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The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the Movies by Gretchen Bataille; Charles Silet Book Review

Gerald Vizenor

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Another query may be raised over movie content as evidential with respect to different-class audiences. May speaks of story film changes resulting from self-conscious efforts to render narrative character more genteel, but the fact is that stories made up only a small percentage of pre-1907 output. They were themselves a genre, like actualities, vaudeville turns and trick films. To be sure, the snippets of women undressing behind window shades and bedroom screens might be labeled appeals to proletarian, certainly all-male audiences, but here as with other staged material, costume and set decor are almost consistently turn-of-the-century middle class.

Such exceptions, some perhaps arguable in themselves, do not negate the usefulness of *Screening Out the Past*. Its author has effectively broadened bases for American silent film study, particularly what precedes World War I, by asking us to reconsider the industry's behavior and product in a context of dramatic social changes with respect to the economy, living and working conditions, sex roles, leisure pursuits, and ethnic dominance. In its own terms, this may eventually constitute part of film history's materialist response to theoretical arguments regarding the cinematic apparatus as they are waged in other quarters.

—JOHN FELL

THE PRETEND INDIANS Images of Native Americans in the Movies

Edited by Gretchen Bataille and Charles Silet. Iowa State University Press, 1980. Cloth, \$19.95; paper, \$9.95.

Ernest Alfred Dench, in his book *Making the Movies* (1915), wrote that "a few white players specialize in Indian parts . . . by clever make-up they are hard to tell from real Redskins . . .

"To act as an Indian is the easiest thing possible, for the Redskin is practically motionless." Dench would like the tribes to be "motionless" perhaps, the cigar store wooden varieties, but few Native Americans, urban or reservation, mixedblood or traditional, are stalled by his blunt insensitivities.

Gretchen Bataille and Charles Silet, editors of *The Pretend Indians*, have not been motionless in the cigar store either. The authors, professors at Iowa State University, studied the literature on tribal people in the movies and leaped from their front row seats to examine frontier fantasies and racist images in an outstanding collection of articles: Richard Slotkin on "Myth and Literature in a New World," Leslie Fiedler on "The Demon of the Continent," Vine Deloria on "The American Indian Image in North America," Philip French on "The Indians in the Western Movie," Dan Georgakas on "American Indians in Film," and 20 more authors.

The images of Native Americans in the movies come in

various forms which tilt in time from the demonic to the natural ecologist. Most appearances of tribal people in the cinema are featherbound crude inventions, struck from repressed fear and colonial sentimentalities to resolve the structural opposition between the ideologies of savagism and civilization.

The Pretend Indians is a thoughtful balance of historical views, comments and analyses of stereotypes in literature and media, selected film photographs, reviews of popular films (such as *Cheyenne Autumn* by V. F. Perkins, and *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here* by Pauline Kael) and an annotated checklist of articles and books on the popular images of Native Americans in the American film. Until now the only other book on the subject has been *The Only Good Indian . . . The Hollywood Gospel* by Ralph and Natasha Friar.

Vine Deloria, the distinguished Native American author, introduces *The Pretend Indians* with an unusual blend of seriousness and humor. His tableau, however, focuses more on written material, including critical comments on the novel *Hanta Yo* by Ruth Beebe Hill, than it does on the ersatz visage of tribal people in the movies—notwithstanding his assertion that visual images "hold much more potential for communication than does the printed word. A vivid scene will do more to impress longstanding images than the most clever aphorism or slogan."

Most anthologies reveal some disharmonies in the assimilation of ideas. This book is an exception. The editors provide an instructive overview and interpretive summaries to each section of the book.

Dench, not tribal people, is rendered "motionless" with his cigar store terminal creeds.

—GERALD VIZENOR

FILM NOIR An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style

Ed. by Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward; coeds. Carl Macek and Robert Porfiro. (New York: Overlook Press, 1979. \$25.00)

Credits, synopses, and interpretations of several hundred films noir, arranged alphabetically, with 75 stills. A good introduction outlines some characteristics of the noir cycle, and a very interesting appendix discusses noir elements in the gangster film, the Western, and the period film (though not the horror film). Further appendices provide a chronology of titles (1927-76); a note on research sources; a bibliography; and lists of films keyed to directors, screenwriters and novelists, directors of photography, composers, producers, actors and actresses, and releasing companies. The main body of the book consists of analyses of individual films, and these are generally interesting and perceptive, though some of the