

Wow Pow Irony – They Got it Backwards!

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Guest Editorial Ojai Valley News Commentary c/o William Roberts

Lake Casitas came alive this weekend with the colorful pageantry of the Native American Indians who traveled here from all over to share their traditions, history, crafts and culture at the annual Pow Wow. The elaborate ceremonial dress was a feast for the eyes and the cadence of the tom-tom captivated the audience. The accompanying chants sung throughout the day expressed prayers for the unification of all people, from all lands, tribes, traditions, customs, and religions.



Some who attend the Pow Wow will consider it no more than a family event and a good excuse to eat Kettle Corn and Squaw Bread. But anyone who has taken the time to understand the plight of the American Indian can hear the mistreatment they had to endure within their invocations that rose like primordial cries from the drum circle.

The Pow Wow does have its commercial aspects... but in a deeper sense it is a genuine attempt by the American Indians to reclaim their place on the map of the world's great religions. There are more compelling Indian celebrations such as the sacred four-day Sun Dance but that liturgy is by invitation only. Participants must have the rigorous stamina of an athlete and agree to fast until the culminating

feast on the last day. The Pow Wow is different because it is offered to us as a sincere expression of who the Indians were so we can appreciate the glory of their heritage.

Although there are numerous variances within the customs of each tribe what they had in common was the remarkable way they living so harmoniously with nature. While the people of the Middle Ages suffered from the bubonic plague, sewage problems and deforestation the American Indians mastered the art of blending in with the environment so harmoniously that they became almost indistinguishable from it. Their lifestyle was beyond anything the Sierra Club could ever hope to accomplish and they were so ecologically minded that they make the environmental activists of today seem embarrassingly silly.

The American Indians understood God as the "Great Spirit" and felt his presence in every aspect of their life. They knew their corn would not grow without the blessing of the clouds and they were extremely resourceful with everything that nature bestowed upon them. They were very conscious of the impact their actions had on the world they lived in. They even offered apologetic prayers to the spirit of the

buffalo before they hunted it for the essential gifts that animal gave them in the form of food, shelter, and clothing.

Although the different tribes were regionally distinguished, the concept of “owning land” was unheard of to them. Proprietorship was the novel idea of the so called “civilized” Europeans that divided up the entire country with barbed wire fence... an invention that some say held the most important patent of the 18 century!

For hundreds of years the caretakers of this land lived here without polluting it’s rivers, poisoning the air, or killing other forms of life to the point of extinction. The Indians understood what is referred to in the Far East Vedic Literature as the “*Universal Form of God*” and they lived that truth.

“O King, the rivers are the veins of the gigantic body (of the Lord), the trees are the hairs of His body, and the omnipotent air is His breath. The passing ages are His movements, and His activities are the reactions of the three modes of material nature.” – Bhagavat Purana 2.1.33

In that same mood the American Indians actually lived with the understanding that:

“Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.” – Sri Isopanishad



The Indians did not have an insatiable need to accumulate wealth, nor did they spend an inordinate amount of time acquiring excessively expensive and useless possessions. The strength of the American Indian came from a fundamental spiritual truth: *“Simple living and High thinking”* This was their source of happiness and the bonding agent that held their social infrastructure together.

What happened to the American Indian is a tragic irony. They were the victims of the gross moral transgressions carried out by ambitious men who invaded this land and then destroyed its people. Fueled by a self-righteous confused religious fanaticism, the *“white man”* took it upon himself to systematically cheat the Indians of everything they had and then rationalized doing it in a variety of creative ways. Driven by the insatiable desire to conquer the world, which was justified by the *“Great Commission”* to *“Save the World”*, the evangelical pioneers conspired with the legislators to *“Solve the Indiana Problem”*... which they themselves had created by their own selfish and repugnant transgressions! The end result was a genocide not much different than what Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin (Uganda) and Pol Pot (Cambodia) are well know for. The paradox is that the pioneers responsible for destroying the God Conscious ways of the American Indian were blinded by their own religious arrogance. An objective person can easily see that the *White Man* was far more despotic, cruel, unjust and demoniac then the *Red Man* they claimed to want to civilize.

Those who donned the full head regalia in the sweltering heat to dance at lake Casitas were not doing it just so we could gawk at them with Wow-Pow academic curiosity. These ceremonies have a tradition that is as important to them as the religious services many attend on Sunday. *“Pow Wow”* literally means *“A coming together”* and that is what the Natives of this land are still attempting to do. When we are ready to honor their faith, traditions, and culture with the same type of respect that we want others to have for what we believe in, then we will have begun to understand something the American Indians have been attempting to tell us for over 200 years.

Aho! (Amen)

Tagline:

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