



Blood Quantum, Enrollment, Imaginary Indians and Plastic Shamans

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Preface:

As of the 2000 Census in America, 8 of 10 Indian people are of mixed “blood” or multi-racial. By 2010, this number is expected to be 9 of 10. Current enrollment of tribal members of Federally recognized tribes seems to be about 2.5 million people. However some 1 million or more people claim to have American Indian ancestors and some 250 American Indian tribes are seeking or been denied Federal recognition.

There are American Indians who are also part African American and a lesser number of American Indians who are Asian and other races. The majority of mixed blood Indians appear to be American Indian and Anglo-Saxon ancestry. The most conflicted, under-counted and discriminated against group appears to be those people of American Indian and African American heritage.

There appear to be three main conflicts regarding American Indians and those claiming to be American Indian: Blood Quantum is one, “enrollment” is another and “pretending” to be an Indian is the other. These three problems have created violence, hatred, and many other negative situations all around the world at this point.

Blood and Bones and Choices



As a young man, when I understood that I had American Indian ancestors, I did something about it. What you do about your life makes all the difference. If someone tells me they are “part Indian” I always ask them, “what are you doing about it?”

I am of mixed ancestors, like so many people in this world now. I have family that is Welch and possibly some family that is Mediterranean as well as some Ojibway, Creek and Catabwa American Indians in my family history. As I came to understand this fact, I went on a series of long journeys to find out who my people were and what place there was for me, This search ended up by becoming my life. I was born and spent much of my childhood in the deep American South. Kentucky, South Carolina, Georgia and believe me this culture leaves a deep impression. I am also a modern person with a diverse education who considers himself an international citizen. The whole question of blood quantum (how much Indian blood you gotta have to be a Real Indian) is a question that torments American society in general and of course American Indian society in particular. This is a narrative of my thoughts and experiences of having lived with these questions my entire life.

Tribal Enrollment Fantasies

Many tribes (and the US Government) insist on believing the only Indians left in the world are those who can prove, in the mode of documents created and controlled by the American government, that they are descendant from the various “tribal roll books” created mostly in the late 1800s. These people call themselves “enrolled members”, like in the boy scouts, but not so much like in real life. The most recent US census indicates that fully half of all people listing themselves as American Indians do not live within 500 miles of their reservation.

Thousands, if not tens of thousands of tribal families never registered, never considered registering, never knew about registration and enrollment. Are they still Indians?

It is well known that these enrollment documents are riddled with problems. Do you think it was then, or now, possible at all to accurately and honestly count every Indian family?

In my travels I have discovered Indian families in the strangest places, in the most unlikely places. Even though I have studied carefully the distribution and history of the dispersal of tribal communities, I have been surprised countless times at the exceptions, and at the hidden nature of Indian people. There are plenty of Indians who beat their chests about what they perceive as their blood. I once met a guy whose first words to me were a screaming shout, “I am a full blood”. I wanted to smack him. He seemed so stupid and angry to me. Instead I looked at him and said, “who cares?”. I have met many others, full bloods, whatever that is, and mixed bloods, whatever that is, who were quiet and shy and living in places the government and the breast beating tribes would never imagine.

These enrollment documents were controlled and instigated by officials of the United States government. They were used to subjugate, rob, and confuse the truth from Indian people. These were never documents of honor. Their use now in defining the truth **for** American Indian people is a tragedy of major consequences for the future generations.

Some tribes are now using these lists to define solely who is and is not a citizen of their tribe. The US Government is using what amounts to the measurable ancestral blood quantum to deny (proportionately) services (treaty services) to more and more tribal members and communities.

Note

Tribes are sovereign nations and in theory have very flexible powers to determine who their members are. Using only the corrupted government lists seems lazy to me.

Both of these uses seem odd. It is strange to see tribal governments buy into the mythology of these government lists and not come up with their own method for determining membership.

Every tribe has lost members to the folly and tragedy of history. Every tribe could benefit from working on methods and means to claim their missing and lost relations.

Of course there must be some place to begin in managing population groups. Your starting calculations have to begin somewhere and this kind of grab bag logic is the basis for much of the support for these official tribal enrollment documents. Just because it is there does not make it the best solution for determining the responsibilities of the US and tribal governments to those who are in fact its members.

There were many cultural methods for denying or adopting individuals into and out of tribes. The movie ***Dead Man*** creates an Indian man named “Nobody” whose father had married outside the tribe and so was considered nobody by all his people. He wanders alone. I related very strongly to this character as I am more or less in the same position. Am I still an Indian?

At many tribes they struck from the tribal rolls the children of families who were forcefully taken away to government Indian schools and came home with leather shoes and the forced English language on their tongues. Even now Taos Pueblo does not consider Taos Pueblo Indians who live away from the reservation more than a few years to be members and they have no rights or privileges of any kind if they try and return.



In many of the northern tribes the tribal rolls were used in political wars between the Traditional and BIA boss Indians. Many families were surprised to see all evidence of their membership and family lines removed from the tribal rolls at Pine Ridge and White Earth reserves, just to name a few. Many of the corrupt leaders of these tribes are in prison right now for their illegal behavior. Were the sabotage of their own tribal records and documents ever corrected? I would not believe they were if I had to guess.

On the other side many tribes and almost every tribal family historically has some procedure and policy about adopting people. An Indian Family can adopt an adult or child human being from any race as a full member of their family. I would not say this happens every day, but it has happened a lot. Who are these adopted persons? Are they Indians?

Does blood quantum alone define who is an Indian? DNA. I am certain DNA would prove many Indians are not Indians by this definition. I am certain it would prove many people to be Indians who have no clue that they are in fact Indians. Are these people Indians?

If an Indian person marries outside their tribe are his or her children still Indians? Many small tribes make up the population of Indian country in the USA. Are they all doomed to not being Indians because wives and husbands can now only be found by looking outside the tribes blood quantum?

Are the US governments treaty obligations, therefore, based only on blood quantum? Many government officials think so and advocate applying diminishing percentages of treaty obligation services as the blood quantum quotient of Indian blood (unstoppably) diminishes. These services include medical treatment, legal services, housing assistance and so forth.

An earlier note from my journals:

The ones who are there as the blood is thinning are holding on to the language, the Ojibway songs, the Ojibway drums and Sacred Pipes and sweat lodges. The Ojibway trees, rice and sacred soul are in the keeping of these mixed blood people.....the blood quantum as some sort of official standard creates a death march for all Indian cultures, dances, languages, prayers, ceremonies, teachings, arts, literature, performance, legal rights, land and so forth.....it is shocking to realize this. The community at large postures dramatically on these largely racist issues...BUT the united states government uses this standard to define all legal and treaty rights. In their minds as the blood quantum of the original treaty Indians fades to zero....their obligations to honor all these treaties and tribal human rights diminishes as well. When I sit quietly and think of the implications of this I am stunned at this realization:

.....If you marry outside your tribe you are dooming your tribe and all of its rights, culture and history to extinction.....this fact is a great problem that not one tribe has addressed officially as of this date.

Only those tribes that can overcome the genocidal terrorism of the implications of the blood quantum standard in their complete legal and moral structure will survive. Perhaps in the end it will just be loose canons and a shrinking team of secret Indians all alone in the midst of the billions of people now on planet earth...perhaps it has already come to that for some.....

I have never felt much like I needed anyone to tell me who I am or if I am an Indian. "You are not an Indian", yes I have heard that. I have never heard it from the lips and face and eyes and words and silences of my tribal elders. When we look for the Indians what are we looking for really? Where does the blood quantum argument fit into this picture of what you want to see in a fair and balanced society?

Racist America on the Road: The meeting in the middle of Nowhere:

Friday, August 18, 2006
Polishing the Soul (an old BLOG entry)



While hiking in a very remote part of Pantelleria, Sicily, we met two Americans. I am an American Indian living here with my wife, who has been living here 10 years. We said hello to these two men, possibly a father and his older son. Naturally being well-mannered, we gave him our names. This is a common courtesy in Italian culture. When he heard my rather American Indian name he immediately, without breathing or missing a heartbeat, began asking me the 20 racial, racist questions: am I a full blood? Is your blood from your mother or father? and other questions I have already emptied my mind of. “Hello, I meet you out here in the wilderness and you choose to not tell me your name or say anything friendly but to calmly grill me on the contents of my blood?” (Normal Anglo behavior?) He spoke without drama....without animation, like he was asleep.

This kind of behavior is so typical with Americans I barely noticed. While I had an impulse to say something corrective or express irritation in this behavior, I was patient and kind to him. Maybe I have become way too used to this behavior. Only from Americans do I get this behavior. Silvia, being from this Italian culture and not at all used to it, brought home the disturbing quality of this exchange by reminding me what would happen if two Italian groups met while traveling in the wilderness of another country. There would of course be handshakes. These white men did not want to be touched. There would be names. These guys said nothing about themselves while wanting to know all about my racial composition..... If Italians had met this way, they would be having the diner together for sure. There would be touching and smiles and no strange race clarification questions. This seems to happen only to Indians like me being talked to by white people in America. *It is endless. It also does not matter "how much blood" is involved....I have seen it pulled on every kind of Indian. The only thing I feel bad about now is that I did not get their names so I could ridicule them in print.*

What's the point? Americans in particular seem so cold, so distant, so frightened. Being here in this Italian culture of peace and respect for one another, I was jarred by being reminded how racist, how arrogant and empty are the people to whom these racial classifications are so important. American culture seen from different eyes is very disturbing. These two guys: after looking in my wife's eyes, I was ashamed for these two dumb and empty white men, not for myself.

I polish my soul by breathing. By waking up in my dreams. By not being for or against anything. It is OK to speak your mind. I was happy to learn that their behavior did not make me angry. In the past such bullshit talk could really get a rise out of me. Now it was just an exchange of emptiness, a flatulence of the new world order.

Italian culture has taught me a lot about love, about accepting others, about what a good and healthy and joyful citizen can do and say to make life more sweet, more tolerant. The contrast is astonishing.

***I remember everything.
I drop my heart inside these stones
and put them in the fire.
I burn, I dream, I become water.....
(a sweat lodge song)***

The place where we met these two ghosts is a very rare and spiritually charged place on the island. It is called “Favare Grande” and it has red stones and pale soil; the only place on the island like it. There are some stone features that are stunning. There are some man-made things here no one understands fully. It is an astonishing hike with both nature and history. It was no fun meeting these dull bored Americans with typical no-manners of Americans in a sacred space, inside a culture which considers hospitality the fruit of a good life....what graceless, bored, ugly bags of mostly water some people are.

Permission For Life? My Personal View

I do not need the United States Government or the politically organized leadership of some tribe to tell me who I am. I do not need documents to authenticate my life on this mother earth. ***For me the breath of the living tribal elders on my open hand is quite enough validation. What I have done about my Indian ancestors is to put myself at the feet and mercy of those tribal elders that allowed me to find them.***

When we “wonder who are the Indians?”, There is now a lot of nonsense applied to this question. I guess if you are dispensing money or seeking to control land there is some need for a standard to apply. If money or property or power is involved, people will lie and murder and do whatever they feel they can get away with. In my life I have made my own money. I have no particular land as my life is a moving one. I have watched with horror sometimes, and at other times disbelief, as people and governments dance with this question as to who is and is not an Indian.

South Africa, some years back, when it was strongly gripped in the apartheid system, showed us very clearly the evils of this thinking along racial, “blood quantum” lines. Everyone of the earth was critical of this system. How is it then that the tribal blood quantum, and even more perversely, the tribal government census roles, have not been abolished or at least reformed? What is it about Indians and Americans that creates this fantasy of recognition or denial of a human beings perception of their roots in humanity?

I am satisfied that I understand clearly enough who I am and what my life is meant to be. I have experienced the rage of Indians who do not think I am an Indian. I have experienced the rage of white people who hate the Indian they think I am. I have always believed these two reactions to be symptoms of the same disease. I have had these two opposite reactions sometimes on the same day at the same place. It could be amusing if the hearts of the people who think this way were not so filled with darkness.

I made a choice when I was a young man that I would ask governments, tribal or national, for nothing. Nothing. I do not want land or money or federal or state or tribal or even societal recognition. I want only to recognize clearly the face I see in the mirror each morning. Now I am a much older man and I have not changed my mind on this issue.

My father was an enrolled tribal member. I am not my father. He used his credentials as a cudgel to beat my brother and I into submission of his authority, just like the government. I have learned over many years that many Indian people feel the same way as I do.

If I have an official standard it is this: let the tribal elders decide who their relatives are. Period. Full rights to tribal privileges have always been largely a religious and spiritual issue in the history of tribes. Tribes were free to adopt any human being who passed their way. Tribes were free to reject from their community any human being who offended them.

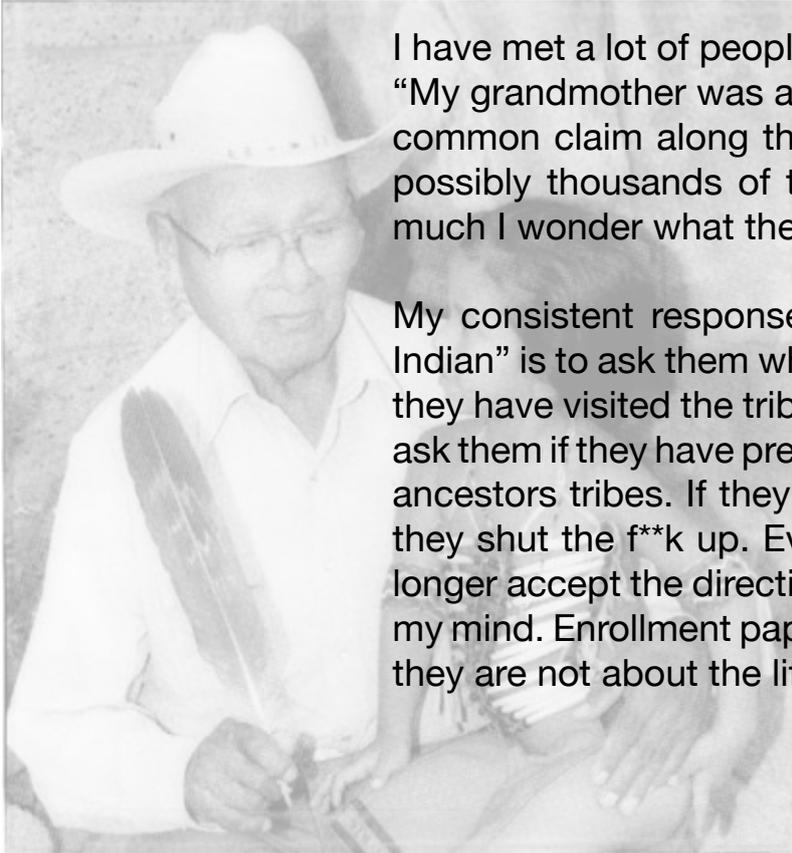
I believe human freedom exists in spite of, not because of, governments and documents and regulations. Where there are groups of people who want to be bound by these things, more power to them. I have never agreed to these things. I have only agreed to the direction of my tribal elders. Everything else is just noise to me. In my life I have met a large number of Indian people who feel the same way. People who care nothing for documents or the permission of governments to live their lives. I believe in the works, the behavior, the art and the actions of my life. These are the things that are real to me. My work is not with governments. My work is with human beings. I have worked with every kind of human being, Indian and otherwise. It is the work, rather than the racial posturing, that defines my life.

To me the saddest truth in the world is that had the immigrants to America been honorable people interested in freedom and truth, then they would all have put themselves under the direction of these same tribal elders and we would all be Indians today. We were all of us, every ancestor of everyone of us who live in America, in a position to do this. There was a society in place here back in the days when the so called white man arrived on these shores. If we would all have followed Indian law and tradition the people and the armies that invaded this land and murdered everyone in eight directions would instead have placed themselves under the guidance and direction of those elders who were here at that time. Society failed to do this and now we have this complicated and pointless posturing about who is who and who is what.

Exceptions to the Rule

I have met a lot of people who like to tell me “I am part Indian”. “My grandmother was a Cherokee Indian” is perhaps the most common claim along these lines. I have heard this hundreds, possibly thousands of times. Cherokee. I have heard this so much I wonder what the hell does it mean?

My consistent response when people tell me they are “part Indian” is to ask them what they are doing about it. I ask them if they have visited the tribes they claim to have in their families. I ask them if they have presented themselves to the elders of their ancestors tribes. If they answer no to these questions I prefer they shut the f**k up. Even if they are Indians. Indians that no longer accept the direction of their elders are not real Indians in my mind. Enrollment papers are just about property and money, they are not about the life you live inside your skin.





The Plastic Shaman List

This is a list that is passed around as a document which says it is from a group of informed and qualified people working for the truth in life. It warns against what they call “plastic shamans” (it used to be *plastic medicine men*). Over many years it has had different names on it. It appears and then disappears and then reappears.

I guess they mean to imply these people are fake or something like this. It has official sounding language and appears to be a kind of declaration. I first saw this list in the 1980s. At that time it was being circulated by a group of angry of Siouxian Indians from around the Dakotas. Now it is being carried by all sorts of people who have taken it up as their “religious duty”. Entire organizations have been built around this strange list. Perhaps soon they will have a web site with a color-coded system like that used by George Bush for terrorist attacks. Maybe all the Indians who are approved can get a big shiny green sticker to put on their foreheads.

The list is the same more or less, but over the years the names on the list change. Maybe after seeing their names on the list these people were stoned or sent to another country. Beware the fakes. Several of these people are dead actually. The web site where I most recently saw this list was in an article entitled “Imaginary Indians”..... Seeing this list again while working on a book project has made it impossible not to express my feelings about it.

Maybe it is important to work up some information on all this darkness. Why do people pretend to be shamans? Why do people say they are Indians walking around in society while other people who say they are Indians say “no way, you are not an Indian?” I have met hundreds of people who have told me their grandmother was Cherokee Indian. I always thought most of these people were kidding themselves and I wonder why so many people do it. But then again why are other people so upset about it? I listen to people say all sorts of useless things without feeling the need to organize against them.

Personally, I think anyone who uses this word “shaman” proves they know nothing. At best it is a lazy word. It has no relevance or correct usage when applied to modern people. At worst it is a phony word of posturing and deception...a kind of projection. Its passage into common usage is another highly charged stereotypical projection which tribal people will have to overcome in order for their voices to be heard. This word has almost come to mean “Indian” in some vocabularies in print and the web, or is often implied in the same breath.

I believe and I was taught that the tribal elders decide upon and give approval for the people who are responsible for ceremonial teachings and the religious life for the people. Leading ceremonial teachings requires a long line of permissions from many elders. Even so, however, any Indian person is free to talk about the ceremonies and teachings of their family. It is called free speech. A few crazy old Indians have had visions of new ceremonies. For that matter people are free to just make things up. They do it all the time. The differences in all these behaviors and freedoms are in degrees of intent. To truly say you have worked inside the sacred space you must have the breath and touch of the tribal elders in your life. I do not think there are any exceptions to this. A person who claims to be doing any kind of work for, with or about Indian people should have this approval from elders. As far as I know this is the only important step. Documents mean nothing inside the Sacred Mystery Life. The Sacred Life is a world of action, behavior, consciousness and a firmly measured reality.

Are all the Indians really and truly in specific locations so we can go to that place and ask these questions? No way. The US Government has a bunch of old and very incomplete lists of tribal families given white man names and numbers when they were put onto reservations. The US Governments treaty obligations to American Indians is to those Indians on those lists, according to the government. Fine. They are called by some “the treaty Indians” or the “enrolled Indians”. Does this mean that Indians on the enrollment documents are the only Indians? If a person is not on this list are they not Indians? No. It does not mean that at all. How could such an obviously corrupted set of documents be given so much power? It just means that for those people and that government there is some business and obligations. It is not possible that in the late 1800s every Indian was counted. It is in fact impossible.



A lot of people are Indians that could care less, just like many people in society in general. Just as some people are angry because someone they don't like is doing ceremonies, I know a lot of Indians who hate having to do the ceremonies and wear the clothes and eat the food and go through these ceremonies at all. And yes, in some areas, the people who believe in the ceremonies are ridiculed and chastised. It is good to remember things like this when you are reading lists of bad people. What about a list of all the lazy and indifferent people? Maybe there is not enough paper for this list.

I believe that someone who needs to make a list like this, and the people who think a list like this is important in any way are the same people. Both groups suffer from fear and worry. If people from these two groups meet, they should probably not have children. They remind me of the Arabic children who are taught from birth to hate Jews. Frankly, I am not entirely sure what their problem really is. These people need each other, they may feed off each other. Their need for each other does not have to be dangerous for the rest of us if we recognize what is going on.

I have always believed I could trust my own senses, my mind and heart, my body and my spirit to help me understand when I am present with the truth. I believe that the teachings and rituals of the Sacred Pipe and the other ceremonies have helped make this possible for me in the strongest way. I believe that is the real purpose of these teachings. Indian religion is not a faith religion. Indian religion is about a way of behaving and thinking and taking responsibility for your life. The Sacred Teaching is a Warrior Teaching. This is why we call it Sacred. The great teachings give you power to stand where it is true and safe and bright.... But it ain't easy.

I have a friend who is reading a book about American Indian pipes written in Italian by an Italian writer. I was interested in seeing if I could find the book in English, so I did a web search for the author. I found her email and wrote her an email complimenting her book and mentioning my web site as a frame of reference for why I would be interested in complimenting her on the book. Anyway she wrote me back with the oddest reply to an email I have had ever. It seemed very defensive. I ended up going back to her web site to look around and see that she publishes some sort of magazine. I downloaded a copy of this magazine and boom there is this article on the plastic shamans with color photos of real American Indian people and others as apparent examples of these plastic shamans. Reading this article and then reading the email again I felt embarrassed at the evident paranoia and crap this list resurfacing brought back to my mind.....embarrassed for all of us and puzzled why this otherwise articulate and educated Italian woman, a scholar, would be so quick to jump down such a negative abyss with a perfect stranger. I remember the elders teaching us to not make assumptions and especially to avoid taking things, particularly from strangers, in a personal way.

I have always found this concept a disturbing one, *even though I am sympathetic with its intentions*. (Yes, for whatever reason, there are a lot of delusional behaviors around these issues.) It is basically a hate list. The language used in the document is filled with hate words and uses dramatic, charged language that is very suspicious. I do not believe in hate lists. If someone has been done wrong let them present their case of facts. Otherwise such behavior is just a type of name calling, like soft core porn, it is soft core violence hiding behind the idea that “we know what is true and you don’t”.

There *does seem to be* a lot of confusion and bad representations of the sacred teachings and ceremonies of tribal people. It is very hard to find reliable detailed information on any of these subjects. It is a serious problem. However, it is a problem that deserves a thoughtful response and a compassionate outlook. This “plastic shaman list” approach seems more like an assault with a blunt instrument.



I was surprised to see the new and improved plastic shaman list included many American Indians names on it. I knew some of these people and knew of some of the others...and they are real Indian people, entitled and able to represent the ceremonies and teachings and the ideas of their culture. I am not sure how they could be “plastic shaman” people at all. Who says they are and why do they say this? *Some of them were never very good at this work, but that is not fraud..*

The idea of the plastic shaman list in theory is that there is a grand council of spiritual and ceremonial elders who has issued their judgement on these people and this issue. “The Great Grand Council has said to the people...etc, etc”. The truth is there is no such thing. There may be a group of angry people who were upset at the behavior of these people and got some old Indians to agree with them and then they circulated this document. ***If someone tells you there is a big council somewhere that has authority to do work like this they are lying for sure.*** It is a contradictory document because it says it is a list of plastic shamans but the list itself is a plastic list.

There is nowhere a group of Indian people who speak for all Indian people. It has never happened and never will. The exact opposite is closer to the truth. The ceremonies of the south and those of the north are vastly different. The ceremonies of the east and west are vastly different. The differences cannot be underestimated. There are no Indians who can say they speak in this way about other Indians who have any special authority or power to do this. The fake list is a fake concept. Yes, for some odd reason there are a lot of misguided people posturing in our society. However, this type of list does not contribute anything useful to the problem. The list has instead become part of the problem. I am sure many people will be misinformed by this list, and have been already.

The list is itself a symptom of the problem, not an answer to it.



I think in the early to late 70s some Indian people started working to share ceremonial events with people from the outside world. Other Indians about the same time had visions that they should bring new ceremonies to all the people of the world. I am one of those people, in that generation. This upset a lot of people and when people get upset they say some ugly things. However, many, many tribal elders and leaders now support responsible sharing of ceremonial experiences and instructions with the people of the world. They expect the practitioners to behave well and follow the guidance and authority of their tribal teachers.

When I first saw this list I thought this plastic shaman list was racist in nature. That was my impression. The first names to appear on it were mixed blood Indian people and some people who may have not had much Indian blood at all. The big question then was about their “Indian blood quantum” rather than “enrollment”.

I am sure any racist, blood quantum qualification is not correct. Making a plastic shaman list because someone is not a “full blood” or “certifiably enrolled” in some tribe is deceptive and inaccurate. People who use this kind of language demonstrate that they know very little about the history and the problems of the distribution and documentations of the more than 600 American Indian tribes that exist today, much less the several thousand tribes that once existed and probably have ancestors scattered throughout the world.

Yes, there is a lot of exploitation of Indian people. Most of it is done by respected business people, media people and people looking for attention. I am rather proud of those first Indians, scattered around the country, who had the passion and the desire to share with the world. Indians need to learn a few things, just like everybody else. You learn best by joining in with others. Many of the people who are angry about sharing the ceremonies are people who live inside of generations of isolation and poverty of the reservation system. It has always seemed to me to be a fear response, not a rational response.

When they started putting Indians from well known Indian families on this list, then I realized something else was happening with this list. It is a pointless hate list with no credibility, no value to society. Many people make obsessive and compulsive behavior around issues of religion and spiritual values. They rarely behave in balance when they do this.

While, as I said, I am not unsympathetic; I don't think circulating a list of naming names is a productive idea. It is better to teach people how to understand when someone is telling them the truth and when they are not. To my mind that is the underlying purpose of the ceremonies and sacred space. It is a real teaching ground. It is not a house of faith. It is a house of teaching. It is a house where you are expected to behave properly and honestly and directly. It scares the hell out of most people this sacred space. If you are under the direction of elders and you do the work of the sacred as it is laid out, you will understand better what is true and who is true and who is not. I have seen big tough people tremble and weep when they are put before the tribal elders to explain themselves.

A lot of people, Indians and others, have been upset over this new idea of sharing the sacred teachings. It is easy to let fear and anger turn into name calling and denouncement. It is exhausting sometimes all the things you need an education about in this work.

It is always helpful to be clear and say what you mean when talking about serious matters. It is important to be impeccable and clear with the words you use. The plastic shaman list uses sloppy language, lazy ideas that are not well thought out.

Every time I run across revitalization's of this so called plastic shaman list (been circulating now more than 20 years), I get agitated. I suspect the list has power to influence people. I think it is a dark thing, a negative weapon. It is a kind of pornography, which is to say I do not see any redeeming social values in its existence or in expecting people to even think this way.

I would like to see a list of positive things. I know a list could be made of good people who had good and important experiences with Indian people, maybe even some of the Indians on this plastic shaman list. There is a great new book that has been published about American Indian heroes. There are so many it is a publication in two large volumes.

Perhaps only a plastic society could produce a list of plastic shamans. I have also noticed many plastic students. I see people every day trying to bring truth and healing and balance in the world only to be met with a listening public that doesn't have a clue. The list of "plastic people" could be advanced to include politicians, teachers, artists, and the leaders of most of the world's religions.

Just as some people may be misguided by seeking to represent Indian thinking in a phony way, there are people who tell us in a very phony way who our enemies are. One negative behavior followed by another negative response just creates a dark hole for the innocent to stumble into.

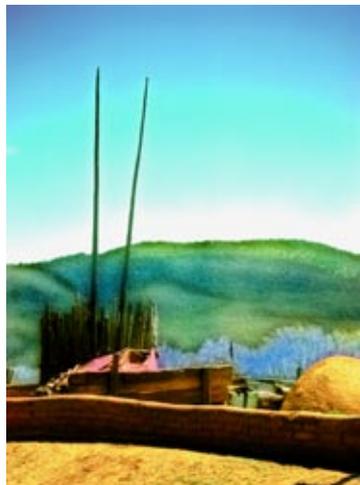
If you love yourself and try to walk in balance and be a good relation to those around you then you will find your way through the plastic forest of liars and thieves and crazy people that are in every society, every village, every group. I don't think you need a list. I think you need a heart and a clear mind and patience.

If, when you meet people, your first response is to be paranoid that they may somehow be trying to trick you. You are no longer living a natural life. Is this a symptom of modern life? I was taught to keep my mind quiet and do not ever think for or against people. I base my experience with people on what happens when we are together, when we are communicating and sharing life. Responding with fear is an invitation for problems to appear over and over.

After the events of 9/11 the US Government made lists to find the terrorists. Like everybody else they discovered these lists don't work, are unreliable, and often include many "innocent" people by "mistake".

Sending an email to this supposedly educated writer and having her invoke this paranoid list, and the strange thinking that produces such a list, was like a slap or an insult. Should we send our emails to the thought police before they arrive in our inbox? I thought of how Ghandi being thrown off a train meant only for rich white people changed the history of India forever. I wish something could happen to change the history of this racist country.

People should take responsibility for understanding how their behavior affects other people. Did this writer intend to insult me? I would say no. Did she write without thinking? How do you do that? I learned early to not take things personally, and I did not in this case. It was more a matter of where and when are white people, in particular, going to start discussing American Indian issues in a responsible way?



This lady said she was/is a scientist and yet here she is invoking a strong documentation of a controversial emotional issue that is anything but scientific. She has some sort of quarterly magazine she publishes and here was the Plastic Shaman List and Imaginary Indians the subject of an entire issue recently. There is a contradiction in speaking objectively out of one side of your mouth while you rant and rave over how much people lie to you on the other side of your mouth. This is called speaking with a forked tongue.

My mother used to call it speaking from both sides of your mouth.

There is no way to stop people talking bad about one another. There is a lot of bad news and a huge collection of bad people doing bad things for sure. Sometimes good people end up doing bad things when they really were hoping it would be a good thing. Some people are just not very good at what they do. Yes, some few people seem delusional and Indians have a problem with people who claim they are some kind of Indian but are not known on the reservations. Not every Indian has their paperwork in order. Some Indians have no paperwork. Many Indian people have never set foot on a reservation. I know lots of Indians who would not tell you what tribe they are from if you held a gun up to their head. I know Indians if they thought somebody was ripping off the sacred things, they would do violence. There are plenty of worthless people, broken people, lost people, criminal people on these reservations and in this life. I would like to see a police report on the so-called authors of this plastic shaman list. Who are they? In most of the versions of this list they use imaginary organizational names and do not put down their real names on their real list.

There are about 2.5 million American Indians right now. Of that number fewer than 10% are what you would say are certifiably full blood. Being multi-racial is like Mr. Toad's wild ride and a never-ending source of spontaneous adventures and "incidents", especially in America (much, much less when I travel to other countries). I have been accused of being not "Indian" in some very scary ways. When some people see a mixed race person they don't know what to think or how to act sometimes. I have had many hateful things said to me coldly from people who will never change their mind. On the other hand I have had a similar amount of anger and hatred directed at me from people who don't like Indians of any kind and will go out of their way to insult one. This is where having a sense of humor begins to pay off. I have been called nothing and have lived on this earth with no home, no family, nothing. I been to the desert on a horse with no name. I have been told my ideas were worthless. This was my fathers favorite theme. These pronouncements of rage and disappointment and fear have never been the information I use to define who I am or where I am going.



Finding things to rant and rave about creates a state of real tension. Tension can trigger anger, cruelty and words that come to quick and create trouble that leaves to slow. Rage is terrible for the internal organ system. Bottled up anger is a dangerous force.

Something I have seen with my own eyes; just because a bunch of people get together and “believe” something is happening does not mean anything really will happen...or that anything has actually happened. I have seen gatherings with ceremonial intentions carried out so poorly by people who understand so little, that the entire affair was boring and forgettable. I really think this is how the sacred protects itself. If your energy is not just right, nothing will happen.

How many times have you gone to a church ceremony or a big speech by some politician and been bored and uninspired. My mother used to take me to Southern baptist Sunday Morning Prayer and Sermon Meetings. I would sit and listen as best I could to what the “preacher” had to say. Five minutes after I left the church I couldn’t remember a word he said.



If you don't do the ceremonies right nothing will happen.

The sacred mathematics and rhythms required must be correct. You can say you are whoever you want to say you are. When it comes to the sacred, that cannot be faked. Not that people won't try.

The real *medicine life* is like kung fu, or as I have said, being a soldier or warrior. If you are going to get involved in this kind of life there is a need for discipline and focus. You need to be prepared. Yes, being prepared is a good concept. If you are prepared in a grounded and observant way, then you can find where the truth is, especially if you really need to. The ceremonies have their own protections, their own way to follow to make things right.

When things are right you will feel really good. Your mind will be sharp, your heart will be happy, your spirit will feel strong and well fed. You can trust this feeling. If you feel this way you have felt the truth, you have done something right. I have seen people's lives change in profound ways during and after a strong ceremony. I am one of the people who has experienced this feeling.

A ceremony is a focused study and experience of a moment in time. The formalities and channels of the senses opened by the sounds and rhythms of the ceremony can all converge inside your consciousness in a powerful and beautiful way. This moment can release all kinds of chemical and nerve sensations and information to every part of your body.

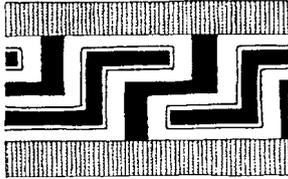
We have all gone somewhere and been disappointed at what we experienced. There are plenty of people standing around together accomplishing nothing. I can see no value in making a list of such experiences.

I have shared many ceremonies with my tribal relations over these many years. They have become like beads, a long string of prayers and meditations, songs, dances and silences which have celebrated life. They opened channels of learning new things and in general this is the force that has carried me in this life. To most Indian people the ceremony is not a single teaching experience but a way of life day by day. Perhaps it is this life that is the teaching. Seeing before me the outstanding life of my Indian teachers, it was very easy to trust them and believe what they said to me. I trust completely the feeling I have about the people around me. It is easy to see that some of them, all of us, have bad moments. We can go for many long years inside a slump, a pit of circumstances around which we experience only problem after problem. Wherever my life has taken me, the ceremonial agreement I have with the earth is my grand council and the guide I rely upon to live my life in a good way.



Do I support the people on this plastic shaman list? I am not for them or against them. I support good behavior and learning to trust in myself.

One thing I know for sure: people like many of these teachings are anxious to know more about them. We need more and better information, not less.



What is the Real Danger Here?

If you use Google or Yahoo or another search engine and search for obvious American Indian subjects like sweat lodge, sacred pipe, eagle feather, Indian rattle, vision quest, dream teachings, etc...what you end up with is *thousands of links* to some of the most preposterous, misguided and entirely **not** American Indian subjects, products, and information. It is almost overwhelming how much bad information is on the internet on the subject of American Indians and their lives and beliefs. A lot of it comes from the freaks who make the plastic shaman list, but even more comes from Universities, newspapers, and political leaders. For example if you look at American Indian in Wikipedia, it lists the religion of Indians as “Christian”, which is just nonsense.

Then there is Mass Production;

(or where is a plastic list when you really need one?)

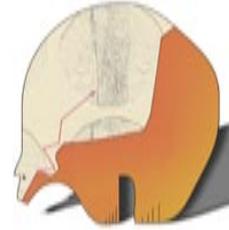
case in point; Dream Catchers

What the people charmingly call “dream catchers” are now officially mass produced junk made in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Indian reservations and toy factories by the tens of thousands. *This dream catcher design was the intellectual and artistic property of one Ojibway family in Minnesota.* They sold them at pow-wows and naturally, being a good idea, they were copied. But now the copying has gotten totally out of hand and none of these Indian families have made a penny from this. ***By mass producing the dream catcher, the world has casually taken a very important and useful dream teaching and made it impotent and useless.*** This is the real plastic medicine, this business of mass producing sacred tribal objects. Taking a very powerful and important teaching and making it impotent and useless. Homicide of the dreaming soul. I wonder if you get it? The plastic art is an even more gigantic problem than the plastic shamans as far as having a direct impact on the lives of Indian people.



Historical Patterns

If you read really old accounts of observations of American Indian ceremonies from the 17th and 18th centuries, you will see language similar to that used to talk about human beings born into American Indian families and listed in the plastic shaman list. No matter what Indian people do, there are always some official sounding people from the church, from the press, from the politicians about how misguided, savage, fake, phony and suspicious these wild Indians really are. Particular white people have always used variants of this same language to talk about the beliefs of people of color. Their first thoughts are always of suspicion and fraud. Christian writers in particular seem completely unable to talk about another religion and its ceremonies without using derogatory, defaming language.



Beware of Messengers

To set the record straight, I am not a messenger and this is not a message. I am defining official positions of my organization, of my work. I felt it was time for me to state my attitude towards this painful subject.

I am suspicious of messengers. Who are they from? Why do people willingly pick up and carry bad news around? Who is being protected? If you have good manners, you can listen to a messenger. Be like Buddha and do not be moved or swayed. Listening is ok. If your manners are not very well polished pick up a rock and chase them away. If they are sacred messengers bringing the absolute truth, maybe your stones will become flowers.



The Nature of Bigotry

Every kind of bigotry leads to unhappiness. I see nothing good in this plastic shaman list. Whatever the question really is, there must be a positive and beautiful way to bring it up, or it is just another face of the same lie. Mark Twain said, “a lie can be halfway around the world while the truth is getting it’s shoes on”.

Writings by American Indians on the subject of the religious and ceremonial life are not common, very hard to find. Many of us hope this will change over time. There are a lot of popular books about Indian subjects not written by Indians. The majority of these works are trash. There are many outstanding American Indian writers, and a few brave ones have written about the ceremonies. Most American Indians will never write about these subjects. Even so, those who do have the same rights as every other person to express their thoughts.

I have met some odd white people who tell people they were *chosen* by an old Hopi man to tell the prophecies of the Hopi to the people of the world. The Hopi recently showed up at one man's door in Taos, New Mexico, with lawyers and a United States Marshall with a cease and desist order. He has written several books about his belief in himself. I think the people behind the plastic shaman list have this same sickness. They have a hunger to feel "chosen". There is something in modern culture that produces selfishness and a desire to be privilege and different than everybody else. I would not call this urge a virtue.

In the case of the strange little white man in Taos, I knew the Hopi elder he said had "chosen him". That old man would tell the story he claims HE was "chosen to tell the world" to anybody who passed by, weather you liked it or not. So much for being chosen.

If you are not an Indian and you write about the sacred medicine, some Indian will call your book trash. If you are an Indian and you write about the sacred medicine other Indians will call you a plastic medicine man and bad mouth you to the four corners. Every one of the old medicine men who have had books written about them have been trashed by Indians and they have also convinced many in the “reputable press”. Most people would be so surprised if they could fully understand just how jealous, hateful, back-biting and trash talking Indians can get. It is like a sickness that almost all reservation environments produce. It is a sickness which comes from institutionalization.

You get in trouble when you write about these things. With all these words on so many pages, I am bound to upset a few people. When I was a young man and I got upset about the Sacred Pipe, I hit the road and went everywhere I could to find out more. Getting upset changed my life. If you get upset my best hope is to wish you good fortune on your journey to do something about it.





Vietnam

I was a soldier, a medic, in the Vietnam war (*HHQ, 1st/18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division*). I was there in 1968 and 1969. I was able to move to several places all across the south of that country as my unit was a small mobile unit. I saw many Asians of course. I also saw many Vietnamese people who were part French or European. I learned that these mixed blood people did not have easy lives. It was compounded when American babies began to show up in the communities.

Did these people stop being Vietnamese when they were born of American and Vietnamese parents? Sounds silly doesn't it? Mixed race people have problems when they live inside a racial culture. This crazy racial, blood quantum thinking is poison of whom the babies of these people pay the penalties and receive this sickness into their souls when they are too young and too innocent to know what the f**k is going on. These mixed blood babies lived hard lives. Many were murdered outright by the communists when they took over that country.

The real adventure waiting for every society is that of embracing life and finding out about each other. There is almost no greater happiness in life than all of us being together and enjoying and savoring the sacred opportunities of life.

I also grew up in the southern United States, and my mother was southern born and raised. I grew up in a society where black people had to go to the back of the bus, had to shop in their own stores. While blacks were no longer considered slaves, the only good jobs were slave jobs. Picking crops and cleaning and cooking for white families. As a child I played with black children. But. Not in the house or where my parents could see me.

I learned how to barbecue a whole pig from a black man. Every summer one of my many uncles held a big barbecue and fish fry for our whole large family and their spouses and kids. It was sometimes 50 people or more at one of these things. My uncle always hired this one black man, Joseph, to barbecue a whole pig. My cousins and I would stay up with him all night and be his helpers. He introduced us to moonshine and beer. I learned a great teaching in southern cooking that stays with me to this day. I still enjoy a big barbecue as one of my favorite ways to get everyone together. My friends tell me I really make exceptional barbecue sauce.

Yes, I have seen the racists hearts of modern society from many angles. I have been harmed by it, but never stopped by it. I am an educated man. I have been around. When it all comes down to beating hearts and the sacred moments of life, all these differences disappear. Inside the ceremonies I have worked with men and women. Children, elders. I have worked with very sick people and very polished people. Black, white, Asian and Indian. At my table it is life that is lived. When people choose to close their hearts and minds to another human being, that is a choice that person has made at that moment. There is no law or requirement of nature or god that forces you to make your choices. When it comes to choice, you have the power to decide what you will think, what you will do, how you will react. People seem to be on automatic pilot when it comes to issues like this. **Yeats called this kind of behavior “automationism”**. What person should be proud of allowing their knee jerk reflexes and fears to control the choices in their life? I do not see how a good case can be made for all this behavior and attitude about race, about blood. Every time the subject comes up it sounds like the voice of trouble and fear. The arguments for it sound like the arguments of robots.

Henry David Thoreau said once, “the mass of men serve the state thus, not as men, mainly, but as pieces of wood.”

My great admiration for tribal mystery life people has come from the Indians I met who live it. Every Indian I have ever met who lives a good life inside the mystery life teachings never even asks blood quantum questions. The entire subject never comes up. They keep their jokes, their conversations, their stories and arguments inside the many fascinating joys and adventures of the mystery life itself. When I experienced this balance inside the teachings and experienced also this good and positive life coming from the people who were teaching it to me I was and remain to this day filled with joy and satisfaction....and respect.

Just quite recently:

I was reading a review of the firing of a controversial “alleged” American Indian from the University of Colorado, on the news delivered across the web. The language used to describe the man, who does sound like he is a bit of a monkey’s ass, was all about his being a “fake”, “non-enrolled” Indian. He was fired, however, for plagiarism and other academic offenses, not for being a fake Indian.

I wonder how many people who stick their heads up and who are not direct full blood descendants of Sitting Bull will get them chopped off by the press, by the reservations, by society? If I agree that he is maybe a man not suited to his work, must I also agree to the racial component used against him? Reporters said they could find no tribe who would admit to his being an enrolled member. Even if true it made me wonder if tribal governments give out the names of enrolled members to anyone who calls them on the telephone?

Is he a bad man because he says he is an Indian and cannot prove it? Or is he a bad man because, regardless of his blood quantum, he has done bad things? If he is a bad man because he says he cannot prove he is an Indian to someone else's satisfaction, does that mean all people who say they are Indians and who cannot prove it to you, or the guy across the street, are bad people? While it seemed clear that he had done some bad and stupid things, I was surprised that the main arguments presented against him in the press and from American Indian commentators in particular, were so filled with contempt for his "unproven claim" that he is an American Indian of some sort. This was in the national, so called reputable press and in 2007. It came along just after another national press commentator on the radio, Imus, was fired from his job because he used racial words to describe a woman's basketball team.

The Body Hair Quotient



In one country I was doing a workshop for the weekend, which involved a sweat lodge and dream ceremony for this Sicilian group. As I made my approach to the point where they are all gathered to introduce myself, this gigantic tall man said to the group “Indians do not have body hair”. First time I had heard that one. I remembered that when I was younger I had almost no hair and only had to shave my face once in a while. Now I am an old timer shave almost every day and have gotten more hair around on my body as I age. Needless to say I had way to much body hair for this guy. Real Indians don’t have body hair?

When I was a boy I liked one charming Indian man I would see at the pow-wows. He was once a major in the US Army. He had a beautiful girlfriend and was a very good Indian dancer. I came to his camp to talk to him one morning and found him shaving. He said hello and told me he would be with me in a minute. First, he said, “I need to scrape the white man off my body”. We both laughed, but I never forgot his saying that.



Reservation Indians Part 2

Is the enrollment archive of American Indians owned and controlled by the American Government a holy scripture that defines the truth and every word on who an Indian is?

I have visited many reservations and I have seen many enrolled people behaving badly. I have seen some exceptional mixed blood people standing by wanting and ready to help with some good ideas but shut out. This is not a good thing. Reservations are places where people were forced against their will, they were pushed there. They are not natural places. Indians like to call the “nations”, but I call them reservations. Many Indians left these terrible environments over the years since they were formed. Do those people stop being Indians? What about their children born far away from bitter parents who have nothing to say about the Indians they left behind and so the children know almost nothing. Are those kids still Indians?

Enrollment documents are useful but they are not the absolute truth, ever. Hopefully, once the cycle of the seven generations has gone full circle this problem for human beings will solve itself. It is inevitable from the very first contact that differing cultures have with each other, their collective lives will change step by step through the seven generations. Soon everybody except those hiding in the cracks and crevices will be mixed bloods.

To me I wonder which is the really the most stupid question....

Is ENROLLMENT what makes you and Indian?

Is being a mixed blood the end of being an Indian?

Is every person who says they are an Indian, but have no documents, not really an Indian but some kind of liar?

For Indians of mixed race born on the reservations this is not yet the most serious problem. Common family knowledge helps protect these children as the people in the community, and their children are well known. The big problem comes when you move away from the reservation and go on your own into some big city somewhere.

There are more Indians than we will ever know that never signed any documents or allowed themselves to be named and numbered into the reservation system. The Apache, for example, have never signed anything. Many Hopi also refused to be documented or signed in to a white man's list and boycott the government run Tribal Council to this day.

Life is a great, sacred adventure really boundless and limitless. ***It is possible for all sorts of contradictory things to be true all at once.*** It is possible, as the elders believe, to work together face to face to arrive at an understanding. It is better not to rely on documents alone. Are these enrollment documents the only truth about who is an Indian in the world? That hardly seems possible.

If I had to depend on the enrollment and reservation system to define myself, how dangerous and strange that would be. While new business opportunities have at last made possible some new opportunities for reservation Indians, it seems there are also many ways in which their members are trapped by an ever-shrinking blood quantum and enrollment factor. That situation benefits only the United States government and no one else on this earth. These old Indians I have known, if you spent time with them, well these kind of questions never came up. Sometimes they sort of did and were met with complete disinterest, like a fart in an otherwise dignified conversation.

Clearly there is some fraud and misrepresentation going on. I would submit far more of it takes place inside the enrolled factions of tribes than it does from people who may or may not be confused about who their ancestors were. I guess it is the difference in saying “He done wrong, but at least he was an Indian” vs “He done wrong AND said he was an Indian when he wasn’t”.

In some people, the spirit lives and shines in such a strong way, one hardly need speak about it. In others it is more hidden and subtle. There are plenty of small bands of Apache, for example, that never signed any treaties with anybody and never agreed to be enrolled in anything. Are they Indians at all? They fill the little arroyos and hills of Northern New Mexico and Texas, as I mentioned earlier on.



and then there is.....ethnic fraud

..and this one can get really complicated, since money and social power may be involved.

Thought I had covered the wounds and rounds of this issue only to find a new spin altogether coming from tribal people. “Ethnic fraud”, which is a new one for me. This seems to concern “people who are not Indians but say they are” getting lucrative professorships and other jobs which are looking to be filled by universities (any kind of job opening for an Indian I guess would qualify) and so forth. Ethnic Fraud appears to be when you pretend to be an ethnic racial member in order to advance your career. Or to get contracts from governments awarded to minority business owners and so forth.

The danger in main, they say, is that you then have fraudulent people in positions to influence American Indian history and circumstances. At first glance this seems way over the top. Hopefully in any academic environment peer review process kicks in and keeps the information being sent out on the up and up. Isn't that what peer review does? If any academic works passes through a strong peer review system and seems valid we should assume the information is ok? One idea seems to be that a person who "lies about being an Indian" cannot be trusted or believed at all about anything.

They also say that if none of the Indians in a particular tribe will claim a certain person as a member, therefore this person is lying about being an Indian. Everywhere I go and everywhere I have ever been I see people, places and things I never heard of before. There are plenty of Indians no one has ever heard of, believe me.



When people talk about the most famous sports figures, I have never heard of most of them. I knew one Indian man for more than 25 years. After he died I met at least five people who told me they knew all about me, and saw my friend, grew up with my friend and were all around the life of my friend. I often visited for 3 weeks or more and I never ever heard of or met these people and found them a big surprise and wonder still many times how it is I never met these guys before. I have a terrible memory for names. I barely remember who anybody is.

The world is famous for springing surprises on people. Sometimes I guess, sure, the surprises are lies and bullshit.....but just as often these surprises are real and profound and true. Some of the best known Hollywood movies embrace the theme of the surprise child or parent or other relative suddenly appearing in everyone's life. Sometimes it can go quite well. Sometimes it is even funny.

So, 10 million people say they never heard of you. Are you lying? Maybe. Maybe how many people have heard of you or not heard of you has nothing to do with who you are. I can believe there are Indians no other Indian has ever heard of. It is proof of nothing if someone says they have no idea who you are. Proof of nothing.

There are a lot of prejudices, and sometimes, just plain bad information that get projected into all of these arguments. It is a subject that is muddy at best, and it lives in muddy waters and I see no way not to get dirty whenever you have to visit this dirty little subject.

Any kind of lie, if it goes unchallenged long enough, eventually becomes accepted as the truth. History seems built around this. It is probably the philosophical basis of government. I feel like I want to be at least one voice who wants to call these lies just what they are. If I knowingly tell you a lie, and you are my good friend, you would believe me generally. If you tell this same set of information to another, you think you are telling the truth. Plenty of Indian and other minority races have reappeared and disappeared inside of this phenomenon of traveling lies in society.

People who are unquestionably Indians have denied being Indians as well, but you don't hear much about this. On a spiritual level I would like to gather every Indian real or imaginary and have a gigantic ceremony to correct this problem. In our culture of the Ahnishiinabek, we have correction ceremonies for these problems. They are called correction ceremonies. There have been and remain people who know they are in fact Indian people and they hide this fact from the world and from their children.

I don't think many people have made much time to really look at all sides of this problem. Certainly there are many damn fine human beings who are in fact real Indians with no documents and no credentials of any kind. I think tribes need to take the issue more seriously and do some serious studies. There are for sure people with all sorts of certificates and enrollment numbers and people who will stick up for them as real Indians who are as phony as they get. There are for sure all sorts of breaks and cracks and lost and inserted pages in the official documents of this government and these tribes. There are certainly a lot of people who will stand up and say they are part Indian, but usually that's all they do really. Some of it seems harmless and may even be true. I am curious, that if this is really true, why? Of course sometimes if money is involved liars will fall out of the trees to get in line. Yes, for money people of every race will tell every kind of lie.



and then there are tribes that give away enrollment to perfect strangers :

Several southwestern tribes are being investigated by federal officials right now (2007) for selling tribal enrollment documentation to so-called illegal immigrants. For some time it has been well known that tribes will add perfect strangers to their enrollment lists to gain federal money and other advantages for the tribe. Who are these guys? What kind of Indian is that? An enrolled tribal member if you ask the tribe.

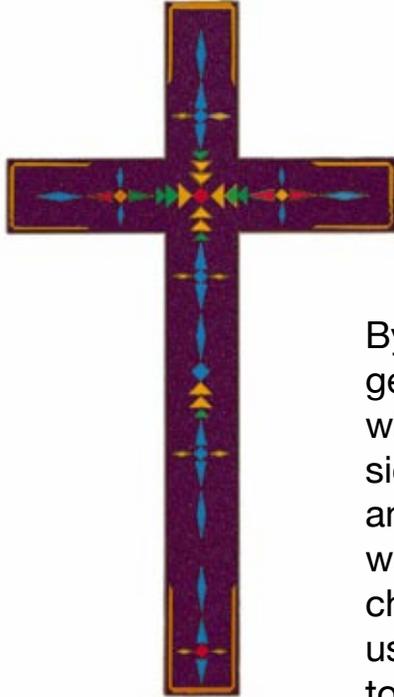
The Professional Outsider : the wabeen-no



In the culture of my relations, the Ahnishinabeg, there was a powerful and important society of healers and councillors called Wabeeno. These ceremonial leaders used ritual and extremely traditional methods to bring healing and other specialized services to the people.

Their work was so important that they were given a status that means “outsider”. Because they lived so close to the mystery life and the spirit world, they believed they were more effective if they lived far outside the society of their people. They often lived alone and far away from everyone else. This gave them important powers of detachment, and also gave them the element of surprise. Sometimes a stranger can be heard speaking to your heart when you have stopped completely listening to the people close to you and around you everyday. Familiarity breeds indifference and misdirected energies.

We all take each other for granted about as often as we are able. The wabeeno system was an answer to this problem. This again shows how interesting and scientific and sometimes just how ingenious the elders of the ancient medicine society which guides Ojibway culture really were. What about wabeenos? Ojibway culture produced brilliant social thinkers and a complex but surprisingly effective knowledge system. The professional outsider is at once the wandering prince, the fool, the unexpected turn of events, the surprise connection, the message from the mystery life, the handsome stranger, slayer of the dragon. He lives outside and apart, but he is still “a relative”.



By the time the missionaries had gone through one full generation of Ojibway Indians those wabeenos became devils who worshipped the night and witches that made other people sick. By 1900 most wabeenos had many Indians pretty nervous and were outlawed and made into criminals. Of course a lot of wabeenos and their friends took offense at being trashed by the church and when people get angry they do some nasty things, usually regretting them later. A lot of the wabeennos turned out to be regular human beings.

My point is based on the big curiosity I have always had as to why so many people do in fact say they are part Indian? Of course saying this in a bar on 1st Avenue is not the same, they say, as saying it on a job application or in some way that will bring you money. We all agree, Indian or not, some people will tell lies for money for sure. A lot of people say it and are doubted. Some people get really angry about it. I remember once at a PowWow in North Carolina a young red haired chubby and fair boy won the fancy dance contest and I thought the crowd was going to riot. After a lot of noise and drama someone produced his enrollment document and everyone grudgingly cooled out.

In the face of all this negative response why do so many people say it and why are so many other people against their saying it. I refuse to believe that enrollment on a government prison farm, sovereign or not, has become the only basis for defining what and who is an American Indian.

Yah it can be very helpful, makes some things easier. My fall back position remains the same in the face of all these stories. The tribal elders, the contemplative spiritual leaders of the sacred center (ceremonies) of their people are the best authority on who the relations are.

In Ojibway culture adoption and recognition of relatives was a ceremonial event and the person seeking to be recognized was permitted to make a small ceremony which would be witnessed by a council and the outcome and council of this moment would tell everyone whatever they needed to know. I always thought that was a swell system.



We used to call it “finding our relations”.

So many things were smashed, and are still being smashed, by the clash of American Indian culture and the world. Our teachers taught us that one day families long separated would find themselves together again. I have seen this happen right in front of my eyes.

Some tribes, one I know of for sure because I lived with them, won't let you come back in the “enrolled membership” even if you can prove you are a full blood and related to everyone. They believe (the short version) that if you spend too much time away from the hoop of the people then you are just lost and spoiled. It is a rule of their religious society, not a political one. Is that guy who went away still an Indian?

I travel far and wide. I have learned that no matter where I stand on this earth I remain an Ojibway man. I have learned that wheresoever I am on this earth there is a place, a moment, and a means to stand in a sacred Way, with my ancestors and my future.

I admire always the direct simplicity of what is the underlying philosophy of the ***mide wi an society*** of the Ahnishinabe people. “The truth, when you hear it, is always simple”. To do what is simple can be a great challenge. When I think of people saying they are Indians and other people saying no they are not, I wonder what the considered elder’s opinion on this would be if they could hear a complete set of facts from all eight sides of the problem.

As me, the main definition of what I think you need to show me to prove to me that you are an Indian is that I believe you are under the directions of some elders somewhere, sometime.

Listen people, a lot of the old Indian teachers like every human being anyway. Many of them have a very soft heart for some Indian orphan. They have adopted them sometimes, they have made them part of their family. They enjoy seeing good people come from other tribes and other cultures. I have known many great Indians, those inside the medicine societies in particular, for want of a better word. ***Those people will size you up in a heart beat. They ain't gonna talk about you when you are gone.*** How many people will tell a stranger about their family. Voice on the phone..."hey this is (fill in the blank), is that guy who came by your house three years ago an Indian or what?" The real Indian world is a lot more mysterious and fluid. Really, it is a very unusual society, that of the Indians. There is far more going on in there than can be described in some list of phoney Indians written on a piece of toilet paper. No matter what name you want to give it, that is all that it is.

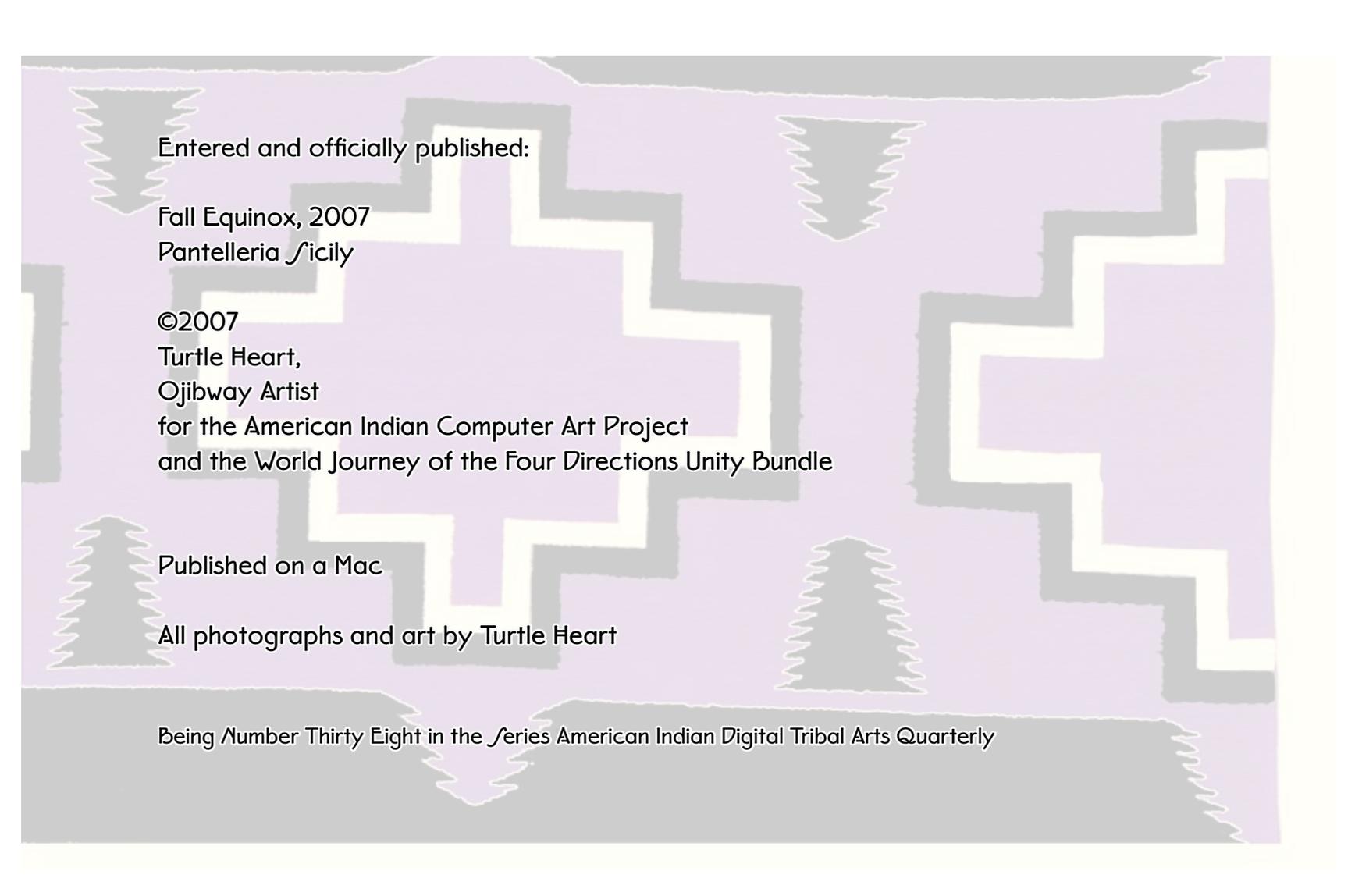
Honestly, it seems like every culture had or is having more or less this same problem in varying shades of detail. Sociologically it is important that the religious leaders, at least, and the general therapeutic community among others, consider discovering and offering a meaningful understanding to this problem. I think right now it is only crazy people who make this question a gigantic problem. What is the real agenda of the people behind the plastic shaman list?

American Indians willing and able to bring their teachings, ideas and support out into the modern world is an entirely new development in the world. It is new for the world, and new for the Indian people as well. In the long history of destruction, murder, and loss that Indian people have endured, this new development is very important, and very fragile. I believe in it. I think the world needs this knowledge inside these people's ceremonies and sacred practices. I believe the Sacred Pipe is an important teaching for the world. Every tribal elder I have ever heard or spoken to about this feels the same way. Go Indians, go !!!

People need to be careful and cautious in the words coming out of their mouths. People say such ignorant things, often without thinking or caring very much about who will be hurt. They will do it to hurt you, and make sure you know that is why they did it. America, for all its "equal rights" is a violently racist culture. So it remains dangerous work. **You** have the great power to help or hurt this work. If you question the identity of people, you have the choice to do it with violence and rage or you have the power to do it with some dignity and reflection.

I hope that American Indian people will continue in their new desires to work with the people of all races, the people of the world. People, including Indians, need to be careful who they criticize and why. Language is not as bloody as a bullet, but the bad language people use can kill something very positive and hopeful just as if it were a bullet.

In all this posturing and argument over blood quantum and enrollment it is important to use the language of reason and compassion. A person who uses violence and filthy language to tell the truth is not telling the truth, not ever, in my opinion.



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Turtle Heart,

Ojibway Artist

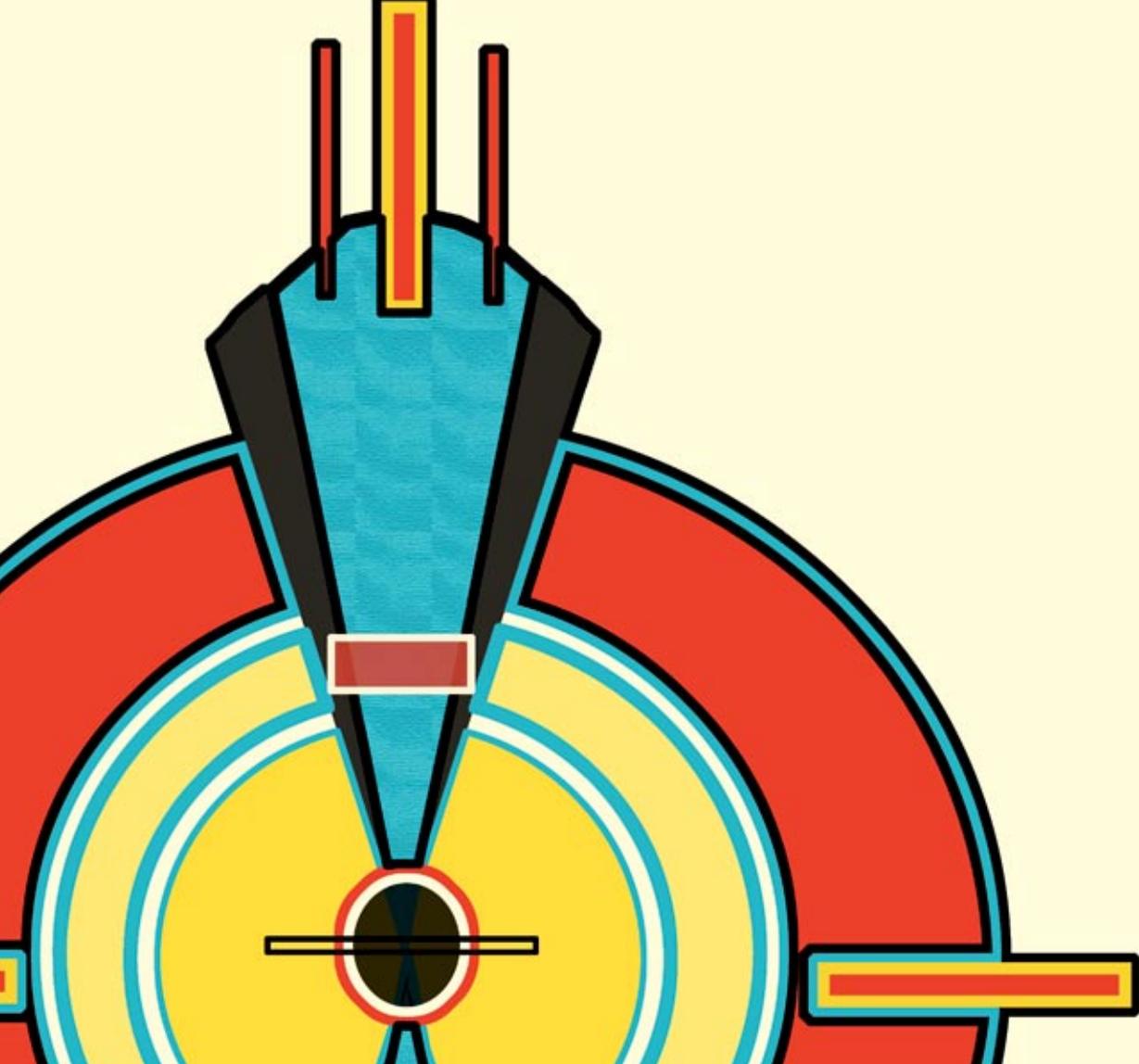
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