

[Marlon Brando discusses his decision to not accept the Academy Award in 1973,](#)

[Dick Cavett Television Show](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB9ZshANpiY&t=5s>

Vocabulary

In order of appearance in the transcript

		English	日本語
1	boo (v.)	jeer, negative cheer	
2	stomp (v.)	pound one's feet	
3	courtesy (n.)	politeness	
4	insular (adj.)	isolated, by oneself	
5	cliché (n.)	common saying or expression	
6	perpetuate (v.)	continue	
7	rendition (n.)	portrayal, production	
8	inured to (adj.)	accustomed to, used to	
9	treacherous (adj.)	mean, disloyal, cheating	
10	outrage (n.)	anger	
11	have a cause (v. + n.)	have a mission, a purpose	
12	posse (n.)	a group made to hunt for a criminal	
13	desecrate (v.)	damage something sacred	
14	cathedral (n.)	large church or temple	
15	sore (adj.)	angry, painful	
16	sacrosanct (adj.)	sacred, religiously special	
17	intrusion (n.)	enter where one shouldn't be	
18	the press (n.)	the mass media	
19	trigger (v.)	cause, start, provoke	
20	lacking (adj.)	not enough	
21	rapacious (adj.)	extremely violent	
22	mayhem (n.)	chaos	
23	subject themselves (v. + n.)	make themselves suffer	
24	keep our word (v.)	keep a promise	
25	treaty (n.)	an agreement between nations	
26	abrogate (v.)	break (a treaty)	
27	alter (v.)	change	

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Introduction

In 1973, the actor Marlon Brando won the academy award for best actor for his performance in *The Godfather*. At the award ceremony, he shocked everyone in the United States by refusing to come to the ceremony and by refusing to accept the award. He used this occasion to make a statement about the way the entertainment industry had abused Native Americans and other minority populations. He sent a representative of Native Americans to accept his award, and he asked that person to make a speech for him. His speech was a protest against the way Native Americans had been portrayed in films for many years.

Some people supported this idea of making a speech at the Academy Awards ceremony. Other people were opposed for one of two reasons, or for both reasons. One reason was that they thought this was the wrong time, place, and occasion for such a protest because if everyone on the stage made such a speech, the original purpose of the ceremony would be lost. The other reason was that some people thought there was no problem with the way Native Americans had been portrayed in films.

In the years since 1973, the public has become more aware of the way minority groups are portrayed in mass media and education, and more aware of the various ways to interpret history from the points of view of these minority groups. Fifty years later, we can see that such protests made during the 1960-1980 period had a great impact on world culture.

TRANSCRIPT

Part 1 The speech at the Academy Award Ceremony, by Sacheen Littlefeather

5 Hello, my name is Sacheen Littlefeather. I'm Apache and I am president of the National Native American Affirmative Image Committee. I'm representing Marlon Brando this evening, and he has asked me to tell you in a very long speech—which I cannot share with you presently because of time limits, but I will be glad to share it with the press afterwards—he very regretfully cannot accept this very generous award, and the reasons for this are the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry and on television, in movie reruns and also the recent happenings at Wounded Knee. I beg at this time that I have not intruded upon this evening, and that we will in the future, with our hearts and our understandings, meet with love and generosity. Thank you on behalf of Marlon Brando.

Part 2 How Minorities Are Depicted in Films and Television

10 Dick Cavett (DC): If you had the Academy Awards night to do over again, would you do any of that differently?

15 Marlon Brando (MB): Well, I don't think so. No. I felt that there was an opportunity since the American Indian hasn't been able to hear his voice heard or have his voice heard anywhere in the history of the United States, I felt that it was a marvelous opportunity for an Indian to be able to voice his opinion to 85 million people. I guess that was the number. I felt that he had a right to, in view of what Hollywood has done to him, and I was embarrassed for Sacheen. She wasn't able to say what she intended to say, and I was distressed that people **booed** and whistled and **stomped**, even though perhaps it was directed at myself. They should have at least had the **courtesy** to listen to her, but I think she did very well, and I was very glad that she did have what opportunity she had to say what she did and...

20 DC: Why didn't she get to read your entire statement as you planned it?

25 MB: Well, I think that they felt that it was inappropriate, and I actually don't know. I think they just didn't want her there. They didn't want the evening interrupted with that particular note, and from their **insular** point of view, I felt that perhaps they had a point, but I don't think that people generally realize what the motion picture industry has done to the American Indian, and, as a matter of fact, all ethnic groups, all minorities, all non-whites. And people just simply don't realize. They just took it for granted that that's the way people are going to be presented, and these **clichés** are just going to be **perpetuated**. And so when someone makes a protest of some kind and says no, wait, please don't present the Chinese this way, or please... I mean on this network every night—well perhaps not every night—you can see silly **renditions** of human behavior: the "leering Filipino houseboy," the "wily Japanese," of the "kook" or the "gook," and the "idiot black man," the "stupid Indian," and it just goes on and on and on. And people actually don't realize how deeply these people are injured by seeing themselves represented—not so much the adults because they're already **inured** to that kind of pain and pressure—but children, Indian children, seeing Indians represented as savage, as ugly, as nasty, vicious, **treacherous**, drunken. They grow up only with a negative image of themselves, and it lasts a lifetime. Is that an answer to your question?

35 DC: Yeah. Did you expect the kind of **outrage** that you got from people? That very night Raquel Welch made a joke against you saying, "I hope the next person doesn't **have a cause**." Who's the Western star who followed later? Steve McQueen? Clint Eastwood, yes, of course. I very seldom make mistakes. He did his version of a joke, and then John Wayne looked like he was about ready to get a **posse** together. Did that surprise you that they would be angered that you **desecrated** their **cathedral**?

40 MB: No, I wasn't surprised. There were a number of people that felt that Sacheen had not been welcomed and not been treated properly, and there were people that were sympathetic to what she was trying to say, and I received an awful lot of mail in support of that.

DC: The **booing** made me **sore**.

45 MB: Well, actually I think the people were **booing** at me. They thought well, this moment is **sacrosanct**, and you're ruining our fantasy with the **intrusion** of a little reality. And I suppose it was perhaps unkind of me to do that, but there was a larger issue, and it's an issue that nobody in the motion picture industry has ever addressed themselves to.

Part 3 The History of Native Americans

50 MB: I don't think that it's useful to refer to, or to confirm or deny anything that was written in **the press**. It's mostly money-oriented, and therefore I don't think it has any value.

DC: OK, tell me then... when way back in the 1950s when you got interested in the Indians fishing rights, before it was fashionable to be so, what **triggered** that?

55 MB: I read a book called *Indians of the Americas*, and after reading the book I realized that I knew nothing about the American Indian, and that everything we are taught about the American Indian is wrong. It's inaccurate, and our schoolbooks are hopelessly **lacking**, perhaps criminally lacking in revealing what our relationship was with the Indian. When we hear, as we've heard throughout all our lives, no matter how old we are, that we are a country that stands for freedom, for rightness, for justice for everyone, it simply doesn't apply to those who are not white. It just simply doesn't apply. And we were the most **rapacious**, aggressive, destructive, torturing, monstrous people who swept from one coast to the other murdering and causing
60 **mayhem** among the Indians. [Reacting to faint applause] There's one Indian in the audience. But that isn't revealed because we don't like that image of ourselves. We would like to see ourselves as perhaps John Wayne sees us. Also what we've learned about the Indian has been largely taught to us by Hollywood, and by motion pictures. They have educated us, so we naturally believe that when the Indians came, the wagons circled, and the Indians rode around and **subjected themselves** to terrible gunfire and died at a ratio of 65 to 1.

65 DC: Both barrels of a shotgun would always get two Indians.

MB: Yeah, and that wasn't the way it was at all, but anyway, Indians have been tragically misrepresented in films and in our history books, in our attitudes, in our reporting, and so we must set about to re-educate ourselves.

70 DC: One thing I want to get into on that, too, was the subject of not only the industry *on* the screen but *off* the screen. I know a guy who was...

MB: Let me say another thing. At a time when we say, especially, that we are going to keep our treaties, and that we do **keep our word**, and that we, above all people, do **keep our word**, I think it's important to mention that there have been nearly 400 **treaties** written by the United States in good faith with the Indians, and every single one of them was **abrogated**, which means broken or changed or **altered**.

75 DC: No exception. And Indians howl with laughter, I guess, when they hear a public figure like a president saying other nations will laugh at us if we don't honor our treaty commitments, when they can think of 400 and—I don't know what the exact figure is—431 examples of why we haven't in the past and this would only be the 432nd case.

Comprehension Questions

In Part 2 of the transcript...

1. What did Marlon Brando say about the depiction of minority groups in American films and television?

In Part 3 of the transcript...

2. How did Marlon Brando become interested in Native Americans?

3. What did Marlon Brando say about the portrayals of European-Americans and Native Americans in film and television?

4. What did Marlon Brando say about his country's attitude about honoring treaties?

Comprehension Questions

SAMPLE ANSWERS

In Part 2 of the transcript...

1. What did Marlon Brando say about the depiction of minority groups in American films and television?

He said they have always been portrayed as various negative stereotypes. These stereotypes have a damaging effect on people, especially the children from these minority groups.

In Part 3 of the transcript...

2. How did Marlon Brando become interested in Native Americans?

He read a book about Native Americans and realized that he had known nothing about them. He also realized that the American public had a false understanding of Native American culture and history.

3. What did Marlon Brando say about the portrayals of European-Americans and Native Americans in film and television?

He said the films and television shows tend to show the European-Americans as heroes and winners of every battle.

4. What did Marlon Brando say about his country's attitude about honoring treaties?

He said his country is hypocritical when it speaks about honoring treaties. Leaders say the United States will lose respect if it doesn't honor its treaties with other nations, but actually the United States has had many treaties with Native American nations. The United States has abrogated all of these treaties.

[That Unfinished Oscar Speech](#)

by Marlon Brando, *The New York Times*, March 30, 1973

<http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/movies/bestpictures/godfather-ar3.html>

For 200 years we have said to the Indian people who are fighting for their land, their life, their families and their right to be free: "Lay down your arms, my friends, and then we will remain together. Only if you lay down your arms, my friends, can we then talk of peace and come to an agreement which will be good for you."

When they laid down their arms, we murdered them. We lied to them. We cheated them out of their lands. We starved them into signing fraudulent agreements that we called treaties which we never kept. We turned them into beggars on a continent that gave life for as long as life can remember. And by any interpretation of history, however twisted, we did not do right. We were not lawful nor were we just in what we did. For them, we do not have to restore these people, we do not have to live up to some agreements, because it is given to us by virtue of our power to attack the rights of others, to take their property, to take their lives when they are trying to defend their land and liberty, and to make their virtues a crime and our own vices virtues.

But there is one thing which is beyond the reach of this perversity and that is the tremendous verdict of history. And history will surely judge us. But do we care? What kind of moral schizophrenia is it that allows us to shout at the top of our national voice for all the world to hear that we live up to our commitment when every page of history and when all the thirsty, starving, humiliating days and nights of the last 100 years in the lives of the American Indian contradict that voice?

It would seem that the respect for principle and the love of one's neighbor have become dysfunctional in this country of ours, and that all we have done, all that we have succeeded in accomplishing with our power is simply annihilating the hopes of the newborn countries in this world, as well as friends and enemies alike, that we're not humane, and that we do not live up to our agreements.

Perhaps at this moment you are saying to yourself what the hell has all this got to do with the Academy Awards? Why is this woman standing up here, ruining our evening, invading our lives with things that don't concern us, and that we don't care about? Wasting our time and money and intruding in our homes.

I think the answer to those unspoken questions is that the motion picture community has been as responsible as any for degrading the Indian and making a mockery of his character, describing his as savage, hostile and evil. It's hard enough for children to grow up in this world. When Indian children watch television, and they watch films, and when they see their race depicted as they are in films, their minds become injured in ways we can never know.

Recently there have been a few faltering steps to correct this situation, but too faltering and too few, so I, as a member in this profession, do not feel that I can as a citizen of the United States accept an award here tonight. I think awards in this country at this time are inappropriate to be received or given until the condition of the American Indian is drastically altered. If we are not our brother's keeper, at least let us not be his executioner.

I would have been here tonight to speak to you directly, but I felt that perhaps I could be of better use if I went to Wounded Knee to help forestall in whatever way I can the establishment of a peace which would be dishonorable as long as the rivers shall run, and the grass shall grow.

I would hope that those who are listening would not look upon this as a rude intrusion, but as an earnest effort to focus attention on an issue that might very well determine whether or not this country has the right to say from this point forward, we believe in the inalienable rights of all people to remain free and independent on lands that have supported their life beyond living memory.

Thank you for your kindness and your courtesy to Miss Littlefeather. Thank you and good night.

This statement was written by Marlon Brando for delivery at the Academy Awards ceremony where Mr. Brando refused an Oscar. The speaker, who read only a part of it, was Shasheen Littlefeather.