

Indian casualties
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September 26, 1957

Mr. Jack Spears
Executive Secretary
Tulsa County Medical Society
b-9 Medical Arts Building
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Mr. Spears:

I am interested in your project of publishing in FILMS IN REVIEW an article on the manner in which the American Indian has been depicted in the motion picture.

Of course I realize that the film is a popular median, largely addressed to the juvenile audience, and that so few people in this country have had an opportunity to know Indians that the public has a great many falsified notions about this admirable people. Moreover, the white men have been engaged for 300 years or more in supressing and destroying the Indians, and their traditional review of these people is largely that of the propagandists for that conquest.

Moreover, the Indians who have loomed largely in the public mind in recent years are the Plains Indians, and so many people imagine that all Indians wore war bonnets, rode ponies, hunted buffalo, lived in tipis, and said "ugh!" I have already commented on these people in my latest radio programs for the Society of American Historians. Not so long ago the American Indian was regarded as a sentimental Hiawatha or as a red devil and satisfactory target for the rifles of doughty frontiersmen.

In most of the films I have seen a tremendous slaughter of Indians takes place. I have investigated the comparative casualties in Indian wars for those fights for which figures could be obtained from observers, and I find that (except in hand-to-hand conflict within an enclosure as at Crow Rock in 1869 when Sitting Bull's Sioux assaulted that natural fortress and killed thirty Crows, losing 18 Sioux and 14 wounded) Indian casualties seldom ran to more than two or three percent. I also found that in these Plains Indian fights the Indians killed five white men for every Indian killed, and wounded four white men for every Indian wounded. Yet the films would have us believe that the white fighters slaughtered hundreds of Indians. If you will consult my piece in the new compilation entitled THIS IS THE WEST