





No-clanners and descendents are a growing issue in the Seminole Tribe of Florida. To my knowledge, I believe the oldest no-clan member of the Seminole Tribe is about 68 years old. But there are now quite a few of them.

Back in the days when I was born, in 1944, some Indian men were known to have married non-Indian women and had children. Pretty soon it seemed like there were quite a few Tribal members who had no clan.

I grew up around all these people. You know who they are. It was in the '40s when the first generation of no-clans were born. And, you know, throughout the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s, I don't recall any issue arising concerning Tribal members who have no clan. We were all together. We all danced around the ceremonial fire at the Green Corn Dance. The no-clans took part in everything. They were called upon to lead dances; they were scratched; they entered the sweat hut; and they participated in all aspects of the Seminole or Miccosukee way of life.

In recent times, some type of racist or prejudicial attitude has developed. It seems more than a little insensitive for the people who are instigating this. As time goes along, someone in each family group will marry a female outside the Tribe and another child will be created with no clan.

A person with no clan is not the end of the world. It gives the person with no clan freedom to marry whomever they choose. Granted some clans have responsibility that they carry on traditionally, such as the Panther who is in charge of medicine and enforcing laws at the Green Corn ceremonial grounds. Someone with no clan does not have the burden of that responsibility.

I am not sure what has caused all of this to develop. But one thing is for sure: If your children are not taught the importance of marrying back into the Tribe, and to a different clan, it will all eventually die out.

The practice is that a Seminole does not marry back into his or her own clan. If you are a Bird Clan, you must marry someone from any clan other than your own, such as Wind, Snake, Deer, Bear, Panther, etc.

It is taboo and against Tribal law to marry back into your clan. Years past, prior to the 1940s, I recall if a Seminole couple violated that law, they were punished severely - cutting off a limb, ears or nose, or even death to the violators. As the older generation - the keepers of our laws - passed on, the taboo or law has been violated many times.

Different Tribes from around the United States, I have found, have no clans. The knowledge and existence of clans have been bled out of them from the 1800s to the present day.

I listened to comments from one of our Tribal elder women one time, brought on because her granddaughter was seeing a fellow clan member. She tried to persuade them not to be together because they were relatives. She was upset that she could not impress upon them the very importance of not being together in a clan relationship and, especially, of not creating children.

These two people, however, had such a strong bond of love with each other that they stayed

together, almost inseparable, the rest of their lives. Their children are here. The two lovers are dead and gone now.

The old lady was lamenting, "Why can't a couple of opposite clans get together and have that same strong bond?" It was baffling to her.

Regardless of how our culture turns out, we are still maintaining a certain amount of our traditional culture. Our children, clan or no clan, are loved just like any child is loved. And in today's atmosphere, violators are not looked upon as severely as they used to be. But that Tribal law still exists. And I don't believe the offspring of the violators are any less of a person than any other person. We love them just the same.

Sometimes it brings tragic circumstances. I've seen one medicine man years back whose daughter knew the law and the rules but violated them anyway by going with the same clan member. He was so upset that he eliminated himself by committing suicide. That was when the old-timers held the laws close to their hearts.

On the subject of descendents, we're told in the Seminole Tribe, especially in our Constitution, you can be a member of the Tribe if you have a quarter of Seminole blood in you. But the Constitution doesn't say anything about clans.

We had never had a problem with descendents prior to the 1990s that I recall until we started having Tribal members who were quarter-blood. That's how it began. These are children of Tribal members. I've met many of them. I have watched them go to school in our system. What a cruel feeling it must have been for that child to be told he is not a Tribal member but merely a person of the general public.

I have two children who are quarter-blood, and I tell them now the consequences - if it is a consequence - of marrying outside the Tribe. If you do and have children, I tell them, they will not be Tribal members. You will still have to take care of that child as your own and with your own finances. You will not have the privilege of the wealth of the Seminole Tribe today.

To have a child in any circumstance is a new financial responsibility to take on. I am not opposed to my children seeking someone outside the Tribe. Hopefully, they will find someone responsible to take care of their personal financial needs, as long as they know that if they do marry back into the Tribe, they will enjoy that certain amount of financial security.

These are some of the dilemmas that we are facing today. Whoever those people are who are instigating inter-Tribal racism with prejudicial comments, they are dividing family members and just plain hurting other people's feelings. Whoever these people are, it will not be long before one of their own descendents is involved in any of those situations.

As large and sophisticated as our Tribe is getting, with our members traveling throughout the world, it is very likely that they will meet someone that they like, fall in love, hopefully get married, and begin new life with.

It's almost inevitable. Seminole Tribe blood is thinning out.

Sho-naa-bish.

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