
PRETEND INDIAN EXEGESIS

[The Pretend Indian Uncanny Valley Hypothesis in Literature and Beyond.](#)

TREVINO L. BRINGS PLENTY

Social media avatars of the Pretend Indian variety disrupt flow, but it's only a pebble unripppling in a massive confluence. Pages or profiles enhanced by Indian imagery are bait to attract a group of people to add or like them. It's the selfie ethnic-wound licked by its victims, used by its predator.

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We have the academic Indian lecturer who is not tied to any indigenous community. A system validates them and meets inclusion requirements of diversity and multiculturalism. Would this create an Indian if non-Indians who bestow Indianhood unto them validate them? They are suspect when they have never stated any story at the beginning of their career of Indianness. They steer in Tribal educational systems only to later find themselves some sense of Indian descendancy.

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We are told to be brave in writing and in telling our stories. Is it braver for a settler-colonial operating writer to colonize a Native American narrative? To pepper their work with enough suggestion to have its readers conclude its authorship true. To wear an underrepresented people's skin is enticing. I get it: to feast on struggle, to explore imagined roots; to lay the foundational work for academic jobs and publishing opportunities.

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If I'm to consider myself a Native American writer, a Pretend Indian is taking my potential success, taking

away and dismantling opportunities for my peers and future generations. I guess this makes my work a consumable flavor for a Pretend-Indian-Ethnic-Munchhausen individual. I'm not offended. I acknowledge tactic, another tendril to colonization. We know the dangers of inviting a settler-colonial agent into the group. We hope they don't steal our stories, we hope better of them, we hope they don't set to default and rip apart communities. We hope they don't prove a disappointment.

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Then the Pretend Indian's work is published, then they are hired to a coveted academic position, then there is a movie or made-for-TV-show about their overcoming adversity as a Native American surviving in two-worlds. Then they Zach Morris the shit out of their story (see episode “Running Zach”); then they Thunder Heart a vision to the stronghold; then they John Dunbar a blanket and woman; etc....

So I guess what are the next steps? Are they allowed back into the group after their abusive behavior?

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To honor ancestors is to absolve the Vague Indian Family Lineage Narrative, VIFLN. It served, for whatever mental health reason, a family-held origin connection to place. To honor that vague story is not to exploit it, but leave it be. No documented records, adoption, or severed family oral history clouds the VIFLN. The concerted effort to genocide a people and the continued erasure from intuitions and dialogue, we get that. How does a VIFLN decolonize and strengthen resistance to the dominant settler-colonial narrative? One could construe the VIFLN as another tactic for colonization. VIFLN is a shadow untethered to communities and people. It continues to say the past when Indigenous people live now and are future-bound.

Honor how the current tribal group identifies itself. If they say descendancy (patrilineal or matrilineal) or Blood Quantum as part of its identification, this is your language. Know who you are related to in the group identified. Who are your relations? They make who you are, they are the stories championed in your narrative. If you don't know your relations, leave them alone. Don't bother them. Don't parasite the experience.

VIFLN is not the language of abundance; it doesn't instill thrivance for a people. Generate your own VIFLN ceremony to unsettle it from your mind. Be critical of your VIFLN. Everyone else is because it's not just a feeling, it's deeper and more widespread than that.

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As shitty as it might sound, there is a part of me that appreciates the Pretend Indian, PI. They are tricksters who antagonize a hard belief. I have to check my eye roll when they relay their noise. In hearing them I imagine a live choose-your-own-adventure-story unfolding. Usually, they start out west with tribal affiliation, but if you press them for more details of the claimed identity, their claim starts to move east and/or becomes more fantastic and prestigious. It's an inverse Manifest Destiny masticating people's stories for how the PI builds cultural cache. It's a deep seeded white privilege thing to feel underrepresented as a luxury; slumming tragedy and exploring plight.

When they say it's not our way to do something, in my mind I think, don't include me in your "our way."

I know they feel privileged when I discuss decolonizing settler-colonial institutions with them. This validates them in thinking they are part of the group when really I might be talking about them indirectly.

I appreciate the PI as the ultimate assimilated Indian. Their vague descendancy is magical. I imagine unicorns with the story or those rumored ancestors walked with dinosaurs.

I do fear the PI, they can pass for non-Natives. In that, they can be deadly. They can use your information to pad their story. It's literate scalping. They collect their bounty. They ingest you - entrails and all. Rim the skull's eye cavity. They wrap your skin over their face, tongue the inside of your mouth. They cultivate your image. Prop you up in bed and slide their body next to yours. Wire-frame your brown body seated in a landscape of their own invention. I can appreciate that kind of image colonization.

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The Pretend Indian does not fear tribal disenrollment.

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How does the Pretend Indian decolonize?

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To say they have Indian blood in their family without evidence or actual tribal criteria eligibility, the Pretend Indian has this story to feel more American than plain-White. The Pretend Indian, in all their heart, is Trans-Ethnic.

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The Pretend Indian, in exploring their native roots, emerge from their chrysalis thinking themselves butterflies when they actually are moths.

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If Native Americans are 1% in the U.S. population, the Pretend Indian is the 1% of said 1%. But a 1% based on a story or a feeling. So a 1% imagined.

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The Pretend Indian is an alt-reality. Their operating system is calibrated through a magical pan-Indianism experience. A Pretend Pan-Indian; a Pan-Pretend Pan-Indian. There is nothing to stop the Pretend Indian from grabbing on to other identities.

The Pretend Indian collects other Natives on social media to validate their existence. The Pretend Indian steals Native dialogue to better hone their rhetoric. The Pretend Indian feeds on brains.

I cringe when the Pretend Indian poet drops Native words/themes in their work. Then say we are all related. No. I don't think so. You are all on your own. That's all you. That's your hot mess. I can't wait until we are Post-Pretend Indian. "It's not working," I will tell them, "All of it. Jus' stop."

The Pretend Indian is a construct of non-natives poorly imagined people. A coffee table book people.

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P.I.: I heard my great-great-great... Grandmother was Indian.

Me: mine was too. Now leave me alone.

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The Pretend Indian has their identity as a core belief, which generally is difficult to change. I get it. The imagination of a story took root. And when inserted into an urban community, there is general acceptance or at least some tolerance. The Pretend Indian uses the identity to build themselves into the urban community narrative. This is a bit more difficult to do in a direct Indian Nation; there are people who will remember you and your family depending on the strength of the community.

Because I can't pass for White, I'm deadly aware wherever I go to not stand out much, to be cautious in my actions.

To be a Pretend Indian to an individual who might suffer personality disorders must be some sense of relief. To be special among other White people while still benefiting from a racist system, it's like a life "theme" or "flavor." I get it. I could, if my ethics were absent, pass as some other Native American theme or flavor. But what would the benefit be?

Be critical of the Vague Indian Family Lineage Narrative. As in this case, a memoirist uses that narrative to become an authority to write of an Indian relationship without appearing to be a white captivity story.

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The Pretend Indian gets a double whammy. They get to enjoy the wonderment, delight and dangers of a narrative from a people who are the subtext of the American Dream: genocide. And not really be a part of the said group, only their wet dream of their participation in that group. Then discard that not to be bothered with further inquiry into the Indian group. Then Pretend Indians rage hard. Pretend Indian anger at those Indians who call them out. Is it lateral oppression/violence when it is Pretend Indian on Indian prejudice? Is it “divide and conquer” tactic when Indians fight among Pretend Indians? The Pretend Indian is the kitsch and Tchotchkes of the American experience.

It feels like sand in one's underwear when Indians hear the Pretend Indian talk about us. The Indians, in their mind, tell the Pretend Indian, whatever you are saying, that's not my tribe. That's all you, creeper.

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The Pretend Indian wants all the Indian glory without all the Indian gory.

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The Pretend Indian doesn't correct the mistake when referred to as Native American. The Pretend Indian will go into details about their features that might hint of an imagined Indian. The Pretend Indian secretly wants to kill any Indian that questions the Pretend Indianness.

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Construct the perfect Indian Name. Must have a Christian worldview. Mammals are cool. Reptiles not so much. Nature references must be Indian Poetic; very bland. Nothing scientific. No John Quark-Dust or Jane Quantum –Leap; no John Gravitational-Lens. Maybe Jane Schrodinger's-Cat. Maybe.

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The Pretend Indian is a formula. A phantom entity in the community, just as real as their story. The Pretend Indian is a zero multiplied by everything.

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Imagine two Pretend Indians seated across from one another. Is it an identity doppelganger fairytale; mirrored motions and phrases? How do two Pretend Indians greet each other? Would they become feral and claw at each other? Or spontaneously combust at any Indian utterance? Do they just nod at each other knowing they are both Pretend Indians?

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What Indian accoutrement does the Pretend Indian pocket? Stone, bone, feather, leather, or made in china relics. How Pretend Intertribal is the Pretend Indian? Do they think collecting Indian names is like collecting Magic or Pokémon cards? Collect and trade or sell.

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To begin with, Poetry is a hard sell. Very few invest in it unless they are craft practitioners. In an anthology

collection, to have the Pretend Indian’s work next to your work – it cheapens the experience. If I were to explore seemingly cultural themes then to read the Pretend Indian’s similar work, there is the cultural mockery.

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Can an Indian Pretend Indian? Can they racially be of the group and ethnically not, but be a Pretend Indian Indian-hobbyists? Can they be intertribal, but not of the infatuated ethnic target? Does coupling up with a targeted group also lend one full reign of cultural practices of said group; a mutual orgasmic cultural knowledge acquisition.

Knowing Indians don’t have the same political power as Settler POCs, does this make it easier to pillage Indian knowledge after having implanted themselves into the targeted group and then assume the group is milquetoast?

Taking knowledge, labor, worldview, intellectual and cultural property is a colonial act, but isn’t this interpretation of property a colonial attribute too? Does the idea of “nothing about us without us” or “stories about us without us is not for us” (“us” being the targeted group) still apply if one has used a consultant for a project? The consultant used as a buffer and validation of the project and the scapegoat if the project is criticized.

Do accolades for the project get a pass if other Indians praise it? Does the offended group have any recourse to defend their cultural property if “they” other Indians applaud the project? Should the offended group stay silent to the deafening praise of the project because if the project is uplift with its creator, it benefits all?

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Did the Pretend Indian become a US citizen in 1924? The militant Pretend Indian is scary but mostly confusing. The Pretend Indian is about wolves. The Pretend Indian wolf is so sacred. I can’t even.

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The Pretend Indian is the dreamcatcher on the rearview mirror. The Pretend Indians' ancestry tall-tale gets so vast, ...again. I can't even.

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The Pretend Indian's drunk Indians are the drunkest, most tragic, but proudest Indians to shed a single tear when garbage is thrown at them.

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The Pretend Indian is the error message in a universe that has error correction compensation code.
If you don't like the Pretend Indian, this validates their pretend oppression.

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The Pretend Indian is a micro-aggression. The accumulative effect compounding on a targeted community until justified outrage strikes. As damaging as the Indian mascot issue, the Pretend Indian causes psychological distress. Their actions are a taunt waving white privilege.

The Pretend Indian author gets off on his actions. Their conflated fabricated blurbs indicate a pathology hell bent on damaging a people's spirit to gratify self. The masturbatory nature of what he flaunts as a white male who can yell racism if criticized but ignoring the fact that it is racism that positions him seemingly untouchable. He systematically uses gaslighting tactics every time. It's too easy to digitally manufacture plausible deniability or credibility.

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Ethnicity is just a flavor. Anyone can identify as any ethnicity. This is the heart of my Pretend Indian, PI, series. We see the John Smelcers, the Rachel Dolezals,

the Andrea Smiths, the Ward Churchills enter targeted communities. They stir any deemed detractors, agitators into their gaslighting web and continue to move forward with their agenda. Often positioning themselves in authority to dictate what Indians are allowed to do or what a community can achieve.

The tactics used are systemic and if challenged the PI falls back on their white fragility to mask perceived persecution. These individuals find there really isn't a border to contain whatever identity they wish to profess their persona. They are okay not to correct someone if they are mistaken as part of the group. These PI's fluidly move in communities and hide in the complications of Indian identity. Other Indians or other folks with their agenda are quick to point out the plausible tracks for the vagueness of the assumed identity. People were adopted out, people had to hide their race on historical documentation, whatever the muddiness is on any historical record, these are dragged out and propped in the conversation. The PI shines brightest in this fogginess and in-fighting.

There is a special kind of shittiness expressed by some Pretend Indians. Usually, if they spend any amount of time with Indians, an interior Indian seeds itself in the PI and begins to wildly bloom. Next thing we see is the PI try on Cherokee, Lenape, Lakota, or etc... bloodlines to aid their personal narrative. They gather information from grandmother Internet. They start to incorporate “we” when around other Indians. A nation of Pretend Indians rises. And they delight in the plight-skin of their identity conquest. The PI is a bizarro-world Indian. The PI is pleather. The PI is the Great Gazoo Indian popping into one's life to remind you they are there to shit on everything, dumb-dumb.

This is why it's important I have in my bio some indication of my tribal enrollment; my citizenship to my nation and the sovereignty it represents. Not everyone has this significant qualifier. But this might be labeled bully-tactic because the PI is triggered and will lash out (white

fragility). But it's none of my business if the PI feels usurped by the Indian enemy. It's confusing, I know.

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The Speaker of this piece of writing is Lakota who sometimes self-identifies as Indian, American Indian, Native American, and Indigenous. They have heard of stories of Indian blood in their ancestry going back ten generations, which contributes to their current Native roots presupposition. The Speaker is an enrolled card-carrying member of a tribe and a Native Nation Citizen.