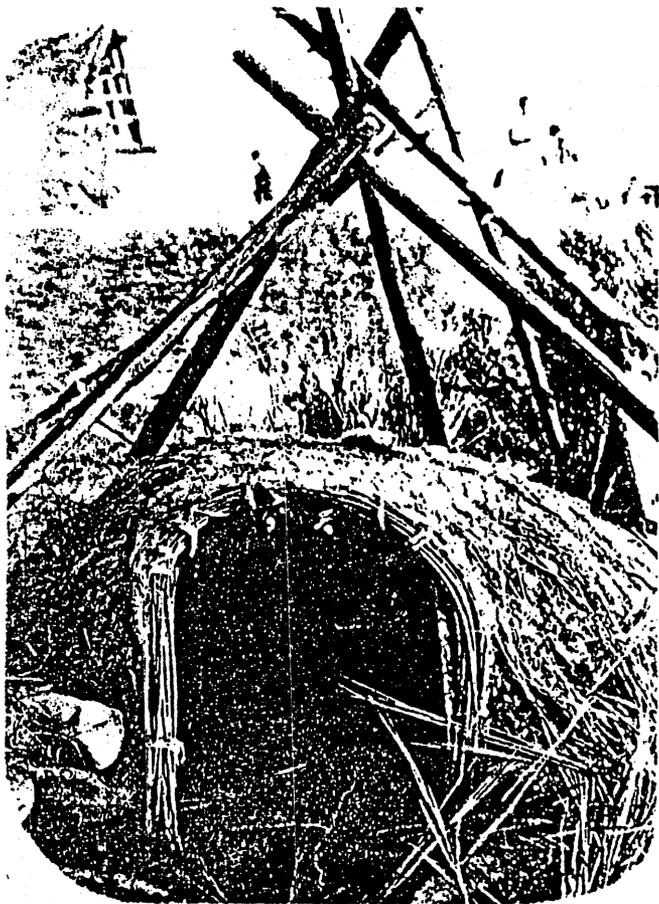
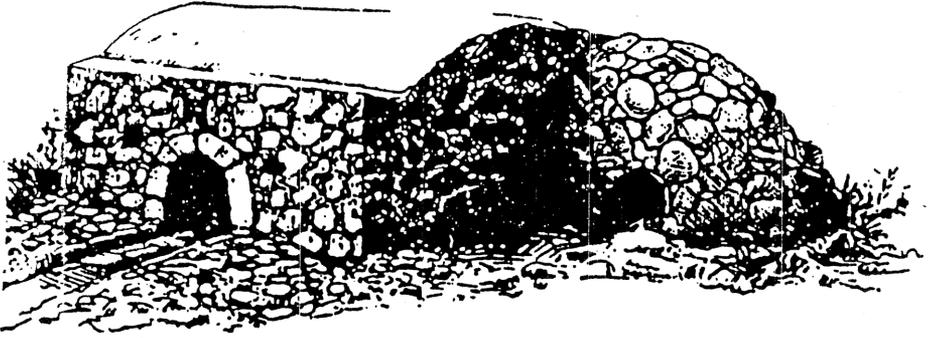


Native People's spirituality



and
the Marketplace



THE FOLLOWING PAMPHLET can only serve as an introduction to the multi-faceted relationship between colonizer and colonized. It is addressed primarily to the so called "New Age" movement. There is nothing "healing" in stealing from an already dispossessed people and nothing "New" in finding new means and justifications to do so. If there is to be a "New Age" it will be without Empires, Colonies, and Markets which have done so much to destroy authentic human culture and spirit.

ReGeneration Publications

"What does it hurt if a bunch of people want to believe they're the personification of Hiawatha?" asks the manager of a natural foods store in Boulder, Colorado. "I will admit that things can get pretty silly in these circles, but so what? People have a right to be silly if they want to. And it's not like the old days when Indians were being killed left and right. You could even say that the attention being paid to Indian religions these days is sort of flattering. Anyway, there's no harm to anybody, and it's good for the people who do it."

The traditional Indian perspective is diametrically opposed to the idea that no harm is done by this interest. As Barbara Owl, a White Earth Anishinabe, recently put it, "We have many particular things which we hold internal to our cultures. These things are spiritual in nature, and they are for *us*, not for anyone who happens to walk in off the street. They are *ours* and they are *not* for sale. Because of this, I suppose it's accurate to say that such matters are our 'secrets,' the things which bind us together in our identities as distinct peoples. It's not that we never make outsiders aware of our secrets, but *we*—not *they*—decide what, how much, and to what purpose this knowledge is to be put. That's absolutely essential to our cultural integrity, and thus to our survival as peoples. Now, *surely* we Indians are entitled to *that*. Everything else has been stripped from us already.

"I'll tell you something else," Owl continued, "a lot of things about our spiritual ways may be secret, but the core idea never has been. And you can sum up that idea in one word spelled R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Respect for and balance between all things, that's our most fundamental spiritual concept. Now, obviously, those who would violate the trust and confidence which is placed in them when we share some of our secrets, they don't have the slightest sense of the word. Even worse are those who take this information and misuse or abuse it for their own purposes, marketing it in some way or another, turning our spirituality into a commodity in books or movies or classes or 'ceremonials.' And it doesn't really matter whether they are Indians or non-Indians when they do such things; the non-Indians who do it are thieves; and the Indians who do it are sellouts and traitors."

Former American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means not only concurs with Owl but further clarifies her argument. "What's at issue here is the same old question that Europeans have always posed with regard to American Indians, whether what's ours isn't somehow theirs. And, of course, they've always answered the question in the affirmative. When they wanted our land they just announced that they had a right to it and therefore owned it. When we resisted their taking of our land, they claimed we were being unreasonable and committed physical genocide upon us in order to convince us to see things their way. Now, being spiritually bankrupt themselves, they want our spirituality as well. So they're making up rationalizations to explain why they're entitled to it.

"We are resisting this," Means goes on, "because spirituality is the basis of our culture; if it is stolen, our culture will be dissolved. If our culture is dissolved, Indian people *as such* will cease to exist. By definition, the causing of any culture to cease to exist is an act of genocide. That's a matter of international law; look it up in the 1948 Genocide Convention. So, maybe this'll give you another way of looking at these culture vultures who are ripping off Indian tradition. It's not an amusing or trivial matter, and it's not innocent or innocuous. And those who engage in this are not cute, groovy, hip, enlightened, or any of the rest of the things they want to project themselves as being. No, what they're about is cultural genocide. And genocide is genocide, regardless of how you want to 'qualify' it. So some of us are starting to react to these folks accordingly."

For those who would scoff at Means' concept of genocide, Mark Davis and Robert Zannis, Canadian researchers on the topic, offer the following observation:

If people suddenly lose their 'prime symbol,' the basis of their culture, their lives lose meaning. They become disoriented, with no hope. A social disorganization often follows such a loss, they are often unable to insure their own survival...The loss and human suffering of those whose culture has been healthy and is suddenly attacked and disintegrated are incalculable.

Therefore, Davis and Zannis conclude, "One should not speak lightly of 'cultural genocide' as if it were a fanciful invention. The consequence in real life is far too grim to speak of cultural genocide as if it were a rhetorical device to beat the drums for 'human rights.' The cultural mode of group extermination is genocide, a crime. Nor should 'cultural genocide' be used in the game: 'Which is more horrible, to kill and torture; or remove [the prime cultural symbol which is] the will and reason to live?' Both are horrible."

As the Sioux scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., put it in 1982,

the realities of Indian belief and existence have become so misunderstood and distorted at this point that when a real Indian stands up and speaks the truth at any given moment, he or she is not only unlikely to be believed, but will probably be publicly contradicted and 'corrected' by the citation of some non-Indian and totally inaccurate "expert." Moreover, young Indians in universities are now being trained to view themselves and their cultures in the terms prescribed by such experts *rather than* in the traditional terms of the tribal elders. The process automatically sets the members of Indian communities at odds with one another, while outsiders run around picking up the pieces for themselves. In this way, the experts are perfecting a system of self-validation in which all semblance of honesty and accuracy are lost. This is not only a travesty of scholarship, but it is absolutely devastating to Indian societies.

Pam Colorado, an Oneida academic working in Canada, goes further:

The process is ultimately intended to supplant Indians, even in areas of their own customs and spirituality. In the end, non-Indians will have complete power to define what is and is not Indian, even for Indians. We are talking here about an absolute ideological/conceptual subordination of Indian people in addition to the total physical subordination they already experience. When this happens, the last vestiges of real Indian society and Indian rights will disappear. Non-Indians will then "own" our heritage and ideas as thoroughly as they now claim to own our land and resources.

"White

people in this country are so alienated from their own lives and so hungry for some sort of real life that they'll grasp at any straw to save themselves. But high tech society has given them a taste for the 'quick fix.' They want their spirituality prepackaged in such a way as to provide *instant* insight, the more sensational and preposterous the better. They'll pay big bucks to anybody dishonest enough to offer them spiritual salvation after reading the right book or sitting still for the right fifteen minute session. And, of course, this opens them up to every kind of mercenary hustler imaginable. Its all very pathetic, really."

Oren Lyons, a traditional chief of the Onondaga Nation, concedes Deloria's point, but says the problem goes much deeper. "Non-Indians have become so used to all this hype on the part of imposters and liars that when a real Indian spiritual leader tries to offer them useful advice, he is rejected. He isn't 'Indian' enough for all these non-Indian experts on Indian religion. Now, this is not only degrading to Indian people, it's downright delusional behavior on the part of the instant experts who think they've got all the answers before they even hear the questions."

"The bottom line here," says Lyons, "is that we have more need for intercultural respect today than at any time in human history. And nothing blocks respect and communication faster and more effectively than delusions by one party about another. We've got real problems today, tremendous problems which threaten the survival of the planet. Indians and non-Indians *must* confront these problems together, and this means we *must* have honest dialogue, but this dialogue is impossible so long as non-Indians remain deluded about things as basic as Indian spirituality."

Things would be bad enough if American Indian realities were being distorted only through books and movies. But, since 1970, there has also been a rapid increase in the number of individuals purporting to sell "Indian wisdom" in a more practical way. Following the example of people such as the "Yogi Ramacharaka" and "Maharaji Ji," who have built lucrative careers marketing bastardizations of East Asian mysticism, these new entrepreneurs have begun cleaning up on selling "Native American Ceremonies" for a fee.

As Janet McCloud, a long-time fishing rights activist and elder of the Tulalip Nation, puts it, "First they came to take our land and water, then our fish and game. Then they wanted our mineral resources and, to get them, they tried to take our governments. Now they want our religions as well. All of a sudden, we have a lot of unscrupulous idiots running around saying they're medicine people. And they'll sell you a sweat lodge ceremony for fifty bucks. It's not only wrong, it's obscene. Indians don't sell their spirituality to anybody, for any price. This is just another in a very long series of thefts from Indian people and, in some ways, this is the worst one yet."

McCloud is scornful of the many non-Indian individuals who have taken up such practices professionally. "These people run off to reservations acting all lost and hopeless, really pathetic. So, some elder is nice enough, considerate enough to be kind to them, and how do they repay *this* generosity? After fifteen minutes with a spiritual leader, they consider themselves 'certified' medicine people, and then run amok, 'spreading the word'—for a fee. Some of them even proclaim themselves to be 'official spiritual representatives' of various Indian peoples. I'm talking about people like Dyhani Ywahoo and Lynn Andrews. It's absolutely disgusting."

But her real disdain is for those Indians who have taken up the practice of marketing their heritage to the highest bidder. "We've also got Indians who are doing these things," McCloud continues. "We've got our Sun Bears and our Wallace Black Elks and others who'd sell their own mother if they thought it would turn a quick buck. What they're selling isn't theirs to sell, and they know it. They're thieves and sell-outs, and they know that too. That's why you never see them around Indian people anymore. When we have our traditional meetings and gatherings, you never see the Sun Bears and those sorts showing up."

As Thomas Banyacya, a spiritual elder of the Hopi, explains, "these people have nothing to say on the matters they claim to be so expert about. To whites, they claim they're 'messengers,' but from whom? They are not the messengers of Indian people. I am a messenger, and I do not charge for my ceremonies."

Some of the more sophisticated marketeers, such as Sun Bear, have argued that the criticisms of McCloud and Banyacya are misguided. Sun Bear has claimed that the ceremonies and "wisdom" he peddles are not truly Indian, although they are still "based on" Indian traditions. Yet, his promotional literature still refers to "Native American Spiritual Wisdom," and offers ceremonies such as the sweat lodge for \$50 per session, and "vision quests" at \$150.

"Since when is the sweat not an Indian ceremony?" demands Russell Means, an outspoken critic of Sun Bear and his colleagues. "It's not 'based on' an Indian ceremony, it *is* an Indian ceremony. So is his so-called 'vision quest,' the pipe, his use of the pipe, sage and all the rest of it. Sun Bear is a liar, and so are all the rest of them who are doing what he's doing. All of them know good and well that the only reason anybody is buying their product is because of this image of "Indian-ness" they project. The most non-Indian thing about Sun Bear's ceremonies is that he's personally prostituted the whole thing by turning it into a money-making venture."

Sun Bear has also contended that criticism of his activities is ill-founded because he has arrived at a spiritual stew of several traditions—his medicine wheel is Shoshoni and his herbal and other healing remedies accrue from numerous peoples, while many of his other ceremonies are Lakota in origin—and because he's started his own "tribe," of which he's pronounced himself medicine chief. Of course, membership in this odd new entity, composed almost exclusively of Euroamericans, comes with a hefty price tag attached. The idea has caught on among spiritual hucksters, as witnessed by the formation of a similar fees-paid group in Florida, headed by a non-Indian calling himself "Chief Piercing Eyes."

"This is exactly the problem," says Nilak Butler, an Inuit activist working in San Francisco. "Sun Bear says he's not revealing some sort of secret Indian ways whenever there are Indians around to hear him. The rest of the time, he's the most 'Indian' guy around, to hear him tell it. Whenever he's doing his spiel, anyway. But, you see, if there were any truth to his rap, he wouldn't have to be running around starting 'new tribes' and naming himself head honcho and dues collector. He'd be a leader among his own people."

According to Rick Williams, a Cheyenne/Lakota working at the University of Colorado, "Sun Bear isn't recognized as any sort of leader, spiritual or otherwise, among his own Chippewa people. He's not qualified. It takes a lifetime of apprenticeship to become the sort of spiritual leader Sun Bear claims to be, and he never went through any of that. He's just a guy who hasn't been home to the White Earth Reservation in 25 years, pretending to be something he's not, feeding his own ego and making his living misleading a lot of sincere, but very silly people. In a lot of ways he reminds you of a low grade Jimmy Swaggart or Pat Robertson-type individual."

Williams goes on, "Sun Bear hasn't started a new tribe. *Nobody* can just up and start a new tribe. What he's done is start a cult. And this cult he's started is playing with some very powerful things, like the pipe. That's not only stupid and malicious, it's *dangerous*."

The danger Williams refers to has to do with the very power which makes American Indian spirituality so appealing to non-Indians in the first place. According to the late Matthew King, an elder spiritual leader among the Oglala Lakota, "Each part of our religion has its power and its purpose. Each people has their own ways. You cannot mix these ways together, because each people's ways are balanced. Destroying balance is a disrespect and very dangerous. This is why it's forbidden.

"Many things are forbidden in our religion," King continued. "The forbidden things are acts of disrespect, things which unbalance power. These things must be learned, and the learning is very difficult. This is why there are very few real 'medicine men' among us; only a few are chosen. For someone who has not learned how our balance is maintained, to pretend to be a medicine man is very, very dangerous. It is a big disrespect to the powers and can cause great harm to whoever is doing it, to those he claims to be teaching, to nature, to everything. It is very bad..."

For all the above reasons, the Circle of Elders of the Indigenous Nations of North America, the representative body of traditional indigenous leadership on this continent, requested that the American Indian Movement undertake to end the activities of those described as "plastic medicine men." The possibly sexist descriptor refers to individuals of both genders trading in the commercialization of indigenous spirituality. At its National Leadership Conference in 1984, AIM passed a resolution indicating that the will of the elders would be implemented. Specifically mentioned in the AIM resolution were "Sun Bear and the so-called Bear Tribe Medicine Society" and "Wallace Black Elk and [the late] Grace Spotted Eagle of Denver, Colorado," as well as others like Cyfus McDonald, Brook Medicine Eagle (spelled "Ego" in the resolution), Osheana Fast Wolf and a corporation dubbed "Vision Quest." Others, such as Dyhani Ywahoo, Rolling Thunder, and "Beautiful Painted Arrow" have been subsequently added to the list.

As Russell Means put it at the time, "These people have insisted upon making themselves pariahs within their own communities, and they will have to bear the consequences of that. As to white people who think it's cute, or neat or groovy or keen to hook up with plastic medicine men, to subsidize and promote them, and claim you and they have some fundamental 'right' to desecrate our spiritual traditions, I've got a piece of news for you. You have *no* such right. Our religions are *ours*. Period. We have very strong reasons for keeping certain things private, whether you understand them or not. And we have every human right to deny them to you, whether you like it or not.

"You can either respect our basic rights or not respect them," Means went on. "If you do, you're an ally and we're ready and willing to join hands with you on other issues. If you do not, you are at best a thief. More importantly, you are a thief of the sort who is willing to risk undermining our sense of the integrity of our cultures for your own perceived self-interest. That means you are complicit in a process of cultural genocide, or at least attempted cultural genocide, aimed at American Indian people. That makes you an enemy, to say the least. And believe me when I say we're prepared to deal with you as such."

Resolution of the 5th Annual Meeting of the Tradition Elders Circle

Northern Cheyenne Nation, Two Moons' Camp
Rosebud Creek, Montana
October 5, 1980

It has been brought to the attention of the Elders and their representatives in Council that various individuals are moving about this Great Turtle Island and across the great waters to foreign soil, purporting to be spiritual leaders. They carry pipes and other objects sacred to the Red Nations, the indigenous people of the western hemisphere.

These individuals are gathering non-Indian people as followers who believe they are receiving instructions of the original people. We, the Elders and our representatives sitting in Council, give warning to these non-Indian followers that it is our understanding this is not a proper process, that the authority to carry these sacred objects is given by the people, and the purpose and procedure is specific to time and the needs of the people.

The medicine people are chosen by the medicine and long instruction and discipline is necessary before ceremonies and healing can be done. These procedures are always in the Native tongue; there are no exceptions and profit is not the motivation.

There are many Nations with many and varied procedures specifically for the welfare of their people. These processes and ceremonies are of the most Sacred Nature. The Council finds the open display of these ceremonies contrary to these Sacred instructions.

Therefore, be warned that these individuals are moving about playing upon the spiritual needs and ignorance of our non-Indian brothers and sisters. The value of these instructions and ceremonies are questionable, maybe meaningless, and hurtful to the individual carrying false messages. There are questions that should be asked of these individuals:

- 1) What Nation does the person represent?
- 2) What is their Clan and Society?
- 3) Who instructed them and where did they learn?
- 4) What is their home address?

If no information is forthcoming, you may inquire at the addresses listed below, and we will try to find out about them for you.

We concern ourselves only with those people who use spiritual ceremonies with non-Indian people for profit. There are many things to be shared with the Four Colors of humanity in our common destiny as one with our Mother the Earth. It is this sharing that must be considered with great care by the Elders and the medicine people who carry the Sacred Trusts, so that no harm may come to people through ignorance and misuse of these powerful forces.

Signed,

Tom Yellowtail
Wyola, MT 59089

Larry Anderson
Navajo Nation
P.O. Box 342
Fort Defiance, AZ 86504

Izadore Thom
Beech Star Route
Bellingham, WA 98225

Thomas Banyacya
Hopi Independent Nation
Shungopavy Pueblo
Second Mesa via AZ 86043

Phillip Deere (deceased)
Muskogee (Creek) Nation (in tribute)

Walter Denny
Chippewa-Cree Nation
Rocky Boy Route
Box Elder, MT 59521

Austin Two Moons
Northern Cheyenne Nation
Rosebud Creek, MT

Tadadaho
Haudenasaunee
Onondaga Nation via
Nedrow, NY 13120

Chief Fools Crow (deceased)
Lakota Nation (in tribute)

Frank Cardinal, Sr.
Chateh, P.O. Box 120
Assumption, Alberta
Canada TOM 0S0

Peter O'Chiese
Entrance Terry Ranch
Entrance, Alberta
Canada

AIM Resolution

Sovereign Diné Nation
Window Rock, AZ
May 11, 1984

Whereas the Spiritual wisdom which is shared by the Elders with the people has been passed to us through the Creation from time immemorial; and

Whereas the Spirituality of Indian Nations is inseparable from the people themselves; and

Whereas the attempted theft of Indian ceremonies is a direct attack and theft from Indian people themselves; and

Whereas there has been a dramatic increase in the incidence of selling of Sacred ceremonies, such as the sweat lodge and the vision quest, and of Sacred articles, such as religious pipes, feathers, and stone; and

Whereas these practices have been and continue to be conducted by Indians and non-Indians alike, constituting not only insult and disrespect for the wisdom of the ancients, but also exposing ignorant non-Indians to potential harm and even death through the misuse of these ceremonies; and

Whereas the traditional Elders and Spiritual leaders have repeatedly warned against and condemned the commercialization of our ceremonies; and

Whereas such commercialization has increased dramatically in recent years, to wit:

- the representations of Cyfus McDonald, Osheana Fast Wolf, and Brook Medicine Ego, all non-Indian women representing themselves as "Sacred Women," and who, in the case of Cyfus McDonald, have defrauded Indian people of Sacred articles;
- A non-Indian woman going by the name of "Quanda" representing herself as a "Healing Woman" and charging \$20 for sweat lodges;
- Sun Bear and the so-called "Bear Tribe Medicine Society," who engage in the sale of Indian ceremonies and Sacred objects, operating out of the state of Washington, but traveling and speaking throughout the United States;

- Wallace Black Elk and Grace Spotted Eagle, Indian people operating in Denver, Colorado, charging up to \$50 for so-called "Sweat Lodge Workshops;"
- A group of non-Indians operating out of Boulder, Colorado, and throughout the Southwest, and audaciously calling itself "Vision Quest, Inc.," thereby stealing the name and attempting to steal the concept of one of our most Spiritual ceremonies;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Southwest AIM Leadership Conference reiterates the position articulated by our Elders at the First American Indian Tribunal held at D.Q. University, September 1982, as follows:

Now, to those who are doing these things, we send our third warning. Our Elders ask, "Are you prepared to take the consequences of your actions? You will be outcasts from your people if you continue these practices" ...Now, this is another one. Our young people are getting restless. They are the ones who bought their Elders in the first place to teach them the Sacred ways. They have said they will take care of those who are abusing our Sacred ceremonies and Sacred objects in their own way. In this way they will take care of their Elders.

We Resolve to protect our Elders and our traditions, and we condemn those who seek to profit from Indian Spirituality. We put them on notice that our patience grows thin with them and they continue their disrespect at their own risk.

RECOMMENDED READING

Fantasies of the Master Race - Literature, Cinema and the colonization of American Indians, by Ward Churchill (1992)

(The book this pamphlet is largely made up of excerpts from.)

Indians Are Us? by Ward Churchill (Common Courage Press, 1994)

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, by Dee Brown (1971)

Blood of the Land, by Rex Weyler (New Society Publishers, 1992)

A Basic Call to Consciousness: the Haudenosaunee Address to the Western World (Akwesasne Notes)

A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization, by Howard Adams (1995)

Lakota Woman, by Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdos

All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life, by Winona LaDuke

Websites:

<http://www.newagefraud.org/> - native site about Plastic Shamanism

<http://intercontinentalcry.org/> - Reporting on Indigenous Struggles

<http://warriorpublications.com/> - Warrior Publications

<http://wiinimikiikaa.wordpress.com/> - Revolutionary Indigenous Resistance

<http://indigenouaction.org/> - Indigenous Action Media

<http://blackmesais.org/> - Black Mesa Indigenous Support

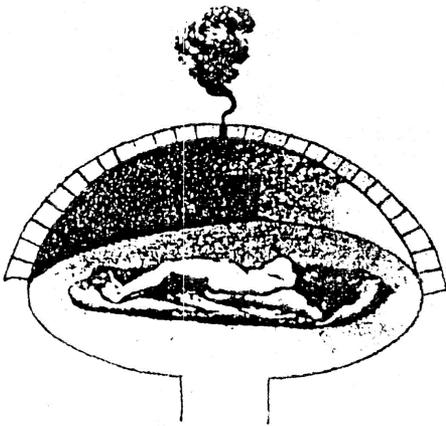
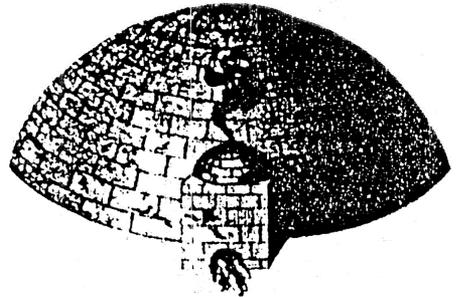
<http://wsdp.org/> - Western Shoshone Defense Project





Do YOU THINK you are
"Indian at heart" or were
an Indian in a past life?

Do YOU ADMIRE native ways
and want to incorporate
them into your life and do
your own version of a sweat
lodge or a vision quest?



HAVE YOU SEEN ads, books,
and websites that offer
to train you to be come a
shaman in an easy number
of steps, a few days on the
weekend, or for a fee?

HAVE YOU REALLY thought this all the way through?