And of course this is why . . . he wanted beautiful girls, chorus girls, in his shows, because he thought this would give them something they didn't have down South and in the rural districts . . . —a smart showman.

Tucker also movingly describes how Micheaux helped him survive between pictures.

Carol Lawrence is to be commended for recording Freeman and Tucker in this documentary, because the film medium is a powerful vehicle in constructing history and forming images in the minds of people. She has made it possible for millions to learn something that “Hollywood” has yet to admit: blacks are people, no better or worse than any other folk.

—Charles C. Irby
Ames, Iowa

Editor's Note: As one of the viewers of The Last of the Caddoes, I invited David Gradwohl to write a review essay of the film. Although we are not in the habit of publishing such lengthy reviews, I believe the review will serve the membership, for our responsibility as an Association is to help eliminate social injustice (Charles C. Irby).

Ken Harrison, Producer. The Last of the Caddoes. 1982. 16mm film, 29 minutes, color, one-day rental $52.50; purchase $525.00, order #22180. Distributor: Phoenix Films, 468 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. (212/684-5910).

Several staff members and students in anthropology and Indian Studies programs at Iowa State University had the opportunity to view the film, The Last of the Caddoes, during the spring of 1984. The University's Media Resource Center had obtained the film on approval and sought our advice as to whether it should be purchased for on-campus classroom use and for rental to interest groups off campus. The film came with a respectable-looking pedigree: it was based on a short story by William Humphrey, an author of considerable repute in Texas; it was produced by Ken Harrison with funding from the Texas Committee for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and it was being distributed by Phoenix Films whose flyer advertised the film's subject area as "American Indian Folklore and Literature, Anthropology, Language Arts-Secondary, Social Studies,"
Phoenix Films touted the moving picture as "... an exploration of not only a part of our American Indian heritage but of the coming of age of a young boy as well. It captures the essence of life in the thirties for parents and child alike, while evoking the spirit and beauty of American folklore." Credits at the end of the film acknowledge assistance from the following institutions: Clarksville Wagon Club, Dallas Historic Preservation League, Dallas Museum of Natural History, East Texas University, El Centro College, Paris Junior College, Southern Methodist University Department of Anthropology, and Southern Methodist University Department of Fine Arts.

The Last of the Caddoes originally appeared as a short story in Esquire and was subsequently included in an anthology of William Humphrey's stories [A Time and Place. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, 1968) 179-208]. The storyline of the film closely follows that of the short story. Jimmy Hawkins, age 12, lives in the Red River Valley in Texas and is "crazy about Indians": he reads books about Indians, makes beadwork belts, and sews his own moccasins. One day Jimmy is impudent to his mother. The shrew-like woman slaps her son and shrieks that his bad behavior "must be the Indian in you coming out." Voila! Jimmy discovers he is part Indian on his father's side. Mrs. Hawkins is careful to point out that the Indian ancestry is not in her lineage. So Jimmy asks his father about their Indian ancestors and pointedly inquires, "Daddy, when did you stop being an Indian?" Daddy does not answer. But the Hawkins family soon takes off to visit grandfather Hawkins who is identified as "half Indian" and portrayed as a scruffy, unshaved, tobacco-spitting farmer.

Grandfather Hawkins is-surprised to find out that Jimmy knows of their Indian ancestry. He asks, "Who told you?" When Jimmy indicates that his mother let the fact slip out, grandfather Hawkins retorts defensively: "Well, sonny boy, our side of the family is ever bit as good as your mother's, and you can tell her I said so." He then disparages the Tyler kinfolk of Mrs. Hawkins. When Jimmy then asks about grandfather Hawkins' father, he finds out very little: "Well, he was not what you would call a big man. Neither was he a little man. More what you could call middling-sized. Bothered with stomach trouble all his life." Jimmy asks the tribe to which his great grandfather belonged. Grandfather Hawkins responds: "Oh. Well, I wouldn't know nothin about that. Indin, that's all I can tell you, boy." Grandfather Hawkins also expresses relief that somebody named Hawkins was "in the woodpile back somewheres along the line" because he would not want to go through life with a name Like George P. Crazy Horse. So much for the Hawkins family attitudes about Indians.

From his reading, Jimmy decides that his ancestors were Caddo
Indians who once resided in what is now Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Some of the books he had read suggested that the large earthen platform mounds in this region might have been built by prehistoric Caddo Indians. Voila! (Again). Grandfather Hawkins just happens to have one of those Indian earthworks on his farm. So Jimmy spends the summer at the farm and sets up his own little archaeological excavations on top of the mound. Somewhere Jimmy has learned to set up a grid system, to use various kinds of excavating tools, and to sift the excavated soil through fine mesh wire screen to recover small artifacts—perhaps he attended one of the public institutions of higher education credited in Harrison’s film. In no time at all, Jimmy is single-handedly fetching “goodies” out of the mound: pottery, stone tools, beads, and human bones. Most of the pottery vessels are miraculously complete. Human skulls are carefully placed on shelves within a burlap enclosure which Jimmy has built as a field laboratory on top of the mound. Jimmy picks up one of the skulls and exclaims “This could be my great-great grandfather!” Grandfather Hawkins is not particularly impressed with Jimmy’s treasure hunt: “The Indins, why, they were all so piss-pore they never hardly had enough to eat, much less any silver and gold. What have you found? Just what I told you you’d find. Nothing but skeletons and a lot of old broken crocks.”

What, indeed, has Jimmy found? Professional archaeological standards and ethics notwithstanding, Jimmy is in the process of searching for his identity and being transformed during the summer from a boy with “baby fat” to a man with thickened muscles and deepening voice. As part of this rite of passage, Jimmy takes on the name Snake-in-his-mother’s bosom. In the end, this is all that Mrs. Hawkins can stand. Although grandfather Hawkins sort of enjoys having his grandson around on the farm, and although Mr. Hawkins is typically ambivalent, Jimmy is forced to put the artifacts and skeletons back in the mound and backfill his excavations. As usual, Mrs. Hawkins’ demands reign rampant over the males in the Hawkins family. Jimmy forsakes his newly-acquired Indian name, says goodbye to the last of his Caddo ancestors, and resigns himself to being James Hawkins.

My immediate reaction after sitting through the film for half an hour was one of complete disbelief, dismay, and disgust. Was this indeed one of the worst films I had viewed in recent years? Not wanting to be intemperate, I viewed the film a second time. My initial feelings, however, were not abated and a number of vexing questions came to mind. Was “our” American Indian heritage being accurately portrayed? Were the Caddo people actually extinct? Was the essence of life for all people in the thirties really captured? Is that the essence of life today? While racism, racist folklore, and literature may have “spirit,” do they also have “beauty” as advertised in the Phoenix flyer? Should state
humanities boards sponsor racist films without any appropriate context? Should government funds be used, even inadvertently, to foster fallacious views of American history and pander to racist stereotypes? Should public institutions and sodalities allow their names to be credited to a film which portrays archaeology in unprofessional and unethical terms?

My questions and concerns will probably seem miniscule when compared to those of the extant Caddo when they find out they are extinct. Without debating all the nuances of "who is an Indian" and "who is a Caddo," suffice it to say that there are a good many people around today who identify or are identified as Caddo. Some are even relatively easy to find—they live in Caddo County, Oklahoma; others reside elsewhere in Oklahoma, Texas, and throughout the United States. It is estimated that there were some 8,500 Caddos in 1690 and that their numbers, along with those of most American Indian groups, were drastically reduced during the early historic period; by 1910 there were approximately 550; and as of 1978 about 2,000 Caddo were enumerated [Douglas R. Parks, Margot Liberty, and Andrea Ferenci. "Peoples of the Plains." Anthropology on the Great Plains. W.R. Wood and M. Liberty, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980) 287-289]. Following World War II and the establishment of the Indian Land Claims Commission a good deal of research on Caddo Indian lands and history was accomplished. [See, for example: David A. Horr, ed. Caddo Indians, I. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974)]. A more recent statement indicates that "In the 1970s, the Caddo descendants in Oklahoma numbered around 800. Although they had essentially been assimilated into the rest of society, they had retained many of their songs and dances and still conducted traditional ceremonies throughout the year" [Barbara A. Leitch. A Concise Dictionary of Indian Tribes from North America. (Algonac, MI: Reference Publications Inc., 1979)]. So much for the extant Caddo—except to comment that if they are still conducting traditional ceremonies, singing Caddo songs, and dancing Caddo dances, I would quibble with the term "assimilated" in terms of their present ethnic identity.

With my personal and professional questions about this film unresolved, I decided to write a friend and former teacher of mine, E. Mott Davis (Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin), who is a well-known proponent of professional standards and ethics and also an experienced researcher in the Caddoan culture area. He forwarded my letter of concern to James F. Veninga, Executive Director of the Texas Committee for the Humanities. Veninga responded to Davis on 22 February 1984 and sent a carbon copy of the letter directly to me.

In his letter Veninga made the following points: (1) The Texas Committee for the Humanities selects projects based on the credentials of the applicants but the final products may differ considerably from the
original proposals; (2) The film in question was meant to be an adaptation of a short story by William Humphrey, a person who is “certainly recognized as a leading Texas writer”; (3) The film was not meant “to enlighten Indian studies or archeology”; (4) The film is essentially within the disciplinary domain of literature, and its myths, archetypes, and images may contradict history and scholarship; (5) The film had received some positive reviews as a piece of fiction; and (6) He did not know the reason why *The Last of the Caddoes* was being advertised and distributed as something relevant to American Indian studies and archaeology. Veninga’s letter concluded:

In short, I get the feeling that the film has been promoted in a misleading way. Whether or not the film adequately captures Humphrey’s sketch of the mind of a young lad growing up in East Texas in the 1930s is the real question. I have no doubt that such a mind concluded an image of Indians that we would find abhorrent today. But perhaps knowing that mind—and its images and myths—helps us know the distance we have traveled.

I appreciate the stand Veninga takes concerning the degree to which the Texas Committee for the Humanities can monitor each project which it funds and the fact that freedom of expression in literature and films must be respected. I am, however, not satisfied with this justification for the film in terms of the context in which it was produced and is being distributed. I am furthermore not heartened by the apparent refusal of the Texas Committee for the Humanities to take steps to rectify the situation. Given this lack of action on the part of the Texas Committee for the Humanities, I can only resort to this review and other attempts to bring the matter to the attention of my professional colleagues as well as American Indians with whom I work.

I will not debate the question of whether the film and short story are good or enlightening literary pieces. My colleagues in literature can determine that point. Even though the film is racist, it could have some uses in the classroom if the context were clearly indicated. On occasions I use racist writings in my classes as do my colleagues in literature and propaganda analysis; but in those instances the evidential nature and social impacts of these pieces are carefully discussed and the writings are offered as examples of biased positions. There are no such explications in *The Last of the Caddoes* or its accompanying flyers. Veninga’s comment that the film is not meant for anthropologists, archaeologists, and Indians is not a satisfactory disclaimer. Would the Texas Committee for the Humanities consider reproducing Ku Klux Klan materials, without editorial comment, and then tell black people, Southeast Asians, Catholics, and others not to use the source because it was not “being promoted as something relevant” to them? Or would it be appropriate to produce, without context, a film on the book *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler.
(certainly recognized as a leading German author) and then hope that Jews would not be upset because the production was intended for other audiences? Admittedly, my analogies are overstated; but the moral and ethical implications are not.

From a production standpoint, the film is not without some good points. It does appear to be a faithful rendition of the original short story by William Humphrey. The cinematography is excellent and careful attention was given to appropriate settings dating to the 1930s. The houses, furniture, clothing, and automobiles are all accurate for the time being depicted. The radios, and the music coming from them, are genuine enough to strike a nostalgic feeling in one who was also a boy growing up in the thirties. The acting was also quite good in that the characters are convincing: Mrs. Hawkins is a believable bitch, Mr. Hawkins is an insipid wimp, grandfather Hawkins is a credibly untutored but pragmatic old man, and Jimmy manifests the curiosity and intelligence of a bright young boy who wants to grow up and find out about himself. Unfortunately, as cast in the story, the boy’s pubescent dreams and potential discoveries are crushed by the insensitive world around him.

It is unfortunate that the funds from the Texas Committee for the Humanities along with the direction and production abilities of Ken Harrison could not have been used for a more productive film representing concerns in the humanities. The film is based upon fantasies about American Indians and the so-called assimilation of ethnic groups in American society. The stereotypes of Indians are essentially negative and degrading. Racist images are promulgated without labelling them as such. Furthermore the film portrays the discipline of archaeology in an inaccurate manner. The image of an amateur digging into a prehistoric mound will not further the humanities dimension of professional archaeology in the realm of cultural resource management, site preservation, and dialogue with American Indians on the ethics of exhuming burials in the name of “science.” Perhaps we should not expect William Humphrey to have been concerned about these matters in the 1960s. But in the 1980s we certainly should expect state humanities boards to be more sensitive in sponsoring projects with racist overtones and in portraying the humanities disciplines which they are entrusted to promote. Otherwise, to use Veninga’s parlando, we can be sure we have traveled no distance at all. Or we have perhaps made the journey in vain.

In sum, I cannot recommend the film for colleagues in anthropology, American Indian Studies, education, or other disciplines represented in the National Association for Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies. As produced and distributed, the film works against the goals of ethnic and racial understanding toward which we strive.

—David M. Gradwohl
Iowa State University