

# Stereotyping is dangerous, tragic

One time the writer of this editorial was sitting in a house in southern California where the television was on. He was not paying much attention to what was showing, but apparently it purported to deal with American Indians. "I don't like Indians," a young, and innocent red-haired girl who was paying attention suddenly burst out. "They're mean!"

"Do you like Margie?" the writer asked, referring to his wife.

"Yes," the girl answered. "She's nice!"

"Do you like Jacob and Caleb?" he brought up his two sons, only slightly younger than the girl.

"Yes," she answered. "They're nice!"

"Well, Margie, Jacob and Caleb, they're all Indians!"

The girl looked at him with wonderment in her eyes, as barbaric act unfolded in the great American eye. "Well, I like them," she repeated herself, "they're nice!"

Ah, Hollywood! That enchanted land where the imagination runs wild, and we are all asked to share in its vision. Truly, imagination and fancy can be a great thing; ask any child, or any adult who has not totally lost what he had in younger days. But when that imagination is twisted and warped and presented to the public in such a way as to take entire Nations of people and degrade them, to make them appear as low creations, something is wrong.

That is just what Hollywood has done. Anyone doubting the seriousness of this transgression should have been in Anchorage last week as Will Sampson showed tapes of a documentary series he made illustrating Hollywood's distortions. Since the recent death of Chief Dan George, Sampson is undoubtedly the best known Indian actor in America.

His role in the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was revolutionary in its depiction of an Indian as a human being. He has been in many other movies, and was a regular star in the television series, "Vegas."

He will soon be appearing in a mini-series based on the book, "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," which was the first major historical work to take a look at the emergence of the United States from a Native American viewpoint.

All of Sampson's work chips away at the giant stereotype of the dirty, dumb, ignorant, drunk, culture-less savage Indian. But it is a big block to chip at. This was graphically illustrated by the many clips shown by Sampson; none of them more horrible than one taken from a comedy starring Bob Hope.

As Hope gunned down Indian after Indian, all of whom fell in a neat pile, he cracked jokes to his leading lady. The last Indian left was staggering around the pile of corpses. Hope walked up to him and dispatched him with a blow to the head. "Keep it neat," he joked as the body fell into the pile.

Try this scene and replace the Indians with middle class college students, and see how many people laugh. But when such images are believed, it somehow makes taking land, timber, mineral and water rights away from such people seem like less of a sin.

You've got a lot of work ahead of you, Will Sampson. We're behind you!