

A MEMBER OF THE "WHITE TRIBE" REPLIES

CAMERON BAILEY'S passionate diatribe against "the recent surge in feature films made by white filmmakers about people of colour" (*Take One No. 5*) bases its ill-founded conclusions on the following pretext: a white man walking down the street can be automatically judged guilty of racism because he's saying nothing about it. If he has a friend who is black, then that merely constitutes tokenism. Even if he tries to ally himself with causes benefitting other races, it still constitutes white tokenism, because he is viewing others in the role of victim or as someone in need of help. In Bailey's narrow worldview, white liberals are guilty until proven guilty.

Like his American counterpart Michael Medved, Bailey demonstrates no ability to make critical distinctions or provide any substantial evidence to back his claims. His argument that *Masks of Nippon* – a forgotten example of WWII propaganda at its worst, is the Canadian equivalent of *Birth of a Nation* (which cinematically ranks as a pioneering work) – is as grossly wanting in historical accuracy as his assertion that the war against Japan was a watershed moment in Canadian history (it was the war with Germany that changed Canada, not Japan). Furthermore, on what grounds does he label social issue oriented films such as *Milk and Honey* or *Sitting in Limbo* as examples of WASP paranoia? And what evidence does Bailey offer to accuse June Callwood of being a racist? On the basis that she was accused three times, regardless if the charges were true or not?

Throughout his whole thesis, obviously written in a white rage (pardon the pun), Bailey seems to be overwhelmed by a paranoid fear that all WASP auteurs are all out to "terrorize aboriginal people and people of colour as it loudly proclaims its own victim status – colonized doubly by European history and American movies." In other words, Anne Wheeler, John N. Smith, Bruce McDonald, and even non-WASPs like Vic Sarin or Atom Egoyan, are all out to keep the injuns and coolies in their place. Not only can white liberals not deal with other ethnic groups without appearing like white supremacists, they can't even deal with their own tribe! In describing "the ethnic drag that foregrounds Canadian whiteness," he somehow implies that Caucasian directors



Birth of a Nation: America's Masks of Nippon?

cannot deal with their own native culture without hinting at white oppression.

I would like to point out to Mr. Bailey that not all white liberals think alike, nor is it fair to label Canadian non-coloured directors as politically liberal. But his arguments are immune to such distinctions. With the likes of Mr. Bailey promoting racial tolerance in Canada, who needs the Reform Party?

**PATRICK LOWE
WINNIPEG**

IN RESPONSE

SINCE I DON'T HAVE the space to untangle Patrick Lowe's thoughts, I'll just try to clarify. My "Pictures From the White Tribe" article in the Spring, 1994 issue of *Take One* had only one goal – to point out that *race has been a factor in Canadian cinema from its very beginnings*. In documentaries, narratives and experimental films one can find a whole landscape of racial representation, a landscape that gets more crowded every year. Critics of Canadian cinema have been silent on this. I thought the subject should at least be on the table.

The article is admittedly brief and sketchy, but one point should be made clear, my own opinion is that the representations of race we have had in Canadian film remain limited. They have followed stale myths that still hold currency in this country's popular imagination – that people of colour are inherently sexier and more mysterious than whites; that Aboriginal people are either dangerously unpredictable or refreshingly innocent; and most importantly, that a story is only a story if there is a white subjectivity (be it protagonist or director) at its centre.

These are old myths. They make for boring films.

Lowe misunderstands what the article had to say about the representation of whiteness, so I'll explain. Films like Atom Egoyan's *Family Viewing* and Bill Robertson's *The Events Leading Up To My Death* foreground whiteness, taking it out of the realm of the neutral. This is a good thing. We need more films like these, because it is only when whiteness is no longer taken for granted that we can even begin to talk seriously about race and ethnicity. We also need more informed debate about race in Canadian movies, and I look forward to hearing more from anyone who's given some thought to it.

**CAMERON BAILEY
TORONTO**

DEAR CAMERON AND HELEN

I RECENTLY PICKED UP issue No. 5 of *Take One* at Revue Video on the Danforth. So everything is working like it's supposed to.

I appreciate the work, congratulations and thank you. It's so difficult to persist at times. *Evidence: Race and Canadian Cinema* will hopefully help to create more understanding out there in mainstream hell!

I've enclosed a complimentary copy of *The Runner*, *Native Magazine for Communicative Arts*. Unfortunately, *The Runner* was referred to as *The Rider* (pg. 35). No harm done, but I'd sure appreciate a correction in the next issue.

**IN PEACE
GARY FARMER
TORONTO**