

A Taino Warrior of Today

Jimmy Red Feather is a Native American who lives on the Shinnecock Reservation on Long Island, New York. The long hard road he walks on has been fraught with emotional, physical and spiritual challenges. The dominant mainstream culture is often intolerant and hostile. **Jimmy Red Feather** is a Taino warrior who was born on the island of Borikèn.

Jimmy's spiritual quest has taken him to a number of far flung places. He has traveled to Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Canada and the Caribbean. He has met and conferred with members of several tribes including the Chippewa, the Kiowa, the Mohawk, the Apache and his own Taino people. This winter will find him hunting caribou with the Innu of northern Quebec.

Years and miles of searching has led him to the insight that there is a common factor in Indian culture of both North and South America: that common factor is spirituality.

"Through the spirits, we will find the answers," he says calmly. As an active participant in prayers and sacred ceremonies, Jimmy has come to realize that his ancestors will lead him where he has to go and what he has to learn.

"What I've learned is that we were a very humble people." This simple knowledge has helped him let go of his rebelliousness and his anger. He has learned to take insults from both natives and non-natives in a humble manner. Ego, hunger for power or yearning for material gain have no place in this kind of undertaking.

Jimmy Red Feather was born in Las Sierras de Cayey in Borikèn. His family relocated to the northeast United States when he was a child. Growing up in the North helped him to understand that there was more to being an Indian than dancing at pow-wows or wearing trendy turquoise jewelry and a headband.

Jaime Pluma Roja, as he is sometimes called, firmly adds: "The ancestors are always there; they are waiting for us to purify ourselves. We do not necessarily have to be in Borikèn. In ourselves, we find the place where the Taino lives."



"Our spirituality is not Christianity. It is not the North American belief system. It is not espiritismo. It is Taino. If we keep the spirit alive and true, the ancestors will give us answers -- as long as we ask in sincerity."

The Taino Diaspora around the world is a remarkable example of how a culture can survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions. Our art, language, music and religion, which were never thoroughly obliterated, are experiencing a dynamic revival. Traditional Taino values, unique to our culture, are being transmitted by our elders to the young ones. Societal pressure to assimilate, to abandon the ways of our ancestors, is great. However, individuals such as Jimmy Red Feather provide assurance that our Taino consciousness remains alive and vibrant.

TO ALL MY RELATIONS.

(Editor's Note: Bobby Gonzalez is a Taino Native American storyteller and lecturer. He has spoken at such institutions as El Museo Del Barrio and the National Museum of the American Indian. For lecture or presentation information, please contact A&L Speakers and Consultants: 212-866-0125)