

The critics about Will Sampson

I. Murphy J. E., Murphy Sh. M. **Let My People Know: American Indian Journalism, 1828 – 1978.** – Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1981. P. 13, 143.

Some few genuine Indian actors surfaced, playing roles that quickly proved the dominance of white heroes...

Only in very recent years, with the emergence of strong Indian actors like Will Sampson and Raymond Tracey, has the image of Indians in film begun to turn away from the degrading stereotypes that formed the material of half century of filmmaking...

Producing radio and television tapes was only one segment of the work of the Navajo Film and Media Commission, begun in 1960 as a watchdog agency...The intent was to counteract the proliferating stereotypes and false pictures of Indians as portrayed in the establishment media... Filmmaking has been one outgrowth of this activity. Several other Indian groups likewise have gone into film production. Recognizing the power of the film medium, Indian filmmakers – along with such Indian actors as Will Sampson and Raymond Tracey – have turned to film as a way to counteracting the Hollywood stereotypes of Indians.

II. Will Sampson in “Buffalo Bill and the Indians”

*/from the book “The Pretend Indians: Images of Native Americans in the movies”.
1980. P. 45-47, 172, 176/*

...Of young actors, probably the best known is Will Sampson, Oklahoma Creek, At 6’5”... Sampson would seem an utterly unlikely candidate as a movie star. However, the physical requirements for an actor to portray “Chief” in the film adaptation of Ken Kesey’s “One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (1975) made him a natural selection. Will was everybody’s vision of the towering mute Indian. As a result of his excellent performance in this role, many felt that he would be the man to bring the media Native into contemporary life.

To date, he has failed to fulfill such high expectations, following through instead with a four-film contract to produce low-grade epics such as “Orca, the Killer Whale” (1977) and “The White Buffalo” (1977), the latter seeing him depicting Crazy Horse in alliance with Wild Bill Hickok to slaughter the sacred white buffalo of the Sioux. While these convolutions tend to highlight Sampson’s strong links to earlier rather than contemporary models of Native involvement in “Cuckoo’s Nest” and the potential of a projected television series, “Indians” (in which he plays the lead role as “Painted Bear”), indicate that the original anticipation of his impact may not have been entirely misplaced...

...While evolution of Native performance in film and television has not kept pace with that of music, it has the potential to catch up through the work of Charlie Hill and, possibly, Will Sampson.

... From this point on, “**Buffalo Bill and the Indians**” (1976) becomes a confrontation of myth with myth. And exactly as the reception committee waiting to welcome the new guest star to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show is deceived into ignoring the meekly undersized Sitting Bull (Frank Kaquitts) in favor of his gigantic interpreter William Halsey (Will Sampson), so the audience is lured into accepting the image it expects. Massive, impassive, and every inch the fearsome Geronimo of imagination, Halsey (a fictional character replacing the John Grass of history and Kopit’s play) takes the part of

the proud, noble savage currently worshipped. Authorized to speak through for the world-weary Sitting Bull, he logic-chops the opposition to ribbons at every turn, whether, provoking Buffalo Bill (Paul Newman) into displays of arrogant white superiority or picking historical holes in the hilariously inept scenario for the Little Big Horn play...

Halsey's persona as the image created by white guilt is given a savage twist when, after Sitting Bull's death, he is seen committing the final betrayal of impersonating his Chief in the gladiatorial combat in which Buffalo Bill contemptuously vanquishes his enemy...

III. From "History of Native Americans in Cinema":
http://www.lipmagazine.org/articles/revichurchill_35.htm

...The Creek actor Will Sampson was not even nominated for his far more accomplished performance as Chief Broom in *One Flew Over the Cuckoos' Nest* (1975). "Why should an Indian receive an award for playing an Indian?" demanded one director at the time. By the same token, why should Robert DeNiro, an actor of Italian descent, have received an award for his portrayal of another Italoamerican, Jake La Motta, in *Raging Bull* (1980)?

Although there is an entry for "Bugs Bunny" in the latest edition of Ephraim Katz's definitive *Film Encyclopedia*, there is none for Will Sampson, despite his prominent roles in more than a score of major movies including such box office hits as *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), *The White Buffalo* (1977), *Orca* (1977) and *Fish Hawk* (1980). Nor is there mention of Graham Greene, the fine Oneida actor who actually did win the Academy's supporting actor award for his work in *Dances With Wolves*, and whose accomplishments include remarkable performances in *Clearcut* (1991), *Thunderheart* (1992) and other films. Missing, too, is Gary Farmer, another Oneida, who has turned in equally exemplary efforts in *Powwow Highway* (1989) and *Dead Man* (1996), among others.

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