

FILM REVIEW OF *JORDAN RIVER ANDERSON, THE MESSENGER*

Kareena

English 2300, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

The documentary *Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger* is one of a series of films from Director Alanis Obomsawin that focus on the struggle Indigenous children have regarding health care, social, and educational rights. This documentary was created in 2019 and centers on the health difficulties of an Indigenous child named Jordan River Anderson.

Jordan was born with a rare muscular disorder that was only seen in eight other children around the world. He lived his full five years of life in a hospital due to a dispute between the federal and provincial governments. He was supposed to be out of the hospital at the age of two; however, the governments were unable to decide who should pay for his care. His improper treatment from the government caused a legal battle that was aimed at ensuring that a dispute between both levels of government would never affect an Indigenous child again.

This documentary takes a deep dive into Jordan's life and the struggles his family faced by having him stay at a hospital that was far away from their home. The provincial government was not funding his care as it felt

it was not responsible for individuals living on reserves. This was also the case for other Indigenous disabled children that were refused funding and resources due to their place of residence. Jordan's Principle was then created to address this concern and create equality for Indigenous youth. This whole journey of this legal battle is followed and seen from the perspectives of different Indigenous families just wanting what is fair and best for their children.

This heart-wrenching film accurately described what is going on in the Canadian government and deserves to be watched by all. Frequently, Indigenous issues within the government and health care are kept hidden to prevent backlash from the community. Controversy regarding Indigenous people living on reserves is kept under the covers, however, through creating documentaries like these and having events such as Truth and Reconciliation Day, mistreatment is finally coming to light. Change will not be made unless awareness is created and presented to the nation. Bringing viewers along for the entire process over the period of a few years

makes it seem as if they are involved in the development of this case, creating a connection between viewers and the family portrayed.

An emotional connection was created by showing actual footage of Jordan as a baby in the hospital. Showing him attached to all the machinery and tubes creates a sense of empathy and engages viewers to be understanding of the situation. Throughout the film, they also show beautiful views of Manitoba from the reserves Indigenous people live on. Living on a reserve may seem perfect from the outside as they have free space and many do not pay taxes; however, this is not the case. Indigenous families are struggling to take care of their children and are being refused funding for help with disabilities and mental health issues.

When watching this documentary, it is suggested that viewers familiarize themselves with the Jordan's Principles and legal terms that are discussed quite frequently throughout. Having a lack of knowledge makes some parts confusing, since the majority of the film is based on a legal battle that is taking place in

court and the House of Commons. It is also recommended to watch the film with subtitles, as there are times when it is unclear what they are saying in the interviews. It is also not required that Obomsawin's other documentaries are watched before this one; however, it would help viewers better understand the battles that Indigenous people are facing against the government.

Overall, this was a well-constructed documentary that stayed focused throughout. It gave insight to issues regarding inequality of Indigenous youth in the Canadian community. It exposed the flaws in the Canadian health care system that is deemed to be so perfect. Many times, principles are made addressing issues such as inequality; however, they are not actually being implemented and are ignored within the judicial system. It is recommended to watch this documentary and learn about the struggles of living on a reserve since it is not openly talked about elsewhere.

REFERENCES

Obomsawin, Alanis. (2019). *Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger*. National Film Board of Canada