

Urban Rez

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



Top: Director of Photography, Charles "Boots" Kennedy (Kiowa), Director Larry Pourier (Lakota), Producer, Writer, Editor Lisa D. Olken and Production Associate Derek Brown (Diné) at the Fort Peck Tribal House in Montana. Photo by Jonny Bearcub (Nakota).
Above: Director Larry Pourier (Lakota) and writer Lisa Olken confer with Moses Brings Plenty (Lakota) about the narration. Photo by Charles "Boots" Kennedy (Kiowa).

"Every tribe has to recognize that the greatest resources they have are their people, regardless of whether those people are reservation Indians or they are urban-based. The tribe that recognizes that is the tribe that is going to be here 1000 years from now. Whereas those tribes that don't learn to take advantage of that and don't learn how to do that will just be the memories in the wind."

Jonny Bearcub, Nakota



Producer Lisa Olken and Director of Photography Charles "Boots" Kennedy (Kiowa) laugh with Charlie Pioche (Navajo) and Laurene Killip (Navajo). Photo by Director Larry Pourier (Lakota).

Program Synopsis

Urban Rez explores the lasting legacy of the relocation policies that encouraged Native Americans to leave their homelands and relocate to urban areas across the country. The film's unique approach to this historical reflection is interspersed with modern-day analysis which makes clear that the program that started over 60 years ago still has an effect in today's world.

Hosted by actor, musician, and Oglala Lakota Tribal member Moses Brings Plenty, *Urban Rez* shines light on a seldom told chapter in American history and is very different from the stereotypical American Indian narrative of land loss, poverty, and scant resources. Interviewees speak about the wonderful opportunities provided to them such as the work-education programs but also of the challenges of maintaining their tribal traditions, speaking their language, isolation, racism, and being separated from family and friends.

Producer's Notes



Lisa Olken

There seemed to be agreement among many people that the Voluntary Relocation Program—which was a significant component of the 1950s U.S. Government's policy to dismantle the Indian Reservation system—was not being taught in schools, either to Native or non-Native youth. Many Native children had never heard of Relocation and were unaware of

why their parents moved to the city, even though 65 percent of all American Indians now live in urban areas.

I wanted to produce a film that explored the intersection of historical memory and contemporary analysis, between how people felt before, during and after Relocation—alongside the stories that people tell themselves today, some 40 years later.

Would there be resolution or absolution? Would there be agreement or disagreement and would anyone even want to talk with us?

The crew and I did not want to portray a stereotypical American Indian narrative of land loss, poverty and scant resources. Instead, we were compelled to tell an honest and insightful story, filled with laughter, tears, courage, weakness, adaptation and resilience. Ultimately, the stories that I am most drawn to have the unique ability to cross-pollinate across cultures and ethnicities. They reveal uncomfortable yet universal truths about ourselves, even while making us grow into more developed human beings.

I am honored and grateful that *Urban Rez* creates a larger window into the national collective of contemporary American history and the Native American's urbanization experience, while also shedding light on a very significant population that is too often misunderstood or overlooked.

By the Numbers

1. The Indian Relocation Act, also known as Public Law 959, was put into effect in 1956. The U.S. Government offered assistance in the way of housing, travel and schooling costs to encourage Native people to leave the reservations and seek jobs in major cities.
2. During the beginning of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) efforts to relocate Native people into urban areas, only about 8 percent lived in the cities. The 2000 Census indicated that by then the urban Native population had risen to about 64 percent.
3. The tribes of the southeastern U.S. struggled for many years to preserve their lands and their way of life, but in 1930 Andrew Jackson managed to get The Indian Removal Act through both houses of Congress. His goal was to free up valuable lands in the southeast that belonged to the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole nations. As a result over 46,000 Native People were removed from their homelands and taken to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.
4. Following the Indian Removal Act, many suffered and died during the long journey from their eastern homelands to Oklahoma or Indian Territory. This event has come to be known as "the trail of tears."
5. From 1953-1965 the U.S. government enacted the policy of terminating established Native Tribes in order to "assimilate" them into mainstream society. The goal was to disband the reservations and thereby release the government of responsibility to the tribes. A total of 109 Native Tribes lost their tribal status.
6. Beginning on Nov. 20, 1969, a group of Native people boated out to Alcatraz Island in California and began an occupation to spotlight Native issues that lasted 19 months and ended on June 10, 1971, when the last 15 people were removed from the island by the U.S. Government. At its peak, 400 people occupied the island.
7. The National Congress of American Indians was formed in 1944 in recognition of the need Native people had to resist policies that would further erode their culture and traditional ways of life. The first Congress met in Denver, Colorado, with 80 delegates representing 50 Tribes in attendance. The NCAI continues to work on behalf of Native People today.
8. The establishment of Tribal colleges was an important movement toward educating and empowering Native people on their own lands. The first Native owned and operated Tribal College was started in Arizona on the Navajo Nation in 1968. Today there are 34 accredited Tribal Colleges operating on or near Native American reservations serving over 30,000 students.



Urban Rez crew shooting at the Denver Indian Center: Producer Lisa Olken, Videographer Janine Trudell, Teleprompter Sarah Newberry, Director of Photography Charles "Boots" Kennedy (Kiowa), Director Larry Pourier (Lakota) and Moses Brings Plenty (Lakota). Photo by: Ken Hendricks.

Reflect & Relate

1. In the face of so many obstacles and attempts to erode Native culture, consider what factors have in the past and continue to contribute to the strength and resilience of Native people. What role do you think culture, family, spiritual practices and economics play in this resilience. Discuss each factor individually or open the discussion to include all of them.
2. As a group, explore why you think that the "Urban Indian" was sometimes treated differently upon returning home. What factors do you believe lead us to treat somebody as "other" or "different" even when they are connected to us in some way?
3. Explore and define what the words "cultural conformity" mean to you. Then examine and discuss what role you think cultural conformity plays in our society or our world at large.
4. It became clear throughout the film that many Native people feel it is important to teach their children and grandchildren the history and traditions of their people. Examine such words as "adaptation" and "assimilation" and discuss your ideas about when it is beneficial to "go forward" and when it is beneficial to preserve and practice our cultural traditions.

Ideas for Action

1. First, individually make a list of words that you personally use to identify yourself or that you use to define who you are in the world. Consider your race, gender, spiritual practices, social and professional position as well as family roles. Now compare your list either with a small group or as a whole group. Which identifiers are the strongest for you? Which are weakest? Which identifiers are shared with other members of your group?
2. Throughout the film, we heard many stories about what it was like to "relocate" from small tribal communities and reservations to the big cities. As a group make a list of all the positive things people mention, and then list all the negative things they mention. Include the little experiential details such as "the lights of the cities" or "loneliness" in your discussion. Which list is longer? What do you think some of the long-term effects of the relocation have been?
3. Imagine that some known or unknown force had the power to simply "take away" two or more of the things or activities that you use to define yourself. How do you think you would respond? How do you think you would "adapt" over time?
4. As a group or class, find images and stories from the relocation period and create a collage of images of that time. Use your creativity and include images, song titles, posters, random words and any other objects you want to use.

Now, create a second collage of the many things you use personally in your life to identify yourself. Again, use your creativity and include images, song titles, random words and any other objects you want to use.

Resources

Internet Resources about The Relocation Act

<http://www.ncai.org/about-ncai/mission-history>

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/t/te014.html>

Recommended by the Filmmaker

Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960 and The Urban Indian Experience in America both by Donald L. Fixico

American Indians and the Urban Experience (Contemporary Native American Communities) by Joy Harjo

Indian Metropolis—Native Americans in Chicago 1945-1970 by James B. LaGrand

Roots of the Native American Urban Experience: Relocation Policy in the 1950s by Larry Burt

The Exiles by Kent Mackenzie [film]

Crossroads of Indian Country: Native American Community in Denver, 1950—2005 and The Relocation and Employment Assistance Programs, 1948-1970: Federal Indian Policy and the Early Development of the Denver Indian Community both by Azusa Ono [these are her thesis books]

Stride toward Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952-1960 by Kenneth R. Philp



Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota. Photo by Charles "Boots" Kennedy (Kiowa)



Sunrise fog, Fort Peck reservation, Montana. Photo by Lisa Olken



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Urban Rez is a co-production of KRMA/Rocky Mountain PBS and Vision Maker Media. Major funding was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Vision Maker Media.

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Funding for this Viewer Discussion Guide was provided by Vision Maker Media. Vision Maker Media supports Native stories for Public Broadcasting. For more information, please visit www.visionmakermedia.org.

Educational resources for this film are available at www.visionmakermedia.org/education/my_louisiana_love.

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