

N. SCOTT MOMADAY: WORDS FROM A BEAR
DIRECTED BY JEFFREY PALMER



WORLD PREMIERE
2019 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

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<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/blog/american-masters-pictures-premieres-three-films-at-sundance-film-festival-2019/>

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Logline:

Journey into the mind and soul of Native America's most celebrated author of poetry and prose, Pulitzer Prize winning author Navarro Scott Momaday. *N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear* visually captures the essence of Momaday's writings and storytelling, relating each written line to his unique Kiowa/American experience representing ancestry, place, and oral history.

Short Synopsis (American Masters):

N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear examines the enigmatic life and mind of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Navarro Scott Momaday (*House Made of Dawn*). This documentary profile delves into the psyche behind one of Native America's most celebrated authors of poetry and prose. ***Words from a Bear*** visually captures the essence of Momaday's writings, relating each written line to his unique Kiowa-American experience, representing ancestry, place and oral history. Original animation, historical photos and aerial landscapes complement interviews with indigenous authors Rilla Askew and Joy Harjo; actors Robert Redford, Jeff Bridges, Beau Bridges and James Earl Jones; and Richard West, founding director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, to reveal Momaday's creative core. ***Words from a Bear*** is produced by Jeffrey Palmer for Rainy Mountain Media LLC, and executive produced by Sally Jo Fifer for ITVS, Shirley K. Sneve for Vision Maker Media, and Michael Kantor for American Masters Pictures.

Long Synopsis (Rainy Mountain Media):

N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear examines the enigmatic life and mind of Pulitzer Prize winning author, Navarro Scott Momaday. This profile delves into the psyche behind one of Native America's most celebrated authors of poetry and prose. *Words from a Bear* visually captures the essence of Momaday's writings, relating each written line to his unique Kiowa/American experience representing ancestry, place, and oral history.

N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear is a fresh and distinctive approach to biographical storytelling. Cinematically, this story takes audiences on a spiritual journey through the expansive landscapes of the West, when Momaday's Kiowa ancestry roamed the Great Plains with herds of buffalo, to the sand-painted valleys of Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico where his imagination ripened and he showed superior writing skills as a young mission student. The biography will give a thorough survey of Momaday's most

prolific years as a doctorate fellow at Stanford University, his achievement of the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 1969, and his later works that solidified his place as the founding member of the “Native American Renaissance” in art and literature, influencing a generation of Native American artists, scholars, and political activists.

Although his unique heritage is a central theme of the narrative, Momaday’s work asks the questions every audience can relate to: what are our origins and how do we connect to them through our collective memories? Through his literature and the cinematic visuals, the film will illuminate how Momaday has grappled with these basic questions of human existence and his own identity. The film will reveal the most intimate details of the writer’s personal life as revealed through his literary texts, along with the trials and tribulations he faced as a Native American artist in the twentieth and twenty first century. Historical photos, original animation, and stunning aerials of landscapes, will complement captivating interviews with Robert Redford, Jeff Bridges, Beau Bridges, James Earle Jones, and Joy Harjo, to bring audiences inside the creative core of this American Master.

Director’s Statement:

As a Kiowa filmmaker, I feel it is my duty to present my Kiowa people in the most compelling manner, visually and sonically. I also believe it is my duty as an Indigenous filmmaker to bring these stories to a larger audience in the most respectful and culturally sensitive manner. Much like N. Scott Momaday, I was a young Kiowa artist growing up in the shadows of the Wichita Mountains, dealing with issues of poverty, racism, and marginalization. I also experienced the triumphs of using art to maintain the stories of my people, a feeling of respect and honor that I will always present in my work. Specifically, I grew up in a Kiowa family that spent almost every weekend at powwows. My grandfather, grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, father, and mother were all competition dancers. My grandfather, Gus Palmer, Sr. was commander of the Kiowa Black Leggings Society and a prominent member of the Kiowa Gourd Clan. Thus, I was always in the presence of Kiowa elders and listened closely to the stories they told. Telling the profoundly important story of N. Scott Momaday in *Words from a Bear*, therefore, is more than a job for me -- it feels like an important obligation that I owe to my family and my people.

I describe my filmmaking as a personal exploration of Native American “life” in twenty-first century America. Exploratory because of the great diversity of Indigenous people in the United States who continuously change and adapt their cultures on a daily basis. I try to achieve this unique aesthetic by documenting the perspectives and experiences within Indian Country focusing on the land, the creation of place, the diversity of people, the language, the music and the spiritual world. I also try to have substantive collaboration with the people I represent, forming a shared ethnography in the construction of knowledge and meaning within fiction and non-fiction projects. Furthermore, these collaborators are filmed in environments Native people recognize most, their homeland. For Indigenous people around the world, the connection to the land is of the utmost importance. I believe the land is a conduit of tribal memory, origin, creation, subsistence and worship. Rainy Mountain Media embraces the use of tribal language and music that is at the heart of present day tribal identity. For over a century Native Americans have been part of an intense ethnographic gaze. As a filmmaker, I am always aware that I might perpetuate this objectification. Utilizing thick soundscapes and dazzling

visual storytelling, I hope to provide the audience with multiple views of the Indigenous experience that go beyond the blunt examination of the subject or their material culture.

Biographies:

Jeffrey Palmer-Director/Producer: Jeffrey Palmer is an Indigenous (Kiowa) filmmaker and media artist. As a Dean's Fellow at the University of Iowa, he received his M.F.A. in Film and Video Production in 2012, with an emphasis in documentary film and video installation. He also received his M.A. in Native American Studies, focusing on Native American exploitation in early cinema and his B.A. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Oklahoma. He was a Visiting Professor at Cornell University, Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at the University of Central Oklahoma, and he is currently an Assistant Professor of Transmedia at Syracuse University. His short films have screened at the Sundance Film Festival, The Berlinale, Berlin Independent Film Festival, PBS Online Film Festival, Winnipeg Indigenous Film Festival, Maoriland Film Festival, SWAIA Class X Film Festival, Film 2 Farm Aid Film Festival Borneo International Film Festival, INDIANER INUIT: DAS NORDAMERIKA FILM FESTIVAL, deadCENTER Film Festival, imagineNATIVE, ICDOCS, Festival International du Film Ethnographique du Québec (FIFEQ) Annual International Festival of Ethnographic Film. His work has also been featured in Indian Country Today, Native American Times, Art Focus and Dreamcatcher Magazine. He received awards and recognition from the Sundance Institute Creative Producers Award, Sundance Institute Native Program Lab fellowship and Firelight Media Documentary Lab Fellow. He has received funding from ITVS, The Ford Foundation Just Films, PBS American Masters, and Vision Maker Media. He just completed his directorial feature debut, "N. Scott Momaday: Words From A Bear", which will premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival and will be nationally televised on the PBS series American Masters in the fall of 2019.

Michael Kantor/Executive Producer/American Masters Pictures: Michael Kantor joined *American Masters* as the series' executive producer in April 2014 during its 28th season on PBS, and founded its theatrical imprint American Masters Pictures in January 2016. American Masters Pictures will world premiere three films at Sundance Film Festival 2019: *Miles Davis: Birth of the Cool*, *N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear* and *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*; and was represented by three films at Sundance in 2016: *Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You*, *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise* and *Richard Linklater – Dream is Destiny*. Other films include *Sammy Davis, Jr.: I've Gotta Be Me*, *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story*, *Itzhak* and *Garry Winogrand: All Things are Photographable*. An Emmy and Peabody Award-winning filmmaker, Kantor has worked on projects for PBS, HBO, Bravo and 20th Century Fox. His PBS series include *Broadway: The American Musical* (hosted by Julie Andrews), *Make 'Em Laugh* (hosted by Billy Crystal) and *Superheroes* (hosted by Liev Schreiber). He served as executive producer of *Give Me the Banjo* with Steve Martin, and distributes the American Film Theatre series including Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, starring Katharine Hepburn, and Chekhov's *Three Sisters* with Laurence Olivier. Kantor has co-authored three books, serves as a Tony nominator, and hosts the *American Masters Podcast*.

About American Masters Pictures:

Founded in 2016 by executive producer Michael Kantor, American Masters Pictures is WNET's theatrical imprint for documentaries co-produced by [American Masters](#), the award-winning biography series that celebrates our arts and culture. American Masters Pictures partners with filmmakers, distributors and sales agents on non-broadcast releases including film festivals, theatrical, online, DVD, VOD and OTT, with PBS as the exclusive U.S. broadcaster of all films as part of the *American Masters* series. Films include *Miles Davis: Birth of the Cool*, *N. Scott Momaday: Words from a Bear*, *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*, *Sammy Davis, Jr.: I've Gotta Be Me*, *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story*, *Itzhak*, *Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You*, *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise* and *Garry Winogrand: All Things are Photographable*. Since 1986, *American Masters* has set the standard for documentary film profiles, accruing widespread critical acclaim: 28 Emmy Awards — including 10 for Outstanding Non-Fiction Series and five for Outstanding Non-Fiction Special — 13 Peabodys, an Oscar, three Grammys, two Producers Guild Awards and many other honors. The series is a production of THIRTEEN PRODUCTIONS LLC for WNET.

Credits:

Directed and Produced by

Jeffrey Palmer

Edited by

Nancy Novack

Co-Produced by

Youngsun Palmer

Supervising Producers

Sally Rosenthal

Nancy Novack

Associate Producers

Jhane Myers

Desiree Hill

Music Composed By

Aska Matsumiya

Supervising Producer

Junko Tsunashima

Series Producer

Julie Sacks

Executive Producer

Michael Kantor

Cinematography

Jeffrey Palmer

Youngsun Palmer

Associate Editor

Dylan Hansen-Flidner

Consultants

Gus Palmer Jr.

Sam Pollard

Colorist/Online Editor

Evan Anthony

Supervising Sound Editor/Re-Recording Mixer

Coll Anderson M.P.S.E.

Sound Effects Editor

Matthew Snedecor

Dialogue Editor

Duncan Clarke

Strings Performed by

Stevie Blacke

Design and Animation by

Molly Schwartz

Jason Conradt

Alisa Frutman

Kelly Gallagher

Jonathan Nee

Animation Producer

Rennie Elliot

Additional Cinematography

Aaron Hlavaty

Ben Hoffman

Mead Hunt

Charles "Boots" Kennedy
Daniel Montano
Jayme Roy

Assistant Camera

Peshawn Bread
Kayla Briët

Sound Recording

Demian Laino
Mark Mandler
Mike Phenix
David Renner

Production Associate

Terrance Clifford

Production Assistant

Marcus Goldblas

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Terrance Clifford
Sirin Samman

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Jolynne Nieto

Archival Research

Judy Aley
Sarah Cunniff
Roberta Helling

Second Assistant Editor

Oliver Dunne

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UCLA Department of Communication Archive
UCTV – University of California Television
UND Writers Conference & Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, The University of North Dakota

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Madeline Palmer
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Bird Runningwater
Benito Sanchez
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Della Warrior

Chi-hui Yang

The Palmer Family
The Yun Family
The Momaday Family
Richard Aitson
Sharron Ahtone Harjo
Vanessa Jennings
The Poolaw Family

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