

'Go Cry Over Someone Else's Tragedy': The YouTube Activism of The 1491s

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Abstract

This article examines the activist role played by the comedy troupe, The 1491s, in social media spaces, particularly on YouTube. Since 2009 The 1491s have used the positive energy of comedy to galvanise others, with a particular emphasis on shaping the ways Indigenous peoples are seen, how Indigenous peoples see themselves, and how changes might lead Indigenous people to think critically about the conditions under which they are living. In addition to examining their comedic output, this article discusses the videos which honour Indigenous resilience and advocate for political causes; these efforts are also supported by their production infrastructure and disseminated via their YouTube channel. Strategically disseminating their videos to a global audience through YouTube, The 1491s should be seen as a major force in social change, inspiring Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike, many of whom interact and form a core fanbase despite being separated by time and space.

Keywords: YouTube; Social Media; Activism; Indigenous; Comedy; Resilience

1 Introduction

The gravity and magnitude of colonisation make it all too simple for non-Indigenous peoples sympathetic to Indigenous causes to focus on dire inequities and the lack of economic, political, social and educational access to the rights and privileges of the nation states who colonised their sovereign nations. Indigenous artists, authors, and filmmakers have similarly been pulled to the 'gritty realism' end of the representational spectrum and have fallen prey to similar limitations. Some critics have called the works of documentarians, filmmakers and writers alike who only focus on dysfunction and deprivation, 'poverty porn' (Ross, 2013). By contrast, The 1491s, an Indigenous comedy troupe which broadcasts through YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook, vigorously work against this reductive take on Indigenous realities, not by ignoring truths, but by highlighting the everyday incarnations of beauty, intelligence, survival and wit manifest in the humorous scenarios they construct. Bobby Wilson, one of the founding members of The 1491s, summed this up succinctly during a 2013 TEDx Talk in Manitoba: "The big thing we're trying to fight, man, is go cry over somebody else's tragedy, 'cause we're alive and thriving, we have absolutely...The thing that gets forgotten in the middle of all the other things is that we're modern, we're human, we're here!" (TEDx Talks, 2013).

This article examines the activist role played by The 1491s in social media spaces, particularly on YouTube but also on supportive platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. While their work is humorous and deeply ironising and quite simply brings happiness to people, it also connects fans together and uses the positive energy of comedy to galvanise others, with a particular emphasis on shaping the ways Indigenous peoples are seen, how Indigenous peoples see themselves, and how changes might be implemented that lead Indigenous people to think critically about the conditions which they may resist and change. Certainly, individual members of The 1491s have their own activist engagements in social media spaces, ones that are more overtly and recognizably politically activist in orientation. Most notably, Dallas Goodtooth (Santee Dakota and Diné) has been extremely active on Facebook, Facebook Live and Twitter as he broadcast from Standing Rock, North Dakota resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline from August 2016 through January 2017. While Goodtooth's recent efforts deserve particular consideration in a separate analysis, I contend that his and his colleagues' work as The 1491s offers equally profound and impactful work and deserves to be understood as activist in orientation and intent. The magnitude of their reach and their subversive power rests in

their ability to lift up others through razor-sharp critiques, energizing, often humorous and positive messages, directed inside as well as outside of Indigenous communities.

In addition to Goldtooth, The 1491s are composed of Bobby Wilson (Sisseton Dakota), Ryan Red Corn (Osage), and Migizi Pensoneau (Ponca and Ojibwe). Occasionally, two other regular contributors make appearances: Sterlin Harjo (Mvskoke) and Tito Ybarra (Red Lake Band of Ojibwe). Core members have been producing their work and uploading videos to YouTube since 2009. Their name posits a point of origin prior to western colonisation, as 1492 marks in the western hemisphere the onslaught of The Columbiad and European empire-building and genocide throughout the Americas. As of March 2017, their YouTube Channel has had 7,205,585 views with 39,109 subscribers (Figure 1). On Facebook 60,955 follow them and 19,400 follow them at @1491s on Twitter.

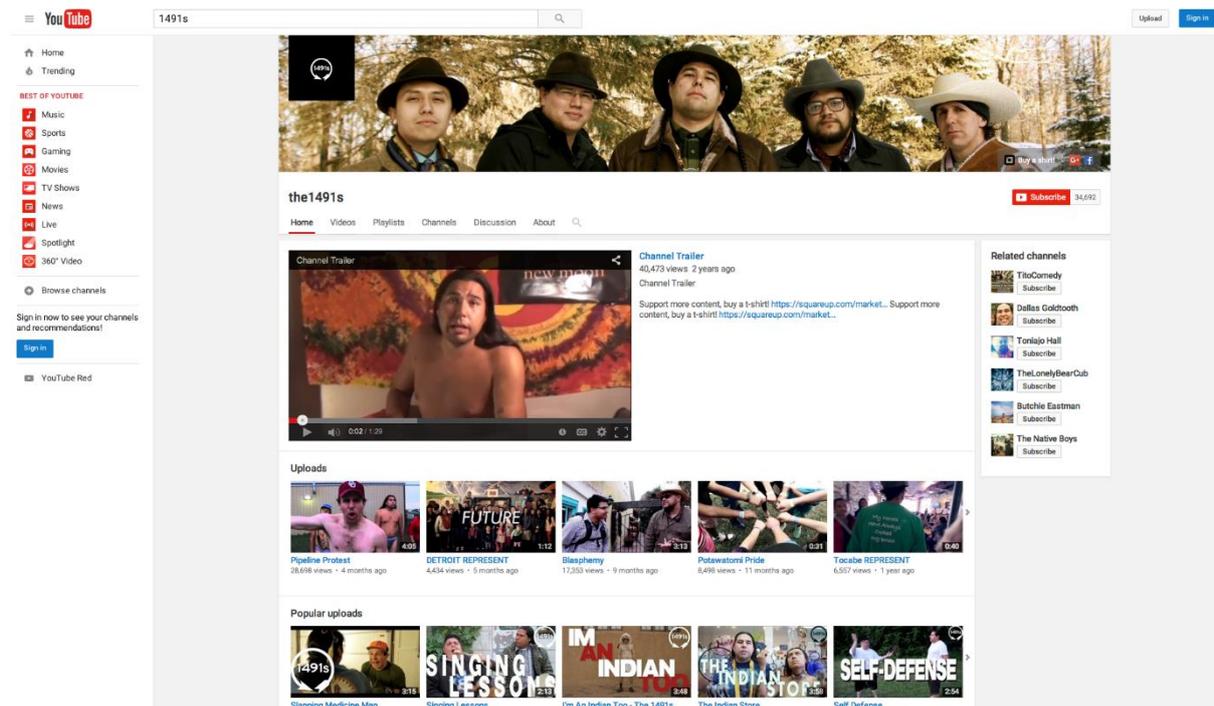


Figure 1: The 1491s' YouTube channel

My aim in this article is to contribute to a growing body of scholarship on Indigenous social media use and to a deeper understanding about the role played by YouTube in connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers through work by Indigenous performers such as The 1491s. I first situate this analysis within scholarship on YouTube and Indigenous social media use. Then, of the dozens and dozens of choices to draw from, I turn my attention to their most popular humorous video, one that keys in on debilitating cycles of behaviour (including internalised colonialist logic) within communities, particularly centering on men. The logo for The 1491s is an arrow turned in on itself, a symbol of the group's willingness to turn the critique on themselves and the communities of which they are a part. I situate this analysis in the tradition of humour within Native culture. Finally, I look at their more typical activist-based work such as public service announcements (PSAs) and celebrations of cultural strength and resilience. Undoubtedly, the audience base for these more serious works in which they are the producers and not the stars in front of the camera, has been built and sustained by their comedic performances. Together, the great variety of their work strategically disseminated to a global audience through the platform of YouTube, positions The 1491s as a major force in social change, inspiring Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike.

2 YouTube as a Performative Social Media Platform for Indigenous Activism

Before 2009, Sterlin Harjo explains, “No one had really picked up a video camera and made YouTube videos for Native people. There was a space for us to do it, because no one else had done it” (cited in Bullock, 2015). With the advent of technology that can be held in the palm of one’s hand, and which is more affordable than ever before, expressive artists like The 1491s who plug into social media now possess the potential to reach broad audiences quickly and efficiently. Social media has transformed the typical power relationships between media technologies and media makers. Mobile technologies mean that like no other time in the history of the world, technologies can be used to connect us, to help us understand one another.

While the role of YouTube is currently understudied in the U.S. context of Native American social media use, social media, generally, has undeniably reshaped the nature of community and provided ways to bridge the time-space divide, bringing people together around common causes and vision. This was well-documented with the ascendancy of Idle No More in 2012 and 2013 from one province in Canada to a national and then global phenomenon. Diné/Navajo writer, Natanya Ann Pulley, reflects on the powerful connections that continue to be made among Native people in online spaces that plug into Indigenous peoples’ cosmologies of time and space in her essay ‘Indigitechs’: “I exist outside the Western grid of time-space, in a space where my encounters with my Native brothers and sisters strengthens our connection to the cosmos. It is the air-spirit of the first world alive and kicking” (2014, p. 99). “Of course,” she continues, “I can, at any time, socialise with my Native relatives and future-friends on Facebook. I can also keep in touch with Native artists, writers, and poets. But more than this, Native people acquire a political pulse online that in the past was sequestered on the reservation—and beaten down there, as was the American Indian Movement at Pine Ridge” (2014, pp. 99-100). Though surveillance of politically engaged Native gatherings continues even online, status updates, the circulation of petitions, announcements of events, and shared memes and jokes join people together in ways that mainstream media and in-person events cannot. “The ‘Natives be like’ joke memes are just as important as shared links to pages about the latest rally against the Keystone XL pipeline” (2014, p. 100). Pulley emphasises here that the “micro utterance,” perhaps something like a meme, has macro consequences as it “reverberates across hyperspace” (p. 100).

New scholarship is emerging on the expansive role played by social media in Indigenous communities with clear reminders that Indigenous peoples are early and frequent adapters of new technologies. Research by Indigenous scholars Bronwyn Carlson, Acushla Dee O’Carroll [Sciascia], and Alex Wilson has examined the role played by social media in Indigenous Australian, Māori, and First Nations Canadian and international Indigenous contexts. Previously, I have written about what Indigenous theorists would describe as the ‘visual sovereignty’ of The 1491s comedic stylings on YouTube, particularly in light of misrepresentation and narrow visions of Native American peoples (Berglund, 2016). In addition to looking at the role played by social media in revitalising communities and connections across great distances, this research also highlights the impact on activism and social justice initiatives. As Carlson (2013) notes,

We still have a lot to learn about Aboriginal use of social media and the potential that social media may offer in terms of social and cultural interaction. But one thing is quite clear—social media is here, Aboriginal people are online and are posting and interacting with one another, having conversations, debates and forming relationships. Social media is a social site but as I have demonstrated, it is also a political site where Aboriginal struggles and identities are being played out in the ‘new frontier’ (p. 164).

2.1 YouTube

In terms of scholarship on YouTube, very little has yet been focused on Indigenous content and subscriber and viewer comments. That said, one of the first full-length scholarly books on YouTube, *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture* (Burgess & Green, 2009) did focus

a few pages on the rapid proliferation on YouTube of the then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology to The Stolen Generations and video reactions and edited responses and reinterpretations of this landmark political event. The reaction to this moment marked one of the first sustained and rapidly unfolding dialogues on YouTube surrounding Indigenous causes. Indigenous peoples' reactions circulated because of YouTube, voices that mainstream media outlets would have ignored or marginalised, and perspectives that might have been rendered primarily in Indigenous newspapers and even in limited newscasts at later dates because of production delays.

In addition to scant attention paid to Indigenous content on YouTube, little attention has been paid to the variable ways that YouTube functions as a social media format. While it does offer the space for interaction and some limited collaboration—as detailed below—its primary function for many users is sometimes outside of social media spaces as yet another disseminating conduit for entertainment, tutorials, news, and self-expression, all of which are commercialised or monetised to varying degrees. The website YouTube went live in 2005 and was purchased a year later by Google for U.S. \$1.56 billion, leading quickly to its commercialisation and monetisation. The 1491s uploaded their first video in 2009, well after YouTube had gone commercial, providing a platform for professional and amateur videos alike. Fan bases elevate the status of all works, irrespective of origin, and dictate the terms of further monetisation and thus commercial viability of particular sites. Some independent producers of videos have engineered their careers to earn up to \$12 million a year (Berg, 2015). Building an audience base that increases revenue streams depends on industries' perception of the profit-potential of the audience. A play-through gaming site or a children's toy site is directly linked to consumer purchasing—both of these types of YouTube channels and stars routinely make Forbes top-ten lists of richest YouTubers (Berg, 2015).

What is the profit-potential in Indigenous sovereignty? While this might be taken as a sarcastic, rhetorical question, there's actually an answer: educational and business-oriented services. Colleges, Grammarly—directed at college students in need of help with their writing—and GoToMeeting, an online service to facilitate long-distance business partnerships, are all currently advertisers on The 1491s' YouTube site (although, admittedly, one wonders, if this ad placement is dictated by analytics about my own online identity). By the time readers of this published article turn to the site, there may be different advertisers. Even with regular sponsorship, YouTubers such as The 1491s only make income if audiences click on the ads or watch the initiating ads (ones that roll before the video content will display) in their entirety, both of which are unlikely if consumers are concerned about conserving data streaming charges (even more likely the case if there's a mismatch between the advertisement and the consumer interests). On top of this, for their use of the platform, YouTube commands a 45% cut of profits. According to comments made by Billy Wilson at Mesa Community College in 2014, The 1491s earn a modest U.S. \$150-\$200/month and depend on sales of t-shirts and performance fees to supplement income earned in their other 'day jobs' (Haskie-Gonzalez, 2014).

It costs money doesn't it? When we get together we do videos. We're Indian guys so we do other things...Then we're getting live shows and make money. Our YouTube channel pays us \$150-200 a month. We sell shirts, and once a year we get together and make videos, plan. We budget, we plan things, we figure out how we'll pay for things, etc.

When some asks, 'What do you do in "real life"?' Billy explains that he manages the group and its schedules. He's also a graffiti artist and does murals. He goes on to say,

Dallas Goldtooth works with the Indigenous Environmental Network and does a shitload of planning for this. Ryan Red Corn owns two businesses, a Fry Bread Mix company, he inherited from his grandfather, and a marketing firm. Migizi is a student working on his Masters in creative writing. Sterlin Harjo makes real movies, not this bullshit like we do. (Haskie-Gonzalez, 2014).

Currently there is no analytic to track ethnic or gender identities of viewers. YouTube tracks numbers: the number of viewers (from unique IP addresses; return viewers from the same computer are not tabulated); the number of likes (thumbs up) or dislikes (thumbs down), allowed only by registered users; and, the number of subscribers to the 1491s channel. Registered users are allowed to leave comments on The 1491s' videos. Registered users can reply to others' comments. Each video has many more viewers than commenters, as might be expected. It's hard to know how many viewers read comments left by other viewers; this information isn't tracked. Viewers may sort by two categories, 'Top Comments' and 'Most Recent Comments.' If a viewer is interested in reading more than twenty or so comments, they may click 'Show More' to go further back in the comment archive (comments are preserved unless The 1491s delete comments).

In her in-depth study of YouTube and its unique facets that alter the reception of digital film, Carol Vernallis (2013) writes,

[YouTube video's] online distribution also encourages participation. In miniature, the video's performers may carry more weight than they would on television—the technological magic that brings them to us feels palpable. We may also experience greater agency with viral media, because a click allows us to seek out the video's performers, who address us directly—one more click or turn away from the monitor would break a fragile bond. As we forward the link to those in our affinity groups, our sense of connection branches outward (p. 171).

To enjoy The 1491s' work, all one needs to do is Google their name or enter their name in the YouTube search bar. But if that's not enough, you may follow them on Twitter, you may subscribe to their YouTube channel and you may like them on Facebook. These various multi-media platforms serve to notify viewers of new postings, keep them updated about other news, and, importantly, maintain a relationship across space and time. Depending on one's smartphone settings, announcements about new postings can immediately reach followers. While there are differences of opinions about the possibilities of YouTube to build a community that receives and creates progressive and innovative media of value, there are some scholars who contend that the circulation and sharing of videos fosters 'kinship networking.' Vernallis (2013) writes,

YouTube provides intense media experiences...sometimes a clip sent by a friend or colleague produces a moment of intimacy, as if we were in a conversation and one of us had suddenly turned the witty phrase that concretized gathering experience. The three-minute clip swells in the light of our shared feeling. The clip's cleverness helps it merge into our paths of dialogue and mutuality (p. 149).

The on-going responses and comments by viewers is a surprising feature of YouTube and grounds the experiences in the real lives of people. In previous generations, fans could have written a letter, formed a fan club, bought a ticket to an event, but YouTube enables direct engagement.

3 Humorous/Satirical Engagements

In *Engaged Resistance* (2011, p. 93), Dean Rader coins a term to articulate the activist contributions made by artists—"aesthetic activism," which is "a manner of political and social activism that finds representation in the artistic realm". I find it useful to think about The 1491s work as 'aesthetic activism' because while they're not writing policy statements, and they're not leading marches, they are forcefully shaping the discourse about the value and rights of Indigenous peoples, and their work definitely issues responses to relevant and timely incidences and everyday occurrences in "Indian Country." This is an especially useful interpretative tactic when analysing works that seem humorous, silly, and sometimes downright "lite." An understanding of the function of humour within Indigenous cultures, though, recognises that humour is a tactic used to move people, to change attitudes, to critique behaviours, and to lead to change. Laguna Pueblo writer and theorist, Paula Gunn Allen

considers humour “the best and sharpest weapon we’ve always had against the ravages of conquest and assimilation” (as cited in Lincoln, 1993, p. 7). Perhaps it is the transformative possibility of humour that led playwright Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa and Delaware) to say, “I see the Indi’n capacity for humor as a blessing...It’s a miraculous thing that’s pulled us through so much. It’s a force that’s part of religion” (as cited in Lincoln, 1993, p. 336).

3.1 ‘Slapping Medicine Man’

One of the most popular of The 1491s’ humorous videos is “Slapping Medicine Man” (2011a) with a simple format and direct purpose: to dismantle a culture of rationalization that displaces to others blame for one’s conditions (See Figure 2). While the video risks oversimplification of the complexities of obesity, depression, gossip, unemployment, broken relationships, and so forth, the healer in the series asks a series of questions of three young men who visit him and gives them a hard dose of reality: a real question that cuts to the heart of the men’s own complicity in their hardship followed by a physical rebuke—a slap in the face. A fixed over-the-shoulder-shot puts viewers in the position of the medicine man who is consulting with three young men played by Tito Ybarra, Dallas Goldtooth, and Ryan Red Corn.

When Tito’s character talks about being overweight and sick, he’s asked if he drinks or parties; when he replies in the affirmative, he’s met with a “Well, knock it off!” and a slap. When Ryan’s character says, “I’m a student, and I don’t think I’m eligible but I’d like one of those free Indian scholarships,” he’s met with a slap. And, when Dallas’ character worries, “I don’t know what to do to get ‘em (my family) back,” the medicine man asks, “Well, are you still drinking?” to which Dallas replies, “Well, yeah, from time to time!” Then, without missing a beat, the medicine man delivers a sharp slap. The unexpected hard truth and the physical surprise of the slap combine to elicit laughter from viewers. The scenarios with the different characters cycle through and the medicine man continues to dispense with truths about hard work, employment and education.

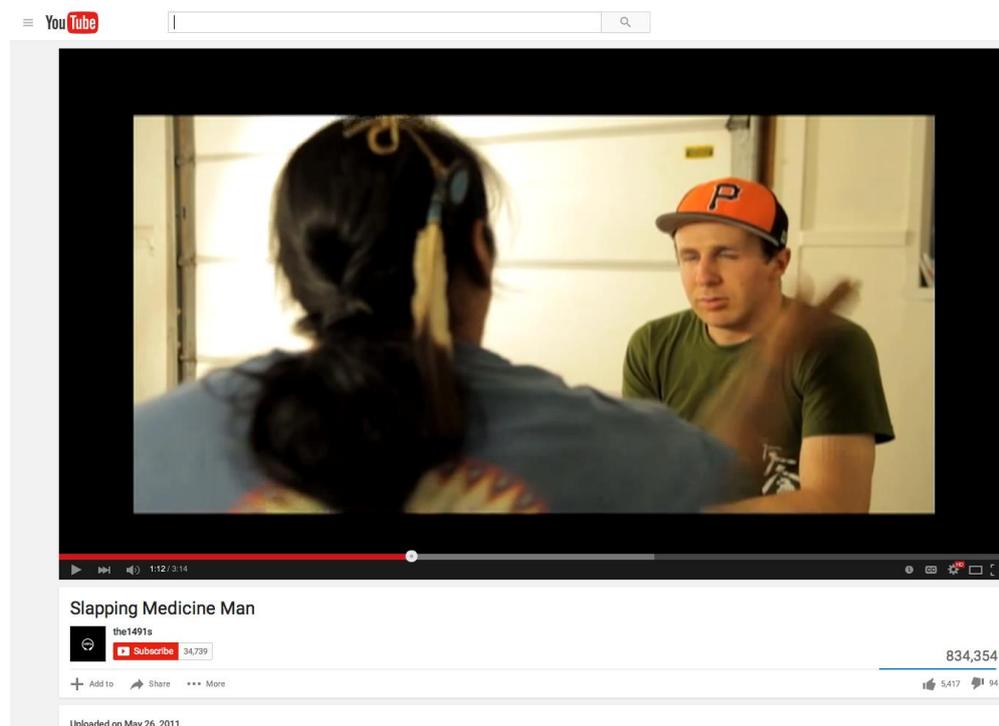


Figure 2: The 1491s, ‘Slapping Medicine Man’

With the greatest number of views of all of The 1491s’ videos (918,193) since it was uploaded in May 2011, ‘Slapping Medicine Man’ has elicited a whopping 623 comments. The extreme ridiculousness of the scenario combined with physical humour and predictable, repeated

patterns, has all the ingredients of classic comedy. Michael RedCrow's response highlights typical audience reactions

BWAHAHAHA poor Ryan, i felt so bad for him (ok, i was laughing so hard i almost fainted but i promise, i was feelin bad, too), and the SLAP (aho !) i literally fell out of my chair onto the floor, my wife thought i was havin some kind of attack ! i loves me some 1491's, and this one was almost the best ever!

Other typical responses focus on the medicine man's logic. For example, Wa-Ya Hilderbrand wonders, "Is it kind of sad that my school beyond needs this medicine man?" Another, Gobbles Wells (KetchupPopsicles), also wishes this hard medicine were in readier supply: "If only today's medicine man was this serious about slapping some sense into the younger generations. Nowadays you find that most are in it just for the financial opportunities to be had, much like the white man that many of them complain about..." Shiidenzhoneshash comments on the way The 1491s are able to deliver these insights through their humorous scenario: "You know watching this video from time to time is good for a laugh BUT what a message it sends us through humor. The slap of reality, wake up and smell the coffee, so to speak snap outta it,...if you want change then change. What a jello community we have become. So because I can't go around slapping my Natives this video is some way good therapy for me . . . hahahahhahhah...".

The satirical humour of 'Slapping Medicine Man' targets self-pity and self-abuse by issuing a call for a commitment to action and control over one's own life, a sovereignty of self that will build the possibility of transformation and resilience for others. 'Slapping Medicine Man' shows the need for self-accountability and the sobering prescription of discipline, dedication, and hard work.

4 Resistance, Resilience Building, and Celebrations of Indigenous Brilliance

The 1491s use the YouTube platform to establish and maintain a community that can bear witness to and honour the many ways to be Indigenous which empowers others to tell their stories and join the conversation. Their work creates models of engagement and resistance, models of problem-solving, models of resilience-building and Indigenous resurgence, testimonials of Indigenous brilliance, beauty, and talent. A specific genre of serious and non-comedic activism by The 1491s is the public service announcements (PSAs) they routinely distribute through their YouTube channel. Disseminating PSAs online is not unusual, but their placement alongside The 1491s' comedic playlists is unique and models an interdependent relationship, both in terms of production and praxis, or theory in action, reminding viewers of their serious commitment to Indigenous peoples and communities even in their comedic engagements. Their production infrastructure and celebrity affords the group a reach that extends far beyond local activist engagements; moreover, The 1491s openly share their equipment, filmmaking knowledge, YouTube platform, and their existing fanbase, all to support work outside of typical commercial media infrastructures.

4.1 Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

One provocative 2011 PSA joined a public dialogue about the epidemic of violence against Indigenous women, both at the hands of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men alike during a period when the U.S. Congress was considering the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act, originally passed in 1994. Based on a poem written by Randy Red Corn, "To the Indigenous Woman" was uploaded in October 2011 (Figure 3). While Red Corn reads the poem in voiceover, viewers see images of Indigenous women, loving and caring for their families and being loved by them in return—the reality that should exist but that does not match the stark reality facing the majority of Indigenous women.



Figure 3: The 1491s, 'To the Indigenous Woman'

Details supplied with the video remind us of shocking, disturbing statistics:

Native women are murdered at 10 times the national rate; 1 out of 3 Native women will be raped in her lifetime, and 3 out of 5 physically assaulted. Even worse, 88% of the perpetrators are non-Indian and cannot be prosecuted by tribal governments. Stand and take action now to restore safety and justice for Native women. Do Something! Visit www.indianlaw.org.

Red Corn's words give voice to feelings of regret and complicity and the need for everyone, all people, men and women, adults and children, Native and non-Native, to stand up and take action. To ignore this stark reality is to be complicit:

To the Indigenous woman I'm sorry we have not fought harder for you
I am the dysfunctional man
I will borrow your forgiveness like I always have,
and you will be there for me like you always are
Ask her, and she will tell you I stole her tongue
Replaced it with guilt
Saddled it with blame and rode off on it like a horse

...
To doctors without clues
for say nothing neighbors
do nothing attorneys
and quiet parents with no memories
Thank you.

You make all of this possible.
We couldn't fail these women without your help.
For the woman and her baby left for dead by the police in her home, while they gave a ride to her attacker back to his house
To the girlfriend punched in her pregnant stomach

To the wife who took the beatings so her kids wouldn't have to
To the daughter who found a man as abusive as her dad
To the coed who will never ever go to the nine again
To the restraining order as strong as the paper its made from
To the shelter with not enough beds
I give 1000 sweats for rape victims
1000 doctorings for husbands
1000 prayer ties for courage
1000 meetings for silence
1000 songs for patience
1000 fires... for enough light... to fill a room
to reflect off a mirror the size of the moon
just so we can see ourselves for what we are.
Complicit.

And if this recognition of complicity—the word ‘Complicit’ flashes on the screen as Red Corn pauses—in inaction is not enough to move viewers of the video poem, Red Corn reminds those watching that these victims are all of our relatives. As he continues to speak, close up shots of women follow. The women stare directly into the camera, making eye contact with viewers, imploring us not to ignore their plight. Red Corn shifts to first-person in the closing lines, giving voice to the women themselves:

I am your wife
I am your sister
I am your mother
I am your daughter
You are supposed to protect me
You are supposed to be a warrior
Protect me from you,
from him,
from all of them.
Tell me you have daughters
Tell me you don't want this for them
Tell me you won't joke about this with your friends
Tell me you won't forget we talked
Tell me you will do something
Do something.

This last line, like ‘Complicit,’ flashes on the screen. The logic is clear. If you don’t ‘do something,’ you’ll be complicit and things won’t improve.

Viewer response to this video was intense and positive. One viewer, Star Kiona, writes,

When I feel like crap because of statistics and due to being a Native women, also feeling like I am going nowhere because of my history, and where I am from. I watch this. Makes me feel like I am cared for, it inspires me to try my hardest to make it different and easier for us Native people. I can almost see my future occupation when I watch this video. Many thanks, 1491s. <3.

Lucretia Lovato, another viewer comments,

So moving and raw... Thank you for calling out to the Native men to help keep the women safe... You’re opening their eyes to what they are doing to their own women. Thank you for being the voice of all those that are too scared, too beaten, or can no longer ask for justice... Many thanks and bless you all for being brave...

One male fan, Rocky Rockholt, stands by Red Corn’s call for all men, as well as Native men, to recognise their responsibility toward Indigenous women:

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for calling out the ‘warriors’ in our Native American culture who will look away from a ‘family matter.’ My mom in an NDN Woman Super Hero!! She raised three of us unruly kids to be solid citizens. Along the way, she was raped, beaten, and treated as if she was disposable. She is not disposable!! She is the mother of a man who is hard wired to keep trying for his kids. She is a businesswoman. She doesn't even recognise her past. Nor do I!!!

Rockholt speaks to the endurance of his mother and the way she transformed her past, but he also speaks to the intergenerational responsibility to be watchful and protective of women and children and to recognise this drive as a fulfillment of being ‘a warrior.’

The 1491s refined this message about putting an end to violence against women in later videos, as well, including a brief, thirty-second one that’s garnered 13,748 views since March 2012. Titled ‘Ten Little Indians,’ and underscored by the sing-song of the outdated and racist nursery rhyme of the same name, the simply formatted black and white video features extreme close-ups of Indigenous women looking into the camera. After viewers are shown a succession of ten women and are reminded that six out of ten Native women will be physically assaulted, they are implored to ‘Do Something.’ The dissonance between the all-too-familiar song, not to mention its inappropriateness in today’s world, estranges the familiar and works to draw attention to an important cause. In 2013 the U.S. Congress did reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and then two years later, for the first time in U.S. history, the most significant update for Native women was finally implemented: a provision allowing tribal courts to investigate and prosecute non-Native men accused of abuse of Indigenous women on federally recognised tribal reservations.

In addition to these PSAs, the 1491s have produced a number of videos that beautifully and forcefully represent the diversity of Indigenous lives. Several focus on language: one issued on Valentine’s Day with dozens of speakers sharing a litany of words for love in different tribal languages; another NSFW video hilariously features phrases and strategies for indicating one’s attraction and romantic or sexual interest in others. In this category are also spoken word performance poems such as ‘Bad Indians,’ which feature multiple contributors, all Native, collectively performing lines of the poem also written by Ryan Red Corn and built around a simple yet profound argument about all of the ways that Native people persist in brilliant contemporary ways. Each speaker looks and sounds different; most speak English; some use their tribal language. Collectively, their voices assert a contemporary Indigenous presence, one that claims sovereignty and control over their own reality and a renewed and collective sense of empowerment. Speakers look confidently and proudly into the camera showing respect and honour for their subject, models of strength, and endurance. They show how to turn on its head Civil War General Philip Sheridan’s perhaps apocryphal comment, “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.” Alive and thriving, the speakers in the video are very ‘bad Indians,’ indeed, but bad in all the very best ways possible. They refuse to die, they refuse to simplistically embody homogenising stereotypes. Similarly, The 1491s themselves are ‘Bad Indians’ who continue to persist, who continue to turn their humour on the colonisers and even turn it toward those within their communities who have internalised colonising ideologies.

4.2 The REPRESENT Series: Showcasing Indigenous Brilliance and Resilience

The 1491s’ work revitalises Native communities through a modeling of resistance to pernicious, damaging stereotypes, but they also do so, specifically, through their ‘REPRESENT’ series (which more than just nominally) embodies Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s ‘Representing’ project she lists among other Indigenising research projects. And, furthermore, the REPRESENT series fulfills Tuhiwai Smith’s goals of ‘Creating,’ ‘Networking,’ and ‘Sharing’ as this series is the outcome of collaborations (referred to as ‘collabs’) with people whom The 1491s meet on university campuses or within communities they visit. The 1491s offer the opportunity for others to tell their own stories by their using equipment, editing software, and the social media platform the group has built. Migizi Pensoneau explains the group’s motives: “We’ve put cameras in people’s hands and have asked what you would like to see. It goes in direct contrast

to that sort of Aaron Huey National Geographic thing where it's like you know we're just gonna showcase all the sad. Look at this poor destitute Indian and we're like, you know what do you want to see when your culture is vital and thriving?...We've created these outlets for people to tell their own stories because it's not something that it's our place to, it's someone else's' (TEDx Talk, 2013). The multiple, varied stories are all connected by the series title that is superimposed at the beginning and close of every video; a fixed camera is used in all videos, cuts are minimal to non-existent. These minimalist choices focus attention on the subjects' talent.

The REPRESENT films create the opportunity for other Indigenous peoples to showcase their talents, to demonstrate their presence, intelligence, and what Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe) would call 'survivance,' 'an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy' (1999, preface). REPRESENT becomes a means of resisting stereotypes through the process of honoring and valuing the full humanity of Native peoples. For Native viewers, the REPRESENT series recognises and honors Indigenous viewers' own knowledge and experiences, provides aspirational models, and shows that transformations of age-old traditions are not merely a rejection of tribal identity or Indigeneity, but a new strategy of empowerment, a means of Indigenizing other spaces. A young man moonwalks like Michael Jackson in front of a natural history museum display; a teacher speaks Ojibwemowin to teach math in an Ojibwe school; a jingle dancer (without regalia) in jeans, with earbuds in, dances on the quad at Dartmouth College; several young hip hop artists rap about Indigenous resurgence and Idle No More, surrounded by friends and family at a community centre in Detroit; a young mother places her child in a cradleboard; an award-winning recording artist sings of the riches of family while Billy Wilson beatboxes at her kitchen table; Berkeley students who are Native go about the mundane business of being college students; a Nambe Pueblo woman, then a student at Yale University, throws candy in a 'Pueblo Throw' at young men passing by; three young women, students at Fort Lewis College in Colorado, sing a '49 about love and desire.

Uploaded in October 2012 the REPRESENT video featuring Fort Lewis College students Sherri Willetto, Diné, (a Sociology major/Minor in Native American Studies); Teahonna James, Tlingit/Athabaskan, (a Humanities major); and Mariana Harvey, Yakama, (an Indigenous Studies major) has received 182, 483 views, the most of all of the REPRESENT series (See Figure 4). The video, as with all others in the series, is filmed with a fixed position camera, framing the women in a medium shot which fosters a sense of intimate familiarity; the camera filter casts the three women in golden light.



Figure 4: *The 1491s, 'Represent-Singing on Campus-Ft. Lewis College'*

The video opens with the three waiting to begin, smiling, and laughing. They sing a '49, a secular popular musical form, typically sung in English about everyday subjects (with 'vocable' or non-linguistic, but traditional stylings such as "yah-he-he-yah"); '49s are sung at pow-wows, at parties, when friends get together and are extemporaneous fusions of pop and traditional elements. The lyrics the three women sing are simple and repeated with each one taking turns singing the lead in a round: "I got this loving feeling/ Ya-he-he-yah/ I got this loving feeling/ Come a little closer/ I'll hold onto you all night long/ Hey-a-hi-hey-a-hi-yo." Their harmonious voices are striking and moving to listeners. They sing of love and desire, components of personhood and a full humanity, for too long absent from any representation of Native peoples on film (albeit something that has been changing over the course of the last two decades). Viewer ChehalaRose comments,

Beautiful to see my Indigenous sisters out there representing our strong and resilient culture! Makes me proud to be nehiyaw. And for anyone who has left negative comments, I feel sad for you because our roles as human beings, as women is not to tear each other down but rather it should be about empowering each other, supporting each other on our journeys. Anyway hiy hiy for sharing 1491's!

After another viewer critically questions the combination of vocable stylings in a love song about desire—"so i guess if u add a few way yah has in a country ass song its all of a sudden cultural....damn how our ways have changed smh :/" While Derick Gill, the previous commenter, may be SMH [shaking my head], another viewer takes him to task and questions his expectations for Native singers. Bulldoggrrr writes, "lmao, what?...you expect them to play the flute on horseback. True, "our" ways have changed, but you are projecting about what you think a reflection of our culture is. Have you ever been to a 49? I would guess not."

Videos which are part of the REPRESENT series combat stereotypes and change common narratives about Native peoples. Often they celebrate the efforts to maintain and revitalise important tribal traditions, in other cases, they offer clear juxtapositions of unquestionable Indigenous pride in the midst of supposedly non-Native contexts. In this way, the videos push back against expectation—that Native culture has been lost or died out, that Native people are part of history, not the present, and that Indigenous people lead separate existences outside the purview of mainstream culture. The videos remind non-Native viewers, in particular, that Indigenous people are everywhere and that their presence is vital and enriching.

And this is the real activist effort of The 1491s, a project supported by their expansive national and international reach on YouTube and the fanbase that responds and communicates with the performers and with one another about important political matters affecting the lives of Indigenous people everywhere. As Natanya Ann Pulley puts it so succinctly, "A Native American presence online is always a political act. It is a testament to our staying power and to the people's ability to surge onward...I no longer need to open a book or work through my mother's memory of Navajoland to reach my people (though I deeply miss its sand and growing winds). I simply have to open an app. And I am not faced with static images, but with emergent and pulsing paths of inclusion and action" (2014, p. 100). There's no room for fixating on tragedy in this space. There's too much to be done, and a little bit of laughter and appreciation of beauty courtesy of The 1491s will make the work easier to undertake and sustain.

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