

## PRODUCER'S STATEMENT – ALLISON ABNER

Family is history. And on my mother's side, our history is preserved in scrapbooks and photos of my grandfather, his father, and generations before, descended from the Stockbridge Munsee in Wisconsin. Two generations of our family were forced to attend the Carlisle School for Indians, where-- despite mistreatment and forced assimilation-- our Uncle Jimmy Johnson became an All-American quarterback on the school's legendary football team (that later included Jim Thorpe). Along with coach Pop Warner, the Carlisle phenoms created the game of football that we know today, won championship victories against Ivy League teams like Yale, Harvard, and Cornell, garnered weekly national headlines in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Harpers*, and led Pres Teddy Roosevelt's inaugural parade.

From those scrapbooks and family stories, I became keenly aware of the gaping hole in my formal education about this chapter in America's (and my family's) history. I became determined to read whatever I could get my hands on-- historical scholarship, Native American autobiographies, Supreme Court cases, news clippings -- to understand what led to the tragic loss of tribal lands and culture. As a writer on *The West Wing*, I wrote an episode (*Butterball Hotline*) that featured Stockbridge Munsee characters lobbying the White House about this buried history and the need for legal remedies.

Flash forward to 2023, when Mary was working on *BAD RIVER*, I suggested that the film would be an excellent opportunity to connect the historical dots and give the audience relatable context. She emphatically agreed and asked me to come onboard. Together, we crafted a visually dynamic narrative that conveys the profound impact that federal laws and powerful corporations have had on *Bad River and all tribes*. From the first treaty signings until today, tribal nations have been engaged in an existential fight for land and sovereignty, meaning their fundamental right to own, control, and protect their land. For tribes-- like for all Americans-- land is a primary asset, and they should have every right to decide what to do with it.

We hope that the film leaves the audience with a deep appreciation for the formidable, strategic, and enduring resistance waged by *Bad River* and all First Nations tribes; that despite overwhelming odds, they have prevailed simply by surviving; and that sovereignty IS self-determination, now and for future generations.

-Allison Abner  
Producer, *Bad River*