

PRODUCER NOTES FOR THE FILM "LEGEND LAKE: A TALKING CIRCLE"

By Mark Anthony Rolo

The film "Legend Lake: A Talking Circle" has finally emerged as the kind of film I had hoped to create for some time. Producing a documentary film is always, it seems, a toss of the dice. You cannot script a documentary film. You cannot tell people who are characters in a documentary what to say. As a filmmaker in this form you are at the mercy of human reality.

When the seeds for this project were planted a number of months ago our goal was to explore the relationship between "place" and people. In particular, how do land, water and other natural resources affect communities? And depending upon these relationship dynamics we wanted to know how communities affect the land they share.

At the Menominee Indian reservation in North-Central Wisconsin community conflict is perpetuated with each generation. Clashes in culture, class and race build up over time like layers of molten rock. The behaviors of discrimination get passed on, but never the reasons why. History is rarely examined in depth.

Historically, the core conflict between Native Americans and whites on this continent has been rooted in the land. Opposing worldviews about "ownership" of land seem as irreconcilable as spirituality, cultural values and notions of community. Ironically, as assimilation continues to make deep impact on tribal communities – fueled by tribes needing to buy into corporate structures of survival over sustenance – different interests in the use of land and its natural resources have created more tension between Indians and whites.

The struggle over the Menominee tribal land and water serves as a great reminder and symbol of the ongoing, deeply-seeded struggle between Indians and whites. The nuances and layers of this truly great historical conflict clearly posed a huge challenge for us in wanting to tell this story about the Menominee and the mostly white owners of private lots on Legend Lake. The majority of Indian and non-Indian audiences know little about Indian history, Indian law and federal Indian policy. Our goal was to bring people on both sides of this struggle together to have a meaningful, respectful dialogue that might lead to some sphere of potential reconciliation. And in order to achieve this goal we knew we had to tell the story about the struggle from a human perspective. Talking heads, charts, graphs and numbers could never catch the real drama – never create strong, impacting resonance with viewers.

I believe we achieved in this film something that I have not seen in my years of covering Indian country as a print and broadcast journalist. To bring together community stakeholders on both sides of the racial and political border was in itself a success, in my view. But we did more than that. We were able, through human story and human emotion, to give a sense of "life" and importance to issues such as tribal termination, tribal restoration, county governance and individual rights and responsibilities regarding financial duty and stewardship of local natural resources.

Legend Lake: A Talking Circle can be a guiding light for other, diverse communities facing conflict-resolution issues concerning land. My hope is that this film will engage communities beyond the Menominee and Legend Lake property owners. The film has the potential to appeal to even the most fringe viewer, those not directly affected by land rights issues. And this could be an even greater success of the film – finding new and larger audiences that do in fact, matter when it comes to bridging divided communities through meaningful discourse.

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