

PRESS CONTACT

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Upstander Project

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FIRST LIGHT

13 min, 2015, documentary

WEBSITE: upstanderproject.org

PREVIEW LINK: <https://vimeo.com/140817010>

FILM LINK (EMBARGOED until Monday October 12th, 4:30am EDT):

<https://vimeo.com/141218300> password: screener2 (DO NOT DISTRIBUTE)

PHOTOS: additional photos downloaded at upstanderproject.org/ mandatory courtesy:
Upstander Project



Photo caption: First Light in Passamaquoddy Territory

FILMMAKING TEAM

Directors: Adam Mazo, Ben Pender-Cudlip

Producers: Adam Mazo, N. Bruce Duthu

Executive Producer: Beth Murphy

Director of Photography: Ben Pender-Cudlip

Editors: Ben Pender-Cudlip, Kristen Salerno

Learning Director: Mishy Lesser
Music: Hawk Henries

SYNOPSIS

First Light independently documents the work of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the first such task force in US history to investigate issues important to Native Americans. The TRC was dedicated to uncovering and acknowledging the truth about what happened to Wabanaki children and families involved with the state's child welfare system. *First Light* is the first film in a series, anchored by the feature film *Dawnland* slated for release in early 2017.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dawnland uses exclusive behind-the-scenes footage to share the transformative journey of a historic body: the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC ultimately concludes that the state of Maine has been engaged in “cultural genocide” against the Native people who have lived there for millennia.

We are making *Dawnland* to shine a spotlight on a unique response to a mostly ignored and ongoing crisis. Today in the United States American Indian children are far more likely than other children to grow up away from their families and tribes. In some states, like my home state of Minnesota, Native American children are 13 times more likely to enter foster care. Many of us from the dominant culture are familiar with popular culture's portrayal of the Doctrine of Discovery, Westward Expansion, Indian Wars, Boarding Schools. We are often taught to think of these things as historical occurrences with no relationship to people who are alive here now. The headlines hide the stories about the state funded bounty killings of Native women and children, the forced assimilation of children, or what one TRC Commissioner calls the federal government's “atonement” for past policies of annihilation and subjugation.

We released *First Light*, the first film in a series anchored by the feature film *Dawnland*, to contribute to the effort to stitch together this unexamined 500+ year history. We could not wait until 2017 when we aim to release *Dawnland*, because we feel we must share this story to help strengthen families and encourage upstanders now.

In *First Light* we tell a piece of the story of the TRC. In *Dawnland* we strive to bring viewers inside this first of its kind truth commission, and share stories from those who suffered in the child welfare system and those who implemented its policies.

-Adam Mazo, *First Light* Co-Director

UPSTANDER PROJECT

We help bystanders become upstanders through compelling documentary films and learning resources. Films we have produced include *First Light* (2015), *Dawnland* (in production) and *Coexist* (2014). We serve mass and targeted audiences by challenging indifference to injustice and raising awareness of the need for upstanders, especially among middle- and high-school educators and their students. With original documentaries, related learning resources, and educator workshops, the Upstander Project helps teachers and students become upstanders. Our goals are to: Overcome indifference to social injustice; develop the skills of upstanders; contribute to action-oriented campaigns in response to vital social issues.

Our previous film *Coexist* was broadcast in 25 countries, including PBS WORLD Channel in US (2014), reaching an estimated 500,000 viewers. The Upstander Project has trained more than 1,000 teachers in face-to-face workshops since 2010. The film, *Coexist*, and teacher's guide have reached 5,000+ educators and tens of thousands of students in more than a dozen countries.

FIRST LIGHT LEARNING RESOURCES

The learning resources for *First Light* connect teachers and students to primary source documents and discussion questions so they can deepen their understanding of both the brutal and disturbing history of settler colonialism that began with the invasion of Native peoples' homeland, and government policies that aimed to force Native people to stop being who they are. These resources are central to Upstander Project's teacher workshops and classroom presentations, and will be revised as they are beta-tested with teachers and in classrooms across the United States.

MAINE WABANAKI-STATE CHILD WELFARE TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION BACKGROUND

(Adapted from the TRC website) The Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission's mandate was endorsed in February 2013. The governor of Maine and the five tribal chiefs signed as equals to authorize the Commission to investigate whether or not the removal of Wabanaki children from their communities has continued to be disproportionate to non-Native children and to make recommendations, as the Declaration of Intent exhorts us, that "promote individual, relational, systemic and cultural reconciliation." This Commission is the first in the United States in which two parties agreed to come together to pursue answers to difficult questions, and it is one of the first in the world to examine issues of Native child welfare. While our commission does not involve an entire country as did the process brought to prominence by Nelson Mandela in South Africa, it nonetheless marks a historic moment, one we have been proud to steer and witness.

MUSIC NOTE

We are grateful to Hawk Henries for providing much of the music for *First Light*.

From Hawk's website: Hawk is a member of the Chaubunagungamaug band of Nipmuck, a people indigenous to what is now southern New England. He has been composing original flute music and making flutes using only hand tools and fire for over twenty 25 years. Hawk is committed to music as a traditional art form and as a vehicle for building bridges of communication and mutual respect. He teaches and performs in a wide variety of settings: indigenous and international art festivals, museums, concert venues, powwows, educational settings from kindergarten through university level, flute making workshops and private family gatherings

His rich and varied experience allows him to adapt his performance to match the needs of the venue and the audience. Though he presents to audiences of all sizes, he especially enjoys small groups where he can engage people on a more personal level.

CREW BIOS

Adam Mazo is the Co-Director/Producer of *First Light* and *Dawnland*. His feature film, *Coexist*, is airing on public television this spring. Over 5,000 educators on six continents now have *Coexist*. The Upstander Project, which he co-created with Dr. Lesser, has trained more than 1,000 teachers in bringing compassion, empathy, and respect for difference into students' lives.

Ben Pender-Cudlip is the Co-Director/Cinematographer/Editor of *First Light* and *Dawnland*. He is an award-winning director of over a dozen short documentary films, including *Sanjiban* in 2012 (Hot Docs, CIFF) and *Fetch* in 2014 (Woods Hole). He was selected as a 2014 Points North Fellow at the Camden International Film Festival alongside Mr. Mazo.

N. Bruce Duthu is a Producer of *First Light* and *Dawnland*. An enrolled member of the United Houma Nation of Louisiana, Professor Duthu is an internationally recognized scholar of Native American law and policy in Dartmouth's Native American Studies Program.

Beth Murphy is the Executive Producer of *First Light* and *Dawnland* and founder of Principle Pictures. She is director/producer for nearly 20 films (Sundance Channel, PBS, History Channel), including feature documentaries *Beyond Belief* and *The List*, both of which premiered at Tribeca. She is a fellow at Boston University and Iraq's Basra University.

Kristen Salerno is the Editor of *First Light* and *Dawnland*. A longtime collaborator of director Ben Pender-Cudlip, Kristen has edited numerous short documentaries, including *Sanjiban*. She is co-editor of the upcoming public television documentary *Raising of America*, produced by California Newsreel and Vital Pictures.

Mishy Lesser, Ed.D. is the learning director for the Upstander Project. She conceived and developed the Coexist Teacher's Guide to help teachers and students use the film in

impactful ways. She is a Circle Keeper and has been featured on WBUR (Boston) and PRI/BBC's "The World." Mishy spent over 12 years living and working in Latin America. She is currently developing learning resources for the short documentary *First Light* and *Dawnland*.

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