

Busting The Frauds Who Are Stealing Native American Culture

By: Robert Evans
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The problem of hip white people appropriating Native culture actually goes a lot deeper than wearing headdresses at Coachella. Right now, Native religions and cultural practices are fighting off a vicious eradication campaign. And it's not being waged by cross-burning racists, or weird hold-over fans of Andrew Jackson: it's legions of New Age "seekers" who don't recognize that their Etsy dreamcatcher is part of something sinister. Cracked sat down with Dr. Alton Carroll, a history professor who runs the site NewAgeFraud.org. He's an actual Native American, and he's dedicated much of his life to busting fake Natives. And he explained ...

6 Native Americans View It As Battling Spiritual Genocide

The appropriation Dr. Carroll encounters today can get very strange. He told us about New Age groups "that claimed Native people were descended from dolphins. There's people out there who claim Atlantis or Lemuria are part of Native tradition, it's not. There are people out there who claim astrology is part of Native tradition, it's not. Uh, y'know you have the ones who are claiming blacks are the true Natives, a lot of them are black supremacists."

One of these guys, Dwight York, eventually gathered enough money for a sweet-ass compound with his own goddam pyramid(s):



Kenneth C. Budd

Yes, some Native Americans built pyramids. No, they did not look like those.

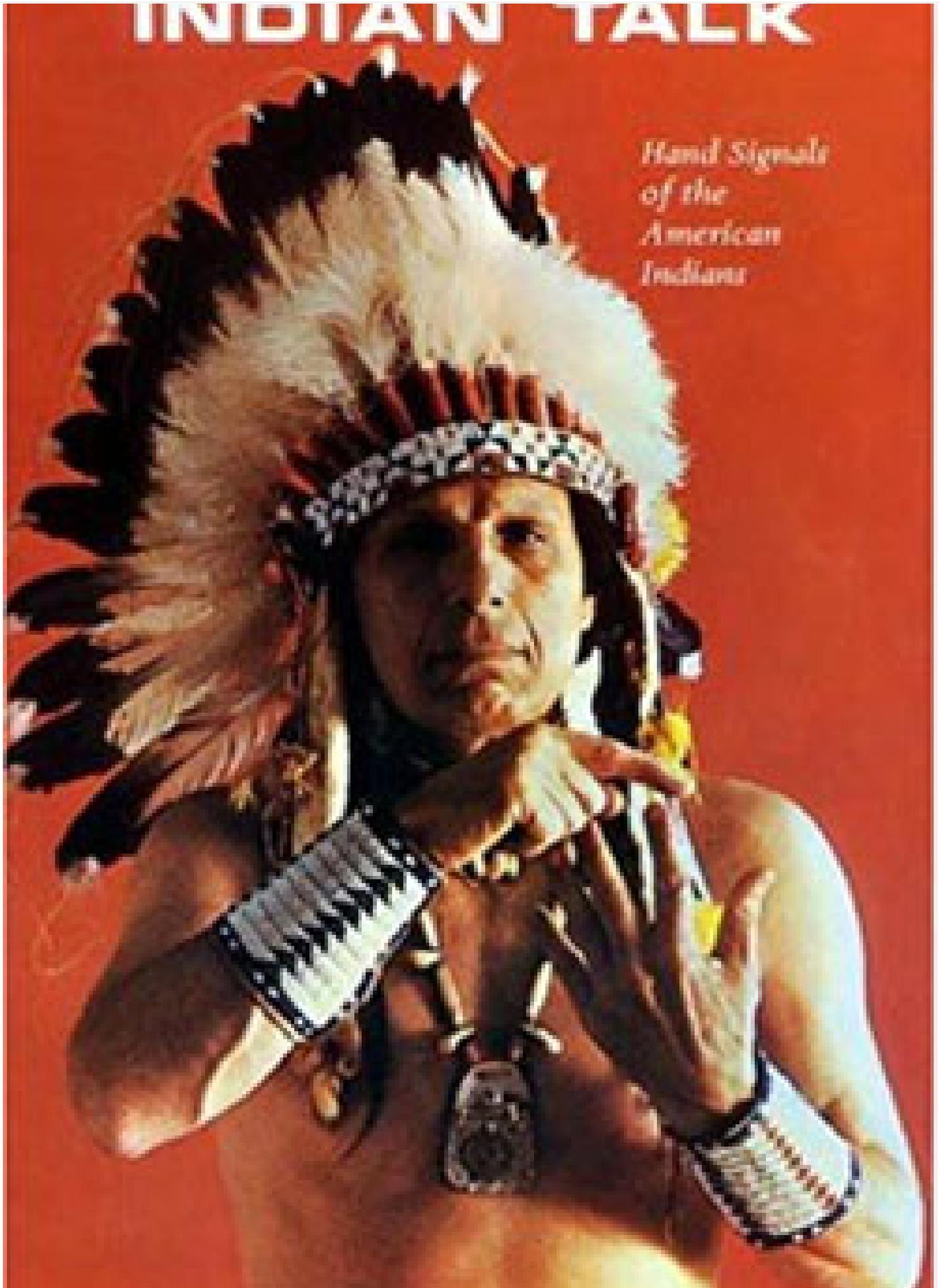
In fairness to Mr. York, his [Nuwaubian Nation](#) was a confusing synthesis of Muslim, Jewish, and Ancient Egyptian beliefs, but he also claimed Creek and Olmec native heritage, because fuck it, why not? And he's not close to the worst perpetrator. Take "Iron Eyes" Cody. You know him from this:



The Ad Council

The one with the iron tears.

He was one of the most influential Native Americans in Hollywood history: He advised some of the great directors of Hollywood's golden age and insisted on [historical accuracy in Native dress and rituals](#) in the movies he worked on. He also wrote a book documenting the nearly lost art of Native hand signals:

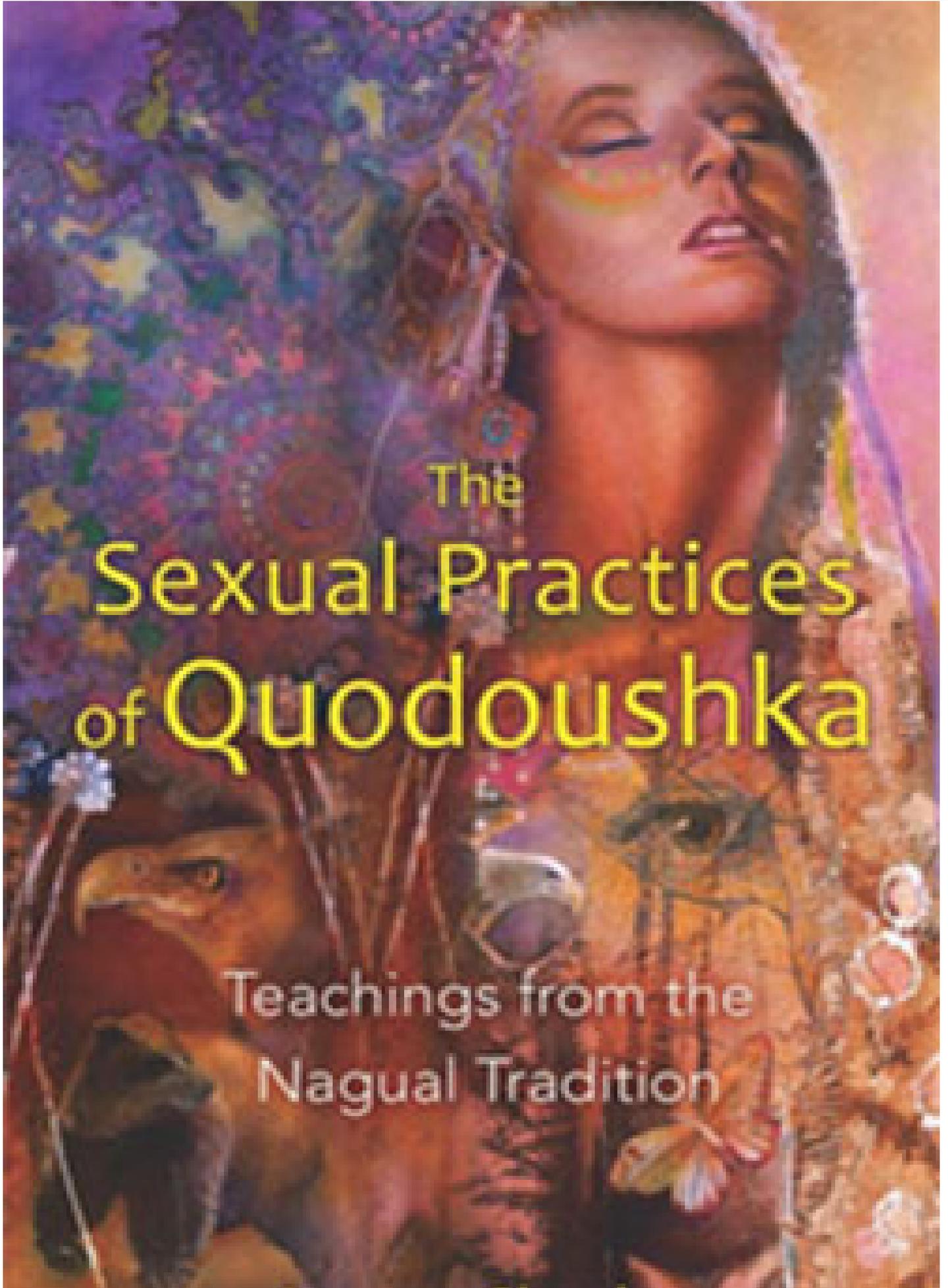


CRACKED*Naturegraph Pub*

And we have a hand signal we'd like to give him, actually.

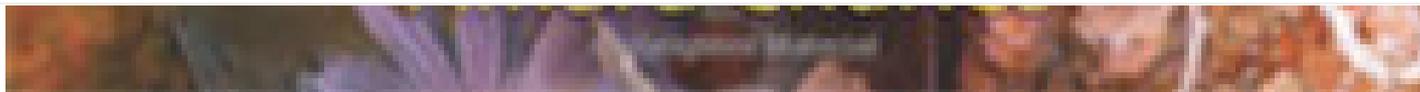
But Cody Iron Eyes was about as Native American as a nice lasagna. He was an Italian-American fraud, and his book on Indian hand signals was a mix of a bunch of different Native traditions, tossed with his own special sauce of complete bullshit. Cody wasn't the first or the last person to build his fame lying about Native Americans. And today, thanks to the internet, it's more profitable to be a fake Native than ever. You can sell books (or classes) on Cherokee sex magic:

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The
Sexual Practices
of Quodoushka

Teachings from the
Nagual Tradition



Destiny Books

Roughly as factual as Amazon's books on dinosaur sex magic.

And you can also make a quick buck from fake Standing Rock Facebook pages, selling shirts and other merch, [like these guys in Kosovo and Vietnam](#).

"We're outnumbered to begin with. Native people are very much outnumbered online. And on top of that you have a huge problem with imposters ... anything you can imagine out there."

Carlos Castaneda earned a doctorate from UCLA for traveling to Mexico, learning the ways of a Yaqui medicine man, and writing the bestselling book *The Teachings Of Don Juan*. It took years for anyone to figure out [he'd made it all up](#). He was eventually exposed as the conniest con-man in con-town, but *Don Juan* is still one of the most popular books on Native American spirituality:

Amazon Best Sellers Rank: #8,991 in Books
#4 in Books > Religion & Spirituality
> Native American
#4 in Books > Religion & Spirituality
#15 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences
American Studies

Amazon

"Don Juan" was the most Indian name the author could think of.

"It's just such a huge problem that, basically, anything that is ... dealing with Native religion online, is false. It's entirely false," Carroll said. "There's nothing you can rely on online except for two sources; university and tribal websites." And even then, "only for general information. Most ceremonial details are kept secret to try to avoid abuses that might endanger someone's health."

The forum on the NewAgeFraud's website is like a clearinghouse of bullshit mysticism:



The Indian Arts and Crafts Act - How to Report a Fraud

Started by [redacted]

ALERT: Imposters Posing Online as NAFPS, Other Activists, or Elders

Started by [redacted] « 1 2 3 4 »

NAFPS takes pride in being called "Enemy"

Started by [redacted] « 1 2 3 4 »

Huna, Ho'oponopono, and other fake "Hawaiian" teachings

Started by [redacted]

"Core shamanism"

Started by [redacted]

newagefraud.org

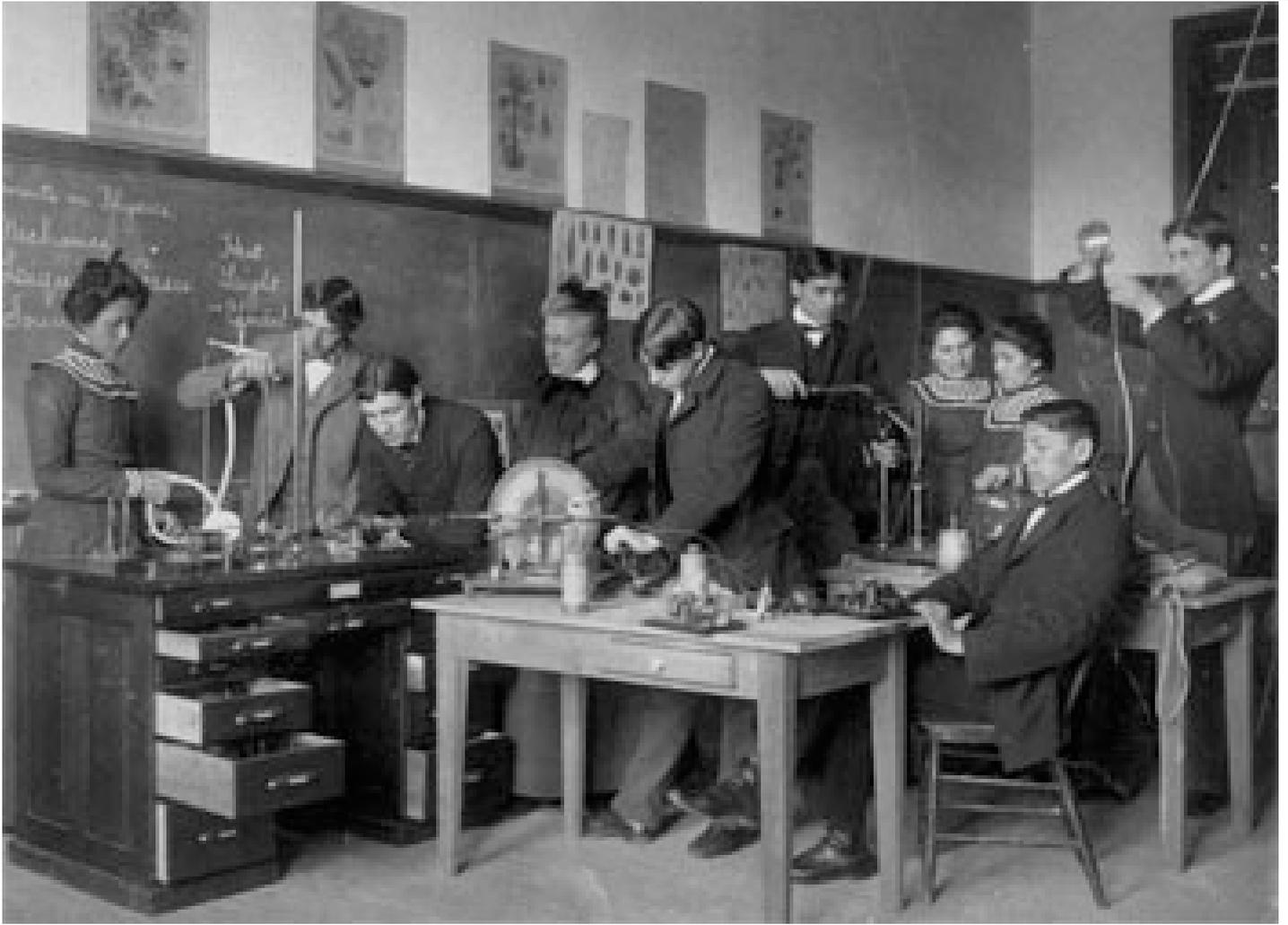
Mocking quotation marks, 50 percent off.

Users help each other track and expose frauds and attempt to do outreach to New Age and pagan groups. Their goal isn't to stop people from being weird hippies; it's just to make damn sure they don't confuse their modern beliefs with ancient Native American religion.

"One of the biggest misapprehensions about the bulk of this material is that it is genuine traditional religion 'just like the Indians do it!' A lot of this has to do with the amount of cultural appropriation that first the New Agers, and then the Pagans, indulged in in regards to various Native American cultures."

One reason there's so much misinformation out there is because a whole lot of the real knowledge has been destroyed.

"There was a period of time when the federal government brought in missionaries to the reservations." This started in the 1870s, and the army officer who founded the first off-reservation boarding schools noted, *"A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one ... In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."*

CRACKED*PhotoQuest/GettyImages*

"If white people can't dress up as Indians, then no one can!"

For decades, U.S. Government policy was to destroy Native religion and culture on sight.

"Native spiritual beliefs are not protected by the first amendment; they are protected by federal statutes. It is perfectly legal for the federal government to bar Native religions as it was done on the reservations for about a century and a half. the Native American religious freedom act that statutes protected Native religion. Basically so many practices were outlawed, either they died or they were conducted in secret, and you had a lot of conversions ... so yeah, a lot of it died or has been lost."

Obviously, the right of Native Americans to practice whatever religion they want is protected under the first amendment. But many Native beliefs are tied to specific parts of the land, and specific rituals, and THOSE have [only recently](#) started to be protected.



The case pitted loggers against the Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association. Guess who was the bad guy?

5 There's An Art To Spotting Fake Native Americans

One of the most infuriating aspects of this New Age appropriation is that it tends to treat Native American religion as a grab-bag of spirituality. And they charge for a dip in that bag:

"You very often see this idea that you can mix and match, so you have someone mixing Cherokee and Lakota and Apache altogether, when they're extremely different from each other ... You have this very common idea that money is energy and it's just an exchange of energy, and that's an entirely New Age idea."



NikolayFrolochin/Pixabay

The best kind of energy is green energy, man.

Actual practitioners of Native American religions don't charge for access to ceremonies. If you see someone charging for time in a sweat lodge, you know they're full of shit. "It's very common that you'll see this idea that you can buy enlightenment ... with a \$19 book or a \$3000 workshop weekend."

I asked Dr. Carroll what he and his colleagues do when they first get the sense that someone might be faking their Native credentials for profit. "You basically first look and see if they are who they say they are. Native communities tend to be small. A typical tribe has an average of 3,000 members. There's usually some online record you can find, if you look at their family history ... there are several people on the site who are good genealogists. So you go back to their great-grandparents and ... every single record says that they're white, every single census record, for four generations back says they're white ... they're probably, they're lying about who they are."

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vgabusi/Stock

If their ancestors were all white, they're *probably* lying about their ancestors not being all white.

Another key clue is when people fuck up basic terminology. "You'll see people refer to themselves as Sioux medicine people, and that's not the traditional term. They'll refer to themselves as Lakota. You'll see people making obvious mistakes about this reservation, or that clan, something people from the community will pick up on right away."

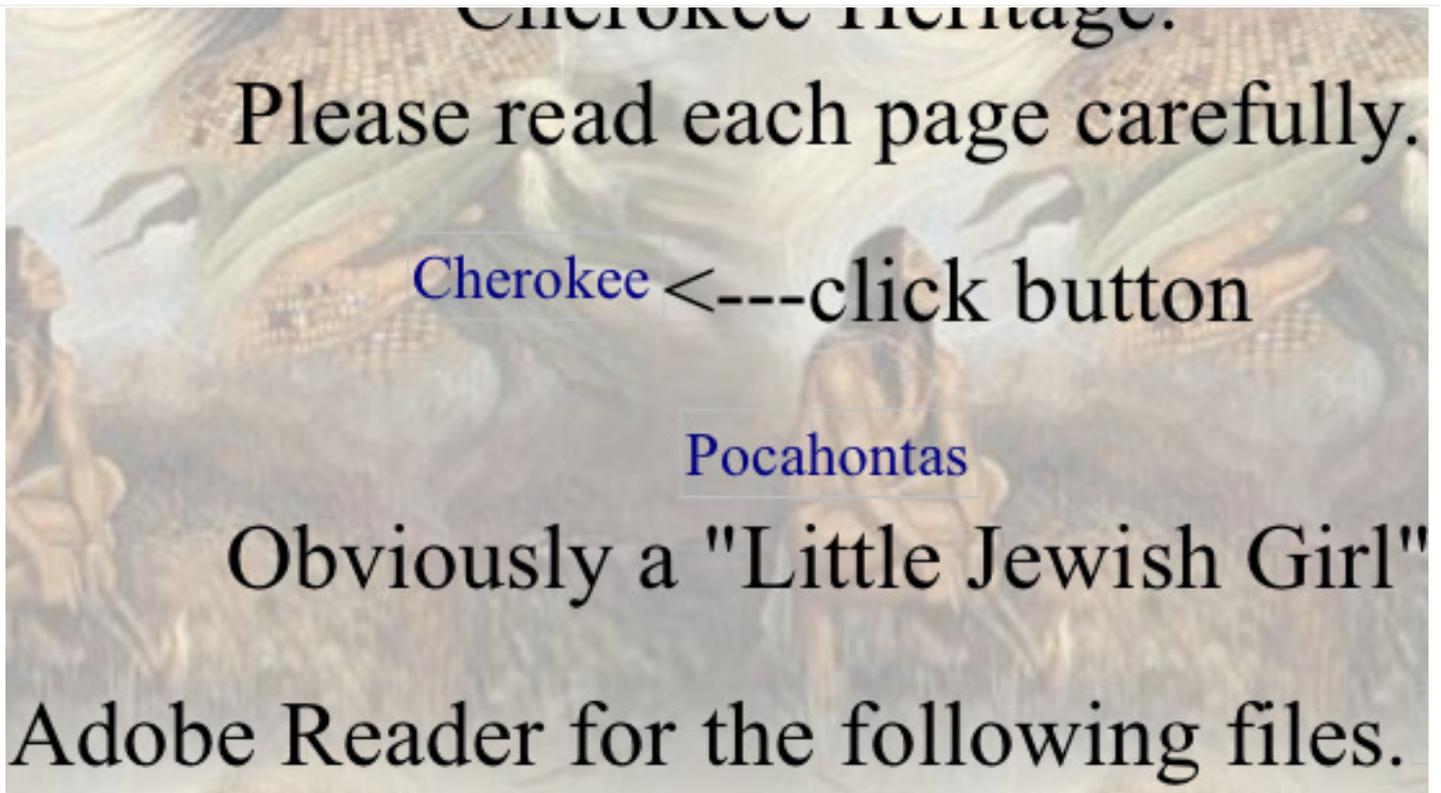
But the most obvious red flag is when folks identify themselves as simply following "Native American religion," because that's just as ridiculous as saying you follow "European religion." "One of the most common things is just the idea that you can talk about Native beliefs as all believing the same thing. You have a huge variety of ... different traditions, different belief systems, hundreds of belief systems that are as dramatically different as y'know, Presbyterians from Hindus. But they very often get lumped together."

4 There Are Entire Fake Tribes

It's one thing to claim to be Cherokee or Sioux, but some people create whole fake tribes. "You have one group out there, calling themselves the Central Cherokee. They pretend Jewish people are the real Cherokee and vice versa."

That group is mostly gone now, but a look through the Wayback Machine keys you in on just [how nutty they were](#):

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cherokeeflawrencecountytn.org

Adobe Reader is their quack Pueblo historian, who will come to your house and not leave.

That's right: These folks claimed Pocahontas was a Jewish girl. The whole thing appears to have been an attempt to let insecure assholes block out two squares on their persecution bingo cards. It didn't work, because [actual Cherokee](#) weren't having it. But the Central Cherokee weren't alone:

"There's a mini industry, really, that started off as the Nation Of Islam-type people that is trying to convince black Americans that Africans are the true Native people and Native people are Chinese imposters. You have about half a dozen cults out there that pretend that, and recruit black Americans. It gets weirder. Their argument, actually, is that there was no Atlantic slave trade. Africans were enslaved inside America. And so that's really bizarre. It's like someone Jewish pretending there's no Holocaust."

CRACKED*Auguste Francois Biard*

"How could there be an Atlantic slave trade, when Atlantic Airways didn't exist until 1987? Checkmate, history."

Maybe the idea of a secret Jewish Cherokee tribe, or some weird Chinese/Native American conspiracy is so crazy it's almost whimsical. That is not always the case. Actual Native American tribes have rights, and a degree of sovereignty, that make them aspiring-to-be-national governments within the United States. So if you're a fraud, creating your own tribe opens up a lot of money-making opportunities. Take the fake Little Shell Pembina tribe (not to be confused with the real Little Shell tribe)

"They just issue a huge number of fake liens, fake affidavits. They found a family called the Delorme family, who actually are Native ... this is a really bizarre group that's kind of gathered around them. There's one guy in the group saying he's had a dream that he's a medicine man and he will sell these strange dreamcatchers with pentagrams inside them ... there's another guy there who was involved in a coup over in the island of Fiji. Yeah, you've got some really bizarre groups out there."

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CBS

We hear that last one happened in 2007. CBS covered it.

Speaking of ...

3 There Is No Such Thing As Cherokee Sex Magic

It's called "chuluaqui quodoushka," or Cherokee sex magic. Basically, it involves paying lots of money for the privilege of fucking your partner in front of people, or sometimes banging prostitutes under the pretense of magic. ("They also practice group anal masturbation, with objects," Professor Carroll added helpfully.) The movement started with this guy, Harley Reagan:

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CRACKEDethericwarriors.com

Clearly a trustworthy figure.

Dr. Carroll described him as "this red-haired Irish-American who claims to be Cherokee and Mayan. And he actually convinced HBO some years ago to put on a program, *Real Sex*, about Cherokee sex magic, where people were paying thousands of dollars for this alleged ritual. And y'know, he built up a cult that has branches all over Europe, all over America, in Canada and Australia, they claim to have something like 3,000 members."

Before Reagan died, Dr. Carroll protested some of his "rituals." "It was held at this very luxurious home in Scottsdale ... and they had some German bodyguards who were there to try and keep us away ... we basically stood outside and tried to convince people not to go in ... the German bodyguards were jumping in front of us saying, 'they're terrorists they're going to attack you! Come inside, quickly they're terrorists!'"

Mr. Reagan and his followers claimed that what they were doing was sexual surrogacy, an actual legitimate healthcare practice. Real sex surrogacy does not involve houses full of people humping together and pretending to do magic.

"We called it prostitution. And they also had a long history of drug use during the ceremonies, people getting high ... so we were urging the police to go in there ... We had fliers prepared, that were written warnings of everything they'd done. And we were saying, please let us talk to you ... and I think we got to two people before the German bodyguards started in."



labsas /iStock

Usually, we don't root for cops stopping the sex and drugs party, but this is an exception.

The Cherokee vehemently deny that Reagan has any relation to the tribe, and that his "teachings" have anything to do with their traditional religion. So Reagan moved on, claiming his beliefs about "q energy" (orgasm powers) were a synthesis of a bunch of other traditional beliefs. But as hilariously full of crap as Harley Reagan is, at least he didn't get anyone killed ...

2 Bootleg Shamanism Can Be Deadly

Military chaplains now [recommend](#) sweat lodge ceremonies for vets with PTSD. Dr. Carroll wanted to be clear that he doesn't think there's anything wrong with white Americans, or anyone else, wanting to learn from Native American religious and cultural practices. "Learning from societies that have a much better history with regards to women's rights, and women's roles, y'know that's a very positive thing. But it's the idea that they're entitled to it, that they can do what they want because they attended one ceremony one time, suddenly they're an expert."

CRACKED*Tempura/iStock*

*1/16 Cherokee is actually more than full Cherokee. Yes, I'm also into homeopathy. How did you guess?"

"That's the danger that sometimes happens. You'll see somebody who attended a ceremony once, and suddenly they're an expert, and they're off charging for it, or they'll come up with a made-up version of it."

This is particularly true of sweat lodges, because the basic concept is so easy to grasp and emulate: Build a big room, start a fire, get everyone sweaty, burn some sage. Put a \$3,000 price tag on that, and you've got yourself a potentially deadly hustle.



D. Gordon

As with any plan where step two is "and then comes fire."

In October of 2009, James Arthur Ray hosted a "Spiritual Warrior" seminar in Arizona. One of his sweat lodge ceremonies went wrong, [three people died](#), and 18 more were hospitalized. It makes Reagan's 'high-end wizard brothel' seem downright respectable by comparison. Professor Carroll adds, "In many other fake sweat lodges, people routinely get burned, scalded, or have heart attacks. Some people pass out and get sexually assaulted. Many relive psychological traumas like molestation."

1 Every Now And Then, A Real Victory Is Scored

"I wish we could report more success than we have had. Unfortunately all you can do is put out the information and hope people listen ... probably the biggest recent success we can point to is a woman named Kiesha Crowther who claimed she was the returning prophet prophesized by hundreds of tribes, by not simply Americans but also people in Australia, New Zealand, indigenous people worldwide, that she was the returning red-haired prophet."

CRACKEDlittlegrandmother.net

Here she is holding -- surprise -- a crystal!

Crowther calls herself "Little Grandmother," despite not being either, and also claims to be a member of the Sioux Salish tribe, despite certainly not being that. ("Actually there's no such tribe. The Salish and Lakota are unrelated peoples with very different cultures," says Professor Carroll.) For a while, she offered naive hippies the chance to join her "tribe of many colors," and take part in the \$6000 ceremonies she completely made up. Dr. Carroll and other online activists began a concentrated media blitz:

"I think simply we started tracking down what info she said. A lot of it was really obvious false things; she was getting the tribal names wrong. And then we had the good luck that there was a relative who came to us and said she's had a long history of making up stories. And so we wrote articles that were published in independent media, so even within her own group, both online and in person, there were people who were starting to question her and she was constantly trying to tamp down criticism that was coming towards her and so it kinda snowballed. At one point she finally publicly apologized and moved to Europe. 'This is my own personal belief and it has nothing to do with indigenous people' and she's over in Holland somewhere and she's pretty much given up most of what she's said before."



littlegrandmother.net

"I am so proud to be among you fine, Danish people!"

She's still making up vaguely spiritual crap, like [this crystal ceremony in Rotterdam](#), but she's not claiming to be Native American Grandma Jesus anymore. So that's a win.

For reasons inside looks into odd jobs, check out [6 Ridiculous Jobs They Have in Other Countries](#) and [6 Badass Jobs That You're Probably Already Qualified to Do](#).

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