DODGING BULLETS
STORIES FROM SURVIVORS OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

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15 VANESSA GOODTHUNDER, RACHEL YEHUDA, DON COYHS, TARA HOUSKA, LEONARD THOMPSON, LESTER JOHNSON III, JOSEPH MARSHALL III
20 LINDA EAGLE SPEAKER, RICHIE PLASS, DIRK WHITEBEAST, RICK MCAFARLIN

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Defining Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma is best defined by cumulative emotional and psychological wounding of a population caused by a traumatic experience or events.

**Genocide. Ethnocide. Forced relocation. Destruction of culture. Abuse.**

These experiences, shared by communities, can result in cumulative emotional and psychological wounds that are carried across generations. Researchers and practitioners call this concept Historical Trauma.\(^1\)

The effects of the traumas inflicted on groups of people because of their race, creed, or ethnicity linger on the souls of their descendants. As a result, many people in these same communities experience higher rates of mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and erosion in families or community structures. The persistent cycle of trauma destroys family and communities and threatens the vibrancy of entire cultures.\(^2\)

It is most commonly seen through high rates of substance abuse, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, suicide, domestic violence, and abuse within afflicted communities.
Native Americans have dodged bullets since first contact with Europeans. This film brings a cross-generational sampling of Indigenous people, researchers, and politicians to reveal stunning reasons for their disproportionately high incidences of health and social issues. This collection of remarkable stories, names Historical Trauma as the unique and insidious part of the genetic code that resilient Native American populations are still finding ways to dodge.

The film focuses on Native Americans and is not the typical “tragedy porn” film about Indian Country, it is an accurate portrayal of life.
Film Segments

Introduction to Historical Trauma
First Contact
No Honor in Racism
Boarding School Era
Treaty Rights
Social Justice
Loss and Resilience

“Dodging Bullets aims to educate the viewer about the untaught parts of American history.”
MSP Magazine

“A personal, heart-wrenching dive into social injustice that is consistently put on the back burner of America.”
Stony Brook University

“Dodging Bullets is important as a vehicle for Native voices, a reminder that even if it’s too late to right some historical wrongs, there’s really no excuse to keep on doing harm.”
Rotten Tomatoes

Dodging Bullets has sold out theaters in private and festival screenings around the USA.

98% of viewers rate Dodging Bullets very good to excellent

97% of viewers would recommend Dodging Bullets to friends

“It’s historical only in that it started in the past. What happened in the past set in cycle processes, norms, behaviors, policies that continue to have an impact today.”
Dr. Melissa Wells, associate professor, department of family medicine and biobehavioral health, University of Minnesota Medical Center

Now Available for Film Festival and Private Screenings | Visit DodgingBullets.org for more information
When I was in my teens, I drove alone to Wounded Knee in order to see life in Indian Country. At the memorial, I got out of my car to experience a part of history that I knew little about. I had grown up in the ’60s and my understanding of Native American history was primarily based on two men; Christopher Columbus, who was portrayed as a great man who deserved his own holiday and Jim Thorpe, a sports hero and one of the only Native American biographies found in my grade school library. Little did I know that my lack of knowledge could have gotten me killed. While at the Wounded Knee memorial, I was chased at gunpoint by three men for just looking around. I have often thought to myself that I dodged a bullet that day.

Three years ago while researching diabetes in the United States, I ran across a man named Raymond White Tail Feather at the Dakota Trading Post in Poplar, Montana. We talked for over an hour, and during that time, I told him about my experience at Wounded Knee. He told me that I was naive not to understand why this happened and that I needed to learn the truth for myself. Not the “truth” taught in history books, but the truth about first contact, relocation, the Dawes Act, and the boarding school era. He said only until I learned about these events, would I be able to understand why I was chased at gunpoint.
It is well known that Native Americans have endured horrible traumas in their collective history that they are still working to overcome. This film hopes to build an understanding that struggles the indigenous people of North America face today may be caused by the trauma that their ancestors faced many generations ago. It has only been recently discovered that traumatic events of past generations may cause epigenetic changes in the DNA, and those DNA changes are passed down from generation to generation.

Just as Raymond White Tail Feather gifted me this journey, diabetes clinician Cheryl Bighorn-Savior gifted me the story about her brother in Poplar, Montana. It became the first step on a journey that led me around North America; from Santee to Browning to Red Lake. My adventure will never end because as a non-native, I want to continue to learn historical life lessons to better understand what the First Nation’s people have to do to survive in this world.

Dodging Bullets is metaphorical, yet it is part of life in Indian Country. When you are marginalized and damaged, health and social issues come at you from all directions. The survivors are like a character in “The Matrix”; they work to protect their Spirit while flexing and bending out of the way of denigrating bullets in order to survive.
### Viewer Surveys

#### What was your reaction to the film overall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### How would you rate the production quality of this film?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production Quality</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### What was the most intriguing section of the film?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of the film</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Contact</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Honor in Racialism</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boarding School Era</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treaty Rights</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss and Survivors</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Did you agree with the message that the film portrays?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree or Disagree</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### How likely would you be to recommend this film to your friends or colleagues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Likely</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Unlikely</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey results taken from film festival and university screenings at 21 locations across the United States.
Viewer Comments

“Such a personal, heart-wrenching dive into an area of social injustice that is consistently put on the back burner of American ineptitude.”

“It was hard to watch, but the stories must be told. Miigwetch to all who sent those voices!”

“Strikingly moving and educationally exploratory at the same time, this movie should launch a societal unpacking of Historical Trauma.”

“A wonderful piece of information and necessary for Americans to be better educated about the continuous oppression among indigenous people.”

“A story that is desperately needed and can teach many people about something may have no clue about.”

“This was an amazing educational and empathetic look into the lives of Native American people.”

“I learned so much from this film and it made me want to take action.”

“This film offers the viewers information that explains the long-lasting effects of Historical Trauma on Native Americans without turning the Native Americans into victims.”

“Important exploration of an issue that can be projected onto other parts of society as well.”

More documentaries like these need to be made in NDN Country

“Very touching film with a strong and important message that people need to see.”

“Educating, awaking, and moving.”

An important film about the effects of Historical Trauma, the growing understanding of its impact, and the work that Native peoples are doing to heal their communities.

“I think that it is the most powerful documentary I have seen in quite a while.”

This movie truly encompasses cultural difference and diversity going into the history, perspective’s and education of trauma.

This film should be required viewing in schools!
North Dakota Human Rights Film Festival (NDHRFF) selected Dodging Bullets as the winner of “Best Documentary Feature Competition”.

Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival (MSPIFF) Awards Dodging Bullets “Best of Fest” and “Best Minnesota Made Feature Documentary” Competition

Jury Statement: The documentary feature Dodging Bullets breaks new ground in form and subject matter. The filmmakers offer a series of largely episodic stories, intimately documented, about Native American individuals who have been impacted by ethnic genocide in the United States. These episodic narratives are joined narratively in an analysis of how each of these events has contributed to an ongoing experience of unresolved historical trauma for many in the Native American community, in which many traumatized individuals and communities epigenetically transmit unresolved trauma to future generations. Compelling in its visual and narrative approach, it is ultimately a story of resilience and hope as the filmmakers bring a nuanced perspective to a difficult topic, demonstrating the dignity of their subjects and offering the possibility of freedom from generations of inherited traumatic stress.
“Low-barrier engagement” refers to pledged actions—actions that are positive and in support of the overall cause, but require a substantial next step and commitment to generating the intended change. For Dodging Bullets, the most common low-barrier engagement opportunities were to subscribe to information on the website, show support on social media outlets, and to engage on the Dodging Bullets Facebook page. Dodging Bullets helped to facilitate these low barrier engagements by creating content that was clear, visually appealing (e.g. pictures, content, etc.), easily shareable, and customizable. Dodging Bullets was (and remains) active on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Facebook “Likes” provide a way for supporters to simply raise their hands in support of a general cause without having to take any sort of follow-up action, thus serving as a great example of low-barrier engagement. The Dodging Bullets trailer has over 109,000 views on Facebook and over 5,000 followers on Twitter.
Outreach

Because of its timely and relevant storyline, Dodging Bullets has been receiving press response worldwide in the form of radio, TV, print, and pixels, the story is being spread viral and creates impact.
Defining Impact

Produce a high-quality, enlightening, focused documentary about Historical Trauma in Indian Country.

Enter the documentary into film festivals to earn recognition and generate buzz.

Oversee a targeted release to human rights influencers.

Create exposure to the film to increase the public’s understanding of the problems of, and potential solutions to, the country’s knowledge of intergenerational trauma, increasing the buzz around the movie and issues and beginning a public dialogue.

Build partnerships with law enforcement, Indian Health Services, Native healthcare professionals to increase viewership and catalyze a grassroots movement.

Move the conversation among the general public and within target audiences (law enforcement, social justice, and healthcare industry), beyond “drunk Indian on the street corner” towards “understanding of the root cause” of the problem.

Present key stakeholders and decision makers to the film and its core issues.

Key decisions makers within the healthcare industry change their practices and policies to provide traditional and more integrative understanding.

Key decision makers within the law enforcement and Congress change legislation and policies to provide a better understanding of the problems in Indian Country - and how they can provide support while recognizing Native sovereignty and autonomy.
Impact: Suicide

A growing numbers of Montana high school students report considering or attempting suicide – and Native American students are at particular risk. [3]

28 in 100 Native American high schoolers report having seriously considered suicide

18 in 100 Native American high schoolers report having attempted suicide

"It can change, it can get better. It may take work, it may take time but we’re here to help we can do it together, we can get through this together."

Dirk Whitebreast
Dodging Bullets
Loss and Resilience Segment

Outcome Goal

The film features the struggles and successes that Native youth face today. The film conveys are peer to peer visions that are projected to better understand suicide and the storytelling by individuals relate first-hand paths that others have taken to overcome Historical Trauma.
Impact: Social Justice

Analysis of CDC data from 1999 to 2014 shows that Native Americans are 3.1 times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans.\[4\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE &amp; ETHNICITY</th>
<th>PER MILLION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>10.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Native Americans are more often pulled over on a per capita basis, are more often charged with crimes in similar circumstances than the mainstream. Are more often brought to trial after being charged, are more likely to be convicted, are less likely to be paroled at every level. There is a major issue in our justice system.”

Anton Treuer
Dodging Bullets
Social Justice Segment

Outcome Goal

The film brings to light the social injustices occurring every day in Indian Country. For example: How Natives are treated by law enforcement? They are more likely to be pulled over, (known as DWI–Driving While Indian), more likely to charged with crimes, sent to jail, etc., than non-Native populations. The film will help elicit a change among law enforcement and offer a better understanding of Native communities as well as expand their knowledge of how to interact with Indigenous people.
Impact: Treaty Rights

New oil pipelines in northern Minnesota violate the treaty rights of the Anishinaabeg by endangering critical natural and cultural resources in the 1842, 1854, and 1855 treaty areas. [5]

“We know that if you try to defame a people, if you try to put down a whole people, then that is an insult in and of itself, but it also leads to denial of treaty rights. It also leads to denial of housing and human rights.”

Keith Ellison
Dodging Bullets
Treaty Rights Segment

Outcome Goal

Throughout history, the United States Federal government has signed and violated treaty rights with Native Nations in efforts to obtain land and mineral rights for economic reasons. Treaties are known as the “Supreme Law of the Land”— agreements ratified by two sovereign governments so that both can prosper. These violations of treaties are yet another example of how a dominant society exposes a population to Historical Trauma. Discussing treaty rights can lead to an understanding of the importance of culture and lower the prejudiced feelings that non-Natives have.
Conclusion

Dodging Bullets gives an intrepid look at what is this thing we call Historical Trauma and how it has affected Indigenous populations in North America for centuries. Not only does it reflect past traumatic events of first contact, treaty rights, and boarding schools, it also conveys how those experiences are still being felt today with high suicide rates, drug and alcohol abuse, and on-going marginalization issues like school and sports team mascots and pipelines being forced through Native lands.

To this end, the film provides an overview of what Historical Trauma is—how it’s continuing today and how people can work to overcome it. This film can help educate and connect communities by bringing about discussions of these issues and working at a more organic level towards a deeper cultural understanding. The impact of this film is found in both wisdom and awareness, a textbook case of how film can be used as a means to attempt both immediate and long-term change, working within the present field but also adding layers of significance and context to encourage collective and personal action.
Appendix


