

**You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, I'm Eric Molinsky.**

**I went to Wesleyan University – the same school as Joss Whedon – not at the same time. But we were in the same film program, and there was this instructor named Richard Slotkin, who taught a class called Myth and Ideology in the Movies. And I remember when I watched Joss Whedon's series Firefly, I was like – oh my God, he took Slotkin's course and turned it into a TV show!**

**And this is the main thesis of Slotkin's class. For years, film critics wondered why Hollywood didn't deal more directly with the Cold War or Civil Rights in the films of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. And Slotkin said – yeah they did. They just did it in the guise of Westerns.**

**And at the end, Slotkin argued that after the Westerns went out of style, the whole genre was reborn in the science fiction genre. And that got piqued my interest, and for years after college, I'd be watching a sci-fi movie and suddenly realize – this is another Western narrative. Specifically, the aliens were playing the role of Indians.**

**For example in the movies – and this goes back to 19<sup>th</sup> century dime store novels – there's always a story where the Indian abduct white settlers. And they bring in the hired guns to organize a search party to find them – like The Searchers.**

**CLIP: THE SEARCHERS**

**Or James Cameron's Aliens.**

**CLIP: ALIENS**

**And weirdly in both movies, when it becomes clear the hostages have been impregnated – the protagonist has to kill them – although for more obvious reasons in Aliens. John Wayne's character in The Searchers was just, you know, racist.**

**Another common character is the man who survives his abduction by Indians – and then becomes The Man Who Knows Indians. He can think like them – which makes him the best person to hunt and kill the Indians, like Captain Picard after he's been captured by the Borg in First Contact.**

CLIP: FIRST CONTACT

**LeAnne Howe is a member of the Choctaw Nation, and professor of literature at the University of Georgia. She also says that Worf is a classic type of Indian character – who has gone to the white man’s schools, and becomes a cultural hybrid.**

LEANNE: So that’s what boarding schools were all about to teach us the language, to convert us to Christianity whether it be Catholicism or some sort of Protestantism. Worf is that character. He has been socialized in the Star Trek schools and he recognizes that and he’s on board both literally and figuratively, but he is the enemy amongst them, who is sort of like Tonto in outer space because he’s there to protect them.

**And the mixed blood character is incredibly important – whether they’re half-Indian or half-alien.**

LEANNE: The mixed bloods were the most powerful, more worrisome to Washington DC because they were both indigenous and they are children of immigrants who are smart and wily. That whole 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative is embedded in these alien films.

**And that doesn’t even cover the movies are really obvious – like Avatar.**

**There’s another type of narrative, which isn’t as obvious – where the aliens aren’t standing for Indians. In fact, this genre is really the story as Native Americans understood it. Which sounds like a type of film that wouldn’t be popular – but it’s the most popular. It’s a guaranteed moneymaker: the alien invasion story.**

LEANNE: Remember these aliens who come in, they want to take our space, they want to use our minerals, or they just want to wipe us out and farm other kinds of alien things. And notice what happens to the aliens. They get kicked off, beat up, and driven off – oh here’s the another one. They all get sick with a cold and all of them die.

OWL: If you take a movie like War of Worlds, where you have a race people or species from other planet, with superior technology, I can’t help notice compassion to Europeans when they first arrived in America.

**The classic First Contact story is John Smith and Pocahontas, given the serious treatment in The New World.**

CLIP: THE NEW WORLD

**Owl Goingback is an author of sci-fi and horror novels**

OWL: You had primitive native people looking upon these basically god like men, in sailing ships, wearing coats of armor that were shining in sun to people not many medals, which would be comparable to ray guns in War of the Worlds.

BRING UP WAR OF THE WORLDS

**In both narratives, there's a moment of first contact, before all hell breaks loose. And the first misunderstanding is often tragic, like the scene in War of the Worlds, where the humans wave a white flag at the Martians, and get zapped.**

CLIP: ZAPPING FROM WAR OF THE WORLDS

OWL: And it reminds me so much of the San Creek massacre in Colorado territory. And the chief stood under an American flag, and not only was he under an American flag, but ran up white flag, and a lot of the people were cut down. And you know, it didn't help the Native Americans during that massacre and it didn't help the people in War of the Worlds.

**Even when he watches a movie like Predator, Owl thinks, wait a second, that's our story too.**

OWL: Predator, I mean where the aliens hunted humans for sport. Native people were hunted for sports. It's a terrible thing. I'm sure on the other side same thing happened. I remember in the California Gold Rush era that was a popular thing to do because they wanted the land that the Indians lived on and they hunted them down, and it was a sport among people.

**The studios have been cranking an out average of two invasion movies a years over the last decade. Next year, we're going to have the sequel to Independence Day, and The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave, which is the next hope for a blockbusters series based on young adult novels.**

**I've been wondering for a long time, why isn't this more obvious to people? LeAnne Howe says, well, of course not. It's part of a cultural amnesia, a**

**nationalistic game, which she calls, “playing Indian.” And it began with the Boston Tea Party, when colonists revolted against the British by dressing up as Mohawks.**

LEANNE: If you are no longer British, what are you? And so the best way to do that was to dress up and play Indian. In the sci fi genre, it’s really easy, because now the earth is being invaded by these great ships from another land, and the Americans stand in for home grown earthling.

**This desire to play Indian – she’s seen it first hand.**

LEANNE: People will come up to you and say, I was an Indian in another life. I’m generally left speechless.

**Professor Despina Kakudaki studies science fiction narratives.**

DESPINA: It’s hard to be in both positions, where you’re saying, oh I see, I am inhabiting the position of the Native Americans here, and that is giving me an insight of the historical experience that they had. If you are them, you’re them! You took over their position, in terms of the narrative, and you can feel all the melodrama and the intensity of that conflict, without necessarily thinking oh I see I am both the aggressor and the victim in this but actually in terms of my historical position I am the aggressor. And it also makes the victim disappear – it makes the original victim disappear somehow.

**Of course, the Americans – representing the human race – always beat back the aliens in the end. But Despina would love to see an alien invasion film where neither side wins. The invasion would grind to a stand still, like so many conflicts in the world. And rather than the rebellion going on for years, like the TV shows V or Falling Skies, instead we just eventually decided to live together.**

DESPINA: It would have to have lots of meetings. It would have to have a lot of frustrated people who hate each other guys but somehow the next day they realize that maybe something has to be gained here and maybe we talk more. The conditions of our everyday life area bout all these negotiations and giving in and winging something and losing something and maybe we have a fantasy of absolutely that comes up in these science fictions movies in, “no!” The answer is, “No, we bomb them!”

**It’s hard to see yourself as the bad guy – no matter what your role would’ve been in history. Leanne turned the genre on its head when she wrote a play**

**about American Indians who build a spaceship, and search for a new planet.**

LEANNE: It was called Indians Radio Days and we start at the platectonics, and we end up on Mars. We are trying to get away from being colonized one more time.

***So, are there aliens on Mars?***

LEANNE: Yeah, we get married, and so everyone sings and dances, and so you have a fusion red and green, like Christmas.

***So there's no fighting at all? No misunderstandings?***

LEANNE Oh no, our diplomacy skills save the day! (Laughs)

**She knows that's not realistic – for a lot of reasons.**

LEANNE: The French really are the first people we adopted, and we negotiate them over problem for 22 years, and the French nearly gone mad. And in the end, the Choctows loose all patients, go to war and hang their intestines in trees, after we've kill them. It's not great filmmaking. I like going to Mars, I think better.

**I'd like to see a film where the whole narrative is taken to its logical conclusion. Because when we do win in the end and drive them back, that's always the least convincing part of the narrative.**

**They're going to conquer us. And after they've fully taken over the Earth and made it their own – and named their intergalactic teams after us --The Andromeda Lawyers -- The Alpha Centuri Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles -- their alien spawn will feel kind of bad about the whole thing, and put up a Museum of Humans in Washington DC.**

**The aliens will float or crawl or slither through the museum, looking at mannequins wearing human clothes that aren't put together properly -- a burka, with a necktie and a fanny pack. And the aliens will communicate through their minds to each other, these creatures really had a good run on this planet – did the best we could with our limited means. And they were so spiritual. And then these alien families will float or crawl or slither back out the door -- through the gift shop.**

**That's it for this week's show, thanks for listening. Special thanks to LeAnne Howe, Owl Goingback and Despina Kakudaki. You can like Imaginary Worlds on Facebook. I tweet at emolinsky. The show's website is [imaginary worlds podcast dot org](http://imaginaryworldspodcast.org).**

**Starting next week – I will be launching a series of episodes that will last until the end of 2015 -- all directly related to one particular movie coming out at the end of the year that's very, very close to my heart. If you're still not sure what movie that is, listen to the first minute of the first episode of Imaginary Worlds.**