



AGAINST THE CURRENT

Preserving Native American heritage in contemporary American culture (USA), 2020
26:43 minutes, airing on public television early 2021



Native American teen activist Daunnette Moniz-Reyome shares her family's journey to retain the sacred rituals and values of their culture in the wake of centuries of loss from disease, war and government policies.

Before the first influx of European settlers in 1492, Native Americans inhabited North America for millennia, following the migration of animal herds with the seasons, farming and sharing the land and its bounty. The settlers introduced disease, alien concepts of property rights and land restrictions, and challenged the fabric of Native American life -- their social, matriarchal structures, communal property and living off the land; their languages and customs. Massacres and forcible transfers decimated the population. Those who survived were increasingly restricted to remote reservations. Native cultural practices, including religious rituals and language, were outlawed until 1978.

The effects of this cultural and physical devastation continue to reverberate through the lives of today's Native Americans, especially young people, who grapple with oppression, poverty and racism.

Daunnette Moniz-Reyome, 17 years old, is a member of the Winnebago tribe of Nebraska and a senior at Walthill Public School, on the Omaha Reservation where she lives. A model since age 11, she has appeared in Teen Vogue. She uses her platform to bring light to Native American issues. In 2017, she was a guest speaker at the United Nations International Day of the Girl event.

Daunnette documents life for herself, her family and her friends as they attempt to juggle modern society and Native American values and rituals. The film illuminates how Native youth can use their culture and traditions to heal from historical trauma.

Daunnette's film, *Against the Current*, will be broadcast on public television in 2021 and distributed with educational materials including a standards-aligned School Guide and a Take Action guide – to engage students and teachers in conversations and actions around cultural appropriation, single-perspective narratives and the cultural effects of American expansion. The film and teaching materials are used by PBS LearningMedia, Discovery Education and PenPal Schools.

AGAINST THE CURRENT key scenes include:

- Alton, store owner: Significance and ritual of the feather in Native American culture.
- Launa and Rodney, Daunnette's mother and father: Her role and opportunity as a model, and their commitment to support her.
- Shelby, dressmaker, single mother of four, Iraq War veteran: Recovering from PTSD and alcohol with the help of smudging, beading and sewing.
- Sidney, Native American schoolmate: On being inspired by Daunnette's address at a school assembly.
- Juray, two-spirited friend with a masculine and feminine spirit: On struggling to be accepted.
- Marisa, friend and mentor: On the collective culture of WE, not me; historical trauma and its companion, resiliency; the alcoholism and depression that plague the reservation, and prayer.
- At the powwow grounds: Preparation for the feathering ceremony and a discussion with Daunnette's mentor and grandfather about her address at the United Nations in 2017.
- Quentin, drum circle member: The drum as the heartbeat of the people and the nation.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT – DAUNNETTE MONIZ-REYOME

"We are a sacred, resilient, powerful, strong group of people. It's embedded in us. I want to show people who we truly are, who we once were before the cycle of trauma began. I want people to gain an understanding of not just the culture itself, but also us as a nation. Who and what we represent. I want to inspire, encourage and motivate my peers to take back pride in who we are as Native Americans."

MENTOR'S BIO – EVAN MASCAGNI

Daunnette was mentored by Evan Mascagni, an attorney turned filmmaker from Louisville, Kentucky. He directed and produced *Circle of Poison*, which premiered at the DOC NYC film festival and aired on Al Jazeera. *The Hollywood Reporter* called his work "eye-opening and ire-raising." His films have received multiple awards and have been included in film festivals across the world. Evan is the co-founder of Player Piano Productions, a documentary film production company based in New York City.

MENTOR'S STATEMENT "Working with Daunnette was an absolute honor. She is one of the most mature young people I've ever met. Her ability to quickly learn and adapt to on-camera situations was equally impressive as experienced filmmakers that I have worked with. Her on-camera interviews are perceptive and revealing; her thoughtfulness continues to inspire my storytelling. The power of her words will inspire other youth across the globe, and her message about the importance of understanding the past will help guide us all to a more equitable future."

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Holly Carter

ABOUT BYKIDS We create understanding through storytelling.

[BYkids](#) produces documentary films by kids and partners with public television and educators to inspire conversations around global issues of human dignity and social justice. FILMS BYKIDS share the stories of kids who confront issues such as immigration, bullying, juvenile justice, climate change and child marriage. We reach kids in classrooms with teaching materials that promote empathy and understanding to make issues feel personal, relevant and actionable, rather than foreign. Join us at [BYkids.org](#) to see and support learning to build an informed society.

"By giving kids from diverse backgrounds around the world tools, skills and guidance to make documentary films, this great organization provides an outlet for sharing personal stories, which in turn brings us closer together as an international community rooted in compassion and understanding."

— Former NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg