

Little Big Man -- blunted irony

CALENDAR

Review by
ROLAND REED

This is the time of the American Indian in Hollywood. Following hard upon the films *Flap* from the novel *Nobody Loves a Drunken Indian* and the controversial *A Man Called Horse* comes *Little Big Man* based on Thomas Berger's novel with the same title.

Although *Little Big Man*, like *A Man Called Horse* has a white man as its central character, the potential for controversy is lessened by the straightforwardness of the point of view.

Little Big Man is clearly and absolutely the vision of a white man living alternately in white and in Indian society. The omniscient point of view and seemingly historical "objectivity" of *A Man Called*

Horse does not exist in *Little Big Man*.

THE MAIN ACTION of *Little Big Man* is framed by a taped interview with 121-year-old Jack Crabb, Indian fighter, white renegade and sole white surviving witness to the Battle of Little Big Horn (Custer's Last Stand).

This cliché of a narrator telling of the events of his past life to lead into the body of the film is successful largely because of the technical mastery of Dustin Hoffman's vocal interpretation of the old man—he sounds like a vigorous and very hoarse crow—and the make-up artistry of Dick Smith, whose credit line should be much more prominent.

THIS NARRATIVE technique works well also because Crabb's 121-year-old insights provide delightful

perspective to the events in his life as he lives them from ages 10 to about 45. His wry comments on his youthful gullibility and innocence provide some of the best comedy in the film.

Calder Willingham's screen play maintains the novel's balance of seriousness, robust comedy and dramatic irony during the first three-fourths of the film.

With the introduction of George Armstrong Custer a polemical tone, fostered by script writer and director alike, invades the film. The serious aspects become melodrama and diatribe, the comedy becomes cartoon farce and the razor edge of the irony is transformed into a bludgeon. Or as a local wit observed, "the film, after sliding with perfect balance down the bannister of irony, finally castrates itself on the newel post."

Berger's powerful ending is blurred and colored by a pure Hollywood honey-filter: the really good live on. To his credit, Willingham's script generally provides motivation and resolution for the condensed episodes.

ARTHUR PENN's direction shows a strong sense of rhythm and pace. He used contrasting shot durations, alternate scenes of brightness and darkness, intimacy and panorama to hold audience attention. These elements also compliment the internal conflicts of the hero who is alternately drawn to white and Indian ways of life—to comfort and adventure.

Martin Balsam's snake-oil peddler scenes do not adequately represent Jack's disillusionment with the white world. Too little of the extreme poverty and hardships of Indian life is realistically portrayed to justify Jack's betrayal of his friends when he defects to the material comfort of the white society.

The film's condensation of the novel suffers most in this area.

CHIEF DAN George as Old Lodge Skins maintains great dignity in a pretty salty, comic role in spite of the uncharacteristic triteness of lines like, "My heart soars like a hawk" (which even surpasses Father Hopkins's, "My heart in hiding stirred for a bird").

The Chief also has some of the best lines. He expresses his frustration at the never ending white plague: "There seems to be an endless supply of white men while the number of Human Beings is extremely limited."

Dustin Hoffman's portrayal of the picaresque hero's 35 year progress from innocence to spikey cynicism is generally believable with the style of the film, but at times the brevity of individual episodes gives him too little time to establish his characterization at a specific age before he is thrown into a later time period.

These limitations detract from, but by no means destroy the film's unique and entertaining vision of the old West "like it wuz."

Little Big Man opens Friday at the Varsity Theater.

- Noon - Kappa Kappa Psi, Union
- 12:30 p.m. - Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, Union
- 2:30 p.m. - CSL Comm. on Student Organizations, Union
- 2:45 p.m. - Awards Day, Union
- 3:30 p.m. - Awards Day Reception, Union
- 3:30 p.m. - Builders College Days, Union
- 3:30 p.m. - Union Coffee House Comm., Union
- 5 p.m. - Corncobs, Union
- 6 p.m. - Special Services Tutoring, Union
- 6 p.m. - Union Program Council, Union
- 6:30 p.m. - Campus Crusade for Christ, Union
- 7 p.m. - IFC Rush Comm., Union
- 7 p.m. - Graduate Student Association, 228 Andrews Hall
- 7p.m. - Opening, Student Art Show, Sheldon Gallery
- 7 p.m. - Blueprint Interviews Staff & Meeting, Union
- 7:30 p.m. - English Dept. Ronald Watkins, Union
- 7:30 p.m. - Math Counselors, Union
- 7:30 p.m. Circle K, East Union
- 7:30 p.m. - Ag. Economics East Union
- 8 p.m. - Human Relations Insight League, Union
- 8 p.m. - Free Univ. Issues & Confrontations, Union
- 9 p.m. - Ag. Advisory, East Union
- 9:30 p.m. - Young Americans for Freedom, Union
- 9:30 p.m. - Mortar Board, Union

Graduating Seniors

10% discount
with this coupon
Jeanne's
FASHION FABRICS

Monday - Friday 9 - 9 Saturday 9 - 6 Sunday 12 - 6
10 blocks North of the Stadium on 10th Street

Opening this fall . . .

BonaVenture

MOBILE HOME VILLAGE
at Southwest 16th & South Streets

An adventure in Good Living. . . .

- Your own Clubhouse
- Laundry Facilities
- 2 Car Offstreet Parking
- Underground Facilities
- And Many Other Extras

Plan to move in about September.

Reservations Are Now Being Taken.

YES! I'd like to hear more
about BonaVenture Villiage.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip Code _____

Commodore Properties, Inc.
8712 West Dodge Rd.
Omaha, Nebraska 68114



REVIEWERS



COLUMNISTS



PHOTOGRAPHERS



FREE-LANCE WRITERS



REPORTERS



COPY READERS



POETS



AD SALESMEN



ARTISTS

OF anybody to help...
EXPERIENCE HELPFUL -
BUT NOT NECESSARY!
CHECK NOW IN
The Rag OFFICE -
STUDENT UNION BASEMENT