

## TO OUT-NDN...

In several columns I used the phrase “to out-Indian” and the term “out-Indianing.” A couple of readers asked me why I was so preoccupied with the concept. “Actually,” I responded, “out-Indianing is what it’s all about in much of Indian affairs – especially in the last few decades.”

In the mid 1960s, the media were bringing the issues of reservation and urban-Indian poverty to the public forefront, and being Indian was coming into vogue. New leaders were emerging in Indian country, and in most cases they were ones who matched the stereotypes the media looked for as representative of the race. Especially in the urban-Indian communities, the question often arose as to who the real Indians were and what constituted being a “real” Indian. Then the practice of out-Indianing came about.

As ideologies formed around the new activist movements of that era, being a “real” Indian required adherence to certain traits, demeanor, and dress. A real Indian, for example, eschewed suit and tie, but wore equally non-Indian and stereotypical Hollywood attire such as leather vests, headbands, and fringes all over. So called “Rez cars” were no longer embarrassments. Decorated with dream catchers, little war bonnets, and Indian-pride bumper stickers they became another effective means of out-Indianing.

Epithets like “Apple” and “Uncle Tomahawk” came into derisive usage in Indian circles to describe those who didn’t conform to the new traits, dress and demeanor. These were fashioned after the epithets of the more radical Black movement. As the term Oreo charged “black on the outside and white on the inside,” so the term Apple charged “red on the outside and white on the inside;” in other words, a sell-out, not a real Indian.

I’m reminded here of an incident from the early American Indian Press Association days when one of our associates, a bright and winsome Lakota woman, was called an Apple. She responded that, if some people were so insistent that she was a sell-out, she’d rather be called a radish – “red on the outside, white on the inside...and HOT.”

In these times, there is a new distinction between the real Indian and the lesser “colonized” Indian. This is based on such breaches of standards as using certain terminology, e.g., “tribe” instead of “nation,” and having Indian-kitsch curios hanging from one’s rear view mirror.

Not long ago, a grand niece of mine was wearing a tee-shirt with bold letters “NDN” on the front. When I asked her what it meant, she replied, “Duuuh... just pronounce it.” I had to bonk myself on the forehead and apologize profusely, “Oh, ‘Indian,’ of course.” But having to ask the question placed me squarely in the ranks of a new caste – “un-hip” Indian.

“Out-hipping” is another form of out-Indianing. That means being hip to the latest buzzwords like NDN, and the latest jokes about welfare, commodities, and fry bread.

In Indian circles, one can also be “out-reverenced.” That is having to be corrected, icily, about something that is or should be considered too sacred for jocularity. I learned to stay out of Native American chat rooms on the internet when I was informed that I should be ashamed for using the

Lakota name Heyoka (he's sacred), and even joking about that little prehistoric Woody Herman called Kokopeli (sacred, too). I was excoriated for saying I am Oglala Sioux instead of Oglala Lakota.

The term "fry bread" (what us old timers used to call "fried bread" back in the '40s and 50s) is yet another fashionable symbol of Indianness doomed for the bone yard of ethno-political incorrectness. The South Dakota Legislature, by enactment, has recently named fry bread as an official symbol of the state...the state food, joining the state bird, state animal and state song. It was a nice gesture of reconciliation, but State acceptance will undoubtedly doom that sumptuously decadent dish, which is already on the endangered list on the part of the real Indians proclaiming obesity as a stigma of colonized Indianness. The great economic benefits to families and non-profit fund-raisers of Indian Taco sales will have gone by the wayside, as will the beneficial use of commodity lard.

My God, Heyoka, what is an Apple, colonized, un-hip, irreverent Sioux to do?

Perhaps I will open up a school of fashionable Indian correctness. With such ever-changing modes in Indian vogue, I will get rich. And although excoriated from various quarters, I'll at least find some comfort in my passe, unhip Indianness.

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