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Little Chief

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Little Chief* (2020) directed by Erica Tremblay.

Keywords

Native Americans, Reservations

Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



Little Chief (2019), dir. Erica Tremblay

Little Chief is a sweet and gentle yet powerful film, which was part of the Sundance US Short Films program. We meet Sharon smoking a cigarette outside the casino hotel. When a guest leaves, Sharon rushes to catch the door and sneaks in. Obviously, she's up to no good. We then see her stealing all kinds of things from the maid's cart. Sharon stuffs the stolen items in her bag and walks out through the casino as casually as can be. She hops in her truck and heads off to work.

On her way she comes across a nine-year old student, Bear, walking to school without a jacket on a very cold day. She gives Bear a school sweatshirt to wear and they arrive at the Turkey Ford Elementary School (the Little Chiefs) on the reservation together. She gives Bear a number of packages stolen from the Casino hotel—probably packages of soap—and tells him to put the soap in the restrooms at school. Sharon also gives the nurses things that they obviously cannot afford. They are grateful.

It turns out that Sharon is not a petty thief, but a teacher at the school doing the best she can for the students, even if it means stealing things from the hotel. During recess Sharon watches Bear play tether ball by himself. It is obvious that he is very angry. Later, in class Bear is teased by other students. He knocks things off his desk and runs away—off the grounds of the school. Sharon catches him after he tires out. She gives him a piece of candy and they sit together as the movie ends.

Little Chief is a simple movie, but one that shows clearly how the very first Americans are still so badly treated by the rest of America.