

# THE PEOPLE'S PROTECTORS

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE

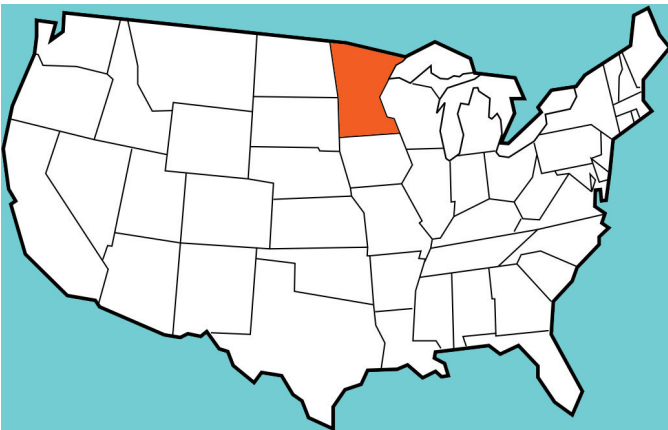


25th Annual Sisseton Wahpeton Veteran's Day Powwow. Photo by: Robert Hutchings

### IN THEIR WORDS

"And I started thinking about all the things I've been told about how we are to be good relatives and how we are to treat each other, and that's how our veterans are, that when, you've heard that phrase, "Leave no one behind," and they go back, when one goes down they go back and get them. They truly are, have learned, and that's being a protector of the people—it's everything about who we are, it's in our DNA. It's been in our DNA from time immemorial."

-Sandra White Hawk,  
Sicangu Lakota



Film location: Minnesota, United States

### PROGRAM SYNOPSIS

Four Native American veterans reflect on their experiences in the military during the divisive Vietnam War and how their communities helped them carry their warrior legacy proudly. From the Marine Corps to the Navy to the U.S. Army, veterans Valerie Barber, Art Owen, Sandy White Hawk, Vince Beyl, and civilian eyapaha (announcer) Jerry Dearly recall their memories of one of the most controversial wars in United States history. Even as they struggled with their relationship to the United States government from genocidal policies and government oppression; the Dakota, Lakota, and Ojibwe warriors still felt compelled to honor their duty to their people as Akichita | Ogichidaag | Warriors, as protectors of the people. A lifetime later, these soldiers meet us in the studio as they begin to tell their stories.



Sisseton Wahpeton Vietnam Veterans Association- Kit Fox Society. Photo by: Robert Hutchings

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### DIRECTORS STATEMENT

As a young girl, I was raised in the Los Angeles American Indian community and taught at a young age to listen to elder's experiences. I was told warriors are to be respected. I rely on these teachings daily in my storytelling and personal life, but especially while I was directing *The People's Protectors*.

Bringing the stories of Native American warriors to life for television has been an honor. These stories were compelling to me because they are the stories of my community, and those around me. They are the stories I rarely heard growing up. They are the stories I hope my children will hear.



Associate Producer- Diana Fraser, Sandra White Hawk (Sicangu Lakota), and Director- Leya Hale (Dakota/Diné) at Twin Cities PBS studios. Photo by: Robert Hutchings

Our featured storytellers are not just heroes, but community leaders and teachers. Vince is an active member of the American Legion and organizes an annual motorcycle fundraiser to support local military families. Sandy speaks across the country about her adoptee and Native veteran identities. Art continues to help veterans from all wars heal and transition to healthy protectors in their communities. Valerie gets her due when she receives an invitation to President Obama's 2009 inauguration (decades after her service ended she discovered she was the first Native American female mechanic in the Marine Corps.). Jerry is adopted by the Sisseton Wahpeton Veterans Association Color Guard for his work in honoring the history of their warrior people, active-duty personnel, and retired veterans. They are epic to me, but, like most good storytellers, they are also kind friends and mentors.

As a Dakota/Diné filmmaker, it is deeply important to me to continue celebrating the stories of my people, as well as sharing with non-Natives the challenges we face. I believe that *The People's Protectors* can combat decades-long stigmas against veterans and empower all Native people—in fact, all people—to be protectors within their communities by remembering and honoring the bravery of those who served as Akichita | Ogichidaag | Warriors.



Director of Photography, Robert Hutchings, filming broll of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington D.C. Photo by: Leya Hale



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### BY THE NUMBERS

- 1.** Native Americans have served in all the wars fought by the United States including Ely Parker (Seneca) and Stan Watie (Cherokee) who served as Generals in the Civil War.
- 2.** When World War II began, Native Americans were not yet considered to be U.S. citizens and yet, 12,000 Native people served in that war.
- 3.** By the end of World War II over 44,000 Native Americans had served in the military which was about one-third of the eligible Native men from 18 to 50 years old.
- 4.** Over 800 Native American women served in the military during World War II.
- 5.** During the Vietnam War, 42,000 Native Americans served in the military. Ninety percent of them were volunteers.
- 6.** According to statistics gathered by the Veterans Administration, only 6 percent of Native American military people made officer rank. Other ethnicities were 2.5 times that rate.
- 7.** The U.S. Veterans Administration has recognized the value of sweats to Native service members and began allowing them to conduct sweats at VA medical centers in 1990.
- 8.** The original code talkers were made up of 29 men from the Navajo Nation, which rose to over 400 by the end of the war.



Vince Beyl (White Earth Ojibwe) security road guard for the Annual Ride for the Troops, Bemidji, MN. Photo by: Leya Hale



Washington D.C. Vietnam Veterans Memorial "The Three Soldiers". Photo by: Robert Hutchings

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### EXPLORING THE FACTS

- 1.** The flood of immigrants and the actions of the U.S. Government caused a massive disruption to the lifeways of America's First Nations. Explore the sociological and psychological effects to the men in particular--those who were taught to defend and care for their elders, women, and children. Discuss what can happen when a man loses his identity and sense of purpose among his people? What are the generational effects?
- 2.** Serving in the U.S. Military was a way for Native people to regain self-identify and self-respect in a changed world. How do you think military service accomplishes this for Native men? Why do you think Native women also chose to serve?
- 3.** Vince Beyl tells of following orders to destroy a small Viet Cong village including killing all of the animals. He says, "Some guys are getting off on it, and I am not." Examine the parallels between what was happening to the Viet Cong villagers and what happened to the Native American villagers in the 1800s. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
- 4.** Native ceremonial life has always played an integral part in the health and well-being of Native People. Explore the ways that the film illustrates how this function is particularly valuable to those who have served in the military.
- 5.** Arthur Owen said, "And then you start to see the economics of the war." Review this section of the film and explore what he meant by that statement. What are the "economics" of war and what does that mean to people called to fight in a war? Realize that this question looms large over many wars fought across the world with no simple answer available. How does this relate to the early history of Native people?



Vince Beyl (White Earth Ojibwe) participating in the candle light vigil at Sisseton Wahpeton Veteran's Day Powwow. Photo by: Robert Hutchings



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### IDEAS FOR ACTION

- 1.** What motivates people to choose a certain path in life? Summarize and compare the "induction" story from each of the four veterans featured in the film and examine the motivation behind each person's story. How are they alike? How are they different?
- 2.** Native Americans have been involved in all of the major wars fought by the United States. Research and create a short synopsis of Native American involvement in the military beginning with the Civil War and examine all wars and conflicts in which Native people have served in U.S. history.
- 3.** One of the subtexts of the film is examining the role that Native Women have played in the military. Create a general timeline of the many roles women have taken in the military and identify the milestones of how that service has changed from generation to generation. Based on the stories of Valerie and Sandy, what challenges did they share with all women concerning their military service? What challenges did they face as Native American women?
- 4.** The aftermath of the Vietnam War affected men and women across all ethnicities. Define PTSD and how it has affected Native American military people in particular. Further research the social and psychological symptoms of PTSD and compare/contrast it to what we know about historical or intergenerational trauma.
- 5.** Identify and describe the methods highlighted in the film that were used to assist returning veterans in reintegrating into their culture without carrying the trauma of war into daily life. Do additional research to identify additional strategies that our society is taking--or not taking--to help veterans live a healthy and productive life.

Close-up of Eagle Staffs at the 2017  
Prairie Island Powwow.  
Photo by: Robert Hutchings





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### RESOURCES

<https://www.visionmakermedia.org/films/peoples-protectors>

<https://www.mnvtetnam.org/the-peoples-protectors/>

<https://www.research.va.gov/topics/vietnam.cfm>

<https://newsmaven.io/indiancountrytoday/archive/natives-the-military-10-facts-you-might-not-know-R95ugVj5WU2oQgtHLSxh4g/>

<https://www.fcpotawatomi.com/news/native-americans-in-the-military-world-war-ii/>

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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, a 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 more than 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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For more information, please visit [www.visionmakermedia.org](http://www.visionmakermedia.org).

Educational resources for this film are available at <https://visionmakermedia.org/films/peoples-protectors>

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