

Indians Like Us

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Photos clockwise from top left:

Dennis Yellow Thunder (Lakota) addressing the Savy Western group.

The Indianist group, Savy Western, performs a song at a country festival in France.

Alain and Suzy exchange jokes while on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Photos by: Sylvie Jacquemin.

Program Synopsis

This insightful documentary takes a close look at the group Savy Western—a small band of French folks who share a passion for everything Native American. In fact, these Indianists have such a sincere admiration of Native culture that every weekend they dress in their self-made Indian regalia to make appearances at various village fairs in France alongside their countrymen.

Yet their dream will remain unfulfilled until they are able to travel to the United States and meet “real Indians.” Together, they finally manage a two-week drive across the Midwest discovering along the way that the reality of contemporary Native Americans is quite different from their imaginings. Filled with unforeseen emotion, this charming road movie visits Pine Ridge, Wounded Knee and Little Big Horn, and along the way it captures surreal and enlightening encounters on both sides.

“You look like us. There are people here that look like you guys—you look like you’re part Native.”

—Suzy Mesteth
(Oglala Lakota)

Producer's Notes



Sylvie Jacquemin

Until I met Savy Western's "chief," Alain Letellier, and his friends, I'd heard of Indianists mostly in negative terms: people shamelessly exploiting Native culture, or people not interested in Native culture who enjoy parading around in Indian garb. I also knew about "serious" Indianist groups—Eastern Europeans and

Germans who are rigorous about accurately reproducing Native arts and crafts.

But when I saw this Savy Western group—who were dressed in self-made Indian outfits and entertaining at a village festival in the Ardennes—I felt a genuine warmth as I had with the Paiute family I'd befriended years ago. As I grew to know them, seeing their humanity and generosity, my initial prejudice faded. This film examines the benefits of looking beyond appearances, exploring the concept of Indianness through the eyes of fake Indians who go to America to meet "real Indians." As a French/Vietnamese mixed-blood person, I'm very sensitive to notions of personal identity.

Camera Lucida producer Sylvie Gautier instantly liked my proposal to film this odd group traveling to America. Gautier previously advised on my documentary *A Red Apple Inside Out*, and knew my interest in issues of the Native world: identity, mixed-blood, language/cultural transmission, and land and law questions.

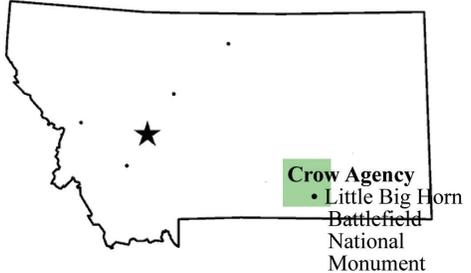
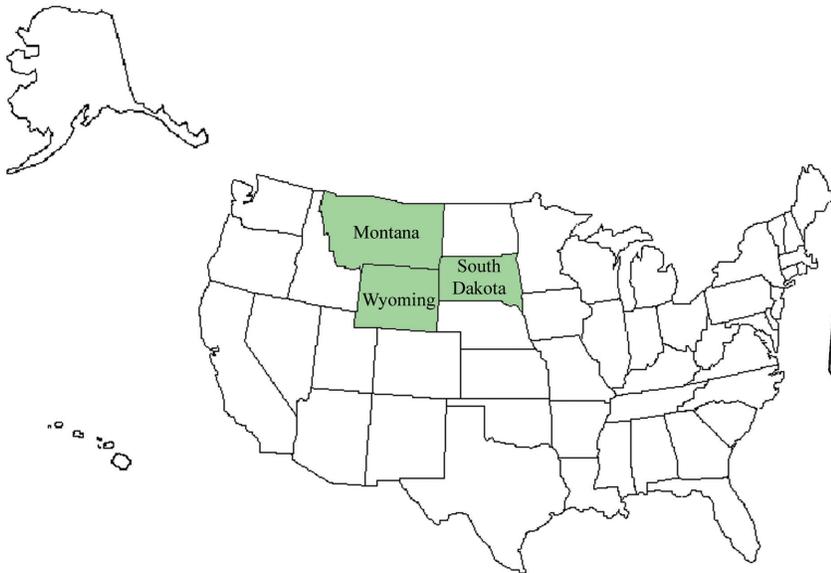
It would be easy to ridicule these people or call out as being naive—and one broadcaster pushed that tack. But, I had sincere empathy for this group, whose genuine passion was not well understood in France. So, I adopted their point-of-view balanced by an objective commentary. Editor Sylvie Demaine toiled with me to build a delicate balance between the humorous and strong emotional moments.

I loved sharing this adventure with Savy Western, and some of them have become real friends (as did some Indians we met along the way). We plan more filming in both America and France on issues covered in the film *Indians Like Us*.

Dispelling the Myths of Indian Country

- There are 566 Native American tribes that are federally recognized in the United States today.
- Each Native American tribal nation or band has its own unique language, culture, spiritual beliefs, and name—and usually a name given to them by others. For example: Lakota vs. Sioux; Yeome vs. Yaqui.
- Many of the iconic images we associate with the word "Indian" are actually a combination of multiple tribes across thousands of miles. Many of these false images come from television, Hollywood, and advertising.
- Today, 2.9 million or approximately 9% of the U.S. population is comprised of American Indian or Alaska Natives (National Congress of the American Indian).
- It is estimated that as many as 50 million Native people occupied the U.S. land body prior to European occupation.
- Native American people are mostly modern people who hold jobs, raise families, farm, hunt, observe various levels of cultural traditions and generally live average lives. Additionally, many Native communities suffer from statistically high rates of diabetes, heart disease, suicide, and other health issues.
- When entering any Native American tribal community, there is no single set of protocol to offer respect or to engage in conversation. If you are concerned about making a social blunder, ask a community member what is expected of you. Most will willingly tell you.
- The Pine Ridge Reservation is the second largest Indian Reservation in the United States. (The Navajo Nation is the largest.)
- You are more likely to make social blunders by assuming old iconic images have anything to do with modern Native American people. At the same time, each community is unique and does have its own social code.

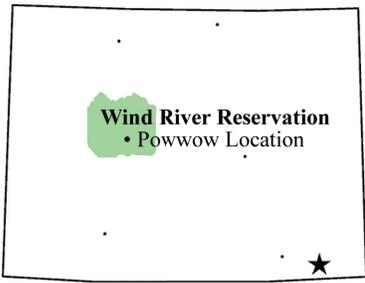
Locations Visited by Savy Western in the Documentary



Montana



South Dakota



Wyoming

Savy Western's RV convoy approaches Mount Rushmore National Monument.
Photo by: Sylvie Jacquemin.





Alain Letelier, Serge Hourdry, and Pascal Cahitte enter the arena to join an intertribal dance at the Arapaho Powwow of Ethete. Photo by: Sylvie Jacquemin.

Discussion Questions: Exploring the Facts

1. In the film, the members of the French group, Savy Western, are enamored with the iconic and romantic stereotypes of the “Old American West.” How do you think this idyllic view of early America compares or contrasts with modern America—particularly modern Native America? Explore the images and ideas in your own mind that may or may not be correct.
2. What do you think is the motivating factor for a modern group of European people to want to model early American and Native American life? As a group examine whether this might be rooted in an interest in history, or connected to a personal or spiritual need, cultural identity, or a remnant of historical guilt? Remember that the French fur traders were some of the first people to interact and marry into Native American tribes.
3. In the film, the only white people that our travelers meet are two bullying Park Rangers and an apparently greedy man selling Native goods to tourists. Do you think this is a true representation of white America? How do you think this also feeds into the stereotypes we hold? Consider the irony that many of the Native people they meet also have “white” blood.
4. On their first night on the Pine Ridge Reservation, the Savy Western travelers are afraid to park their campers on the reservation for the night. As a group, explore the many ways that fear plays into racism, stereotyping, and lack of cultural knowledge of other people and places. How do you think they came to have this fear? What do you think is the solution for overcoming the fear of people who are different from us?
5. The French travelers and many other foreign visitors have limited and stereotyped notions of both Americans and Native Americans. In the film, the Savy Western travelers have based many of their activities on such films as *Thunderheart* and *Dances With Wolves*. As a group, explore your own limited and stereotyped ideas of other nations such as the French, Italian, Syrian, Egyptian, Korean, etc. What images instantly pop-up in your mind as you consider these very different nations? What level of truth do you think exists in these stereotypes? How many of your ideas of this place come from the media?

Ideas for Action

Racism and stereotyping are often rooted in a true lack of knowledge and the opportunity for face-to-face contact with people from a different culture or nation. The following activities are designed to help you reach out and learn something about other cultures and nations in the world.

1. Either as a group or individually, choose a place whose people and culture are very different from yours. First, examine your stereotyped images and ideas of that culture, and then either on the internet or at the library, do research on that nation to discover the reality of life in that nation. Learn as much as you can about population, religion, food use, economy, spiritual life, etc.
2. After each person has researched a culture other than their own, pretend that you are taking a two-week journey to that place. Choose one destination as a group or have each person plan his or her own trip. What steps would you take to prepare yourself? What would you want to learn from these people? How would you approach strangers from another place in a way that would show respect and consideration for their ways?
3. Explore your own area. Is there a place in your city, state, or region that has significant cultural and ethnic differences from your own comfort zone? Examine first your own fears, stereotypes, and ideas of this place, and then make a plan to visit that community. You might attend a church or gathering, plan to visit a cultural center or museum. This activity could be done as a class or social organization.
4. As a group or class, choose a culture other than your own and make a list of the many differences. Base your list on research either on the internet or at the library. Now make a second list of the similarities—the way their lives are similar to your own. Consider which list is longer. One way to overcome fear of those who are different from us is to discover our similarities.

Resources

Official Film Website:

www.indianslikeus.com

Pine Ridge Reservation Website:

<http://www.oglalalakotanation.org/oln/Home.html>

Little Big Horn Website:

<http://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm>

Northern Arapaho Website:

<http://www.northernarapaho.com>

Other European Indianist Groups

<http://www.eaglecircle.org/>

<http://www.indianisme.be/>

“The Indian Hobbyist Movement” by Colin Taylor

<http://staff.washington.edu/kbunn/Hobbyists.pdf>

“If Only I Were an Indian” by John Paskievitch

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0113381/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5qbnWysQY>



Alain Letellier offers the French flag to the Oglala Lakota tribal office. Photo by: Sylvie Jacquemin.



Part of the Savy Western group hunting for timsillas. Photo by: Sylvie Jacquemin.

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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master’s in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio’s landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/indians-like-us.

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