

“Indian in a Bottle” Exposing people who falsely pretend to be Native American: such as supposed historical lecturers, dues paying or card issuing organizations, “tribeless” member’s, and false clan mothers and medicine people

It seems that every time I go to a festival in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and the Maryland area, whether it is historical, educational or celebratory; there is more often than not, a man, women, or group of dubious distinction set up with a table, either selling their so called “hand made art” pushing a future so called pow wow, or even doing a paid presentation of their “supposed” culture. More often than not, they have a required tee-pee; they will tell you very seriously they are of some eastern woodland nation, while they are standing in front of a tee-pee. Because after all you are not “Indian” if you do not have a tee-pee. (Just reminders – tee-pee’s are not, nor were they ever a dwelling of the eastern woodland tribes). Of course, you must have the required buckskin, beads, feathers, and other decoration to go along with that romantic image. These so called self proclaimed “Indian” are trying to give the public what they think they want. This in it self is bad enough, but I have become so immune to it any more, I almost just laugh when I see a tee-pee set up in western Pennsylvania portraying Native American culture.

The eerie and more disturbing thing I am now starting to see more often is people showing up portraying themselves as “Woodland Indians” of course they have to wear their versions of Haudenosee style clothing, whether it be an article of clothing, head wear, or whatever. If their natural hair color is brown, blonde, red, gray, white – any thing but jet black – they have to pull out the old hair color bottle and dye their hair jet black, even if it looks ridiculous with their skin tone. Or better yet, get the industrial sized bottle of make up and cover their face, neck, arms and hands with make up that is 3 to 4 shades darker than their natural color. Hence, my new favorite term...”Indian in a bottle”

Many of these would be or if you prefer “wannbes” is usually someone who recently discovered their “Indian” heritage. Quite often they end up taking up residence in Pennsylvania because we no longer have reservations and the “hunting grounds” are ripe for the picking so the Indians in a Bottle stay and reek their havoc on the unsuspecting public and festival promoters, who either don’t know any better, or because the promoters themselves, want to give the public what they think they want, and they will do anything to drawl the public in to attend their event. These “Indians in a Bottle” often do not use or have a tribal affiliation, or you will not see it listed. When they do, it is usually Cherokee, Lenape/Delaware” or Lakota/Sioux. You will often see somewhere along the way they have decided to call them selves a medicine man or women, clan mother, spiritual leader, chief, or some other self proclaimed title, sometimes they will even call themselves a “historian” with a doctoral or Ph.D. in another area of study. They are rarely if ever just a run of mill regular native person.

You will sometimes hear them tell you a medicine person adopted them or they studied under so and so, where they learned the path of the red road. They have learned all of the centuries old methods of healing and ministering by these traditional teachers and when they felt they were ready, they were told they could set out on their own to spread the good news of Indian Medicine, healing, cultural ways and conduct ceremonies. Often the Indians in a bottle will want to conduct a ceremony or invite you to a ceremony to give you your “Indian name” after you have completed some sort of studies with them and paid a rather large fee. In the many flyers, catalogs and announcements where the Indians in bottles names appear it is usually White Dove, Two Feathers, Red Hawk, Standing Bear, etc. So that the public will assume by their name they are “Indian”. Of course, the name they give you will be similar to what theirs is like – after all, it too has to sound like what everyone thinks is an Indian name. The truth of the matter is with most tribe’s names they

are given most often by female family members who have been entrusted with the names to hand them down. Our names are not usually names like Spotted Fawn or Running Bear. Most people could not pronounce let alone spell our names and they are private. The Indians in a bottle developed a system of monetary charges for healing ceremonies, sweat lodges, vision quests, adoptions, or presentations often without really spelling out the fact they are getting paid, one way or another, somehow, somewhere from someone if not you directly. Of course, if you are truly native or understand our culture, you should all know and understand that there are no charges for the services of the medicine people.

When questioned about their roots they became evasive, non-committing or even angry and defensive. Many proclaim their rights to practice Indian medicine by virtue of their adoption by an individual, tribe or group. Many will not, or could not, reveal the names of their so-called mentors, or if they do name their mentors that mentors name will usually pop up on the usual suspect roll call of nationally known plastic Indians. There is a law you need to be aware of it is **The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-644)**: This law not only covers people misrepresenting the selling of arts and crafts, it also applies to individuals and groups misrepresenting themselves and pretending to be something they are not, whether it be as a speaker, historian, dancer, clan mother, medicine person, what ever. You have to understand that some of these “Indians in a Bottle” have professed to sometimes have extraordinary powers. They will tell you if you question them, they will put bad medicine on you and your family.

Dying your hair, covering your exposed shin with dark makeup, dressing up in “sacred traditional clothing that is not part of your culture is out right dishonestly, misrepresentation, and fraud. Today, with the internet and super size bookstores, anyone can look up how to dress, how to dance, what to cook, what herbs to burn, what art artifacts to use or display or make up an Indian sounding name for themselves. Then after you look these things up you can go on line and buy what you need to carry out these fantasies many of us do not understand the depths that wannabes will go to help perpetuate their mystic and persona they had made up in their own mind. Whether it is to fill their bank accounts, feed their ego’s, or live out their romantic ideal “Indian” life so they can convince themselves they are not playing Indian, that they really are Indian - real or imagined. Informing and educating is one thing, teaching others especially non Indians our **traditional** sacred ways such as making and how to play our sacred drums, how to dance our traditional sacred dances, how to make a sacred tradition outfits so you can go show up at a pow wow and be hopefully accepted as “Indian” and so on. This is sacrilegious, disrespectful, and insulting... These Indians in a Bottle are greedy, self-serving and often delusional. They end up confusing the public and perpetuating stereo types and Romanic images we try to over come daily. They provide miss-education, confusion, and end up harming Native American Indians and tribes. I am not saying that there are not true Native people out their trying to educate the public; there are. What I am saying is you need to very cautious. I suggest you ask for references, if need be call the references, ask how long they have been in the area, look to see if their hair is overly dyed coal black, look for over done make up, be cautious if they are trying to fit into the ingrained stereo type image of an Indian to hard, be cautious if they have so called Indian sounding names, be cautious of what they are selling, be in jewelry, or any kind of art or craft. In the end, remember, it is Orinda (bad medicine/destiny) that will come back on the presenter/instructor and the person they are teaching as well. It will come back seven fold if they are conducting themselves they way I have outlined.

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