

Triracial Nation

by Tom Big Warrior

If the Lenape People are to survive and the Lenape Nation is to be restored, we must reject the white colonial definitions of what it means to be an "Indian" and an "Indian Nation." We must reject it in favor of a traditional understanding.

The Ancestors had no conception of "Race." They did not think in such terms, even in the early colonial period. They thought in terms of families, clans, villages, bands, tribes, nations, and the whole of Creation.

Strictly speaking, there were different "Races" of Indians, different gene pools, with different looks and physical types, including pigmentation. These were most noticeable, however, as language family groups, such as the Algonkian and Iroquoian speaking families of nations. Between these groups, and within these groups, there was both contention and collaboration. In both war and trade, the groups interacted and intermixed.

The practices of adoption of captives in war and intermarriage stirred the gene pool and mixed the "races." These practices continued in the colonial period and then included the European colonists and their African slaves.

The Ancestors recognized right away that the Africans were an ancient people and dubbed them the "Elder Brothers" of the Indians. They also recognized that the "white" people were a mixed people because of the diversity of their features.

They did not look down on "mixed bloods" or adopted people or see them as less Lenape. A 1/2 white or 1/2 black baby or child was not thought less beautiful or worthy than a "full blood." These distinctions came from the white colonial society and only gradually gained influence among the Indian peoples.

Racism is an important part of colonial domination and exploitation. It justifies an unjust social order and promotes division among the People. Colonial America invented it, and European colonialism spread it all over the world. It permeates almost everyone's thinking today. However, if we are to be successful at Lenape national restoration, we must thoroughly reject it.

Clan membership is, and has always been, based upon matrilineal and/or fictitious relationships. Clans could adopt outsiders to replace lost loved ones, freshen the gene pool, restore broken lineages, level the work load, and make grief bearable. It was accepted practice after an adoption to consider the adoptee to have always been a Lenape and family member.

No distinctions were made between biological and adopted relationships. The adopted children or siblings were equally loved and respected. This gave the family and the clan, and thus the nation, tremendous resilience in the face of adversity and disaster. Sometimes whole groups were absorbed into a village or nation at one time.

To restore the Lenape Nation in its historic Eastern homeland, we need to absorb large numbers of non-Lenapes into our Lenape national restoration movement and rally even more in its support. To

do so without careful instruction in our historic traditions and ways has been shown to be reckless and foolish.

Having a trace of Lenape blood is no proof of understanding anything. It is a fact that Lenape traditionalism is centered here in the East and not out West, where the blood quantum level is higher. The reality is that we have all been assimilated into the white colonial society. We cannot get more ethnic, but we can get more traditional. This is the key to building unity and steering our movement clear of New Age pollution, agnosticism and cultural Pan-Indianism.

Those who promote such nonsense as "Lenape Sundances" are agents of cultural genocide. Likewise, narrow nationalism and failure to extend proper hospitality to the non-Lenape Indians now in our homeland destroys our core values that make us Lenape. Those of us who align with the Lenape Big House tradition need to concentrate on preserving and practicing it. Within it is our true national identity.

Our beliefs and practices have much in common with the Longhouse and Sundance religions, but they are not the same. Our traditions prepare us to be the "Grandfathers." The Big House is not for Christians or others. It is for Traditional Lenapes. In the Big House we renew our "National Vision" and compose our Nation's "Vision Song." We dance together through the 12 levels of Heaven to sing our song and give thanks to Creator.

Along the way we shed our grudges and divisions between us to unite as one people, with one heart and one mind. We take part in the ancient "Bear Feast" that has been performed for millennia, long before the

Ancestors came to Turtle Island. By comparison the Longhouse and Sundance traditions are recent responses born of the pain of colonization.

The journey back to the Big House and our national restoration is complicated and difficult, and there are no short cuts. Genealogy makes interesting study, but it doesn't get us any closer to these goals. Our Nation is triracial, and that a) isn't going to change, and b) is not so bad. "Race" will not determine which of our people will be exemplary Lenapes and which will prove to be fools or scoundrels.

Being Lenape requires a change of heart, no matter who your parents are. No one changes overnight or without struggle. Every day we must struggle to shed our white colonial ideas and prejudices and become more traditional in our thinking and ways. It is not a solitary path. We need each other to traverse it, and we must bring the children and elders along.

The "Trail of Tears" was nothing compared to the journey back. We must discard all our *wapsu* luggage, overcome our conditioning, and discover and adopt the spiritual orientation of the Ancestors. We have to break free of the captivity of our social indoctrination and break through to a completely different worldview. We must replace our individualism with true tribalism moving from a state of alienation to the restoration of our Lenape Nation where future generations can live and work together as free men and women continuing the ways of our people.■