

## VIDEO REVIEW

Sayisi-Dene First Nation:*Nu Ho Ni Yeh (Our Story)*. VHS Video, colour, 54:23 minutes. Produced and directed by Allan and Mary Code. Edited by Greg Nosaty. 1992. Tadoule Lake, Manitoba: Treeline Productions. CDN \$35.00.

In 1958 the Canadian government relocated, virtually by force, the Duck Lake, or Churchill, Band of Caribou-eater Chipewyan (the Sayisi Dene) from a substantially self-supporting life in the bush to degradation in the port town of Churchill, Manitoba. There, the demoralized, dislocated people were forced to live in what was described - by government - as Canada's worst slum, sunk in a morass of welfare, alcohol and violence, unable to hunt or to support themselves. The bewildered and suffering Dene protested frequently to authorities, but to no avail. After literally dozens of their number had died, the direct result of the abuse and poverty into which they had been thrust, about 75 members of the Band returned on their own to the bush in 1971. Soon after they all went home, first to Duck Lake, then to another traditional use area, Tadoule Lake, where they now reside in a stable, if not perfect, hunting/trapping community. They live now as testimony to the incredible and often repeated cruelty of governments in so many countries towards hunting peoples. (The Innu of Labrador, the Lubicon Cree of Alberta in Canada, the Yanomami of Brazil/Venezuela, the Aborigines and Islanders of Australia, all come to mind here.) They are also a monument to the strength of one of the few hunting peoples on earth who have successfully defied government, who have damned their towns and their alcohol and their wilful cultural ignorance, packed up their few possessions and gone home to the bush to live much as their ancestors did, in a manner which has for them cultural validity. They are among the few hunting survivors left in this world.

*Nu Ho Ni Yeh (Our Story)* chronicles the history of the Sayisi Dene people. Current video footage, vintage film clips and archival photographs help the viewer travel through both the seasons of the year and the annals of history. Narration is provided by Band Elders, young adults and non-Native speakers. The primary focus of the film relates to the significance of the caribou in the lives of the Sayisi Dene people. More specifically, it highlights how government misinterpretation of data and photos of herd populations nearly led to the demise of the entire Band through starvation in the 1950s.

This video is extremely well done from an aesthetic point of view. The

cinematography depicting the pristine beauty of the subarctic leaves the viewer breathless. Images of the changing seasons and corresponding harvest of game is so vivid, one can almost smell the woody aroma of fresh meat being grilled over an open flame.

The black and white images used to portray historical matters offer a stark contrast to the color footage of current Sayisi Dene life. This may be strictly due to the availability of the medium, but it procures a secondary effect; that is, it conveys the feelings of hopelessness and despair felt by the Dene during those periods when contact with Europeans and government policies negatively affected members of the Band.

From a historical standpoint, it is refreshing to hear Aboriginal testimony about events which occurred in northern Manitoba since the time of first contact with Europeans. Video taped interviews of Sayisi-Dene Elders speaking their own language (with English subtitles) as they reflect on these events provide an excellent historical document both for future generations of Sayisi Dene and for students of anthropology, history and linguistics.

In one memorable scene, an Elder sits by the wall of the great old Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Prince of Wales. It was right there, she tells us, that the Dene met with Europeans for the first time. It was right there that they first talked and agreed to interact. Clearly it was that meeting which was intended to set the stage of mutual respect and assistance for the future. The meeting as it happens, so fresh in Dene memory, so much a matter of interpersonal morals, took place over 200 years ago. To non-Aboriginal people it is a thing of the past, not written down and thus not "history." To the Dene, it is a thing of concern, a statement and a fact of proper behaviour marred by the perplexing failure of so many in government and trade to recognize it as real. With patience, this Elder clearly hopes that the Europeans will someday understand, comprehend, honor, indeed live, their part of that past of mutual respect.

Moreover, the portrayal of a non-violent solution to past injustice renders this film unique. While many recent movies highlight militant action as a means of ending oppression, the makers of this film demonstrate that passive action can be equally effective. However, a Band Elder's verbalization of her doubts about the success of the new community is the key ingredient in making the outcome believable.

One negative aspect of this video is the lack of identification of the speakers, either by verbal introduction or by the use of subtitles indicating the speaker's name or occupation. For future generations of Sayisi Dene people who view this film and are not able to recognize their ancestors strictly by appearance, names, and perhaps ages, should have been included. Students doing research on this Band may have difficulty con-

ducting further interviews with the individuals who appear in this video. Finally, for the general public who may view this production purely for entertainment, including the names and occupations would in some cases add credibility to the testimony of the interviewees.

Secondly, the film does not go far enough in outlining the implications of government's past action on the Band's current struggles. For example, the relocation to Churchill indirectly caused the death of over 100 Band members within the space of 16 years, many of these individuals of child bearing age. Had they survived, the number of acres of Reserve land to which the Band is entitled would be significantly higher, as population directly affects land entitlement. This reduction in the size of the Band's Reserve will have serious consequences for future generations of Sayisi Dene people. Therefore, more detail on this matter is critical, both for this Band and others who may face similar difficulties.

Despite these shortcomings, this is an excellent video. It is visually appealing and historically accurate. More individuals might pursue the study of their past if it was presented in the way the makers of *Nu Ho Ni Yeh (Our Story)* have done it. I would highly recommend this film to academics of the humanities or social sciences. The information contained within provides appropriate topics for discussion in many disciplines.

Michelle Samagalski  
60 Memorial Crescent  
Brandon, Manitoba  
Canada, R7B 3P2