February 2020

Now is the Time

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**Recommended Citation**
McDavid, Jodi (2020) "Now is the Time," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 1 , Article 47. Available at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol24/iss1/47

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Abstract
This is a film review of Now is the Time (2019) directed by Christopher Auchter.

Keywords
Cultural Genocide, Totem Poles, Indigenous communities, Haida

Author Notes
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This sundance film festival review is available in Journal of Religion & Film: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol24/iss1/47
Now is the Time (2019) dir. Christopher Auchter

This 16-minute short is a statement on tradition, loss, and reclamation. It can be viewed as a moment in time that captures an important cultural event, the raising of the first totem pole in 100 years in the Indigenous community of Massett, on Canada’s west coast. But, for anyone thinking critically, the event responds to a cultural genocide against the Haida specifically, and Indigenous people in Canada in general. Robert Davidson, a Haida youth, had gone to museums and seen totem poles, and wondered why he had never seen one in his community. The lack of these material artefacts created a void in the community, especially among the elders. The elders taught him the songs and dances (and engineering) required for the process, but the practice of carving and erecting totem poles had been prohibited by religious leaders and the Indian Act. These sanctions impacted the importance of all cultural practices, and specifically ceremony, song and dance in the community.

The reason that this short, largely based in 1969, is still relevant is because Indigenous people in Canada are still fighting this battle today. Many were removed from their home
communities and put in Residential Schools where they were tortured (starved, sexually abused, beaten), separated from their culture and forced to reject their heritage through social pressure, law, and abuse. The content of this film is very relevant today, and the story is told in an important way that shows the empowerment of the community and its willingness to work together, across clans and intergenerationally.

The artistic choices made by Auchter (also a member of the Haida community) honor the subject matter and will appeal to various audiences. The 1969 film is hyper colour-saturated, and the film uses “quirky” animation and traditional language in parts for emphasis. Overall this would be a great introduction to some of these topics in a classroom setting.