

***The Canadians* (1961): No Singing Please**

By Ron Smith

There was a time when Hollywood and some American filmmakers were infatuated with images of Canada and The Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Of course, for many cinephiles, Hunt Stromberg's 1935 wilderness operetta *Rose Marie* is the most recognizable—but there were many more. The genealogy of the cinematic Mountie can be traced, via literary antecedents, to Hollywood's production of 575 films set in Canada between 1907 and 1956, most of which portrayed Canada in a stereotypical fashion (Gittings 1998). In these films, Canada was basically about moose, Mounties, snow and muskeg. Hollywood director Burt Kennedy's first feature film might be considered as an extension of that sub-genre.

The Canadians (1961) is a film that seems at first glance to lack the usual Hollywood glitter. The opening sequence of Canadian landscapes and towns might suggest, to some, a National Film Board documentary. A low budget movie that loosely uses the background of the Cypress Hills massacre as its narrative foundation, Burt Kennedy's first feature length film (he wrote the story as well) is relatively short (under two hours), and with the exception of an aging Robert Ryan, has few name stars. What sets it apart from the usual Mountie fare is its effort at geographical authenticity and a link to an historical event that prompted the Canadian Government to provide a police mandate for the Mounties in the Canadian West. It suffers, as did other Mountie sub-genre films, from a somewhat pedestrian script and an inability to divorce itself completely from the stereotypical American Western. *The Canadians* did, however, get the geography right—the film's introduction notes that it was shot in the Cypress Hills of Southern Saskatchewan. Although the hats were questionable (the fur hats look as if they had been rented from the Paramount Costume Department—shades of *Northwest Mounted Police*, 1940), the low keyed department of the police force towards the indigenous North American tribes provided some historical validity not seen in the other films. In spite of these attempts to provide historical accuracy for the film, *The Canadians* is, in the end, a seriously flawed representation of the history of the Canadian West.

Because some of the film was being shot in Saskatchewan (which cost \$400,000), there was pressure from the federal and provincial governments to have the RCMP give it their tacit approval (Berton 185). Deputy Commissioner George McClellan, who was made a senior technical advisor on the film, later recalled that although the film was supposedly based on the Hills massacre “Twentieth Century Fox weren’t satisfied with that alone. They had to get Sitting Bull into Canada with his several thousand warriors...Actually Sitting Bull didn’t arrive until 1879 but for the purposes of this turkey of a picture, Twentieth Century-Fox made them contemporary for each other. The result was an absolute mishmash of history” (Berton 185). McClellan seems to be mistaken about the date of Sitting Bull's arrival, as both Robert Utley (1993) and Ian Anderson (2000) have the Sioux chief on Canadian soil in 1877.

To compensate for the questionable history shown in the film, Kennedy must have felt compelled to connect with his Canadian audiences. The musical introduction to the film, called “This is Canada”, might go down in the annals of film scores as the most preposterous piece of music ever foisted on film audiences. Dated film footage of the Canadian parliament buildings and other regional landscapes provided a visual curtain for Canadian opera star Teresa Stratus as she sings the rather bland “This is Canada.” The film’s story was questionable enough without this seemingly out-of-place musical sequence, but in retrospect, the lyrical introduction was more akin to a dirge than a film score. Stratus, who had a role in the film as a captured white woman living with the Sioux, blesses audiences with a “prairie aria” later in the film. It would be hard to imagine, with such melodic interludes during the film, that the Canadian West would ever be the same again.

Critics of the film have been hard on its lack of historical accuracy, and rightly so, but the film’s visual authenticity is in marked contrast to the other Mountie films. *Northwest Mounted Police* was filmed in Hollywood, *Saskatchewan* (1954) in Alberta’s foothills and mountains, and *Pony Soldier* (1952) in Arizona. *The Canadians*, on the other hand, provides one with an authentic representation of the geography of the region. In addition, Robert Ryan has the grizzled look of a frontier police officer challenged by the hardships of duty. In fact, Burt Kennedy mentioned that Ryan’s role was a composite of a well-respected Mountie Inspector, probably James Walsh (telephone interview,

2000). Compared to Rosenberg's slanderous *Saskatchewan*, *The Canadians* provides audiences with a realistic view of the Canadian Prairies. But like its cinematic Mountie cousins of an earlier era, *The Canadians* ventures south of the medicine line (Canadian-American border) to borrow ingredients from the Western genre. The film was promoted in a "cowboys and Indians" fashion with posters proclaiming "The Human Stampede at Buffalo Cliffs" and "The Ambush of Death" (*The Canadians—The Mounted Giant*. 4).

The Canadians would be the last of the Mountie films to place the story in the late nineteenth century. The 1960s were challenging the traditional Western with a new type of frontier saga. The "Mountie Western," which had been part of a film genre where the good guys wore white hats and the bad guys had a five o'clock shadow, was now on its way out as popular film entertainment. Films such as *The Wild Bunch* (1969) and *Soldier Blue* (1970) would be part of the new breed of Revisionist Westerns whose stories were more social commentaries about contemporary history than of the "Old West" (*Soldier Blue* has been viewed as an allegorical representation of the Mai Lai Massacre in Vietnam). One Mountie film managed to sneak into the Revisionist era, and it could not be classified as a Western. *Death Hunt* (1981) starring Lee Marvin and Charles Bronson was set in the Canadian North during the 1920s. Marvin's character seemed more like a take on Clint Eastwood's "Dirty Harry" than of a dashing Mountie. Will Chabun, a feature writer with the *Regina Leader-Post*, in a 1990 interview with the then curator of the RCMP museum in Regina, Malcolm Lake, noted "It took perverse liberties with the story of Albert Johnson, the 'Mad Trapper' of the Yukon". In Lake's opinion, it is "the worst Mountie movie ever made" (Chabun). In this fantasy about the Force, the American producers, defying all historical evidence, turned Johnson into a sympathetic character, hounded by crazy Mounties (Chabun). There seemed little need or opportunity for the perpetuation of the Mounted Police stories and, given their track record as weak historical representations, it might have been time for a rest.

The fact that Mountie films made it out of Hollywood is interesting enough in itself. Selling stories about Canada to audiences in the United States and elsewhere was never easy. The key to their success was to have a strong American connection. Richard Attenborough's *Grey Owl*, released in 1999, is a good example of a film that failed to connect to audiences in the United States. Its limited release schedule and quick video

distribution indicated that large scale cinematic productions with a Canadian theme do not play well in the United States market unless there is a strong American Connection (*The Hurricane* [1999] is a good example). *Grey Owl* was too Canadian (a story about an Englishman who takes on the persona of a Canadian Indian)—and Attenborough, perhaps, too honest an historian. Such cannot be said about Kennedy and his contemporaries—their tales about Canada were all too American.

Burt Kennedy would go on to become a very able film producer and screenwriter. His later films included *The Rounders* (1965), *Dirty Dingus Magee* (1970) and *The Train Robbers* (1973). Some of his earlier work included writing scripts for the popular 1960s television series *Combat*. His book *Hollywood Trail Boss* (1997) has received favourable reviews for its insights into the making of Hollywood Westerns, but Kennedy's notions about the Canadian West were on much shakier ground. Kennedy was candid about the legacy of *The Canadians* as film history. His story for the film took liberties with the historical time frame. Kennedy indicated that he had looked at two historical volumes (he could not recall the titles) on the Mounted Police to get some sense of the history of the period, but said that one of the major factors motivating him to do the film were the uniforms: "I liked those scarlet coats plus the fact there had been few major films about the Mounties" (telephone interview, 2000). Kennedy agreed that Pierre Berton's criticisms about the film were valid—the timing of the Sioux's arrival into Canada didn't mesh with the Cypress Hills Massacre upon which the film's story was loosely connected. Kennedy also supported Berton's accusation that RCMP officials were upset with a scene where the prisoners escape from Mountie custody. According to Berton, Mountie officials were upset with this episode in the film. Mounted Police spokespersons suggested it was ridiculous to think that the police would not have searched the prisoners gear for arms etc. Kennedy recalled that "Harvison's major concern about the picture was the hiding of the gun and the prisoners' escape" (telephone interview, 2000). Harvison, it seemed, wanted these scenes eliminated from the picture. Kennedy noted "his only objection was the gun and no singing" (telephone interview, 2000). The picture's final cut had both.

Kennedy admitted that he had little control over the film's production and the final cut of the movie. Berton notes in *Hollywood's Canada* that "Burt Kennedy, the director,

tried to wiggle out of the responsibility for the deception in a letter to Commissioner Clifford Harvison in which he claimed that he did not have a chance to view the finished movie, as the major part of the technical work on the film was done in London" (185). The studio, he said, "had me pretty much between the devil and the deep blue sea on some story changes" (Bert185). Kennedy suggested that the criticisms were valid, adding "The film was subsidized by the British under the E.D.Y. plan, and they insisted on a British crew, etc" (telephone interview, 2000). One of the positive outcomes of this association, according to Kennedy, was that it enabled him to work with cameraman Arthur Ibbetson, who later worked with David Lean on *Lawrence of Arabia* (telephone interview, 2000).

The Canadians was, according to Kennedy, a reasonably accurate representation of the late nineteenth century Canadian West, more so than some of the earlier Mountie films. He liked the fact that his film had a great deal of geographical authenticity given that it was filmed in Southern Saskatchewan and the Cypress Hills and, like other Mounted Police films, it was promoted as being based on a true story (the Cypress Hills Massacre). This connection, however, had been challenged by the RCMP technical advisor associated with the film, who had stated that the Sioux represented in the film had arrived in Canada about five years too early (the massacre took place in 1873). Kennedy noted that the historical time period was a composite of the late 1870s. He mused that the film was his first and stated that "if directors need to serve any sort of cinematic punishment for the lack of quality in their films, they should have to re-examine the first film that they ever made" (telephone interview, 2000).

Kennedy admitted that his first feature length film was not one of his most memorable cinematic efforts. In his book, *Hollywood Trail Boss*, Kennedy calls *The Canadians* a disaster (9). Kennedy noted in his interview that he was not about to do a remake of *Rose Marie's* singing Mounties (Commissioner Harvison had made it clear that he did not want to see another *Rose Marie*), stating that the idea to include the musical interludes provided by Teresa Stratus were not his. Stratus, according to Kennedy, was dating Spyros Skouras, head of Fox Studios at the time, and she had to be in the picture (telephone interview, 2000). Kennedy re-emphasised that this was his "first film," implying that he might have done a better job and had more control with the picture had

the film been made later on in his directorial career. "Good directors," he said, "learn on the job" (telephone interview, 2000).

As with the other Mounted Police films, the representation of Canadian history and the Mounties never did quite measure up to the historical events as they had occurred. It is true that *Sitting Bull* fled across the medicine line to avoid being prosecuted by American authorities. It is true, to a degree, that the Mounted Police, particularly Inspector James Walsh, befriended the Sioux. But in the end, the historical dates and the claim that the film was based on true historical events were distorted. Kennedy, it must be said, does make a reasonably honest attempt to show the plight of the Sioux at the beginning of the picture. The Sioux Chief, Four Horns, states somewhat forcibly that Sioux women are tired, and the Sioux warriors are without bullets for hunting. It does not mask, however, the generally menacing demeanor of the Sioux. The violence in the film pays homage to the Western genre, and the inclusion of the out-of-date Cypress Hills massacre connection to the film story is the trigger that sets in motion the war-like posturing of the Sioux. Kennedy's use of this narrative device, while easily placed within traditional Western formulas, is historically out of place in Canada. Although Kennedy might have availed himself of historical information, the exploitation and promotional material for the film confirmed that the viewing public was being presented with a fictive account of the Mounties exploits. Much of that fiction involves the manner in which the Sioux were portrayed in the film.

The geographical credibility of the film could not hide the cultural and historical distortions in the plot. Twentieth Century Fox Exhibitor's Campaign Manual for 1960-61 promoted the film as "Here Come The Canadians...Flinging Their Fiery Challenge At The Sioux Nation Custer Couldn't Stop", but the story focuses more on the rampaging American ranchers than it does the Sioux (1). The poster ad also takes liberties with the geography stating "Filmed in the towering timberlands that saw it happen"—an assertion that is not quite true (1). Saskatchewan is mostly prairie and the Cypress Hills, while wooded in spots, could not accurately be described as "towering timberlands". Walsh's legendary exploits with the Mounted Police are not ignored, as the film's promotional synopsis states that Inspector William Gannon (Robert Ryan), portrayed in the film as a Walshesque historical composite, is to "select 2 men and intercept the Sioux and deliver

an ultimatum. He is to tell them the Queen is happy that they have chosen to live in their land, and they will protect them from their enemies as long as they remain in peace. But, if they do not keep the peace they will be driven back to the U.S” (1). This historical representation is generally sound, but when one adds to this scenario the Montana ranchers (based on the American wolfers looking for stolen horses in 1873 that resulted in the Cypress Hills Massacre), the story is essentially five years out of sync. The promotional blurb mentions, “Frank Boone (John Dehner), a Montana rancher, accompanied by three gunhands (a connection to the traditional Western formula)... come in search of horses Boone believes were stolen from him by the Indians. They sight a small Indian camp and 7 loose horses. Boone and his men massacre the Indians and take the horses” (1). As Kennedy suggests, the film was based on a true historical account, but the history and the film advertising is subjected to some questionable fabrications.

The promotional literature for the film also subjected audiences to large doses of historical ethnocentrism. This would be no “revisionist” Western. One advertisement mentioned “Theirs [the Mounties’] Was The Courage That Stood Against The Killers Custer Couldn’t Stop” (Theirs was the Courage 3). There was no mention that the Sioux were defending their traditional homeland and culture, nor the fact that Custer, Sheridan and some American government officials were bent on exterminating the Sioux and other Native American tribes. American historians such as Jeffry Wert (1996) and Stephen Ambrose (1975), in their biographies of Custer make, it clear that the American government's policies against the Sioux bordered on racism. The Native Americans portrayed in the film were tainted by the stereotypes of Indians seen in most traditional Westerns, more than by historical truth. That the promotional literature for the film constantly referred to the Sioux as “killers” suggested that the accuracy of the historical research was on shaky ground. Although historical sources for the period were pre-revisionist, they would have certainly presented Native Americans in a much more balanced historical context. Historians such as Raymond Billington (a student of Frederick Jackson Turner) and Walter Prescott Webb would have been available to Kennedy and others, yet were apparently ignored for a “dime novel” version of history.

The newspaper advance copy for the film didn't fare much better, and confirmed the somewhat dubious historical accuracy of the film, noting that "*The Canadians* is the true story of three gallant men of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, the way they confronted the dangerous leader of the Sioux nation who had just annihilated General Custer at the Battle of Bull Run, and made him obey the law of Canada" (Fast-paced 5). Not only was the claim a distortion, given the film's story (most of the film was about the American rustlers), Sitting Bull and his fellow chiefs would have been surprised to know that they had just taken part in one of the major battles of the Civil War. Fox had not only failed to grasp Canadian history, they couldn't seem to get their own history correct either. With such questionable advance publicity, Kennedy was right to suspect that this film was going to be a cinematic disaster. The final blow to the film's historical credibility might have been the closing text of the Fox advance copy 'The fast-paced north country...' which served up another stereotype of Canada's geography and culture: "Filmed in the Frozen wastelands of Saskatchewan, Canada, in all kinds of weather, this brilliantly photographed Cinema-Scope Deluxe Color production was directed by Burt Kennedy, who also authorized the screenplay" (5). The promo concludes with "Producer Herman E. Webber overcame many physical and natural obstacles to bring this adventure to the screen. 'The Canadians' under his supervision emerges as one of the great outdoor pictures of the year" (5). What they could not overcome were the questionable historical representations.

The distortions were clear. The film story should have been set in 1877, but the Cypress Hills Massacre parallel, of course, spreads the story's events over a period of five years. Ryan's character, as Kennedy alluded, is a composite of Walsh, Irvine, and/or Macleod. Kennedy's script certainly attempted to convey the strength and integrity of a small detachment of Mounted Police. Ryan's instructions to the Sioux were historically accurate, but the placement of events and the Sioux's warlike posturing negated the "based on a true story" cinematic perspective. In actual fact, the Sioux's demeanor was anything but warlike. Earnest Chambers in his *The Royal Northwest Mounted Police: A Corps History* provides an interesting glimpse at the meetings of the NWMP and the Sioux. He notes that

On the morning of the 31st, the assistant Commissioner [Irvine] started for the camp...accompanied by Inspector Walsh and Sub-Inspectors Clark and Allen. Irvine was much impressed with Sitting Bull...Irvine addressing the Indians...remarked 'You need not be alarmed. The Americans cannot cross the line after you. You and your families can sleep sound and need not be afraid.' (50)

Walsh had informed Sitting Bull that Irvine was the highest representative of the Great Mother at present in the country. Chambers mentioned that Irvine was surprised later that night to receive a surprise visitor in his tent. Chambers mentioned that "He [Sitting Bull] sat on the Assistant Commissioner's bed until an early hour in the morning, telling him in a subdued tone his many grievances against the "Long Knives"(50). It would be hard to believe that these rather harried Sioux were "The Killers That Custer Couldn't Stop."

Kennedy's film, in particular, uses the image of a small band of Mounted officers confronting the warlike Sioux. All of these Mountie sagas set in The Canadian West had tended to portray the Sioux as invading warriors from the south. The truth was the exact opposite. Sitting Bull and the Sioux were on the run trying to avoid the U.S. Army. Their trek across the Northern Plains was made to avoid capture. By the time they crossed the medicine line into Canada, they were a rag-tag and starving nation. In *Northwest Mounted Police*, *Saskatchewan*, *Pony Soldier* and *The Canadians*, film audiences saw the Sioux and Canadian Natives, for the most part, portrayed as war-like adversaries. In a broader cultural context, these representations reinforced the "legacy of conquest" theory that seemed to have influenced the study of Western American history, particularly of the frontier. It was a perspective that certainly had become entrenched within the Western genre. When the Mounted Police first came in contact with the Sioux, they were not confronted with an image of a Native people trying to overrun the Dominion. Frontier reporter John Finerty had noted the NWMP delivering food and clothing to Sitting Bull's people at Fort Walsh (Anderson 221). A report in the *Chicago Times* about the Sioux's plight in Canada did not mention that Sitting Bull's warriors were overrunning Canada; rather, the report noted that "It was only the intense humanity of Major Walsh that kept the wretched people from eating their horses" (Anderson 221). Fox publicity material must have been in the form of "pulp fiction." Promotional material for the film couldn't seem to move beyond the dime novel images of the 1870s American West.

Utley's account of Walsh's meeting with the Sioux is at odds with the film's depiction of Ryan's Inspector Gannon and the Sioux chiefs. The film's promotional material suggested that "He [Gannon] brought back the victory they said no man could win" (Here come. 1). If one adds to this the description of the Sioux chief, Four Horns, "[h]e spoke for the Sioux-and the white earth trembled", it is clear that Kennedy and Fox were, cinematically, altering the peaceful relationship that existed between the Mounties and the Sioux (1). The "us versus them" mentality portrayed at times throughout the film could have been an episode from American frontier history. The Canadian West, however, had avoided the Washita Creek-like massacres that had occurred in the United States, actions initiated by the American government which would eventually precipitate Indian reprisals such as Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn. Yet Fox was firm in their assertion that *The Canadians* was based on a true story. Any thread of historical authenticity was quickly eliminated with exploitation copy such as "...white man pitted against Indian...This action packed drama will thrill you as three gallant men pit their wits against the entire Sioux nation and gain a tragic and stunning victory" (Outdoor lure 6). Kennedy was not clear on his historical sources for the film, but somewhere in his research, the Walsh story surfaced. Kennedy himself had stated that the Ryan character was based on this Mountie (he could recall the name of the officer specifically) whose exploits had become famous by his meetings with Sitting Bull. Written accounts of the Walsh-Sioux meeting put this friendship in a much clearer perspective (telephone interview, 2000). The charismatic James Morrow Walsh's understanding relationship with Sitting Bull and the Sioux was the factual basis for the film's claim to historical accuracy.

Spotted Eagle, one of Sitting Bull's chiefs, noted to Walsh that they had been hounded by the Long Knives and that for the sake of the women and children they had no choice but to seek sanctuary in the far northland (Turner 78). The image of warlike natives in these films was way off the historical mark. The Canadian tribes had come to respect the Mounted Police and the Canadian government's paternalism. The Sioux, according to Robert Utley, knew about the "Great White Mother" who governed in "benevolent and wise contrast to the Great Father in the United States" (184). Two written accounts point to Walsh's first meeting with the Sioux leader, and they clearly

convey the symbolism associated with the Force's strength of character. To both the American and Canadian Natives, the Mounties symbolized bravery and trust, attributes which they greatly admired. Utley notes that Spotted Eagle, whose stature had come to rival Crazy Horse's, spoke to the redcoats. According to Utley, Spotted Eagle mentioned, "They had arrived at the village of Sitting Bull...and never had white men dared approach this close, as if it did not exist" (185). Turner, in describing the same scene, mentions that Spotted Eagle had for the first time in his life "seen white men (soldiers or scouts) walk into Sitting Bull's circle and settle down with such lack of concern" (76).

These recorded accounts of this fearless action by the Mounties never translated into a specific story about Walsh's exploits. Walsh, himself, would have been an interesting character to portray, but Hollywood settled for a composite. Utley described him as a man of medium build with dark hair who displayed a character of vigor and flamboyance: "He struck some as another Custer" (186). Utley draws an interesting parallel:

Inclined like Custer to romanticism, Walsh nonetheless brought to his mission a more informed sympathetic view of Indians. He looked on Sitting Bull as grievously wronged by the United States government...In the first of many meetings, the Lakota chief and the Queen's police officer laid the groundwork for mutual trust and respect and finally true friendship. For the first time in his life, Sitting Bull met a white man he would come to appreciate, a sentiment that would be reciprocated. (186)

Robert Ryan, as Kennedy had implied, was playing the role of Walsh under an alias. Two earlier films had also drawn on Walsh-like attributes for their hero roles. Alan Ladd, for example, in *Saskatchewan* is a Mountie who understands the Native culture, and in *Pony Soldier* it is Tyrone Power's courage that impresses the Crees. Yet, little if anything in these films points to any concrete historical event as the basis for the film's story. It is not an historical event that they are chronicling but rather the qualities that have come to symbolize the Mounted Policeman. Utley, in describing such qualities, could have scripted them for the producers and directors of these films. He noted the characteristics that guided the Force in their duties: "fairness, justice, firmness, courage,

tolerance, kindness, honesty, and, of great consequence in light of the record of U.S. officials, a resolve to make good on all promises" (189). It wasn't so much that the films "were based on a true story;" rather, they had come to represent or symbolize those virtues associated with "the true character of the Mounted Police." Kennedy's chronicling of historical events in the film can certainly be questioned, but his Inspector Gannon (Robert Ryan) might have been recognizable to Walsh's contemporaries.

One issue that these films ignored completely was the attitude of the American government towards Native Americans, particularly the Sioux. Those attitudes would be left for later revisionist films such as *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) and *Little Big Man* (1970), stories that confronted the political and social issues affecting Native Americans. According to Utley, a pictograph made by the Sioux of the meeting between Walsh and an American contingent led by General Terry to discuss the status of Sitting Bull had found its way into the hands of one of the American government's chief architects of Indian Policy, General Sheridan, who endorsed the pictograph with the same sensitivity that had symbolized his understanding of his Sioux adversaries: "I attach no more interest to these than the drawings on a slate of a boy 12 years old" (198).

The Canadians, interestingly enough, is a film that became part of the transitional phase between the stereotypical Western genre and the revisionist perspective of the West. In the decade that followed *The Canadians*, revisionist history would begin to question the "winning of the West" mentality that had influenced American frontier scholarship. Kennedy's later Western films displayed a keen sense of place; that is, they tended to create an environment that fit the story and the characters. His films showed the dust and the dirt of the prairie and American Southwest landscapes that formed the backgrounds for his stories. *The Canadians* captured that geographical sensitivity very well. It was, in fact, the film's major strength—the Southern Saskatchewan terrain was real and it provided a true historical backdrop for the unfolding of the story. Where the film goes awry is in its depiction of the Sioux. It is clear in the film that Kennedy attempted to put a more caring and more humane face on the character of the Sioux, but the war paint on the Sioux warriors could not hide his ties to the Western genre. In spite of Kennedy's attempts to feature Stratus as a white woman who has grown to accept the Sioux culture, Fox promoted her characterization in typical ethnocentric fashion noting

“The White Squaw...torn between red man and white” (Theirs was the courage 3). Canadian historians have generally agreed that white people proved to be more troublesome than Natives were, and Kennedy’s use of the Cypress Hills massacre as inspiration for the story reinforces this fact. The relationship between Mountie and Native was basically one of “paternalistic co-existence”: all would live peacefully under the care of “The Great White Mother.” In *The Canadians*, however, Kennedy could not completely move beyond the notion that Native Peoples were still adversaries.

Kennedy was able to temper the traditional Indian stereotype in the film (shown through the eyes of a white woman captured by the Sioux), but in the end, he could have made better use of historical research for the film, particularly in showing the Sioux’s desperation and anxiety over dwindling food and shelter. In the film the Sioux still gave the appearance of a nation that was defiant and unwilling to yield to authority. In actual fact, many Native American nations (such as the Cheyenne and Nez Perce) were attempting to find ways of adjusting to the settlement of the Plains and the Pacific Northwest. Sitting Bull, after the Little Big Horn, was trying to come to terms with this changing prairie landscape. The Sioux had fled to Canada to seek refuge, yet Kennedy in his film had them stalking the Mounties as if on the verge of a full-scale uprising. The location could have easily have been Monument Valley. Kennedy fell back on the formulas that had become standard fare within the Western film genre, which generally emphasized the conquest of the wilderness and the subordination of nature in the name of civilization. These plot lines had continued to be rather simple—good versus evil, rugged individualist versus the unknown, and settlers versus Native Americans, who were portrayed as inhuman savages. *The Canadians* would continue to be haunted by historical newspeak. A television promotion suggested that “This action-packed drama will thrill you as three gallant men pit their wills against the entire Sioux nation and gain a tragic and stunning victory” (Outdoor lure 6). This was Canadian history according to Hollywood.

Promoting the film to the public would continue a legacy of inane images about Canada and the Mounted Police. All Hollywood publicists for these Mounted Police epics must have been required to take “Images of Canada #101,” for they all seemed to churn out the same type of advertising ideas. *The Canadians* offered outdoorsy appeal

that suggested hunting, camping, and kerosene lamps. One of the promotional tips offered: “Arrange a tie-in with stores that sell camping equipment outfits, and supply them with stills and posters of *The Canadians*” (Promotion tips offer 6). The “Indian trinket” syndrome was also part of Fox’s campaign alerting promoters to “contact your local jewelry outlets and have them arrange during your playdates to promote Indian type pins, rings, along with pictures and posters of *The Canadians*” (Promotion tips offer 6). One promotion was on dangerous ground. Fox suggested that an essay contest be tied in with local schools using Canada and its history as the subject. The follow up was to invite teachers and special groups to a film screening. Fox might have had an awful lot of explaining to do about their interpretation of Canadian history.

Kennedy, in the end, sensed that his film was in the same class as the earlier Mounted Police films that were made. He had implied that his film was a studio picture over which he had little or no control. Kennedy could be criticized for a rather suspect historical script, but the final film editing and promotion had fallen to others. *The Canadians* was not a new breed of Mountie story; it was a continuation of the same type of questionable historical representation of the Canadian West. But perhaps that should not have been all that surprising. Kennedy had viewed a number of the earlier Mountie films noting “I liked *Northwest Mounted Police* although the story was a bit hokey. *Pony Soldier* was a studio picture with a phony story, but *Power* was very good” (telephone interview, 2000). As for *Saskatchewan*, Kennedy stated “It didn't impress me; it was an awfully weak story” (telephone interview, 2000). Kennedy could take some satisfaction that his film, from a geographical perspective, was sound. His story would be no Mountie epic filmed on the golf course at the Banff Springs Hotel. Kennedy had been awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart for his war exploits in the South Pacific, and his Westerns reflected a self deprecating humor, best exemplified in *Dirty Dingus McGee's* “Code of the West” satire. His Westerns were as much about Kennedy, the person, as they were about the “Wild West.” Kennedy's first film experience, however, lacked that familiarity and comfort. His screenplay of *The Canadians* suggested someone who was an historical and cultural spectator. *The Canadians* did what *Northwest Mounted Police* and the others did not do—Kennedy managed to film his story on Canadian soil. But his tale, like the others did not resonate historically with the period.

The Cypress Hills Massacre, the Sioux arrival, and the apparent exploits of James Morrow Walsh all come together in a single story. Kennedy's film runs well under two hours. Given the timelines for the so-called history in this picture, the film should have required at least three intermissions. The cinematic heritage of the earlier Mountie films might have served as an omen that *The Canadians* was doomed to failure.

Try as Kennedy did to give the film some sense of historical authenticity, his portrayal of the Sioux seemed to lack the type of understanding that Kevin Costner would later capture in *Dances With Wolves*. Kennedy had captured the spirit and qualities of the Force, but he could not quite overcome the Indian stereotype. Utley and others have made clear from their research that Native American and First Nation's peoples had endearing qualities too. They were eloquent, humorous, and intelligent, but those qualities were rarely displayed in these films. *The Canadians* as well as the other Mounted Police stories provided few insights about the Native psyche. It would have been refreshing to see the character of an "Old Lodgeskins" from *Little Big Man* or a Graham Greene's "Kicking Bird" in Costner's prairie epic featured in these stories about the Mounted Police. Instead, audiences got a steady dose of white actors masquerading as screaming savages. The history of the American West was still being presented as victory and conquest. Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continents* (1992) had yet to challenge such ethnocentric perspectives. In the end the film could not make a complete break from the stereotypical Western genre, and Kennedy would be governed by such traditional thinking. Kennedy would go on to become a rather beloved director of some very popular Westerns—*The Canadians*, as Kennedy himself and most critics agreed, wasn't one of them.

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