# The Adam Beach Experience In Flags of Our Fathers

Adam Beach, a Native Canadian actor a part of the Saulteax (Ojibwe) tribe, is one of the most successful indigenous actors and has become a household name. He has starred in many films, both native and non-native, and has played both native and non-native roles. He has also been a part of breakthroughs for native cinema. This research paper explores Beach's life, his roles in films, and his experiences and feelings about some of these films.

Beach was born in Ashern, Manitoba and grew up on the Dog Creek First Nation Reserve. He did not have what one would consider a typical childhood. At the age of 8, his life would change forever when his pregnant mother was killed by a drunk driver. Just a few weeks later, tragedy struck again when his father drowned. To this day, Beach is still afraid of the water (Griffiths). His grandmother in Winnipeg ended up taking him and his brothers in.

Beach's acting career began early on in high school. In an interview he was asked how he got into acting. Beach said that initially he joined acting class so that he and his friends could be in a group during class (Simpson). Little did he know, this would be the beginning of an extremely successful film career. He was also asked how he got through the difficult times and adversity early on in his life. Beach said that the teachings of traditional knowledge and the traditions of his people got him through the hard times (Simpson). Learning about his ancestral timeline helped bring harmony into his life (Simpson).

Adam made the decision to drop out of high school to further pursue his acting career at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People, which was also in Winnipeg. Beach then began to make television appearances and film appearances. One of his first major appearances was as the lead in Disney's Squanto: A Warrior's Tale in 1994. In this film, a group of sailors come to America and kidnap Squanto (Beach) and other natives and take them back to England. The sailors see the Indians as "savages" and believe that the Indians are inferior. His success in this film led to him being cast in subsequent films and tv series' like Dance Me Outside and as Tommy Bright Hawk in Walker Texas Ranger (IMDB).

In 1998 the film, Smoke Signals,was released. Smoke Signals, a culturally significant film, was the first American film to be made by a Native American and have a largely Native American cast. Beach starred as Victor Joseph alongside Evan Adams who played the role of Thomas. Victor and Thomas are complete opposites. Victor is rough around the edges and what some would say a "tough guy," while Thomas would be considered nerdy. Yet, when Victor is informed of his estranged father's death, the two go on a trip to go retrieve the remains of Victor's father. This film is noted for showing modern day Native Americans and some idea of what reservation life is like. For Beach, this film hit home. When asked about the film, he says that the film was an outlet for him to deal with the tragedy of losing his parents' when he was young.

While he had made some brilliant film/tv appearances along the way, Beach's big breakthrough came in 2002 when he played Ben Yahzee, a WW2 Navajo code talker, alongside actor Nicholas Cage. The film shows the great impact that the Navajo code talkers had on U.S. Marine victories in the pacific theater during WW2. After he was cast for this role, he says that

his dreams became a reality (Beach). Out of respect for the Navajo, he wanted to get approval from them before he took the role. The Navajo Nation's only request was that a Navajo be cast for the film as well. That was when Roger Willie was cast to play Charlie Whitehorse, Ben Yahzee's friend. Beach says that Willie taught him a lot about the Navajo Culture and that it is something that he will always hold on to (Beach).

A few years later, Clint Eastwood chose Adam to play Ira Hayes in the World War II film, Flags of Our Fathers. Beach earned a lot of praise for his role in this film. The film tells the story of Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian and WW2 marine, who fought at Iwo Jima and helped raise the flag there. However, he also fought his own demons after the war and died an alcoholic. Beach was ecstatic to play Ira, who he says was a very patriotic man (Abele). He was glad to be a part of a film that doesn't feed into the stereotypes of an indian and one that truly represented his people as human. Beach said that being a part of an Eastwood film brought out the best in him, since he knew that Clint expected great things and the pressure was on. To prepare himself for the role, he thought about the horrors of war around the clock to prepare himself emotionally.

Not only did Beach receive praise from critics and fans, but he also received it from Ira's family as well. Beach portrayed Hayes in such a brilliant way that truly brought to light the battles that Hayes faced. Some of his family didn't even truly understand what Ira had gone through emotionally and psychologically up until watching the film. Beach was glad that he was the one that was able to help tell the story of Ira Hayes and the hero that he was, as opposed to simply an "alcoholic" as he was depicted before. Beach completed this film in hopes that his role would help and encourage other Native American actors to make their breakthroughs into film and Hollywood (Abele).

Flags of Our Fathers also shows the racism that Ira faced. It includes people calling him "chief." When asked if he gets called that, Beach replied with "of course" (Miranda). While growing up, Beach was called "Chief" a lot. He also says that when he hears it on movie sets, it doesn't phase him because he knows that people saying it don't know any better. He knows that Hollywood, through the years, has depicted Native Americans in bad ways and people don't realize the culture and the other side that exists within indigenous people.

Beach is known for being against non-Natives being cast for Native roles in tv and film. He's even baffled at the thought of it. He thinks that "people in Hollywood don't believe that a Native or an ethnic person can be a draw and make money (Miranda)." He believes that along with the fight to preserve their land and culture is to fight to maintain their identities, especially in film. Beach is also a firm believer if someone wants to be cast for a Native role, they need to prove that they are Native. He wants his people to be able to play a part in telling their own stories.

Not only is Beach an actor, but also a motivational speaker and advocate. He founded the Adam Beach Film Institute to encourage and help Native get into the film industry. He is a motivational speaker for the First Nations youth and continues to inspire aspiring Native actors.

Adam Beach, a man of integrity, continues to make strides in the film industry. He has taken on native and non-native roles, and has excelled at both. He has taken on roles, used his roles as emotional outlets, and has put on brilliant performances time and time again. Beach has proven to the industry that Native actors/actresses can succeed in the film industry. While not directly saying it, he is at the forefront of a fight to keep the Native identities alive in film. This research sparks some more interest. Should we expect another big Native role soon from Beach? And is

there any Native talent at his film institute that we should be on the lookout for?

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