



TRIBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST FRAUDS

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

Film Producer Heather Rae responded to evidence that she is not an American Indian in an interview with Hollywood Reporter journalist Rebecca Sun on March 31st. Rae acknowledges that she isn't Cherokee and that she has been privately "reframing" her identity since 2020 (just as Michelle Latimer was outed).

While this is progress, Rae's response does not appreciate the privilege that her falsely claimed identity gave her throughout her career, or the privilege she takes today in her response to truth. Quietly backpedaling to reframe references to "Cherokee" heritage is not enough, especially when she continues to identify with the more ambiguous term "Indigenous" and clings to a shred of false hope of Cherokee ancestry, which plants a seed of doubt in the public mind when she says "...there's an indication that those ties could be there". No, there is not. We challenge her to show us this "indication".

Rae found success and influence in film because those she worked with thought she was Cherokee. Rae acknowledged this when she said: "[Identifying as a Native woman filmmaker] influenced the way in which I engaged with the industry, specifically around systemic change." She justifies this by saying she "was always working in the capacity of trying to create space for American Indian filmmakers and storytellers." However, this was always done by putting herself first. Rae used American Indian voices to strengthen her own influence. She betrayed American Indian people and defrauded the public by doing this, for her own benefit.

Simply erasing "Cherokee" references or replacing them with even more vague references is not enough, because her "brand" is that of a Cherokee woman, built on years of work on American Indian related films. *New York Post* journalist Joshua Rhatt Miller notes that Rae physically branded herself as well with a tattoo of Selu, a Cherokee "corn goddess". These are the tactics of every Pretendian.

Rae continues to influence American Indian and Indigenous films through her work on the Academy's Indigenous Alliance, with individual film companies and as a Narrative Change Strategist at IllumiNative. She cannot fulfil these roles with integrity or credibility, since she is not who she said she was. It is inappropriate to center herself in any of these roles as if she were an American Indian.

If Rae truly wants to make amends, she should resign from these posts and make room for authentic American Indian voices. She can then reflect on her family history in her own time, rather than at the continued expense of the American Indian peoples whose lives, cultures and histories she disingenuously claims to support. Thus far we have seen no transparency, accountability, apology or amends on her part. Only backpedaling because she got caught and a continued inference that she could still be Cherokee. She is not. And this is not the behavior of an ally.

Note: TAAF did reply to Ms. Sun, several times, expressing a desire to comment for her story. She has not replied to us.