



TRIBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST FRAUDS

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HEATHER RAE BYBEE OP-ED 4-3-23

CASE: Heather Rae Bybee, Film Producer
Sovereign Nations falsely claimed: Cherokee Nation

In the Hollywood Reporter article on March 31, Heather Rae says “I began to really look into my family’s history in a deeper way” and “I’m still in that process, so for several years I have identified as an ally.”

The time to have looked in a deeper (honest) way was before *ever* claiming to BE Cherokee and centering herself in all these “Indigenous” endeavors as if she is one of us, speaking from a Cherokee perspective she will never possess. This is the classic backpedaling of a Pretendian who has made a LOT of money based on her claims of BEING a Cherokee woman.

And what she has always claimed to be is Cherokee. Even with her relatively recent qualifier that she is “not a Cherokee tribal citizen”, she *still* claimed to be of Cherokee heritage. She doesn’t understand that this is still centering herself as a Cherokee, as an American Indian woman. And that is not true. Stop already.

What she carried forward with her from childhood as a personal “mandate” was a family myth that fueled her white saviorism.

Rae claims to have been identifying as an ally rather than as a Cherokee for some time. Yet we cannot find any prior public statements by Heather Rae identifying herself as a *non-American Indian* “ally”. The closest we have found are one biographical statement where she is noted to have vague “Native American heritage, but is not a recognized citizen of a tribal nation” and one vague Instagram post where she says “We can be allies, with roots in culture. In other words, we get to participate in supporting the center, which is a beautiful thing.” She also said in that post “We can find our place – with respect, integrity and responsibility.” It’s a shame she never did *any* of that. And this sole, vague reference to allyship that was easily found does not indicate an effort on her part to correct her false claims and become an ally. Which is a title that is earned, not one that is self-declared. We are seeing a pattern here...

That is also backpedaling, including the vagaries. We don’t use DNA, monolithic vague claims of being “Native American”, or blood quantum. We rely on sovereign tribal nation citizenship, tribal kinship, and documented genealogy. Heather Rae has none of these. Period. There is nothing left to guess at.

How easy it is now to suggest that she has been working through this for years, privately, speaking to friends and family about it. If this were true, she should have been transparent about it.

She was not transparent (did not publicize) about the “reframing” of her identity (her backpedaling rather than truth-telling) until now because she is being called out now. She’s not sorry for what she’s done, she’s upset that she got caught. Two very different scenarios.

TAAF has dozens of examples to share of Rae’s centering behavior as a self-proclaimed “Indigenous” woman. She’s never stopped doing it.

And there absolutely *is* a “gotcha” here.

The American Indian people of the United States today are the descendants of the few American Indians who managed to survive the genocide against us, the massacres, the forced relocations, the boarding school atrocities, etc., and we are still only 1% of the population, maybe 2%. We still have to deal with atrocities like Standing Rock, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, rampant cultural theft, vulgar redface mascotry, ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) violations, eagle feather violations, NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection & Repatriation Act) violations, and the list goes on and on.

Our grandparents fought for this country and yet were not permitted to vote until 1924 because they weren't even recognized as United States citizens until then.

While Pretendians and Boy Scouts were playing at performing “sweat lodges” and dancing around in Tandy leather vests and fake headdresses, it was illegal for American Indian people to practice our authentic ancient ceremonies until 1978.

In its infancy, the United States wanted to exterminate us. Now everyone wants to BE us. Why? Maybe they think it's cool as they fantasize about ‘Rousseau’s Noble Savages’. Maybe it's a settler move to innocence, a move away from whiteness for some, to assuage themselves of the responsibility of having to work to dismantle the inherited legacy of white supremacy in this country. Maybe its to make a fortune as a minority business owner or film producer. Whatever it is, Pretendians are erasing us by replacing us at this point. They want to be “Native”, but without any of that pesky oppression, intergenerational grief or trauma, poverty or racism. Just the feathers, please.

In 2020 there was an 86% jump in the United States census since 2010 in the American Indian population here. How did THAT happen? It wasn't due to immigration.... Or an American Indian baby boom. It was due to people self-identifying as “American Indian”, with nothing to base that claim upon and no accountability.

People who self-identify as “Native American” with nothing to back it up other than a vague family myth, like Heather Rae, and then check boxes to get minority status as business owners for loans, or university scholarships or to further their lucrative careers by cashing in on being an Indian are committing ethnic fraud.

They are usurping the voices of actual American Indian people. They are centering themselves in spaces meant for American Indians. Heather Rae is a white savior. Her saviorism is no excuse for pretending to be Cherokee all these years, which clearly furthered her career. To quote Chickasaw citizen Tony Perry: “Heather Rae, a white woman who claimed Cherokee ancestry, used her false identity to become one of the most influential people in Hollywood. Rae serves on the Academy of Motion Pictures’ Indigenous Alliance and previously led the Indigenous Program at the Sundance Institute. Through this, she shapes what Native films people see and what stories people hear. Rae coordinated the Academy’s “apology” to Littlefeather and, likely, the ongoing exhibit at the Academy Museum that perpetuates Littlefeather’s fraud.”

We wonder why Rae began “reframing” her public identity in 2020? Could it be that she took a lesson from what happened to Michelle Latimer at that time? Backpedaling.

Heather Rae clearly has no respect for tribal sovereignty. If she did, she never would have claimed to be Cherokee without first doing her genealogy, submitting it to the Cherokee Nation for verification and moving forward appropriately from there, in whichever direction her genealogy took her.

This type of laziness on the part of every single Pretendian is causing real harm. Every single crime committed by a Pretendian fraud began with an unverified myth in the family. Every Pretendian author or educator speaking to a large audience as if they have an American Indian perspective is committing fraud.

Every Pretendian “medicine person” who kills someone in one of their fake ceremonies or sweat lodges began their con-artist career with an unverified family myth. The harm comes, and a Pretendian is born, when those mistaken myths are *acted upon* to center themselves and take, in some way, from real American Indian people or to defraud others.

While Rae wants to see people who are researching their family myths be allowed the space to do that, which on its own is completely reasonable, TAAF recommends that you don’t claim to be Cherokee in the meantime, until you discover that myth is true.

Where is the acknowledgement by Heather Rae that she has ZERO ties to the Cherokee people? Where is her apology? At the end of the Hollywood Reporter story she said “...and there’s an indication those ties could be there.” *Still* hanging on to her claim that maybe, just maybe, she could still be an Indian... She is putting a seed of doubt in people’s minds that we can’t discount her “Indigeneity” just yet. Where is that indication? We would surely like to see it. Because Cherokee tribal genealogists have not been able to find it.

Otherwise, Heather Rae, where is your apology and your commitment to standing down from all American Indian spaces as a non-American Indian woman? This is very reminiscent of another high-profile white woman who shamelessly argued incessantly with the Cherokee tribe with whom she falsely claimed a connection. This is NOT the behavior of an ally. A simple admission of having made a gross error in judgment and an apology would have sufficed. This is just kicking dirt in our faces.

Heather Rae’s response *should* have been: “I am not an American Indian woman in any way. I believed my family’s myth without verifying it and claimed a Cherokee identity that did not belong to me. In doing so, I acknowledge that I have caused harm. I apologize deeply for that and vow to educate myself and do better going forward as a white ally.”

THAT would have garnered forgiveness and respect. As things stand, there has been zero transparency, honesty, accountability or apology, let alone amends.