



## Television Race Initiative

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A Project of Active Voice/American Documentary, Inc.



# *in the* LIGHT *of* REVERENCE

A film by Christopher McLeod and Malinda Maynor

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DISCUSSION GUIDE



During a break from filming at Black Mesa on the Hopi reservation in Arizona, from left, co-producer Malinda Maynor (Lumbee), producer/director Christopher McLeod, and Vernon Masayesva (Hopi).



JOHN SCHAEFER

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Cover photo: Cliff painting in Escalante Canyon, Utah. Photograph by Christopher McLeod

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## A LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS

### *Dear Facilitator,*

Across the United States, Native Americans are struggling to protect their sacred places. Religious freedom, so valued in this country, is not guaranteed to those who practice land-based religion.


Every year, more sacred sites – the land-based equivalent of the world's great cathedrals – are being destroyed. Strip mining and development cause much of the destruction. But rock climbers, tourists and New Age religious practitioners are part of the problem, too.

The biggest problem is ignorance. We spent 10 years making *In the Light of Reverence* to confront that ignorance and to tell a universal story of clashing world views.

It's an old story that was ignored for a long time. The journals of early English colonists and Spanish missionaries are full of words like "heathen" and "infidel." Native American ceremonies were banned for more than 100 years and it took an act of Congress – the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 – to allow native people to come out of hiding and openly perform their ceremonies. Access to sacred sites has since become a public conflict.

The philosopher Alan Watts once was asked, "How can we save the world?" He replied, "Preserve diversity." To do that, we have to understand each other, learn the value of respect and make some accommodations. Indians and non-Indians actually share many values, and we have much to learn if we take the time to listen and have the kind of dialogue outlined in this guide. There is great strength in healing past wounds and uniting to protect religious freedom and the health of the Earth. Surely this country is big enough – in geography and in spirit – to protect sacred sites and grant religious freedom to land-based practitioners.

May your discussions and consideration of the themes raised in this film be a first step toward such a reconciliation.

Christopher McLeod, *Producer/Director*  
Malinda Maynor (Lumbee), *Co-Producer*  
Sacred Land Film Project  [www.sacredland.org](http://www.sacredland.org)



# in the LIGHT of REVERENCE

**I**n *the Light of Reverence* explores cultural and land-use conflicts at three North American sites considered sacred by the Lakota, Hopi and Wintu: Devils Tower in Wyoming, the Colorado Plateau in the Southwest and Mount Shasta in California.

Rich in minerals and timber and beloved by recreational users, these lands are ground zero for the struggle over how sites on public land should be used and whether Native Americans have valid historic claims to the use of property now owned by others.

For Native Americans, the land is alive and sacred. For many non-Indians — miners, ranchers, rock climbers and others — the appropriate use of “natural resources” is industry and recreation. While this film has a strongly Native American point of view, the filmmakers interviewed people with varied perspectives on land issues. Many see themselves as engaged in a complex collision of rights and responsibilities. Their battles tell a contemporary story of long-standing culture clashes in an ancient landscape.

*Five centuries ago, the Indian world view and the Anglo world view clashed and were never reconciled. Five centuries later, they still aren't reconciled.*

Charles Wilkinson, Professor of Law,  
University of Colorado at Boulder

## Leading a Discussion

*In the Light of Reverence* provides fertile ground for discussion among those who care about places of natural beauty, about preserving cultures and religious freedom, or about private land development rights. These discussions have the potential to nurture new alliances across cultural, political and religious divides, and to move people to actively seek solutions to the difficult struggles represented in the film.

Consider organizing a screening of the film in your community, workplace, school, place of worship or among your friends. If possible, before hosting the screening, view the film yourself so that you are better prepared to facilitate discussion. Ask the audience to engage in an open, honest discussion that respects diverse viewpoints. You might want to establish ground rules for dialogue: Listen and speak with respect; don't talk “over” someone who has the floor; speak for yourself, not on behalf of an entire group; take risks when giving opinions; be open to opposing viewpoints; keep all discussions confidential.

After showing the film, begin with these general questions, which viewers can respond to verbally or in writing: What are your immediate reactions to the film? Did anything impress or surprise you? Does any person, comment or incident stand out?

After sharing a few reactions, move to questions that get at the most controversial or compelling issues. This guide provides you with selected quotes from interviews in the film and several questions related directly to them; questions about land use; questions about culture and identity; and questions designed specifically for faith-based groups.

As the dialogue unfolds, take note of who is speaking often and who is keeping quiet. To encourage diverse viewpoints, you may need to intervene to ask those who haven't spoken to take part. Be sure to leave time for people to reflect on how the film's themes relate to their own lives or communities, and to brainstorm action steps to bring about change.



CHRISTOPHER McLEOD

*Lightning over Devils Tower, Wyoming, Mato Tipila (Bear's Lodge) to the Lakota.*





## Quotations from the Film: Rights, Responsibility, Religion, Respect

For each of the following quotations, ask:

- Can you appreciate this person's point of view?
- What underlying cultural values, priorities or events may have helped shape this individual's perspective?
- Is it possible for someone with an opposing view to find common ground with this person?
- Is your community grappling with any related local issue, an issue that pits one group's values against another's? How is that conflict unfolding?

*In our common land, we do not share a common vision. What is sacred is often elusive — like a spider web — unseen, until it catches the light.*

*Narrator, In the Light of Reverence*

**N**ative people are the only ones who take care of this area by prayer, fast, meditate [sic], ceremony. That's how we keep this land in balance. White people don't understand this kind of thing. They only look for money and jobs and a good time. They don't care about land. They just want to sell and buy and destroy everything.

– Thomas Banyacya (Hopi)

**T**his tactic of claiming religious areas is happening all over. . . . It's used to stop all kinds of activities. I think it's being used as a land grab versus actual Indian religious purposes. . . . If they want to worship there, I think that's fine. But let's not preclude any other activities there.

– Mike Tokanczyk, logger, Wyoming

**T**he idea is not to pretend to own [the land], not to exploit it, but to respect it. Trying to get people to see that that's a dimension of religion is really difficult. . . . The basic problem is that American society is a "rights society" not a "responsibilities society."

– Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota), scholar and author, University of Colorado at Boulder

**T**o me, climbing lifts my spirits more than any other activity. . . . When I climb the tower and I get up on top there, I'm fully engaged with nature, and I'm actually feeling it and touching it and wedging my body into it.

– Andy Petefish, commercial climbing guide, Devils Tower, Wyoming

**A**s I looked up at the climbers on the tower, it imparted to me a feeling of violation — a sense of desecration. And I thought to myself, "Why are they doing this? Don't they have any respect for anything?"

– Johnson Holy Rock (Lakota)

**T**here's nothing out there on this piece of property [Woodruff Butte] that's tangible to me. . . . There's nothing I can see, so I can't perceive it being important to this degree. It's not a burial site. There's not artifacts scattered all over it. . . . I'm going to mine [the butte] until they forcibly remove me from it. . . . I believe it's without a doubt my right to go up there and do that.

– Dale McKinnon, owner, Woodruff Butte, Arizona

**T**he basic issue here is respect for other human beings — that somehow we must co-inhabit this planet. And we do that by making accommodations for each other. . . . What we're accommodating here at Devils Tower is Indian peoples' rights to their culture. . . . These sacred sites are central to the perpetuation of their culture, and one of our jobs here at Devils Tower is to protect that right.

– Deb Liggett, National Park Service, Devils Tower, Wyoming

**W**hen you look at the land, what is the first thing people see? How they can make money on it. So it's money, or learning how to value what looks like nothing.

– Caleen Sisk-Franco (Wintu)



WILL FARRINELLO

New Age celebrants at Panther Meadows on Mt. Shasta, California.



## Our Relationship with the Land

- Do you think the U.S. government has the right to interfere with private property rights? In which instances?
- Why do you think climbers are banned from climbing Mount Rushmore but not Devils Tower? Do you agree with this distinction?
- Some climbers and New Agers argue that they have equal access rights — at all times — to native sacred sites on public land, and that the right is a fundamental freedom. Native elders respond that it takes centuries to sink spiritual roots into land — to develop ceremonies and responsibility to the land — and that they should be granted privacy to conduct rituals in traditional places. Discuss the logic of these arguments. What criteria should determine land-management policies on public land and on private land?
- Has anything that you cared about — in your neighborhood or surrounding environment — ever been destroyed suddenly? Who was responsible? Were you forewarned? How did you respond? Whose responsibility is it to sound an alarm when such destruction occurs?
- Have you heard about similar land struggles going on in other places, other countries? How would you feel if the Temple Mount in Jerusalem or the Vatican in Rome were destroyed?
- Some people are concerned that sacred land claims will interfere with the economic development of natural resources. Do you or others in your community share those concerns? Is it possible to resolve the conflict between those concerns and sacred land claims?



Florence Jones, Wintu healer, and Mary Norton at a fire ceremony on Mt. Shasta.

CHRISTOPHER McLEOD

### ETHICS FOR VISITING SACRED SITES

*After screenings of In the Light of Reverence, people often ask how they can experience sacred places respectfully, in a way that doesn't appropriate from native people or offend them. Here are a few ideas for discussion and practice. You also may want to create a code of ethics for your place of worship, then ask yourself how much of this is obvious to an outsider.*

— Christopher McLeod

1. Always ask permission from a site's caretaker or guardian before visiting. Be prepared to accept a negative response. Many sites can be visited only by those who are initiated. Even after attaining permission from a governing agency you may be offending indigenous people who may not have jurisdiction over their own sacred sites.
2. Learn about and respect customs regarding attire, offerings and behavior at sacred places. Know the history of people and place before visiting.
3. Realize that people of other cultures have different belief systems about sacred time, space and appropriate actions. For example, nudity may seem natural to some but offensive to others, particularly at important cultural sites.
4. Refrain from performing rituals that may be culturally unacceptable or offensive. Most sites have people who are specially trained to perform rituals that are traditionally associated with the site. Ask about participating in rituals that are being performed. Sometimes outsiders may not have the proper instruction or preparation required for participation.
5. Always ask for permission before taking photographs, video or film, or before drawing, recording or taking notes. When in doubt, don't.
6. Refrain from walking on fragile, ancient "ruins" or from entering ceremonial sites. Stay on marked trails or walkways even in temples, churches and shrines.
7. Do not move or remove anything at a sacred site. If you are at a natural sacred site such as a mountain or spring, remember that offerings can take many forms.
8. Find a quiet location and quiet time to experience the spirit of place. Even at crowded places of mass pilgrimage, out-of-the-way spots exist for reflection, contemplation and inspiration.

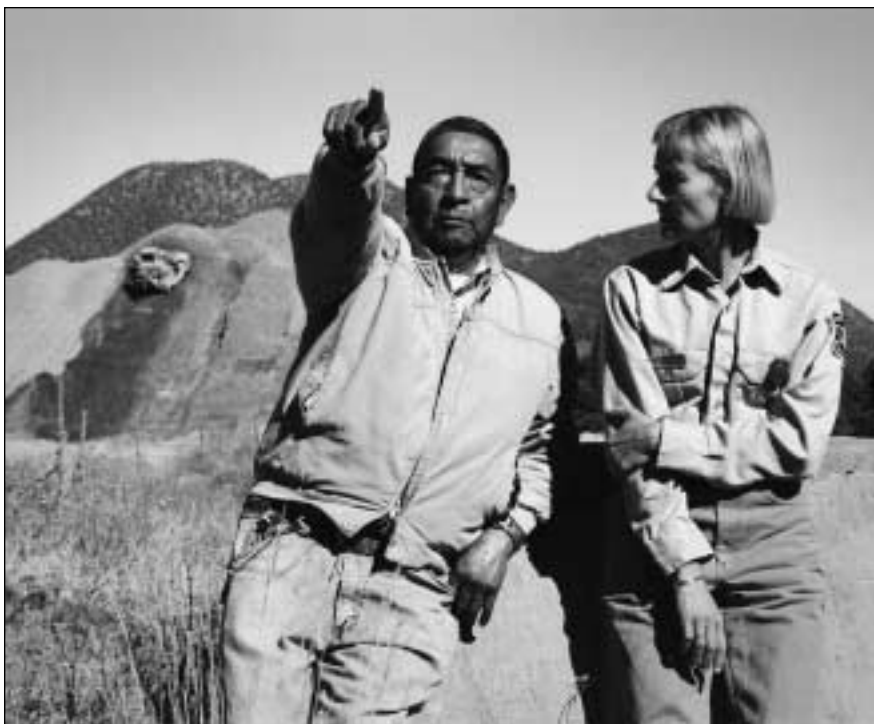
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## QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

The questions raised by this film are varied and rich: land use, cultural conflict, tradition vs. progress, public policy, identity and more. As a community of faith, you may share many of these concerns and may wish to view the film through the lens of religious freedom and inter-faith relationships. Discussion based on the following questions can become a guide for collective as well as individual action.

- What points in the film resonate with you as a person of faith? Which raised questions? How can you get those questions answered?
- How does your faith define “sacred”? Has the definition changed over time? If so, how?
- What is the basis for your sense of the sacred (i.e., scripture, oral tradition, personal experience, clergy, other leaders)? Is that sense of the sacred held universally by all of your members?
- In the film, the Native Americans who leave prayer bundles at Devils Tower are accused of “hanging dirty laundry.” Have you ever been personally criticized or disrespected for your religious beliefs? How did you respond, personally or collectively?
- Can you find any common ground with those whose beliefs differ from yours?
- Does your community of faith have a responsibility to uphold the rights of other faiths to practice what they believe is right? What if you don’t agree with their beliefs?
- What practical steps can you take to protect religious freedom for everyone?










*At the White Vulcan Mine in Arizona, Hopi elder Dalton Taylor points out a pilgrimage trail to U.S. Forest Service archaeologist Linda Farnsworth.*

## Preserving Cultures, Protecting Freedoms

- Would you be willing to refrain from visiting a place that an American Indian culture considers sacred? Would you stay away permanently?
- In your opinion, to what extent do the struggles documented in the film stem from cultural or ethnic differences?
- Do your local newspapers or other media cover stories about cultural and ethnic conflicts? If so, do they seem relevant to your life and concerns?
- The film shows that survival of a culture is threatened when a language dies out, traditions are not passed on, or places considered sacred by that culture are destroyed. What aspects of your culture or surrounding cultures are at risk of dying out?
- Are there elements of your culture or religion that are considered secret or private? What tests do newcomers have to pass to be “initiated”?
- Have you ever been criticized or disrespected for your religious beliefs or lack of beliefs? How did you respond?
- Where do you draw the line between learning from another culture’s traditions and appropriating them? For example, in the film, are the young visitors at Panther Meadows on Mt. Shasta celebrating native religion or abusing Wintu heritage?
- At what point would another person’s religion or cultural practices interfere with your rights?
- What do you consider sacred? What sacred place or object would be worth fighting for?
- What practical steps can we take to protect religious freedom for everyone?



## Taking Action

-  Hold additional screenings and discussions with other groups in your area, especially any that represent the interest groups in the film. Consider using the film to bring together different faith-based, ethnic, environmental or land-use groups to discuss what is most important to each, and to help them define their common ground.
-  With others in your community, make a list of the local structures, landmarks or open spaces that you consider most precious. Determine whether any are threatened and find out if any groups are already working to preserve or restore them. If so, contact them to offer your support. If not, develop your own preservation plan and let media know about the actions your group intends to take.
-  Research conflicts over sacred sites near you. If you feel strongly about what you learn, find out how you can get involved. You also might write to the editor of your local newspaper to state your opinion.
-  Encourage those who coordinate programs at your place of worship to screen the film and follow with a discussion of religious freedom issues.
-  Talk with your children about what you've learned. Discuss ways your family can get involved.
-  Suggest to public officials that they sponsor a screening of *In the Light of Reverence* followed by a public forum on the issues the film raises.
-  Research and offer support to local groups that are working on the issues raised by this film.



WILL PARRINELLO

*This climber, who chooses to respect Lakota wishes, stays off Devils Tower in June and climbs an alternative mountain.*



CHRISTOPHER McLEOD

*National Park Service sign at Devils Tower.*

## RESOURCES

### [www.ienearth.org](http://www.ienearth.org)

**Indigenous Environmental Network** is an alliance of grassroots indigenous peoples whose mission is "to protect the sacredness of Mother Earth from contamination and exploitation by strengthening, maintaining and respecting the traditional teachings and the natural laws." (218) 751-4967

### [www.sacred-sites.org](http://www.sacred-sites.org)

**Sacred Sites International** advocates the preservation of natural and built sacred sites and their traditional cultures, because "protecting sacred sites is key to preserving time-honored cultural values of respecting the earth." (510) 525-1304

### [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)

**National Religious Partnership for the Environment** is a federation of major American faith communities that are implementing distinctive programs on behalf of a common mission: "We act in faith to cherish and protect God's creation. Our goal is to integrate commitment to global sustainability and environmental justice permanently into all aspects of religious life." (212) 316-7441

### [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

**National Park Service** preserves the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

### [www.sacredland.org](http://www.sacredland.org)

**The Sacred Land Film Project** of Earth Island Institute seeks to deepen public understanding of indigenous peoples' struggles to protect sacred places, to provide native people with advocacy tools to use within their communities to save land, and to rekindle respect and reverence for the land within technological society. (650) 747-0685

*Sacred Lands of Indian America*, edited by Jake Page, photographs by David Muench, foreword by Charles E. Little, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001 [www.liveoak.org](http://www.liveoak.org) or call (877) 771-1651

*Sacred Objects and Sacred Places* by Andrew Gulliford, University Press of Colorado, 2000 [www.upcolorado.com](http://www.upcolorado.com) or call (800) 627-7377





# *in the* LIGHT of REVERENCE

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*In the Light of Reverence* is a featured program of Television Race Initiative, a media model that fosters sustainable collaborations among public television stations, community organizations, civil rights leaders, interfaith networks, independent film and series producers, and foundations. Since 1998, TRI has positioned powerful, high-profile PBS broadcasts on issues of race as catalysts for dialogue and problem-solving. If you find this guide useful, please contact us at the TRI e-mail address above.

## P.O.V.

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*In the Light of Reverence* will have its national broadcast premiere on August 14, 2001, on P.O.V., PBS' acclaimed showcase for independent nonfiction film. P.O.V., a cinematic term for "point of view," is a laboratory for television's potential. It amplifies broadcasts by pioneering media innovation, interaction and impact through a wide range of energetic broadcast-related activities including *Talking Back: Video and Digital Letters to P.O.V.*, *High Impact Television™* (HITV) and *P.O.V. Interactive*.

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Through the full participation of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, the mission of NAPT is to inform, educate and encourage the awareness of tribal histories, cultures, languages, opportunities and aspirations by creating and employing all forms of educational and public telecommunications programs and services, thereby supporting tribal sovereignty. NAPT receives major support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

## To purchase or rent the film please contact:

Bullfrog Films, Oley, PA 19547 (800) 543-3764 [www.bullfrogfilms.com](http://www.bullfrogfilms.com)

