# **INDIGENOUS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IN FASHION WITH BETHANY YELLOWTAIL AND JAMES ST. JAMES Video Transcript**

(James) James St. James with WOWPresents. I'm here

with the fabulous, the wonderful, the

gorgeous Bethany Yellowtail! It's

nice to see you again! How are you doing?

(Bethany) I’m doing really good. (James) And congratulations! (Bethany) Thank you. (James) We just

started a series with you called…

(Bethany) Alter-NATIVE. (James) Alter-NATIVE and it follows a

year in the life of Bethany Yellowtail and

it's on the Storycast YouTube channel

and they've partnered with ITVS and PBS

Digital Studios. SO tell us how many

episodes there are and what we can

expect from it. (Bethany) So there are six episodes

that follow my journey through art,

activism, and fashion and they're about 7

to 10 minutes long and they'll really

show my transformation as taking on the

role as understanding that fashion can

be a catalyst for the message for

indigenous people. (James) In the first episode,

you are talking about your Sun Road

Woman dress, the Power dress. (Bethany) Yeah. (James) It's

a design that's very personal to you.

Talk a little bit about that and then

what happened when you saw it ripped off.

(Bethany) Yeah.

Well, actually the Sun Road Woman

dress was inspired out of a time where I

was going through a breakup. (James) You talk

about that, yes. (Bethany) Yes (James) It was very

hard on you at the very beginning of

the show. (Bethany, laughing) I was so pitiful! That experience

really like shaped me into to moving

forward. Now, I'm like I'm so grateful, you

know? (James) It's a journey! You’ve totally been on

a journey. (Bethany) Totally. I thought it was the love of

my life, but I'm the love of my life. (James) Oh, I love that!

(Bethany) Yeah, but Sun Road Woman dress is

actually my name in Cheyenne is

Ese’hemeona’e. (James) You're Crow and

Cheyenne. (Bethany) Crow and Cheyenne. (James) And from Montana? (Bethany) Yes,

from Montana. So in Cheyenne

Ese’hemeona’e means Sun Road Woman, but

before that, I did a design that was

inspired by regalia from my great

grandmother, Irene Not Afraid Yellowtail,

and that piece… (James) Oh, I love that name. (Bethany) Yeah, we have some great

last names, but the design was from her

purse and my family gave me permission

to use that design. So I put it on a

dress and it was like the very first

like dress that I put out when I

launched B.YELLOWTAIL and so it was very

like exciting and personal and it was

something like that was my family and

really was like sharing my story. (James) And

it's a Power dress and it's one of those

dresses that looks great on every one… (Bethany) Yeah, totally!

(James) …and so it's an important dress for

you personally and professionally.

(Bethany) Yeah and also it symbolizes my community,

and so when we saw it ripped off at

Fashion Week, it was so personal and it

like really just like gutted me at that

moment. (James) Do you have a legal recourse when

something like that happens or is it…? (Bethany) I

mean, there are protections for Native

American artists. There's the Indian Arts

and Crafts Act, which is federal law that

protects indigenous people’s designs.

(James) There are so many people like Urban

Outfitters and Forever21 and things like

That, they take these Native American

patterns and textiles and just sort of

put it out there like it's

their own and like they have perfect

right to use it. Talk a little bit about

that, about the cultural

appropriation aspect and how wrong

that is. (Bethany) Totally. Well, I think when people

think about cultural preparation, it’s very

much from they think of indigenous

people as our ancestors, like from the

1900s and like the 18th century, and

instead of seeing us for who we are now

in contemporary like time because

there aren't very many of us. I mean, our

numbers are much smaller and Los Angeles

actually has the largest amount of urban

Indians in the country, but no one

recognizes, no one sees us. (James) Well, yeah. (Bethany) You

know? And so I want people to see like

our humanity. I want them to not look at

it as like ‘oh, we're taking from those

Indians from the past.’ There's people who

are working in our communities who are

still holding those traditions very

close to us and who actually make a

living. Like, art is a hustle on the rez

and people get by day to day by selling

art or creating things that our

ancestors passed down to us. (James) But I

noticed that in a couple episodes later

on where you're back on the reservation

and you're talking about that where you

say that they sell their wares

for $15 and then the mark-up is, you know,

a tenfold… (Bethany) Totally. (James) …and they don't end

up ever making any money to get out of

the cycle. (Bethany) Yeah, it's not sustainable

because there isn't disposable income in

our communities and so my dream for

B.YELLOWTAIL is to be able to remove that.

I want to be able to create a space

where artisans are getting what they

deserve, what they're worth. Our cultural

designs are purchased with integrity.

They're purchased at the true value that

they're worth. (James) One of your quotes in the

first episode is that you said you're

tired of our representation through non

Native American lenses. (Bethany) I mean, in every

single industry, our images for

indigenous people are always shown

through a

non-native lens. Like literally, if you look

through all the films, major films and

entertainment industry, every single

industry that is Native American and the

overall consciousness in the United

States of who native people are is never

from our own mouths and so what's really

incredible about Alter-NATIVE maybe

unbeknownst to people is that the

director and producer is Billy Luther,

who's also native. Like, I feel very

grateful that my story is in hands with

someone I trust and who knows the overall

purpose is to really authentically tell

indigenous stories and it's me, you know? [laugh]

And so I think it's a really incredible

opportunity that people get to follow my

journey through fashion, see native

people as contemporaries and as artists

and fashion designers and producers and

directors, and see us for who we are and

not for this stereotypical image of our

ancestors. (James) Billy Luther is somebody who

has worked a lot with the World of

Wonder. He's really carved out a niche

for himself in telling Native American

stories and indigenous people's stories,

doing documentaries, and really showing a

world I could grab and things that a

lot of people like didn't know about. (Bethany) Yeah,

it's so important for every single voice

to be at the table, to recognize our

humanity that people from all sorts of

walks of life, no matter your color, your,

you know, your religion, your sexual

orientation, that all people are

represented in a true way and indigenous

people are very much so left out of that.

(James) In the second episode, you put on a

fashion show at Native Fashion Now… (Bethany) At

the Smithsonian, yeah. (James) …at the Smithsonian, which is a

great honor… (Bethany) Yes. (James) …but by the same token,

you were just talking a minute ago about

the fact that why is it always about the

past as opposed to something

contemporary and now. (Bethany) You know, that show

was a great honor. You know, the women who

put it on, I applaud them because they

did such a great job trying to do it

with the best integrity and best

intentions, but even walking up to the

Smithsonian, like even all the sculptures

around are of like colonial figurines. So

it's very strange that like you walk in

and it feels like you're walking back in

history. I mean, it's great for people

to see that juxtaposition, but we're

still in a museum and, you know, I have

relatives who their things were in

that museum from,

you know, the 18th century. It was great

to see that mine are, you know, alive and

breathing there with them, but at the

same time that's not where we belong.

(James) Tell me about some of the other

designers that you were with in that

show and some of the other people out

there that we should be on the lookout

for. (Bethany) Yeah, absolutely! So Patricia

Michaels, she's one of the designers

there and I love her. She was on Project

Runway. She was the very first Native woman

to be on Project Runway and she does

such a great job like representing our

communities. Her grandfather was very

very close to my great-uncle so it was

very cool to see like where we are now

and that we still have that connection

as native peoples. One of my favorite

moments in that second episode is when

the Vogue people invite you to come and and

watch this sort of… it was a panel

discussion, I think, and you get up and

you just let them have it. [laugh] Tell us a little bit about that. (Bethany) Yeah, I've always

considered myself pretty like reserved

and shy and I was just in that room and

this panel was going on and they opened

it up to the room and everyone's

asking questions… (James) And being very polite

because Anna’s there. Everyone’s a little intimidated. (Bethany) When she walked in

people were like [gasp] and I was like… Yeah, you know,

like I mean I respect her and stuff, but

I didn't feel afraid. I didn't feel

scared because I was also like…

(James) You were on a mission! (Bethany) I was on a mission!

I felt like my relatives sent me like

To go say something and so they were asking

questions and people raised their hands

and I wasn't getting picked, so at the

end, the microphone did not get past me.

So I just stood up and I said excuse me,

I'm not about to be the only native

person here and not get an opportunity

to speak and they were just like huh? (James) Ruh? Scooby Doo? (Bethany) Who let her in, you know?

(James) What was it you said? What was that…? (Bethany) Um, so

basically, I said as we're talking about

inclusivity and diversity in this room,

we also have to keep each other

accountable and I said so Anna and I like…

I did. I mean, but, you know, what afterward

she gave me the nod so I don't think she

was mad at me for that. (James) I don't think

that very many people like call her

out. People sort of kowtow to her

and I think that maybe she respects that

that you… (Bethany) I hope so because I mean I felt

like that space was the right

opportunity to do that. It wasn't like we

were having those conversations. They're

tough, they're uncomfortable, and you know

they were very much from like a BLM,

Black Lives Matter, perspective and there

were a lot of really great representation

of designers who are in that movement,

but we were missing. At that time, I

thought this is the only opportunity I'm

gonna be in Vogue. I got invited here so

I'm gonna say something. If I don't ever

get to come back, like at least I said

something, you know? (James) Afterwards, there was

a girl who came up to and sort of

fangirled out on you and was like so like

impressed with you. It was like I can’t believe it! You were fantastic! (Bethany) She was like girl you got some balls and I was like… I guess so. (James) So, once again, it's called

Alter- NATIVE. It's available on YouTube on

the Storycast YouTube channel.

They had partnered with PBS Digital and

ITVS Studios. So tell me, when do new

episodes drop and how often can we see

them and… (Bethany) Sure. There are six episodes and

they drop every Tuesday at 11:00 a.m.

Pacific Standard Time.

(James) Fabulous!