

Honor the Treaties



Aaron Huey is a photographer whose evocative and richly textured work has graced Mountainfilm's gallery walls more than once. This short piece profiles his work at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, home to some 300 Lakota Sioux Indians. It's a dark world of poverty and violence but one into which Aaron has allowed himself to be deeply drawn. Why? So that he can give voice to a people's unspoken pain and suffering and the injustice that caused it and sustains it.

Discussing the Film:

The following questions are intended to be used post-film screening to spark discussion and activities related to both the content and storytelling elements of this particular film.

1. What scenes and images do you remember most about *Honor the Treaties*? Why did these stick out to you?
2. How is Aaron Huey's narration used in the film to tell the story? Do you think it is effective?

3. If you had the chance to do a huge mural to bring awareness somewhere in your own community, where would you put it? What powerful images would you chose for your mural?
4. In the film, Aaron Huey narrates: “The last chapter in any successful genocide is one in which the oppressors can remove their hands and say ‘My God, what are these people doing to themselves?’ This is how we came to own these United States. This is the legacy of manifest destiny.” How do you feel about this statement? Do you feel we should bear responsibility today for wrongs committed by others in the past?
5. Aaron Huey calls for us to “Honor the Treaties. Give back the Black Hills.” Do you think the U.S. government should actually do this? Why or why not? Also, do you think getting their land back would help solve some of the issues you see in the film?

Extensions:

1. Check out photographer Aaron Huey’s TED Talk about his work on the Pine Ridge reservation — that is chronicled in *Honor the Treaties* — and about the history of the U.S. government’s interactions with the Sioux peoples.
2. Visit honorthetreaties.org to see find out more ways you can get involved in the “Honor the Treaties” movement.
3. Go to <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/knee.htm> to read a short first-hand account of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890.
4. Work in small groups to design murals surrounding social issues in your community, and have a competition to pick one winner. Complete the project by having the entire classroom put up the winning mural somewhere on the school grounds.

Filmmaker Conversation:

Eric Becker (Director) of “Honor the Treaties”.

Where did you get the idea for *Honor the Treaties*?

EB: Aaron (Huey) got the *Honor the Treaties* poster campaign going and I met him randomly at a coffee shop. I was looking for a personal project that was short and that people would see. Aaron had this energy to him that I knew would show up really well on film. I put it out there and he called me up a couple days before they were going to put the mural up in L.A. We shot for two days on the mural and had these great scenes. Fortunately, I continued working with Aaron and eventually got to go with him to Pine Ridge. I came back from that trip and did a “pitch competition” at an artist’s dinner in Seattle and we got selected! I showed a small piece of the L.A. footage and ended up getting second place. One of the program directors from the Seattle International Film Festival told me he would premiere the film, if I could get it done in two weeks. So, I didn’t leave the dark room for the next two weeks and the film was made. We put it out online and the Vimeo staff gave it the all-important “staff pick” label. Then Reelhouse.com put it out and it got picked up by *Upworthy* and we got around 200K views.

Is there some piece of the story that you wish had made it into the final cut?

EB: Nothing thematically or narratively, but there were images of Aaron shooting some of the folks on Pine Ridge that we couldn’t use it because we were worried about National Geographic’s exclusivity rights, since this was really a feature story he was doing for them.

Talk about the power of art in your own life?

EB: I have always loved films. I made films in high school on VHS decks. I come from a family where it wasn’t entirely understood that people could be creative in their careers, so I’ve never even taken a film class. I went to Yale for grad school and got a degree in global health. It wasn’t until after that I knew I couldn’t ignore my drive to make art. I moved to L.A. with my buddy Will Riser and learned how to produce. Will taught me how to go from a general concept to a specific idea. I wanted to do work with social justice and global health, so I moved up to Seattle in hopes of doing more work, and was actually able to do it.

Do you think the film is successful? What do you hope your audience will take from it?

EB: Critically, I suppose so. The film has played at a ton of festivals, we have hundreds of thousands of views online, and we won a local Northwest Emmy. My work usually focuses on social justice and impressive narratives, and I want to make uplifting films. So, in that sense, I see it as a personal success. It’s helped elevate the conversation surrounding Pine Ridge and any little bit helps. I follow my heart with these projects — I cried a lot during *Treaties*. It was a really moving experience.

What piece of advice can you give to a student who wants to get into filmmaking?

For more information on the film, the filmmakers, or to see other tour destinations and films, visit www.mountainfilm.org

EB: You need to find great subjects. Films are about people and they must have interactions and opinions that are different. Filmmaking is a social thing — you have to engage with the people you film. You have to have an innate curiosity about the trials of other humans. Also, follow projects that are in your heart, because it takes an incredible amount of work and personal risk to make films. You have to work your butt off. Don't worry about the project – just do it. Just work. I totally believe in the “10,000 hours” to become an expert rule. And these days you need to know how to do everything to do anything well.

What's next?

EB: Oh man! There's no big juicy documentary. I direct a lot. I directed some videos for Nike and Thermarest. The more commercial stuff I do, the more I learn about filmmaking. It's nice to have fancy resources in order to learn how to create beautiful compelling imagery.