ReFocus: The Films of Wallace Fox
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Tom Brannan of Marietta, Oklahoma
and to Wallace Fox, Jr., and all the family and descendants of
Wallace Fox

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Wallace Fox, Chickasaw filmmaker
Introduction: Wallace Fox and the B Film

Joanna Hearne and Gary D. Rhodes

Beyond the industrial structures and the typical glossy Hollywood cinema . . . there is another entire category of American fictional feature films created and shown under different conditions. These are the B-movies, also called “quickies,” “cheapies,” “low-budget,” or simply “budget films,” even “C” or “Z” films . . . B films occupied an equally important role in Hollywood; to concentrate upon the A would emphasize the art of a few films and elide the basis of production, the underlying commercial and artistic means by which the industry survived—as well as the vast quantity and range of films offered to spectators during the studio era.

Brian Taves, “The B Film: Hollywood’s Other Half”

In asking “hakaru marumatu kwitaka?” [who is bullshitting who?] we have to remember: movies are movies, reels of data captured on camera, never to be trusted and producing multitudes of incommensurable interpretive possibilities. We also have to remember: movies are far more than that, something far-reaching, endless, and rooted in ancient traditions of storytelling and storied tales.

Dustin Tahmahkera, “Hakaru Marumatu Kwitaka?: Seeking Representational Jurisdiction in Comanchería Cinema”

How have Native Americans participated in the creation of films in the twentieth century?

Liza Black, Picturing Indians
Bringing together two streams of film history from the quotations above—at the intersection of B film history and Indigenous film history—we find one answer to Cherokee historian Liza Black’s question in the life and career of Wallace Fox, the youngest member of the first family of Indigenous filmmakers in Hollywood. Born in Purcell, Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) on March 9, 1895, Wallace (or “Wally”) Fox began his Hollywood career as an assistant director in 1921. The film was *The Invisible Fear*, directed by Fox’s brother Edwin Carewe. After working as an actor and later director, Carewe ascended to major studios as the producer-director of such films as *Resurrection* (1927), *Ramona* (1928), and *Evangeline* (1929). Some of Carewe’s films were written by the third brother, scenarist and scriptwriter Finis Fox. Together, Edwin and Finis became major Hollywood players, and part of the social scene of the 1920s. By contrast, Wallace Fox did not appear at Tinseltown parties, at least not so far as the Los Angeles press noticed. Nor did Fox become a director at major studios. From his directorial debut in 1927 with *The Bandit’s Son*, a western starring Bob Steele, Fox spent over two decades working in what became known as B-movies.

Our anthology tracks several analytical approaches to the B film career of Wallace Fox: his work within distinct film genres, his work across the B film industry, and his work in the context of his Chickasaw Nation citizenship. At times these approaches converge and can be understood in conversation, as when we consider Fox’s westerns, while at other times they diverge, as in considerations of Fox’s horror films or East Side Kid dramedies. The highly codified, constrained production system of the B film industry left little room for the Indigenization of genre films in the way that contemporary Indigenous directors have undertaken with independent feature films, such as Jeff Barnaby’s 2019 zombie film *Blood Quantum*, or Georgina Lightning’s 2008 gothic ghost story *Older than America*. Fox represents something of a hidden Indigenous presence in the history of the genre film—hidden especially because he did not “Indigenize” the B film genre system so much as occupy a managerial role within it as a director and sometimes producer who, due to the rigidity of the B film studios and their budgets at mid-century, had little control over its scripts. Even if he had wanted to, without control of scripts, Fox could not have made oppositional work within the B film system. But he could, and did, have a career making genre films, and he seems to have thrived in that milieu despite (or perhaps because of) its limitations. The chapters here focus on the work he made within that system—westerns, horror, serials, and more—showing us the contours and necessarily varied career of an Indigenous person directing mainstream, low-budget studio films during the era of classical Hollywood cinema.

As editors, we come to this anthology from two different backgrounds, our work converging in a manner not unlike Fox’s life and career. Gary D. Rhodes is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation who grew up in the Chickasaw Nation of
Oklahoma. He has written about Native Americans in the cinema, both in scholarly publications and in op-eds for popular audiences, but much of his research concentrates on American film history, specifically the classical Hollywood era and B-movies in which Fox spent the bulk of his career. Joanna Hearne is a non-Indigenous scholar of Indigenous media history, whose work often involves attention to re-crediting Indigenous participants in the film industry as well as archival recovery of Indigenous film texts.

WALLACE FOX AND THE B-MOVIE SYSTEM

When we speak of B-movies, we are speaking of low-budget cinema, but more specifically the kind of low-budget films produced in Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s. Film historian Brian Taves defines them this way:

First, they were to fill the bottom half of a double bill. Second, B’s had leads with moderate, questionable, or unknown box-office appeal, such as second-string cowboy stars. Third, budgets and shooting schedules were more limited [than A films], and B’s were usually made in three
weeks or as little as one week. Fourth, the running time ordinarily ranged from fifty-five to seventy minutes.\(^5\)

While westerns were core to the “poverty row” studios that produced B-movies, other genres came to the fore as well, including comedy, drama, and horror. Certainly it is possible to identify auteurs amongst the large number of B-movie directors, most notably figures like Edgar G. Ulmer and Joseph H. Lewis. But most of these filmmakers hardly fit that description. Consider instead Taves’s description of the successful B-movie director:

Many individuals were shunted into careers dominated by B’s because of their consistent effectiveness in filming efficiently and smoothly. They became typecast, in a sense, not for lack of talent, but precisely because of their demonstrated skill. Turning out pictures rapidly on low budgets required rare abilities: knowing exactly what shots were necessary, editing in the camera without wasting footage on full coverage or more than a few takes, quickly arranging the lighting and camera angles to conceal the cheapness of the sets, eliciting or giving an effective performance with few rehearsals, and covering such disadvantages with fast pacing and shadowy lighting. These abilities were highly prized and might well lead to a continuation in the B realm, but seldom advanced one to the A’s.\(^6\)

This context—the strictures and systems of B film production—frames our discussion of Wallace Fox, who directed approximately eighty films, as well as short subjects and serials, before spending the last four or five years of his career directing low-budget television programs.

Fox was not an auteur. By contrast, we herald him in part because he is an avatar of most B-movie directors, an example of what was special about them: the ability to helm successful low-budget films year after year, genre after genre. And to create at least some films that still resonate with audiences decades later. During his lifetime, Wallace Fox was never as noteworthy or as praised as his two famous brothers, whose careers came to an end with talkies in the early 1930s.

But prior to his death in 1958, when his B-movies began appearing on television, and certainly since his demise, Wallace Fox has experienced something his brothers never did. Not fame, but repeat viewings, over and over again. The fact that so many of his sound movies fell into the public domain—as large numbers of B-movie studios went out of business and never renewed their copyrights—meant that they became popular for TV stations to program. Late-night viewers might see one of Fox’s Monogram horror films such as *The Corpse Vanishes* or *Bowery at Midnight*, for example. By the 1980s, some of them became available on inexpensively produced home video formats. By
the 1990s, some appeared on DVDs on sale for as little as $1. Thus, with regard to studying B-movies, access is both limited and extensive. It is limited due to the general lack of surviving company paperwork, as is available for major studios like Warner Bros. Fortunately, the project of digitizing film industry trade publications has helped expand the historical archive, as the “poverty row” film companies did receive regular coverage in them. With regard to extensive access to B-movies, the fact that most of them are public domain means that viewing them—even if in sometimes poor-quality prints—is extremely easy to do. Hundreds of such movies populate YouTube, for example.

In addition to the wide accessibility of his films, the Wallace Fox legacy has also been fueled by ongoing interest among movie buffs in genres like westerns and horror, as well as in the stars of his films, such as Bela Lugosi, B-western film star Johnny Mack Brown, and the young actors who played tough-talking urban teen characters in Monogram Studio’s East Side Kids film series. As a result, Fox’s films have remained visible and relevant in a manner that his brothers’ work has not.

Examining film directors of the classical Hollywood era is both exciting and challenging. Much effort has been expended on locating auteurs and heralding their unique styles, particularly given the constraints of studio-era filmmaking. That Orson Welles directed such films as Citizen Kane (1941) is all the more amazing given that—as Frank Capra once said in the mid-forties—there were only a few directors with the power to choose their own projects. Scholarly consideration of such studio-era auteurs as Welles and Hitchcock is crucial, but can minimize the fact that most directors largely adhered to overarching studio styles, helming films that they were told to make. Here is the world of, for example, Archie L. Mayo, W. S. “Woody” Van Dyke, and Victor Fleming. Though Fleming was the director of such important movies as The Wizard of Oz (1939) and Gone with the Wind (1939), he was not as much an auteur as he was a talented studio director.

If anything, B-movie directors were even further hampered in terms of power, as some described in conversations with Gary D. Rhodes. Joseph H. Lewis, for example, repeatedly spoke about his lack of choice of story material to direct for B-movie studios in the forties, as well as severely limited budgets and shooting schedules. “Seven days!” he would marvel in retrospect, thinking about how quickly he directed some of those films. Gerald “Jerry” Schnitzer, who wrote many B-movie scripts in the forties—including Bowery at Midnight (1942) which Wallace Fox directed—learned he was supposed to write a project for actor Bela Lugosi on Friday; he had to deliver the finished script on Monday. He had no choice over the genre, and he had only 48 hours to write it. Schnitzer also talked about the fact that it was B-movie producers like Sam Katzman who held the power, not the writers and directors, with Katzman not only choosing which individual films and film series to make, but even at
times becoming involved with particular dialogue on given movies: a brash, cigar-smoking micromanager. He was also someone who, realizing the changing audience landscape of World War II, saw a need to make movies specifically targeted towards women and children.

Studies in B-movies are at once expansive and limited, meaning that much scholarly work has been undertaken on B genres like horror and film noir, particularly as they relate to a few directors that have—despite the aforementioned limitations—been viewed as auteurs, such as Edgar G. Ulmer and Joseph H. Lewis. Engagement with their work has varied in approach and methodology, ranging from psychoanalytic criticism to neo-formalist aesthetic analysis. That said, there remains a dearth of work on the industrial practices of the B-movie studios, a term that may itself be problematic. As Schnitzer told Rhodes, “studios” like Monogram and PRC weren’t really studios; they were mainly comprised of company offices, with personnel renting studio space as needed.

In the B-movie industry, most directors were not auteurs, any more than they were at the major studios. The companies producing B-movies often masked the individuality of their directors in favor of the consistency of genre products. As a result, there has not been enough focus on individuals within the B film system. We focus on Fox in part to emphasize that even in such restricted industrial contexts, those working within it were individuals, despite their lack of authorial control.

WALLACE FOX AND INDIGENOUS HOLLYWOOD

In addition to being an exemplar of a successful director of low-budget B-movies, Wallace Fox is distinctive because of his Indigenous identity as an enrolled citizen of the Chickasaw Nation. He and his family members are all listed on the Dawes Commission of Final Rolls (the “Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes”), and trace their Chickasaw lineage, through their mother Sallie Priddy, to their mixed-blood ancestor John McLish, who appears in histories of the Chickasaw as a translator and treaty signatory, and who traveled, during Removal, from the Chickasaw homelands in Mississippi to the Indian Territory in 1837. McLish had close ties with Chickasaw Nation leadership and the powerful Colbert family, and even generations later, Wallace’s eldest brother Finis was active in tribal and Territory politics, serving briefly as a legislator in the Chickasaw government.

Thus, although Wallace was only a young child during the family’s time in Indian Territory—his mother died when he was five, and his father remarried and moved the family to Texas sometime before 1906—he grew up in a politically engaged environment at a moment of intense pressure on the Chickasaw
Nation, immediately prior to the formal dissolution of the tribal governments in Indian Territory on the eve of the 1907 admission of Oklahoma to U.S. statehood. He and his parents and brothers lived through some of the events, like the settler land runs of the 1890s, so often (mis)represented in later films; they would have discussed not only local but also national Indian policy. These federal policies changed radically during their lifetimes, from the early twentieth-century assimilationist policies of land allotment and tribal government dissolution; through the pressure for reform in the late 1920s leading to the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act advocating tribal and territorial reorganization; to the late 1940s and early 1950s Termination and Relocation policies which attempted to terminate tribal governments and collective landholdings once again.

The Fox brothers came from an intermarried family of relatively wealthy lawyers, stockmen and landowners, and could pass for white; they were highly mobile physically and socially at a time when the movements of people from other Native nations were often restricted by reservation Indian agents or superintendents who had the power to control the off-reservation travel of individual tribal members. Like his elder brothers, Wallace Fox traveled widely in his youth, enlisting in the Navy in 1911 and serving in World War I. Passport records show him traveling back to the U.S. from Istanbul upon his discharge in 1918. By 1920 he had joined his brothers in Los Angeles, where Edwin Carewe was directing films and Finis Fox working as a scenarist. Unlike Native American actors in the Hollywood studio system, Wallace Fox and his brothers held positions of industrial importance; once Carewe retired from acting to direct and produce full time, the brothers worked behind the camera rather than in front of it. They were proud of their Chickasaw Nation citizenship and of their youth living in Indian Territory—both Finis Fox and Edwin Carewe often mentioned it in their interviews and press materials—but they never played Indian for the camera.

In mid-century Hollywood from the late 1920s through the early 1950s, images of Indians were ubiquitous on American screens and consistently narrated Indian demise. Decades of scholarship have parsed these stereotypes—from Robert Berkhofer’s 1978 *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, which outlined the historical trajectory of “noble” and “savage” images of Indians, to the work of Jacquelyn Kilpatrick (*Celluloid Indians*), M. Elise Marubbio (*Killing the Indian Maiden*), Armando José Prats (*Invisible Natives*), and others.

Productions during Wallace Fox’s career in classical Hollywood imagined Indians not only through these longstanding stereotypes but also in terms of production cycles that engaged with policies and political discourse, such as the pressure to reform the Indian boarding schools in the 1920s (the subject of Paramount’s prestige films, *The Vanishing American* in 1925 and *Redskin* in 1929)
and the assimilationist pressure of the postwar period through the mid-1950s (framed as integrationist in “pro-Indian” westerns such as Devil’s Doorway and Broken Arrow, both 1950). The 1930s and 1940s, Fox’s own peak decades, saw the rise of the B-western, the singing cowboy, and the talkies in which Indian characters spoke in broken English or not at all, even as they provided a major source of on-screen action and stunts. Outside of a few projects that attempted to represent pre-contact Native life—such as Nanook of the North (1922), Daughter of Dawn (1925), and The Silent Enemy (1930)—Indian characters were always represented in relations of hostility or loyalty to white settlers, and in some stage of decline or vanishing.

In contrast to the “vanishing Indians” on screen, Indigenous participants were alive and well and professionally active in Hollywood at mid-century. Most Indigenous performers specialized in playing Indian roles, or were hired onto productions as consultants, such as Nipo Strongheart and Chief Yowlatchie (Daniel Simmons), both Yakama, Mohawk actor Jay Silverheels, and Molly Spotted Elk (Mary Alice Nelson, Penobscot). Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja has developed an expansive definition for performative “redfacing” to indicate “the process and politics of playing Indian,” whether the performer is Native American or non-Native (indeed, makeup artists frequently applied bronze skin makeup to both, as Liza Black’s research has shown). Many Native actors had their own professional and social networks in Los Angeles, but studios also hired large numbers of non-professional Native extras when shooting westerns on or near reservation lands. In both cases, performers used what power they had to negotiate for better pay and labor conditions, and some actors, like Victor Daniels (Chief Thunder Cloud), used promotional materials to leverage small interventions in the larger patterns of Hollywood representation and messaging.

Wallace Fox would have constantly navigated this complicated space of film conventions as a Chickasaw director working within the extremely narrow limitations of the Hollywood studio system in general and the stricures of the B-film production pipeline in particular (which precluded certain kinds of variation even as it was predicated on producing prolific versions). Raheja describes such Indigenous negotiations as “visual sovereignty,” a way of “thinking about the space between resistance and compliance wherein filmmakers and actors revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure” film conventions, “while at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created by these conventions.”

Recovering the career of Wallace Fox contributes, then, not only to the history of the B film but also to the history of Indigenous Hollywood, where behind the images of Indian erasure on screen, we also find ample evidence of “Indians in unexpected places” (to use Phil Deloria’s phrase). One of those places is that ur-story of vanishing Indians, the 1936 George Seitz version of
The Last of the Mohicans, a production for which Wallace Fox served as an Assistant Director. Should we begin to think about this film differently with the knowledge that a Chickasaw director was involved in the production? At the very least, we can no longer see it solely through the lens of onscreen stereotypes; re-recognizing and re-crediting the stories of Indigenous presence within the very industry that produced images of Indians vanishing shows us the contours of the system in a new way—its “working environments, representational boundaries, and conditions of possibility.” At the same time, as a director and sometimes producer, Fox was not defined by his identity as so many Native performers were; he was not limited to westerns or to films on Indian subjects but rather ranged as widely in genre work as the B-film industry allowed. For example, much scholarship in Indigenous film history has tracked the dynamics of creative control whereby non-Indigenous directors dictated representations of Indigenous peoples on screen; Fox’s films occasionally instantiate the opposite configuration, in which a Chickasaw filmmaker orchestrates the consolidation of urban Irish-American identity and values on screen, as in the East Side Kids series. Yet across the contradictions in Fox’s Chickasaw background and his representations of the bowery, “survival is the name of the game” (see Sipiora’s chapter in this volume).

In Kings of the Bs (1975), Todd McCarthy wrote persuasively that:

In accord with Henri Langlois’ policy at the Cinémathèque Française, that every film ever made deserves to be saved because of the constantly changing perspective of history, we determined to reach back (some might say down) into film history as far as possible, to disregard temporarily the upper crust, to let qualitative considerations, by and large, surface where they may, perhaps to illuminate the business side of the art form for a change, and, hopefully, partially fill a gap in film history, to study the American B (and C and Z) movie. In opting to compile an anthology on Wallace Fox, we share the same perspective, hoping to build on prior literature by investigating an important but largely forgotten director, one who helped anchor the industry for over a quarter of a century, not because of his heritage as an Indigenous person, but largely in spite of it.

In this volume, we present twelve essays on the film career of Wallace Fox, beginning with three that explore different eras and concerns that surface in his westerns, the genre in which he worked more often than any other. Andrew H. Fisher inaugurates the volume with his chapter “Between Compliance and Resistance: Mapping the Careers of Wallace Fox and Nipo Strongheart in Early Hollywood,” which importantly places Fox’s career within the context of his era.
Joanna Hearne’s “Indian Agents and Indigenous Agency at Universal” explores *Wild Beauty* (1946) and *Gun Town* (1946), both of which depict Native American characters on screen. They invite us to re-examine the potential for Raheja’s “visual sovereignty” in the work of an Indigenous director embedded within the Hollywood system. Both films make heroes of Indian agent characters and activate discourses of friendship and hostility between settlers and tribes in their storylines, looking toward the resurgence of social commentary in sympathetic westerns and frontier *noir* films from major studios in the 1950s, while also adopting some of the gender politics of the singing cowboy films of the 1930s.

In Chapter 3, “Neglected Western Traditions and Indigenous Cinema in the 1945–46 Series Westerns of Wallace Fox,” Jacob Floyd examines Fox’s westerns of a later period, specifically those starring Kirby Grant. In addition to examining Fox’s use of stock footage against its initial purpose, Floyd provides insight into how the Grant film series demonstrates neglected and progressive traditions.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 move the discussion to the horror genre, in which Fox worked only rarely, but quite memorably, particularly given how much attention the work of Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney, Jr. still receives. In “*The Corpse Vanishes* and the Case of the Missing Brides” Gary D. Rhodes analyzes how
The Corpse Vanishes (1942), with Bela Lugosi, activates generic past practice, resulting in the convergence of three important trajectories of horror entertainment: (A) the intrepid and fast-talking female newspaper journalist who investigates and documents weird goings-on that, (B) under scrutiny invoke the vampiric more than the scientific, all being the work of (C) a bizarre and insane family. Here is a brew that percolates with more possibilities than any test tube in the mad scientist’s laboratory, combining elements of the past into a unique formula that was prescient of horror movies to come.

In “‘Like a crazy nightmare’: Noirish Vampirism and Deviance in Bowery at Midnight” Marlisa Santos interrogates another of Fox’s collaborations with Bela Lugosi, one in which surrealistic, logic-stretched aspects of the film set it apart from conventional B-picture horror fare and place it squarely as a weirdly compelling noir, in the same—albeit less polished—vein as Boris Ingster’s Stranger on the Third Floor (1940) and Jacques Tourneur’s Cat People (1942). From the opening scenes showing Lugosi as a seemingly charitable soup kitchen proprietor, Fox capitalizes on viewer associations with his vampire roles, making the ensuing narrative about underground criminal networks, drug addiction, and class privilege much deeper than those of typical scare features and displaying the unapologetically violent, logic-averse, and morally ambiguous elements of film noir that would come to define the cycle.

Murray Leeder concludes the trio of horror film chapters with “Voices and Vaults: Pillow of Death.” In it, Leeder argues for the last of Universal’s Inner Sanctum series, Pillow of Death (1945), with Lon Chaney Jr., as an unusual and ambiguous treatment of the cinematic supernatural. After establishing the film’s place within traditions of films involving spiritualism, the chapter provides close readings of three scenes in which characters investigate apparently supernatural phenomena. The chapter observes that ambiguous uses of POV shots and sound cues place the film formally within Tzvetan Todorov’s category of the Fantastic, even as the script on its own seems more inclined towards the Fantastic-Uncanny.

In Chapter 7, on “Wallace Fox and America’s ‘Career Girls,’” David J. Hogan investigates the director’s work in what was sometimes called the “women’s picture.” His chapter looks at those movies—The Girl from Monterey (1943), Career Girl (1944), and Men on Her Mind (1944)—as 1) discrete creative projects; 2) exemplars of America’s growing interest in working women; and 3) revealers of American attitudes about women. For Hogan, Fox’s career-girl trilogy focuses on professional ambition, much as Fox himself diligently pursued his professional career, coping endlessly with challenges posed by minuscule budgets, and laboring to succeed.

Fox’s work with the “women’s picture” was not limited to feature films, however, as Sara Rutkowski researches with “She Made Her Own Deadline: Fox’s Brenda Starr, Reporter.” One of the last “cliffhanger” serials produced
by Columbia Pictures, *Brenda Starr, Reporter* (1945) caps the era of the “girl reporter” film, a fashionable genre throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. But unlike other girl reporters portrayed as fast-talking hardboiled heroines whose encounters with their male counterparts bristle with sexual tension, Brenda Starr is notably wholesome and soft-edged. Nevertheless, she is also a driven and daring sleuth, who proves she can excel in a dangerous man’s world. Rutkowski’s chapter examines how the particular commercial, cultural, and aesthetic demands of the film serial format helped to create a unique version of the girl reporter as one which embodied the contradictions inherent in a burgeoning postwar society: namely, the desire both to contain women in acceptable, feminine roles and to relish their capacity for independence and ambition.

In Chapter 9, Phillip Sipiora presents “Bathos in the Bowery,” which interrogates Fox’s films in the *East Side Kids* series, an innovative collective portrait of urban New York adolescence that was produced between 1941 and 1945. These films were not unlike other contemporary portraits of rebellious youth, but what distinguishes the work of Fox is his ingenious demonstration of youthful rebellion in a complex weave of bathos and pathos that systematically reveals penetrating sociological insight into the complex, challenging cultural arena of an urban homeland during wartime. Many films from this era were patriotic efforts to boost national morale, and others appealed to respite or escapism from the stresses of war. Fox’s films, however, are much more than a gesture of distancing the nation from the trauma of current events. There are common performative and cultural threads running through them, particularly Fox’s deft use of intertwined bathos and pathos to entertain as well as articulate his subject matter with somber gravity.

Chapter 10 provides insight into Fox’s major foray into science fiction. Michael L. Shuman’s “Infernal Devices: Wallace Fox’s Aeroglobe, Cosmic Beam Annihilator, and the Pit of Everlasting Fire” inspects the 1947 serial *Jack Armstrong: All American Boy*. For juvenile audience members just beginning to comprehend the puzzle and complexity of the adult world, Fox’s serial provides an alternative, and simpler, solution to the problematic mechanics of living while inspiring both the thrill of heroic temperament and the wonderment of scientific progress. Fox appropriated the conventions of the B-movie serial format and, with an extensive career of producing thrills and suspense on a low budget, directed a chapter play that met the stated goals of the format admirably and, perhaps, more consistently than Hitchcock, Lang, or Chaplin fulfilled their own A-movie ambitions.

Robert Singer concludes the current volume by exploring the final stage of Fox’s career, which unfolded in the nascent medium of television. Chapter 11, “A Fox in the Wild: *Ramar of the Jungle* and the Crisis of Representation,” specifically delves into *Ramar of the Jungle* (1953–1954). Fox’s episodes and the
entire series have been pejoratively classified as ideologically circumscribed, even embarrassing narratives. Singer contends that Fox’s Ramar episodes are not as easily catalogued as markedly racist and merit reassessment. National and international media productions from the postwar era invite intergeneric, alternative readings of the socio-political matter, while acknowledging obvious controversies. For Singer, these are problematic, not superficial, narratives.

Collectively, it is our hope that the essays that comprise The Films of Wallace Fox will add meaningfully to studies of B-movies and classical Hollywood as well as expand the purview of Indigenous film history to include B-films. Wallace Fox exemplifies the convergence of these film forms and genres that might otherwise be regarded as distinct or even disparate. While audiences and researchers from these fields begin with different kinds of working knowledge and expectations, bringing distinct approaches into juxtaposition can expand the horizons of both readerships and help all of us to reclaim the history and work of one of the first Native American film directors.

NOTES

5. Taves, 314.
6. Ibid., 330.
10. See, for example, new work on Cherokee humorist Will Rogers, Winnebago performer and activist Lilian St. Cyr, and Yakama consultant Nipo Strongheart, among others: Amy M. Ware, The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of an American Icon.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, Hollywood seemed to be full of chiefs but not enough Indians. Thanks to the popularity of the western genre, the film industry supported a veritable council of celluloid chiefs and sachems, who competed for work and sometimes jealously checked each other’s bona fides. Many were not mere charlatans or pretenders, but popular expectations compelled them to adopt colorful stage names and even to assemble whole personas of dubious authenticity. Among the notables were Chief Big Bear, Chief Black Hawk, Chief Blue Eagle, Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, Chief Francis Sitting Eagle, Chief Red Fox, Chief Running Horse, Chief Standing Bear, Chief Thunderbird, Chief Young Turtle, and at least three Chief White Eagles. Others performed under such imposing titles as Chief Darkcloud, Chief John Big Tree, Chief Many Treaties, Chief Strongheart, and Chief Yowlachie.¹

By the late 1920s, “Hollywood Indians” had become so commonplace that a Wyoming newspaper could sarcastically describe them as a distinctive type:

He is a male person, so eager for work “in the movies” that he even jumps at the chance to take off his clothes, dab 95 percent of his body surface with an unpleasant red compound that is disagreeable to wear—besides temporarily ruining [the] bathtub—and run about the Hollywood environs with a thousand of his kind, wearing only a few feathers, in blazing sun or shivering cold.²

There were some women as well, including Princess Redwing and Princess Tsianina Red Feather. The latter, a Cherokee-Creek singer, reportedly caused a local “Indian shortage” in the fall of 1927 when she summoned all the Native performers in town to participate in a four-night extravaganza of “ceremonials” at the Hollywood Bowl.³
Thanks to this pageant, director Wallace Fox had difficulty finding sufficient extras to wrap up the shooting of FBO’s *The Riding Renegade*, starring cowboy actor Bob Steele. According to the *Roosevelt Standard*, Princess Tsianina’s event at the Hollywood Bowl took virtually all of the Indians away from the studios and made it necessary for Steele and Fox to “combine the hinterland of Hollywood for three days to get enough Indians for the scenes in the production.” Apparently, Fox could not wait for the pageant to conclude and chose not to participate himself, despite his Chickasaw ancestry and the good cause to which it contributed; namely, “to raise funds to build an Indian village near Los Angeles where the vanishing Americans can carry on their arts and crafts.” He had a schedule to keep, and he would soon acquire a reputation for finishing his movies on time and under budget.  

*The Riding Renegade*, which opened in February 1928, was Fox’s third film as lead director and one of six he released that year alone. Such a high rate of productivity did not lend itself to auteurism, artistry, or concern for authenticity. It also suggests the different choices made by one Native film professional at a time when Hollywood expected and rewarded stereotypical presentations of Indianness both on and off screen. While his brothers Edwin Carewe and Finis Fox collaborated to create *Ramona* (1928), a lavishly produced and critically acclaimed epic about the plight of California Indians, Wallace Fox began a long and prolific career churning out B-movies. Between 1927 and 1938, he directed sixteen westerns and served as assistant director on *The Last of the Mohicans* (1936). Of those films, only the latter and *The Riding Renegade* featured Native Americans in any significant way. The rest were conventional B-westerns, with bandits, kidnappers, robbers, or rustlers as the villains and Indians conspicuously absent. Significantly, Native Americans provide heroic backup in *The Riding Renegade*, but none of Fox’s early movies made them the protagonists or the focal point of the story. If he was interested in advancing what Michelle Raheja calls “visual sovereignty,” it is not readily or consistently apparent within his body of work. Whether we should read that choice as capitulation to the dominant discourse of early American cinema, or whether Fox’s career encourages us to expand our understanding of Indigenous filmmaking, is one of the central concerns of this chapter.

Fox presents a particularly interesting case because, unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not engage in obvious forms of “redfacing” either as a director or as a member of the Los Angeles Indian community. Most Hollywood Indians of his generation worked in front of the camera, taking the roles assigned them by the cinematic conventions and cultural discourses of the day. They played their part as Savages or Noble Savages, Vanishing Red Men, and Romantic Primitives in scenarios written by and for members of the dominant society. In public appearances as well, they often donned paint and feathers to satisfy the expectations of white audiences, which generally