

This article was written by Lee Francis, Founder and National Director of Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. His sister was Paula Gunn Allen, one of the most influential Native writers of the 20th century. Lee wrote the article largely because of the way I was mistreated by other Native writers after I joined Wordcraft Circle. The article was originally published in *Tribus*, a newsletter for the Houston Intertribal Council, in 1995 when Otilia Sanchez was editor. It was later reprinted in *News from Indian Country*, America's largest Native-owned newspaper. Lee died in 2003.

Are You a Real Live Indian?

By Lee Francis (Laguna Pueblo-Anishinaabe)

The Guardians of Blood Quantum all across Turtle Island want to know. And they are absolutely ferocious about ferreting out anyone passing as a Real Live Indian (RLI). In fact, it has become the issue upon which the fate of their “civilized” world rests. The Guardians want to see the enrollment card issued by your Sovereign American Indian Nation or Tribe or, failing that, they require that you provide a duly notarized CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) for their inspection. The Guardians of Blood Quantum are quick to denounce anyone who challenges their right to demand proof of anyone who claims to be a RLI. Those who refuse to produce or—even worse—do not possess such documentation will be dealt with in no uncertain terms according to those who have been targeted by the Guardians of Blood Quantum.

Preliminary investigation as to which Sovereign Nation(s) and/or Tribe(s) appointed these Guardians of Blood Quantum has been unsuccessful. Many are convinced that the only hope for discovering the identity of these Guardians of Blood Quantum depends on Robert Stack who will find out and reveal all the facts on *Unsolved Mysteries*. For the moment, the evidence suggests that the Guardians of Blood Quantum appointed themselves to ensure that only those with proper documentation are granted Real Live Indian status. Some have suggested that these self-appointed Guardians of Blood Quantum are secret agents. However, highly reliable sources vehemently deny that the Guardians of Blood Quantum are agents of the U.S. government's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). And while it is said that many have undergone extensive indoctrination under the watchful supervision of the descendants of the Hang-Around-the-Fort cadre, there is little evidence to support the charge that the Guardians are gov'mnt agents.

It is important to consider why these Guardians of Blood Quantum are so ardent in their thankless task of exposing those imposters. Discovering those undocumented “pretend Indians” who have the unmitigated gall to not only proudly claim their Native heritage, but are also involved in their respective Indian communities year in and year out, decade after decade—is definitely a thankless job. Perhaps the reason why the

Guardians are so committed is because they have had a vision of millions of “pretend Indians” storming the U.S. Department of Interior’s Bureau of Indian Affairs demanding to be placed on tribal rolls. Everyone knows that if the Sovereign Nations and Tribes let just anyone be a member, there won’t be any money left to help the Real Indians. Someone forgot to tell the Guardians of Blood Quantum that tax-payer dollars are allocated based on the number of individuals “on the rolls”. That is, the more people, the more money. It would seem that the Guardians of Blood Quantum do not qualify as mental giants.

“It’s the principle of the thing,” one resolute Guardian of Blood Quantum hotly declared. “We’re just making sure the law is obeyed,” pronounced another Guardian. “They don’t have any right to make money selling stuff as ‘Indian Made’ if they aren’t Indian,” argued still another Guardian. “They aren’t federally recognized.” “They aren’t traditional.” They don’t respect their elders.” “They don’t act like Indians.” “They don’t look like Indians.” “Their hair is too curly.” “Their hair isn’t black.” “They have blue eyes.” “They don’t go hunting.” “They aren’t Indian ‘cause they don’t grow their own food.” “Real Indians don’t have Doctorate degrees.” “They aren’t respectful.” “They don’t know how to speak our Indian language.” “They live in the city.” “They don’t use Indian dance movements.” “They don’t write like Indians do.”

Today, in INDIAN COUNTRY, there are an untold number of Guardians of Blood Quantum hard at work. They are busy conducting investigations. They have taken upon themselves the task of keeping Indian Country pure for Real Live Indians only. To qualify as a Real Live Indian, all you have to do is produce your enrollment card or CDIB (pronounced “see dib”). Even when confronted with legal verification, some Guardians will not relent—for, like Nazi enforcers, they are incapable of admitting wrongdoing—and they continue their formidable efforts to alienate and destroy anyone in their sights, sometimes individuals respected and beloved in their Indian communities.

If you are a Guardian of Blood Quantum, it is respectfully suggested that you carefully study the strategies employed by the agents of the Spanish Inquisition, the techniques developed by the Salem Witch hunters, and the genealogical documentation and extermination methods of the Jewish Liquidation Bureau of the Third Reich. With intense study, you will be an incredibly effective Guardian of Blood Quantum. If you are not a Guardian of Blood Quantum and are accosted by one demanding to see your documentation (what have you got to hide?), just smile and keep walking.