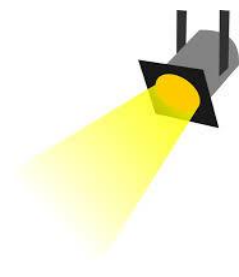




**NOW SHOWING**  
*The Vanishing American*



Writers	Ethel Dougherty & <a href="#">Zane Grey</a>
Screen Adaptation	<i>Lucien Hubbard</i>
Cinematography	<i>Harry Perry</i>
Director	<a href="#">George B. Seitz</a>
Year	1925
Filmed in	<i>Black-and-white/silent movie</i>
Cast	Role
<a href="#">Richard Dix</a>	Nophaie
<a href="#">Lois Wilson</a>	<i>Marion Warner</i>
<a href="#">Noah Beery</a>	<i>Henry Booker</i>
<a href="#">Malcolm McGregor</a>	<i>Earl Ramsdale</i>
Nocki (NA)	<i>Indian Boy</i>
Shannon Day	<i>Gekin Yashi</i>
Charles Crockett	<i>Amos Halliday</i>
Bert Woodruff	<i>Bart Wilson</i>
Bernard Siegel	<i>Do Etin</i>
Guy Oliver	<i>Kit Carson</i>
Joe Ryan	<i>Jay Lord</i>
Charles Stevens (NA)	<i>Shoie</i>
Bruce Gordon	<i>Rhur</i>
Richard Howard	<i>Glendon</i>
John Webb Dillon	<i>Naylor</i>
Gary Cooper	<i>Uncredited Extra</i>
George Magrill	<i>The First Nophaie</i>



**THE VANISHING AMERICAN**

A review by William M. Drew

It is often assumed by critics that the sympathetic treatment of Native Americans by white filmmakers is a new phenomenon. Yet, in truth, there were many early films that expressed support for the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere in their struggle with the white invaders. Foremost among the directors of the silent era who were sensitive to the American Indians' cause was D. W. Griffith in such films as *THE REDMAN'S VIEW* (1909). Even in a film like *THE MASSACRE* (1912) that concentrated on the white characters, Griffith showed that the whites were just as savage as the Native Americans in the Indian Wars.

These early efforts culminated in the large-scale Paramount production, *THE VANISHING AMERICAN*, based somewhat loosely on Zane Grey's novel of the same name. Directed by George B. Seitz, a specialist in action films renowned for his serials with Pearl White, *THE VANISHING AMERICAN* is often considered the definitive (certainly the most famous) silent film depiction of Native Americans and their plight in modern American society. It stars **Richard Dix** as the Indian hero, **Lois Wilson** as the white teacher who loves him and **Noah Beery** as the villainous white government agent who brutally exploits the Indians. Much of the supporting cast includes some Native Americans (among them, Geronimo's grandson, actor Charles Stevens). Taking full advantage of the magnificent

scenery, most of the film was made on location in Arizona in the summer of 1925, where, according to Lois Wilson, the cast and crew were housed in the school buildings that were built for the Indians.

While THE VANISHING AMERICAN strongly denounces the oppression and exploitation of the Native Americans, it departs from the romantic view that the New World was an unspoiled Eden inhabited by uncorrupted people until the sudden invasion of the predatory Europeans. The film opens with an elaborate thirty-minute prologue showing a succession of tribal wars and conquests long before the coming of the white man. By demonstrating that the Navajos after their conquest of the Cliff Dwellers were filled with the same hubris as the white man in later centuries, the prologue reinforces the message of the never-ending evil of racism. An undercurrent throughout the film is the implication that the white man himself may be doomed to the same historical process of decline and fall as the earlier inhabitants and that only eternal nature remains. Beside it, man--all men, red or white--appear puny, a concept reinforced by some of the majestic shots and the opening and closing statements: *"For men come and live their hour and go--but the mighty stage remains."*

To emphasize decline, the film contrasts the heroic Kit Carson promising the Indians prosperity in exchange for peace with the explorer's venal heirs, the greedy, brutal white agent and his nominal superior, a soulless bureaucrat interested only in efficiency. These ignoble representatives of white "civilization" confine the Indians to "a desert country called by courtesy a 'reservation' with one strip of fertile fields, barely sufficient to provide corn for the winter." In a poignant early example of racist cruelty, two white men steal an Indian boy's valuable pony, kicking the protesting, helpless child. The Indians' appeal to the authorities falls on deaf ears. Not only do they fail to obtain redress but they continue to suffer the theft of their horses by the whites.

With the United States' entry into the First World War, the Indians enlist in the hope they will finally gain respect as Americans and win equality and justice. They fight bravely in the trenches of Europe only to return home and find conditions worse than ever on the reservation, the agent having become all-powerful during their absence.

Released just one year after all Native Americans had obtained full citizenship, THE VANISHING AMERICAN is a tragic counterweight to the optimistic visions of seemingly unlimited progress in many films of the era including other epic silent westerns. The suggestion in THE VANISHING AMERICAN that we are doomed as a species through our cruelty, greed and injustice is mitigated only at the end when at the end a fair-minded administration finally takes charge of the reservation. The denouement seems to imply that a commitment to social justice and an abandonment of racial hubris may enable the whites in America to escape the cycle of conquest and decay that has been the history of the human race. Today, the film, like many others of the period, is embroiled in the controversy over the fact that a white actor played the Native American hero. Even leading lady Lois Wilson (long a supporter of Indian causes), while praising her co-star's performance, felt in later years that "An Indian should play an Indian." Still, THE VANISHING AMERICAN challenged the prevailing racism of the day by demonstrating the havoc produced by the global dominance of whites.

**FINAL IMPRESSIONS ABOUT NATIVE PEOPLE FROM THIS FILM? + OR -**

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