FILM ANALYSIS 1

How Tasty was my Little Frenchman and America Before Columbus

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Race, Love, and Conquest
Giovanni Stradano’s engraving, *Amerigo Vespucci awakening “America”*, is embedded with many examples of colonial discourse. It illustrates many myths, including the myths of racism and conquest. *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman* and *America Before Columbus* are two films that illustrate similar colonial discourses from this time period. These films encapsulate and juxtapose these myths of racism and conquest.

The myth of racism is evident in both *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman* and *America Before Columbus*. The cultural difference between the Europeans and Native Americans in both films is pretty obvious. The racism in *America Before Columbus* is more evident than in *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman*. During portions of the film involving Europeans, they play dramatic background music as if the Europeans held more importance over the Native Americans, in which they played nature noises in the background. The portrayal of the Native Americans makes them seem naive and passive. The European portions of the film focus on class, industry, and innovation, while the Native American portions just focus on culture and nature. The insiders, Europeans, are viewed to be more adjusted and celebrated while the outsiders, the natives, are viewed as bizarre and pre evolution. *How Tasty was My Little Frenchman* is classified as a genre of film called Cinema Novo, which is a movement of film that highlights social equality and intellectualism. This genre was created in response to racism in Latin America and in the United States. The director does not show the Natives to be weak, passive, or savage, but instead shows lush landscapes of their land and
the beauty in their people. In this film, the Native Americans are portrayed as good, strong people.

Stradano’s engraving also includes images of cannibalism, which is another myth illustrated in both films. *America Before Columbus* is centered around the year 1491, which is known as a “European” year. The whole film is building up to Columbus’ discovery of the “new world”. This documentary is believable because they have scientists and expert opinions. With their professional tone and academic vocabulary, it is easy to believe that the film showed all true facts and situations. The fact is, the winners, Europeans, write history so it is likely that some important parts of history were not shown in this film. Europeans were selfish in their conquests and only sought power and fortune. The Europeans killed anyone in their way out of greed, but they were unable to understand the natives’ presumably “other” way of living. This makes the viewer question who the real savages are. The Natives may have consumed their enemies out of honor, vengeance, and respect, but Europeans ripped their enemies limb from limb and fed them to flesh eating dogs. The Natives and the Europeans held many prejudices against each other and thus failed to understand each other. This idea is illustrated in *How Tasty was My Little Frenchman*. The Natives captured Jean and brought him into their community. He married and even fell in love with a woman from the village. Even though Jean was given a decent life in the village, he was still a greedy European. The director chose to include a part showing Jean kill another European for gold. This
portrays the Europeans as greedy, while the Natives are kind and honorable. Eventually, the Natives did sacrifice Jean, but they sacrificed him out of honor and in order to consume his courage and strength.

*How Tasty was My Little Frenchman* and *America Before Columbus* both exhibited the myths of racism and cannibalism, but in two different ways. While the documentary still seemed to be biased towards the Europeans and held prejudices against the Natives, the fictional movie opposed the idea of racism and favored the Natives over the Europeans. Cannibalism is a projected idea of savagery which was lightly addressed in *America Before Columbus*, but cannibalism was more clearly described in *How Tasty was My Little Frenchman*. Although in that film, cannibalism was not shown as being “savage” but a form of honor and respect for one’s enemy.