



## STUDY GUIDE

# THE INQUIRY FILM: A REPORT ON THE MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE

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### INTRODUCTION

The CFMDC's Seminal Works project examines five key works from our collection: *Moose Jaw (There's a Future in Our Past)* by Rick Hancox, *Hookers on Davie* by Janis Cole and Holly Dale, *In the Gutter and Other Good Places* by Cristine Richey, *The Inquiry Film* by Jesse Nishihata and *Winter Kept Us Warm* by David Sector. These films were chosen for their capacity to raise issues and questions relevant in a variety of educational settings and across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

The five works were made between 1965 and 1993, spanning almost three decades of film production in Canada, the oldest of which is 40 years old this year. Examining the films in 2005 will provide both an opportunity to see how history has changed our understanding and interpretation of the works themselves, as well as the opportunity to examine how we now understand the issues the films explore.

Four of these works are social issue documentaries dedicated to specific regional, community and cultural concerns and one is a dramatic feature which was the first-ever film produced in Canada that addresses gay sexuality. As a group of films, they all challenge previous cinematic theory and practice—formally, aesthetically and conceptually. They use filmic and narration devices unusual for their time: surveillance technology, first-person perspectives, personal memory, and multi-level excavation of subjects, as well as forbidden themes and contentious political history.

With this project, CFMDC inaugurates a process of rejuvenation for Canadian film and documentary. Given their cultural significance, we believe that these films will be engaging for educational audiences and will generate renewed interest and discourse. Our goal is to increase public exposure of what we feel are some of the most important works produced by Canadian media artists.

For discussion of the four documentaries, it will be useful to read these definitions of cinema vérité and “new documentary:”

**Cinema vérité** is a style of documentary filmmaking that emphasizes the showing and telling of the ‘truth.’ The cinema vérité approach is employed to present reality as it really is, enabling ‘objective’ observation. A cinema vérité movement emerged in the 1960s simultaneously in France, USA, England, and Canada with different philosophies to the practice emerging in each locale. The practice that emerged in North America is often referred to as direct cinema. Cinema vérité, as a method, gained significant repute since the making of Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).

(See: Callison, Candis. 2000. “Truth in Cinema: Comparing Direct Cinema and Cinema Verité.” [www.web.mit.edu/candis/www/callison\\_truth\\_cinema.htm](http://www.web.mit.edu/candis/www/callison_truth_cinema.htm))

In his discussion on the evolution of Canadian documentary filmmaking, Peter Steven describes the period of the 1980s and 90s as one in which filmmakers departed from merely documenting the ‘observed’ truth to employing a hybrid form that married art and social-issue documentary. A significant and defining feature of the “**new documentary**” is the departure from ‘neutral’ observation and ‘balance’ of viewpoints.

### FILMMAKERS

**Jesse Nishihata, 1977. 90 minutes. Colour. Sound.**

### FILM SYNOPSIS

The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry was a precedent-shattering examination of Native rights and economic development in Canada’s North. The contentious issues brought out by the Inquiry are very much alive today as Southern Canada still seeks to exploit the resources of the North. *The Inquiry Film* documents and reveals the process of the Inquiry and humanizes a complex political and national issue.

## POLITICAL STUDIES

## QUESTIONS

1. In his report on the inquiry, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, Thomas Berger writes: “the north is a region of conflicting goals, preferences, and aspirations.” As you watch, identify three of these conflicts outlining both sides of the disagreement. Given these conflicts, and the evidence you hear in the film, do you think Berger’s decision to impose a ten-year moratorium on construction of the pipeline was appropriate?
2. The Berger inquiry has been praised as a unique example of democratic public participation and communication. What evidence can you see from the film that the inquiry attained a high degree of citizen engagement? Compare the degree of openness and participation with contemporary public inquiries. What differences do you note? What do you think the aim of a public inquiry should be?
3. In his closing comments Berger states that aboriginal peoples are “forcing us to reconsider the economic religion of our time.” In what ways do the Inuit and Dene people’s everyday life and values, as they are represented here, challenge the ideologies of capitalism and development?

## Additional Question

4. Do you agree with Berger that for the majority of Canadians living in the south, the north appears mostly as a place of resource development? What role does the “idea of north” play in the imagination of Canadians living in the south? What kind of impact does this have on people living in the North?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Légaré, André. “Nunavut: The Construction of a Regional Collective Identity in the Canadian Arctic.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 17, No. 2 (2002): 65-89.

Patten, Steve. “Democratizing the Institutions of Policy-making: Democratic Consultation and Participatory Administration.” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35, No. 4 (2001): 221-239.

Phillips, S. D., and M. Orsini. “Mapping the Links: Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes.” Canadian Policy Research Networks Discussion Paper, 2000.  
[www.cprn.com/documents/11418\\_en.pdf](http://www.cprn.com/documents/11418_en.pdf)

## ABORIGINAL STUDIES

### QUESTIONS

5. As you watch the film, make two lists, one which records the reasons why the Dene and Inuit opposed the construction of the pipeline, and one which records the gas companies' and white and Metis communities' reasons for supporting its construction. Which arguments do you find the most compelling? Why?
6. As Thomas Berger made clear in his final report, non-aboriginal peoples often view the North as a resource-rich frontier to be exploited for profit. Describe non-aboriginal participants' attitudes to the land as they are revealed in the film. What is the relationship between these views and a colonial attitude to aboriginal peoples?
7. In the last section of the film, George Erasmus declares that the Dene people are and have always been a nation. What does it mean to be "a nation"? Why is Erasmus' statement so significant?

### Additional Question

8. Almost thirty years after the inquiry, a natural gas pipeline is once again being proposed. This time, the project has the support of most Dene and Inuit leaders in the Northwest Territories. What kinds of political, social, and cultural developments have made this shift in support of the project possible? Do you think that any of the oppositions raised in the original inquiry are still relevant? Which ones? Why?

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bussidor, I., and U. Bilgen-Reinart. *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1997.

Dene Nation.

[www.denenation.com](http://www.denenation.com)

Usher, Peter J. "Environment, Race, and Nation Reconsidered: Reflections on Aboriginal Land Claims in Canada." *Canadian Geographer* 47, No. 43 (2003): 65-382.

Valaskasis, Gail G. *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2005.

## ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

### QUESTIONS

9. Throughout the public hearings, the Dene and Inuit articulate specific concerns about the potential environmental impacts of the pipeline. What are these concerns? What arguments do the corporate representatives use to counter these concerns?
10. Academics and lawyers for Arctic Gas argued that Dene and Inuit people were no longer living on the land, yet as the inquiry made clear, this was not the case. As you watch, make a list of the many ways in which aboriginal people continued to make their livelihood from the land. Consider both the testimony from Dene and Inuit peoples, as well as Nishihata's visual images.
11. Berger writes that aboriginal land claims cannot be properly settled if northern wildlife and the northern environment have not been protected. How is a singular focus on land claims, to the exclusion of contextual questions about the environment, wilderness, and wildlife, symptomatic of non-aboriginal failure to understand aboriginal claims?

### Additional Question

12. Consider arguments put forward by opponents of the Kyoto Accord, who contend that the accord would not only delay economic benefits but also create hardship. How do corporations at the Berger inquiry make arguments similar in content and tone?

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Chess, C. "Evaluating Environmental Public Participation: Methodological Questions." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 43, No. 6 (2000): 769-784.

Chronology of Northern Conservation and Development Initiatives.  
[taiga.net/wmac/consandmanagementplan\\_volume1/appendix2.html](http://taiga.net/wmac/consandmanagementplan_volume1/appendix2.html)

Paehlke, Robert. "Environmental Politics, Sustainability, and Social Science." *Environmental Politics* 10, No. 4 (2001): 1-22.

Sherry, E., and H. Myers. "Traditional Environmental Knowledge in Practice." *Society and Natural Resources* 15, No. 4 (2002): 345-358.

## FILM STUDIES

## QUESTIONS

13. How does Nishihata's opening sequence set the tone for the rest of the film? Consider both his juxtaposition of shots of northern wilderness and development, and the content and rhetorical style of his first voice-over selection.
14. How does Nishihata's realist style – exhibited most clearly in his long takes of the inquiry proceedings – fit with the inquiry's own aim to make public a wide range of interests, opinions, and voices?
15. In *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, Thomas Berger writes: "in the North there are not just 'native peoples,' but a complex network of social systems." In your opinion, is Nishihata successful in demonstrating the complexity of aboriginal social systems and the diversity of aboriginal peoples through his film? Support your answer by considering the filmmaker's use of interviews, outdoor scenes, and footage from community meetings.

## Additional Question

16. The first half of the film portrays the debates about the pipeline solely from the perspective of white people, while the second half includes the testimonies of aboriginal people. Whether or not it was the filmmaker's intention, in what ways does the first half of the film narrate a study of whiteness and white privilege? In what ways does the film – through its choice of whose voices it represents – illustrate larger social questions of power and political representation as well as exclusion?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Leuthold, Steven. "Rhetorical Dimensions of Native American Documentary." *Wicazo Sa Review* 16, No. 2 (2001): 55-73.

White, Jerry. "Alanis Obomsawin, Documentary Form and the Canadian Nation(s)." In W. Beard (Ed.). *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (General)

Aboriginal Pipeline Group.

[www.aboriginalpipeline.ca](http://www.aboriginalpipeline.ca)

Berger, Thomas. *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland: The Report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry*. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977.

Berger Pipeline Inquiry. CBC Archives.

[archives.cbc.ca/300c.asp?IDCat=73&IDDos=295&IDLan=1&IDMenu=73](http://archives.cbc.ca/300c.asp?IDCat=73&IDDos=295&IDLan=1&IDMenu=73)

Mackenzie Gas Project.

[www.mackenziegasproject.com/index.asp](http://www.mackenziegasproject.com/index.asp)

## FURTHER VIEWING

*Hat Creek*. Amarcord Productions. 1981. 28:00. Canada. Distributed by Moving Images Distribution.

*Kainayssini Imanistaisiwa: The people go on*. Loretta Todd. 2003. 70:00. Canada. Distributed by National Film Board of Canada.

*Lac la Croix*. Judith Doyle. 1988. 57:00. Canada. Distributed by CFMDC

## FILM CREDITS

**Producer:** Arthur Pape

**Director:** Jesse Nishihata

**Editor:** Joe Solway

**Sound Editor:** David Leach

**Shot on Location:** Yellowknife, NT

**Film's Funders:** The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, The Canada Council for the Arts, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Division of Mission United Church of Canada, The Anna Maytag Foundation, The Gladys and Merrill Muttart Foundation, and The Anglican Church of Canada

## BIOGRAPHY

Jesse Nishihata is a pioneer in Japanese Canadian documentary filmmaking. From 1966 to 1978 Jesse worked as a contract producer with the CBC-TV Public Affairs Department. From 1979 to 1995, Jesse worked as an instructor in film and media studies at the Image Arts Department at Ryerson University. It was during this period that Jesse established himself as an independent producer and director.

The films made during this time included some of Jesse's best works such as the *Inquiry Film: A Report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline*. Jesse earned the 1977 Canadian Film Award for best Documentary over 60 minutes and the Golden Athena for Best Feature Documentary at the 1978 Athens International Film Festival in Ohio for this film.

Another of Jesse's seminal works is *Black Earth* (1980) shot on location in India. A film-essay on the earth's body, *Black Earth* follows a woman's journey through time and space. The film's images and utterances and sounds poetically resonate a world as woman, a woman suffering the fate of humanity. The film was awarded a citation for Personal Vision and Cinematography at the 1988 Oakland International Film Festival.

Jesse's prolific career in film opened up doors for all Japanese Canadian artists and Canadian documentary filmmakers in general, as he continually brought pressing issues and interesting stories into the public consciousness. Jesse Nishihata, now retired at 75, resides in Toronto.

### STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

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[www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/tps/Boler/index.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/tps/Boler/index.html)

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