

Whistles - the controversy heats

up in Indian Country

Submitted by: Craig Whitehead
Written by: Pamela Stillman
Taken from *Indian Country Today*

RAPID CITY - Their use at pow wows throughout Indian country is becoming more and more controversial. Whistles, once owned by few and hardly ever used, are now seen in abundance and are used, according to some, too frequently.

Cheyenne River Sioux Elder Sidney Keith explained the difference between whistles for pow wows and those for ceremonies, or Sun Dances. He said pow wow whistles are made of wood or plastic. Sun Dance whistles are made of eagle bone and are only to be used in the ceremony itself.

"The whistle man at a pow wow, he's not just anybody. He has to be selected. A spiritual leader or medicine man has to choose him. At a pow wow there are only three or four whistle men," Mr. Keith said.

He said that it is a great honor to be a whistle man and that the whistle is very sacred. He explained that whistle men have to blow the whistle four times during a song and that they have to know a song very well to blow it at the right time. He said after blowing a whistle, whistle men then honor the drum, or singers, with a giveaway.

The Elder is concerned about the misuse of the whistle in pow wows today.

"I see some using them who are not qualified to do that. They blow at the wrong time," he said. "These people should know that they have to be selected and that the whistle is a sacred thing. The sound is like an eagle or birds. The whistle should never be used during a contest."

Norman Roach, a well-known fancy-dancer from the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, is also concerned about whistles. As the newly elected vice-president of the Black Hills Pow Wow Board, he is recommending that the board not allow any whistles at this year's July pow wow.

"I've been asked by an Elder that

we not allow any at all," he said. "This Elder said the purpose of the whistle has always been to extend a song and for the purpose of honoring Elders and those who couldn't dance.

"What's going wrong is, today anybody can get a whistle and not have to earn it. It doesn't seem like some are blowing for the people, but they're blowing for themselves. This is becoming a real controversial thing."

Mr. Roach said he has even seen some dancers blow whistles during dance contests, which is an unfair advantage. He added that the meaning of a giveaway for some whistle blowers is getting lost.

"This is considered a very sacred act. It used to be followed by a large giveaway, as it was explained to me. Now-a-days, people blow the whistle and giveaway \$5. The giveaway is supposed to be big," he said.

The pow wow vice-president said young people need to be taught the meaning of the whistle and who can use them. He said they need to understand their sacredness.

Mr. Roach hopes other major pow wows strongly consider banning, or restricting, the use of whistles.

"I've seen a couple other pow wow boards do this. I hope it becomes a trend. It's important because of the misuse that's going on," he said.

Terry Fiddler, a well-known Cheyenne River Sioux traditional dancer, said he has also seen misuse of the whistle at pow wows throughout Indian country.

"A long time ago, they hardly ever used the whistles. Then they honored the whistles by what they gave away. Sometimes at pow wows today, people blow the whistle two to three times a day through the week and do not giveaway.

"Sometimes they only give \$5. Maybe that's all they got, but that's the controversy," he said.

Mr. Fiddler said people should look to Elders to inform them about the proper use of whistles.

"We've got a lot of good resource people out there, the Elders," he said.

Pow Wow MC Needed!

The Pow wow Committee is looking for people interested in being Master of Ceremonies at this year's Pow Wow. If you are interested or would like to recommend someone, please contact either Charlene Holycross at (503) 444-4226 or Karen Bell at (503) 444-4216, or write to:

Confederated Tribes of Siletz
Attn: Pow Wow Committee
PO Box 549
Siletz, OR 97380

Respect for the People, Their Culture, and Traditions

As more people become aware of Native American culture and start attending Pow-Wows and other ceremonies, it is important to understand some of the basic obligations to follow while there:

- Listen to the Master of Ceremonies, he coordinates the pow-wow; he will announce when to stand, when men should remove their hats and when it is not appropriate to take pictures.
- If you want to take pictures, check with the person you are taking pictures of.
- Do not touch anyone's Regalia without their permission.
- Do not cut across the dancing circle.
- Show respect for Elders at all times.
- Do not bring or consume alcoholic beverages or drugs while attending the pow-wow.
- No smoking

TIP! DRAW

The Pow Wow Committee will be holding the annual Tipi Draw on July 21, 1995. There are fifteen tipis available this year. The draw is available to all Tribal Members, however, only one tipi per household. If your family would like to spend the Pow Wow in a tipi, please fill out the application below and send it to: Pow Wow Committee, P. O. Box 549, Siletz, OR 97380.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE _____ ROLL NUMBER _____

ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY JULY 21, 1995.

Pow Wow Hats &

T-Shirts will be on sale soon with the new 1995 logo. Contact Karen Bell at 444-4216 or 1-800-922-1399 ext.# 216 for prices. We still have some T-shirts from 1994 at a reduced price!

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