

SMOKE TRADERS

Press Kit



TOBACCO TRADING WARNING: Tobacco trading is hazardous to your health. May cause government taxation, police raids, and death.

LOG LINE —

SMOKE TRADERS takes a look at the controversy ignited by the Mohawk Nation's involvement in the tobacco trade, raising issues of sovereignty, economic independence, and entrepreneurship versus illegal activity.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

For centuries, Europeans have run the North American tobacco trade; today the First Nations people are taking it back. But is the tobacco trade a road to independence or criminality for Native people?

SMOKE TRADERS tells the story of the contraband tobacco trade and the effect on individual lives and communities from a Native perspective. The multi-million dollar cigarette industry that Mohawks have built has pulled their communities out of third world poverty, but the Canadian government is determined to shut the trade down. Are these traders criminals who must be stopped? Or are they a new breed of Native entrepreneur who deserve our support?

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS

Where there's *smokes*, there's fire. Mohawks maintain that tax-free tobacco is a guaranteed treaty right and that the Native tobacco industry has provided an economic lifeline to their people. Whole communities have gone from rags to riches in a mere couple of decades. But the government and the police want to stop the Native trade because it means the loss of millions of dollars of tax revenue for the Canadian people. *SMOKE TRADERS* follows some of the characters and events central to the story to learn the benefits and deadly costs of the trade.

Robbie is a federally licensed cigarette factory owner on the Mohawk reserve, Kahnawake. He's fighting

to protect his treaty rights and legitimate business, and to expand his empire to support other reserves through smoke trading. But his efforts are knocked down and his products seized each time he tries to sell to reserves in other provinces.

Brian is a former tobacco runner from Akwesasne, the Mohawk reserve that borders on the US. He's seen the cost of living outside the law and is tired of fighting to legitimize the Native cigarette trade. He has young children to care for and he wants out of the trade. He's got a business plan for a legitimate business in alternative energy and an empty warehouse ready to be filled, but without the proper funding and support from the band council, he may have to resort to illegal smoke running to feed his family.

SMOKE TRADERS puts a human face on the industry and the traders as they struggle against obstacles that threaten their treaty rights and economic security.

LONG SYNOPSIS

For centuries, Europeans have run the North American tobacco trade; today the First Nations people are taking it back. But is the tobacco trade a road to independence or criminality for Native people?

While the Mohawks have literally pulled their communities out of third world poverty, building a multi-million dollar cigarette industry, the government is determined to shut it down. But there's too much at stake for the Mohawks to give up. The influx of both legitimate and contraband cash has turned the community upside down, making millionaires of some and providing jobs and much needed support for local infrastructure, schools and fire departments. It's become the financial backbone of their economy.

“...is the tobacco trade a road to independence or criminality for Native people?”

Fifty known Native-run factories produce millions of untaxed cigarettes per day that are shipped worldwide. The Native communities see a path towards independence and out of poverty, but the Canadian government sees billions of tax dollars lost each year. Frustrated and embarrassed, the government and Big Tobacco want to put an end to it (or at least to tax it). But they fear a Mohawk backlash and another Oka Crisis. They know the Mohawks are armed and will push back if challenged. It's not just about money—it's an issue of Native sovereignty, trading rights and tradition.

Many Mohawks believe that tobacco is an integral part of their spiritual legacy and that tax free, cross border trade is their historic and legal right. Today, it's also a road to independence and self-respect—the native tobacco industry has created more jobs and a stronger community than any government-funded program has ever done. Most cigarette runners are ready to fight to legitimize their profession and to be recognized as entrepreneurs instead of being painted as criminals. But, much like the Wild West, an individualist spirit runs high and talk of unity is often

easier than achieving a consensus. Many runners and producers mistrust their own band council, believing that the so-called native government is merely an extension of the feds they are battling. The result of this divide is that many within Native communities feel that the tobacco barons are becoming the political warriors they need. Not only are they defending Native rights, they also have the money, the will, and the resources to push back with a vengeance.

It's an inflammatory situation and where there's *smokes*, there's always fire. How long can the Feds afford to keep up the pressure before the community reaches the breaking point? Can the Mohawks get enough tobacco through the border to keep the industry alive despite increasing government pressure? Will the Mohawks manage to negotiate the decriminalization of the lifeline to their community? Or will they find another way to encourage Native entrepreneurship? Will the government save face in a battle they can't win against the tenacity of the smoke traders? Or will they decide to work together and find common ground?



Q&A

with

Director Jeff Dorn

Q. Where did you get the idea to do this documentary?

While doing the show *Rez Rides* (a car customizing TV show) in the community of Akwesasne I got to know a lot of Mohawks who were involved in the tobacco trade. I began to hear their stories about how the whole industry changed their lives from a third world experience into a first world experience. Until then I had always heard of the criminal Mohawks and, as a journalist and storyteller, I knew then that the story needed to be told from the Mohawk point of view.

Q. Why now?

This is a story that has been waiting, and needs, to be told. The governments and police have done an excellent job of demonizing the Native tobacco trade. In doing so, they have made the Mohawks a feared and dark people in the greater public's perception. The Canadian public needs to know the other side of the story and the reality—if this was truly illegal, then why does the government license and allow the industry to continue but, at the same time, arrest the lonely runners and make their lives hell? There is a huge social and political issue here that Canadians have been blinded to by propaganda, and the mainstream media is not telling the Native side of the story.

Q. What were some of the challenges you faced?

Trust is always the biggest challenge. When the Mohawks see a camera, they think right away that you're there to degrade them in some way or another. Rightly so, as the media track record speaks for itself when dealing with Native people. Only through spending time with the community did I get access and [earn] the trust of the smoke traders.

As we gained trust, the next challenge was getting their stories shared on film. This was the second biggest obstacle. Even though each and every Mohawk I met stood tall on the point that this is a right and it is completely legal to deal in tobacco, the fact remained that Canada states it is illegal and will pursue them with the mighty legal machine. No one



person, with no money or political backing, would risk his or her future freedom for righteous beliefs. So, getting the stories on film was tough, but the truly brave decided the important story we were telling required their participation.

Q. How did you choose the characters that are portrayed in the documentary?

The characters were chosen because of their belief in the right they had to do what they were doing, along with [having] a strong connection to their community. For example, Brian White is a powerful Mohawk man who had lived through the height of the tobacco trade and made money, but he knew that the pressures from the outside society would eventually cost him his freedom. In addition, he always wanted more than just money—he wanted success for his family and his community, and the stigma of tobacco was not the solution. His story illustrates the crux of the issue. Filmmaking always asks us to associate a story of conflict with our viewer, and Brian really represented to me a man, who was faced with a challenge, that I hoped our audience could relate to.

Q. What is historical significance of Natives and tobacco?

It was a sacred plant that was used for worship—a plant that was shared with the Europeans and then exploited by them for profit, while the Native received none of the bounty. It's time that Native people got their share of the wealth.

Q. What are the difficulties in going legit?

Legit is the Canadian legal frame to the whole issue. For Mohawks, this is legit, legal, a right guaranteed in treaty law, but to the Government of Canada it's all about taxes. The 'pick off the small guy' mentality speaks to the very issue of legitimization of the Mohawk point of view. If it were illegal, then why in decades of this so-called crime has the government not shut it down?

Q. What have you learned from telling this story?

There is a lot of power and strength in Native territory. It's a power that has all the gifts of non-Native society and is now coming into its own.

Q. Why should the public care about this issue when the Government is coming under heat profiting from a product that causes health issues?

No question, smoking is bad for your health. This film is not about the promotion of smoking. It is rather unfortunate that tobacco and smoking are the targets and the substance driving this issue, but there is more to it than health concerns. The answer is simple in one way: if the government wants to shut down the tobacco industry, then they need to make all tobacco companies shut down. The Mohawk and Native tobacco trade are now established, so they need to be dealt with as real players in the world market. Since treaties have been marginalized, tobacco and the power of the dollar have given new financial strength to the communities. Governments need to deal with Native communities on a nation-to-nation basis and resolve these issues through negotiations on a

governmental level, not by painting a race as an evil, criminal empire. This is a film about strength.

Q. What do you want people to take away from watching *SMOKE TRADERS*?

This is not a film about smoking. It is a film about rights and the reality that, when left with scraps, the strong will prevail. This is a film about the spirit of a people and how they can rise above. I want the greater public to realize that there is more to this story than the criminal image being presented by non-Natives.



Who's behind it all?...

up under the shadow of racism and its economic consequences. A skilled mechanic by trade, Brian couldn't get a good job off the reserve. As a young man with a family to support, he became involved in the tobacco trade. Running smokes was quick, easy, and very lucrative, even though he was risking his life to make a few good bucks. But Brian is hard working and ambitious - running smokes was always just a means to an end. With the money he made, he started to build a beautiful home for his family and opened his own business: a car-customizing garage. Using his entrepreneurial skills, Brian had finally built his empire.

Empires can crumble and an expensive divorce, along with an economic crash on the reserve, killed Brian's business. Police were cracking down on the tobacco industry, half of Brian's clients were either in jail or too poor to customize their cars, his mansion remains unfinished, and his kids are hungry. Brian went bust but, for the sake of his kids and community, he's determined to use his business skills to build a legitimate business. He wants to open a solar panel manufacturing plant that will create jobs and economic stability on the reserve. He's done the homework, made the connections - now what? How long until he gets the business loan he needs? How long can he resist the temptation of the smoke trade and easy, if dangerous, money?

ROBBIE DICKSON (Short bio)

Rainbow Tobacco CEO Robbie Dickson is articulate and driven. Now the leader of a multi-million dollar company, he began running cigarettes as a means to subsidize his university education. Robbie amassed a small fortune while obtaining his degree, and went on to build a solid career working as a civil engineer for Kahnawake. But he believed there was more to life then eking out a living working for the local band

ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

BRIAN WHITE

(Short bio)

Brian is a former cigarette runner and a struggling entrepreneur from the Akwesasne reserve. A single Dad, he lives in a half-finished mansion, one of the relics of his lucrative

days as a smoke trader. After years of looking over his shoulder for police, he's tired of risking his life speeding across rivers, driven by need and greed. Brian's got a family to support and a business plan to build a solar panel manufacturing plant in his community. It's a clean business, the energy wave of the future, and real jobs for the reserve. He just needs the loan. And until then, how long can he resist the temptation of the big bucks he could make running smokes?

BRIAN WHITE (Long Bio)

Brian White is a Mohawk, born and raised on the Akwesasne Reserve, in Southeast Ontario. Like many aboriginal children in Canada, Brian grew



council so he invested his cigarette money. Robbie bought Rainbow Tobacco, the last Native tobacco company in Kahnawake to hold a federal license. He was building a legitimate, tax-paying enterprise and everything seemed on track until his western expansion. As Rainbow Tobacco shipped out product, the RCMP began seizing it, which was in direct contradiction to what Robbie had been told. It cost him big and Robbie vowed to fight back. This trial by fire forged a new type of leader—an educated, Mohawk politician, entrepreneur and warrior for sovereign rights with the resources to support his people's battle to determine their own destiny and economic freedom.

ROBBIE DICKSON (Long bio)

Robbie Dickson is a CEO like no other. Born and raised in Kahnawake, Robbie was defined at an early age by his athletic and scholarly abilities, and his ambition. Articulate and driven, this university-educated Mohawk now leads a multi-million dollar company, Rainbow Tobacco, as well as his people's fight to defend their sovereign rights and determine their own destiny. Robbie, who began running cigarettes as a means to subsidize his university education, amassed a small fortune while obtaining his degree. Upon graduating, he built a solid career working as a civil engineer for Kahnawake, but his entrepreneurial spirit led him to believe there must be more to life than eking out a living working for the local band council. Robbie invested the cigarette money he'd saved in Rainbow Tobacco, the last Native tobacco company in Kahnawake to hold a federal license. He was intent on building a legitimate, tax-paying enterprise and everything seemed on track until his western expansion. As Rainbow Tobacco shipped out product, the RCMP began seizing and confiscating it, which was in direct contradiction to what Robbie had been told—suddenly his legitimate business was wrapped up in red tape and he and his employees were being sent back to legal limbo. It cost him big and Robbie vowed to fight back. This trial by fire forged a new type of leader—an educated,

Mohawk politician, entrepreneur and warrior willing to fight for sovereign rights who has the resources to support his people's battle to determine their own destiny and economic freedom.

QUEENIE

Queenie is a vibrant woman who speaks her mind with little prompting. A traditional person who spends hours making Mohawk ribbon shirts and dresses. She has so many back-orders that she can barely keep up to the demand. Queenie built her house by the tobacco trade and has tried to unite the Cigarette business to keep it strong. This straight-talking soul of the earth preaches the power and liberty tobacco brings to her people.



TIMMY MONTOUR

Timmy Montour is a contractor and godfather to the tobacco business. Timmy was rich in many of his incarnations during the historic Mohawk tobacco trade. He has seen it all, meeting most of the characters behind the years of running name brand smokes to the current Mohawk made cigarette days. Timmy's millions went the way of a drug addiction but he fought back and reclaimed his strength, quitting drugs. He lost it all and has returned to his first love as a carpenter. The tobacco business still looms in his life, when times are tough, one phone call can turn into a much-needed financial boost to his pocket. Timmy runs *smokes* in times of need. This man's experience makes Timmy Montour the voice of *SMOKE TRADERS*.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

JEFF DORN

(Director/Writer/Director of Photography)

Ojibway writer and director Jeff Dorn creates intelligent, stirring films that evocatively speak to the human condition. From the Walpole Island First Nation, Dorn began his career as a news photographer in Winnipeg. His filmography includes working as a director for CTV News CJOH in Ottawa between 2009 and 2012, the *National Aboriginal Achievement Awards Television Showcase* (2007-10), the *Arctic Winter Games Opening Ceremonies* (2004) and two television adaptations of Robert Munsch's *Winter Tales* (*50 Below Zero* in 2004 and *Baseball Bats for Christmas* in 2003).

Dorn's credits with Rezolution Pictures include co-director for two seasons of the acclaimed documentary series *Rez Rides*, and director of photography for *Club Native*, a Gemini Award winning documentary. Once again Dorn turns his passionate eye on the Native community for Rezolution Pictures' latest documentary. This time, it's *Smoke Traders*, an inside look at the world of the Mohawk tobacco trade. "My goal in making *Smoke Traders* will be to show audiences – and especially non-Natives – the real face of the "illegal" Mohawk tobacco industry. Why, for the Mohawks of Akwesasne, this trade is a right, not a crime." – Jeff Dorn.

CATHERINE BAINBRIDGE

(Co-Director/Writer/Producer)

Catherine Bainbridge brings her trademark energy and enthusiasm to a range of key roles, from creating projects and pitching, right through to writing and editing the final product. Winner of a Gemini Award

for Best Direction in a Documentary Program for *Reel Injun*, she's also spearheaded Rezolution's move into fiction programming with *Moose TV*, winner of the 2008 Indie Award for Best Comedy Series.

Bainbridge is currently executive producer on two series in development: the one-hour episodic drama *The River* for The Movie Network and Movie Central, and the half-hour dramatic comedy *Mohawk Girls* for APTN.

Co-founder of Rezolution Pictures along with Ernest Webb in 2001, she's also now leading the way as the company expands into video games via their new venture, Minority Media Inc.

A trailblazing documentary filmmaker, former newspaper reporter and TV host, Bainbridge began her distinguished career behind the camera in 1992 as co-director of *Okanada*, an inside look at the 1990 Oka Crisis. In 2000, she was honoured as most promising filmmaker of the year by the Montreal chapter of Women in Film and Television. She is a co-founder of Beesum Communications and *The Nation* news magazine.

HOWARD GOLDBERG

(Writer/Editor)

Howard Goldberg has edited over 34 feature-length documentaries. He is also an accomplished writer and director.

He won a 2006 Gemini Award for Best Picture Editing in a Documentary Series for, *How William Shatner Changed the World*. His numerous editing credits include *Malls 'R Us*" which was shown at the MoMa Canadian Perspective in 2009, and *Undying Love*, a 2004 Gemini winner for Best History Documentary directed by Helene Klodawsky.

He also received a 2000 Gemini Award for Best Writing in a Documentary Series, for *The Cola Conquest*, which he edited and co-wrote.

His directing credits include *Being Dorothy*, which was nominated for Best Feature Length Documentary, IDA (International Documentary Association) in 2004 and 2007 *S&M: Short and Male*, which screened at the 2007 edition of Hot Docs.

DANIEL TOUSSAINT

(Composer)

Daniel Toussaint, composer and sound designer has handled composition sound design, music editing for several documentaries on Cirque du Soleil shows, including the Emmy® Award-winning *Fire Within*, and the Grammy® Award-winning *All Together Now*, about the Beatles.

He recently completed the sound editing, music and mixing for a documentary on the latest film from Cirque du Soleil, *Touch the Sky*.

Toussaint has also worked as a composer and sound designer on multiple projects for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB).

He also created the award-winning music for the play *Vinci* by internationally-acclaimed playwright and director Robert Lepage.

CHRISTINA FON

(Producer)

Two-time Gemini Award winner Christina Fon handles a wide range of duties for ReZolution Pictures International. She is responsible for sales, business and legal affairs, as well as broadcaster and funder relations.

In 2009 and 2010, Fon received Gemini Awards for both *Club Native* and the Peabody Award-Winning *Reel Injun*. Her current production credits include co-producing video games with Minority Media Inc., and executive producing the upcoming dramatic comedy series *Mohawk Girls*.

LINDA LUDWICK

(Producer)

Linda Ludwick is responsible for financial management and business strategies at ReZolution Pictures, overseeing all corporate and production-related finances. Linda is also a founding member of Beesum Communications, an independent Cree majority-owned and operated communications company, where she has served as Director of Finance for over 15 years.

Her production credits include the award-winning *Reel Injun*, *Club Native*, and *Mohawk Girls*.

ERNEST WEBB

(Executive Producer)

Born in Moose Factory and raised in the Cree community of Chisasibi, James Bay, Ernest Webb has devoted his life to telling the stories of Canada's Aboriginal peoples across all media. He is the co-founder and executive producer at ReZolution Pictures International.

He is co-creator of "*The Silent Enemy*," an Aboriginal video game experience now being developed by Minority Media Inc. Ernest's most recent credits include directing the Gemini-nominated documentary series *Down the Mighty River* for APTN, and two projects with Neil Diamond: the docudrama *The Last Explorer* and the Gemini Award-winning *Reel Injun*, co-produced with the NFB and the CBC.

SMOKE TRADERS

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Jeff Dorn

Co-Director

Catherine Bainbridge

Writers

Howard Goldberg

Jeff Dorn

Catherine Bainbridge

Producers

Christina Fon

Catherine Bainbridge

Linda Ludwick

Executive Producers

Ernest Webb

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***SMOKE TRADERS* airs this fall on TVO.**

About TVO

TVO is Ontario's public educational media organization and a trusted source of interactive educational content that informs, inspires and stimulates curiosity and thought. TVO's vision is to empower people to be engaged citizens of Ontario through educational media. TVO is funded primarily by the Province of Ontario and is a registered charity supported by sponsors and thousands of donors. For more information, visit tvo.org.

About Rezolution Pictures

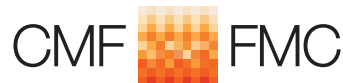
Rezolution Pictures International is an award-winning film, television and interactive media production company, working with many of Canada's best new and established talents to create unique comedy, dramatic, non-fiction and video game programming.



makes you think



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“Where there’s *smokes*, there’s fire!”



SMOKE TRADERS