

Screenings make pale but Positive effort to fight racism

Irrelevancies mar impact of local film festival dealing with racism

Colour Positive:
Anti-Racism Film Festival
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The cover-up of an American Indian's murder, fascist suppression in Guatemala, the rebirth of tribal folklore in maximum security prisons—these and a wide range of other related issues are dealt with in *Colour Positive*—English-speaking Canada's first Anti-Racism film festival.

Colour Positive was sponsored by DEC Films and Multi-Culturalism Canada in the hope of drawing attention to the still prevalent racism in societies like our own.

Toronto, with its large variety of cultural and ethnic groups, seems appropriate for a festival of this nature. Screenings were held all over the city, making the films available to as large an audience as possible. One of the festival's major aims was to exhibit little-known but important works, including many by Third World and minority-group filmmakers.

The festival also strives to investigate the nature of racism; the films illustrating the causes and effects of, and possible solutions to the problem. also, *Colour Positive* attempted to provide a public forum, with discussions about key issues. Another aim was to develop approaches to fighting racism on an international scale in the mind of the audience.

Although such reaching effects are somewhat unlikely, the enthusiastic response audiences gave the screenings can only be seen as a step in the right direction. As the following reviews indicate, not all the films necessarily deserved such a "positive" response:

When the Mountains Tremble
Directed by Peter Kinoy and Pam Yates
Guatemala, 1983

The Guatemalan film *When the Mountains Tremble* depicts the native peoples' struggle against the oppression of that country's military government.

The film effectively documents the conditions which led them to revolt, such as fraudulent elections and the persecution of the Catholic Church. Through powerful cross-cuts, as from a child's face to a heavily armed soldier, one gains an understanding of what drives a populace to rebellion. The fact that the natives are Indian, and the rulers Spanish, adds the dimension of racism to the situation, further drawing the viewer's sympathy.

Where the film falters is in its overstatement of left-wing ideals, and in the director's use of inappropriate techniques to convey them. The voices of the corrupt officials, for example, are overdubbed in pompous, dumbfounded tones, while those of the revolutionary fighters are clear and resonant. These weaknesses do not destroy the film, but lessen its impact to a definite degree. Suffice it to say that *When the Mountains Tremble* is an impressive account of the inevitable suffering which arises from government oppression and brutal racism.

Cimarrones
Directed by Carlos Ferrand
Canada, 1982

Cimarrones, a 24-minute film set in Peru, attempts to depict the efforts of some African slaves to free two of their comrades from a Spanish cara-

van. Although the subject (African slaves in Peru) is obviously racial, the film does not deal specifically with racism, and is therefore of little relevance to a festival of this nature.

Further detracting from the effectiveness of *Cimarrones* is its poor production; in one shot, the camera is focused only on the narrator's knees. Also, the subtitled dialogue consists of lines like, "Die, you son of a goat." Given this, and the fact that it does not deal with racism, one has to wonder why it was screened at all.



Annie Mae Aquash, subject of film purporting FBI-linked murder, mutilation.

Annie Mae Aquash: Brave-Hearted Woman
Directed by Lan Brooks-Ritz
USA, 1978

In 1975, an American Indian activist named Annie Mae Aquash was killed and mutilated on her reserve. Her assailant was unknown, but the film argues that the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), with which she had been in conflict, was directly responsible for her death.

Like other films in this festival, *Brave-Hearted Woman* shows a strong bias in its documentation of events. The FBI is represented by only one man, whose interview is selectively edited to highlight the filmmakers' contentions.

Where *Brave-Hearted Woman* succeeds is in its depiction of the Indian peoples' struggle for their rights, and their battles against alcoholism and drug addiction. Annie Mae Aquash was a leader in these crusades, and her death was a great loss for the Indian Community.

It is quite possible that the government was involved in her murder, but by presenting such a biased viewpoint, the viewer is likely to disregard the entire argument. Despite this, the true heart of the Indian people is evident, and that is where *Brave-Hearted Woman* makes its mark.

Great Spirit in the Hole
Directed by Chris Spotted Eagle
USA, 1983

Great Spirit in the Hole, a potentially fascinating documentary on Indian prisoners returning to the mystical warp of their ancestors, seldom succeeds in capturing the viewer's interest, and, like many other films in this festival, it has little relevance to the discussion of racism. Its sole benefit is illustrating the ancient custom of the sweat lodge, which is initially fascinating, but cannot form the basis for an hour-long film.

The interviews conducted with the prisoners, while illuminating, grow tiresome and in the final analysis say little. On the whole, *Great Spirit in the Hole* serves as nothing more than a record of an ancient Indian rite, and is, at its best, merely educational.



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