c) Cowboys take Victor and Thomas’ seats, and Victor and Thomas are asked to relocate seats

- Rendition of “Garry Owen” by Ulali (titled “All My Relations”) as Victor and Thomas move to the back of the bus after seats taken by “cowboys”
- Victor and Thomas sing 49 style song after sitting down and being told to “have a powwow” somewhere else; “John Wayne’s Teeth” track performed by Victor, which then becomes non-diegetic (by Eaglebear Singers)

## **7. Phoenix**

- a) Victor and Thomas meet Suzy Song and stay at her house for dinner
- b) Thomas tells Suzy a story about Arlene and fry bread
  - Same music as 3.a during Thomas’ story
- c) Suzy tells story of how she met Arnold
  - Atonal piano ostinato with electric guitar during flashback to while Suzy flashes back to finding Arnold deceased in his trailer
- d) Victor learns that Arnold was the one who accidentally started the house fire in 1976

## **8. Arnold’s Trailer**

- a) Victor finds a family photo in Arnold’s wallet with “Home” written on the back
  - Metallic, dissonant sounds and electric guitar heard as Victor goes through Arnold’s trailer; dissonant flute can be heard when Victor opens Arnold’s old wallet
- b) Victor cuts his hair
  - Loud frame drum

## **9. On the Road**

- a) Victor and Thomas leave Suzy’s place in the middle of the night using Arnold’s old truck
- b) Victor and Thomas argue about Victor not knowing himself as a person
- c) Victor crashes into another car, a woman is injured; other driver (American) appears to be drunk
- d) Victor runs to the nearest town for medical help; intermittently flashes back to fire, Suzy and Arnold while running

- Vocables/drumming with dissonant strings, auxiliary percussion and eventually electric guitar

### **10. Hospital**

a) Injured woman thanks Victor for getting help but warns them the police are looking for Victor and Thomas

### **11. Sheriff's Office**

a) Victor and Thomas accused of assault with a deadly weapon but not a strong case

b) Victor refers to Arnold's ashes as "my father"

c) Suzy burns down Arnold's trailer

- "Father and Father" track by Jim Boyd/Sherman Alexie

### **12. Coeur d'Alene Reservation**

a) Victor and Thomas arrive home

b) Victor gives Thomas half of Arnold's ashes

c) Victor spreads Arnold's ashes into the river and screams

- During long shot of the river before we see Victor on the bridge, orchestra heard
- Orchestra transitions to "Forgive Our Fathers Suite" track by Ulali, crescendos with Victor screaming

### **E. End Credits**

## **Appendix B: *Dances with Wolves* Plot Segmentation**

### **Main Cast: Character (Actor), Relationship**

- Lieutenant John Dunbar (Kevin Costner), Protagonist
- Stands With A Fist (Mary McDonnell), Kicking Bird's adopted daughter/John Dunbar's love interest
- Kicking Bird (Graham Greene), Lakota medicine man
- Ten Bears (Floyd 'Red Crow' Westerman), Lakota chief
- Black Shawl (Tantoo Cardinal), Kicking Bird's wife
- Timmons (Robert Pastorelli), American convoy
- Wind In His Hair (Rodney A. Grant), Lakota warrior
- Toughest Pawnee (Wes Studi), Pawnee warrior

### **C. Credits**

#### **1. St. David's Field, TN (1863)**

- a) Battle between Union and Confederate soldiers
- b) Dunbar survives attempted suicide and becomes known as a hero amongst Union camp

#### **2. Fort Hayes**

- a) Dunbar arrives after being granted a transfer
- b) Major tell Dunbar he is being posted at Fort Sedgewick in the Frontier, sends Timmons to show him the way
- c) Major kills himself as Timmons and Dunbar leave Fort Hayes

#### **3. On the Road to Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Timmons and Dunbar find a destroyed American wagon with arrowheads on the Plains

#### **4. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Outpost decides to desert because they believe reinforcements/cargo from Fort Hayes will never arrive

#### **5. On the Road to Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Timmons thinks lowly of Indigenous peoples (thieves and beggars)

b) Scene with “Indian presence” detected by Dunbar

- Wind and ambient noises heard

## **6. Fort Sedgewick**

a) Timmons and Dunbar arrive and find the post deserted

b) Dunbar decides to stay while Timmons leaves to tell others in Fort Hayes about Dunbar’s whereabouts

c) Dunbar finds several dead deer in the pond and burns the carcasses (symbol of American waste and disrespect for the land/animals)

## **7. Frontier**

a) Pawnee attack and pillage of Timmons’ camp

- “Death of Timmons” and “John Dunbar” Themes featured

## **8. Fort Sedgewick**

a) Dunbar encounters a wolf but decides not to shoot it

- “Two Socks” theme begins as Dunbar lowers his rifle

b) Thirty days pass and Dunbar still hopes the army will come with provisions

c) Dunbar encounters the wolf again and names him Two Socks

d) Dunbar sees Kicking Bird at his fort trying to steal a horse and chases Kicking Bird away

- No music, can tell Kicking Bird is curious and is portrayed differently from the previous Pawnee attack (clothing, music, body language, approach)

## **9. Lakota Camp**

a) Learn from Ten Bears that the buffalo are late which causes concern

b) Kicking Bird tells Ten Bears he saw a white man on the Plains

c) Council meeting indecisive as to whether the Lakota should attempt communication with the white man (Kicking Bird wants to, Wind In His Hair does not); some younger Lakota overhear this meeting and sneak off at night to Fort Sedgewick to see for themselves

### **10. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar awakes after hearing Lakota children try to steal Cisco but knocks himself out on the door frame; Lakota children run away
- b) Dunbar regains consciousness later to find Cisco is still there
- c) Wind In His Hair rides with some other men to intimidate Dunbar, dressed in war regalia similar to Pawnee

### **11. Lakota Camp**

- a) Many Lakota are injured and dead after apparent attack
  - Diegetic singing and drumming in powwow style (men only)

### **12. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar is curious and decides to ride to the Lakota camp to make contact

### **13. Frontier**

- a) Dunbar finds a woman (Stands With A First) singing to herself under a tree with blood
- b) Woman passes out and Dunbar decides to bring her to the Lakota camp

### **14. Lakota Camp**

- a) Lakota are afraid at the sight of Dunbar
- b) Wind In His Hair takes Stands With A Fist, Dunbar leaves
- c) At another council meeting, Ten Bears decides the Lakota should try to talk with Dunbar

### **15. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Kicking Bird and Wind In His Hair approach Dunbar to talk; learns “tatanka” means “buffalo” in Lakota

### **16. Lakota Camp**

- a) Kicking Bird wants Stands With A Fist to translate with Dunbar
- b) Flashback to childhood of Stands With A First: audience learns she is white and her family was killed by Pawnee; later adopted by the Lakota
  - “Stands With A Fist Remembers” Theme during flashback

### **17. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar tries to build trust with Two Socks
- b) Kicking Bird gives Dunbar buffalo hide; signifies improving relationship

### **18. Lakota Camp**

- a) Dunbar is invited to the camp; sits and talks with Kicking Bird and Stands With A Fist

### **19. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar hears a buffalo stampede overnight and immediately rides out to tell Lakota
  - When Dunbar arrives at the Lakota camp, they are engaged in what appears to be a buffalo dance (fire, powwow music, dancing, call and response singing, traditional clothing and masks)

### **20. Frontier**

- a) Dunbar allowed to scout for buffalo with the Lakota
  - Music is slow rising second intervals; “Journey to the Buffalo Killing Ground” Theme
- b) Scouts discover many skinned buffalo rotting on the Plains
  - “Journey to the Buffalo Killing Ground” continues; music noticeably melancholy, appears to be minor key/dissonant variation of “John Dunbar” Theme

### **21. New Lakota Camp**

- a) Lakota moved camp to be closer to the buffalo migration
- b) Stands With A First and Dunbar display interest in one another
- c) Another herd of buffalo discovered not far away
- d) A Lakota celebration happens at night; Dunbar realizes it is because they found and killed the white men who hunted the other buffalo for their hides; Dunbar notes difference in their cultures
  - Lakota celebration music similar to 19.a
- e) The next morning the Lakota prepare for a big hunt (ululations, war paint on people and horses, drum shots, etc.)

## 22. Plains

a) Dunbar and Lakota hunt buffalo

- “The Buffalo Hunt” Theme; Spaghetti Western style cowboy music when Dunbar enters the shot with his gun while the Lakota use arrows/spears

b) Dunbar shoots and kills a buffalo that was about to gore a Lakota child; Dunbar eats buffalo heart

## 23. Lakota Camp

a) Night after the buffalo hunt the Lakota and Dunbar celebrate good hunt

b) Lakota move on to follow the buffalo while Dunbar stays at Fort Sedgewick

## I. Intermission

- Musical interlude

## 24. Fort Sedgewick

a) Dunbar feels affinity for the Lakota

- Scene at night where Dunbar performs a “fire dance” as Two Socks watches; “Fire Dance” Track by Peter Buffett

## 25. Plains

a) Lakota return, Kicking Bird and Wind In His Hair encounter Dunbar playing with Two Socks

## 26. Lakota Camp

a) Dunbar is given his own lodge at the camp; growing concern amongst camp regarding the number of white men who are coming

b) Lakota preparing to send a war party out to the Pawnee soon; Dunbar offers to fight with them but is denied, instead Kicking Bird asks Dunbar to watch over his family while he leaves with the war party

c) Learn Dances With Wolves is Dunbar’s Lakota name

- Music when Dunbar hears name for first time; light, floating flute

d) After war party leaves, Stands With A Fist begins to teach Dunbar Lakota

e) Dunbar upsets Stands With A Fist when he questions why she is single; learns from an elder that Stands With A Fist is in mourning for her dead husband, only Kicking Bird can decide when she may move on

## **27. Fort Sedgewick**

a) Dunbar returns home melancholic after upsetting Stands With A Fist

➤ Music is a slow version of “John Dunbar” Theme with harmonica

b) Dunbar writes “I Love Stands With A Fist” in his journal

## **28. Lakota camp**

a) Dunbar and Stands With A Fist begin love affair in secret

b) Learn Pawnee are coming to ambush the Lakota camp so Dunbar offers to get provision rifles from Fort Sedgewick

c) Lakota win battle because of the rifles

d) Lakota war party returns and there is a celebration

➤ Music/dancing/ritual similar to previous before but with guns firing

e) Black Shawl suspects the romance between Dunbar and Stands With A Fist; convinces Kicking Bird to lift the mourning for Stands With A Fist

f) Dunbar and Stands With A Fist marry

➤ Diegetic drumming/singing as Lakota process Stands With A Fist on wedding day; turns into “Love Theme” track (as solo flute theme) followed by ululations, drumming and singing as they enter tent to consummate marriage

## **29. Frontier (Autumn)**

a) Kicking Bird and Dunbar go for a ride to a holy part of the land and discover an abandoned American settlement; garbage littered everywhere, excess of trees cut down, animal heads as prizes displayed, general waste

b) Dunbar finally tells Kicking Bird that they will never be able to stop the white men from taking the land as there will be too many of them

## **30. Lakota Camp**

a) Kicking Bird and Dunbar tell Ten Bears the news about the impending American takeover

- b) Ten Bears decides he wants to go down fighting
- c) Lakota pack up to set up at their Winter camp
- d) Dunbar realizes he forgot his journal at Fort Sedgewick and promises to catch up

### **31. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar arrives to find the army at the fort
- b) American soldiers mistakenly shoot at Dunbar; Cisco dies

### **32. On the Road to Lakota Winter Camp**

- a) Kicking Bird realizes Dunbar must be in danger because he has not returned; sends two men to Fort Sedgewick to check up on him

### **33. Fort Sedgewick**

- a) Dunbar tries to explain himself to the soldiers; asks about his journal and apparently it never existed (learn later it was stolen by another American soldier)
- b) Americans peg Dunbar as a traitor and make a deal with him to reveal the Lakota camps for a lesser punishment/imprisonment; Dunbar refuses
- c) Learn Dunbar is being shipped back to Fort Hayes to be hanged for treason

### **34. On the Road to Fort Hayes**

- a) American soldiers shoot and kill Two Socks for sport
- b) Lakota arrive and ambush the American wagon
  - Triumphant music
- c) Dunbar's journal seen floating away on the river

### **35. Lakota Winter Camp**

- a) Lakota men return with Dunbar
- b) Dunbar reveals the attack and escape will lead Americans to hunt for Dunbar; Dunbar decides to leave to protect the Lakota (he also suggests Ten Bears move the camp)
- c) Stands With A Fist agrees to follow Dunbar wherever he goes

**36. Frontier**

a) Editing suggests American soldiers are actively seeking Dunbar

**37. Lakota Winter Camp**

a) Lakota boy gives Dunbar lost journal before he leaves camp

b) Dunbar and Stands With A Fist leave

c) Americans arrive with Pawnee to discover the Lakota camp has been moved/abandoned

**38. On the Road**

a) Shot of Dunbar and Stands With A Fist travelling alone with text about Sioux culture being destroyed thirteen years later in Nebraska

**E. End Credits**