

# Keep America Beautiful

## Still Keeping America Blindfolded

Keep America Beautiful tugged at the heartstrings of the American public with their unforgettable ad campaign launched on Earth Day 1971. Professionals in the advertising business have rated it one of the most powerful and successful ad agency creations of all time.

The now legendary image of the lone American Indian in full native dress, staring teary eyed at a littered landscape, left an indelible tattoo on the American psyche.

Unfortunately, decades after KAB's offer to keep America beautiful, the American landscape is still choked with trash. KAB was never able to 'get America beautiful' much less keep it beautiful!

An updated version of the Iron Eyes Cody ad was introduced on Earth Day 1998. According to a story in the *New York Times* (April 22, 1998), KAB's Evan Jones said, "Our equity is the tear, and we're hoping to build that equity." One might argue that the ad that ran 27 years after his single falling teardrop should have featured Iron Eyes Cody weeping uncontrollably at the sight of littered roadsides and mountainous landfills.

Writer Ted Williams didn't mince any words in his article titled "The Metamorphosis of Keep America Beautiful" (*Audubon Magazine*, March 1990). Williams wrote, "My thoughts on the weeping Indian ad are that it's the single

most obnoxious, commercial ever produced . . . . It strikes me as the ultimate exploitation of Native Americans: First we kicked them off their land, then we trashed it, and now we've got them whoring for the trashmakers."

Three decades after the crying American Indian was introduced to the American public, armies of well-intentioned volunteers still stand ready and willing to pitch in whenever they hear the rallying cry for flower planting, beach clean ups or park renewals. These litter purges are well attended and well organized, but the results are short term and short lived. KAB and it's various state and local affiliates all operate under the umbrella of KAB' s glowing image, and who could fault an organization dedicated to keeping America beautiful?

CRI respects the efforts of well-intentioned groups and hard-working individuals across the country that enlist in programs sponsored by Keep America Beautiful and it's many reinventions of itself. We believe that many, if not most of them, are unaware that they have aligned themselves with a trade group rather than an environmental organization.

The fact remains that more than 75 corporations fund KAB. The strongest supporters of KAB are beverage manufacturers like Coke and Pepsi and their trade association, the American Beverage Association. Together with packaging companies they promote Clean Community Systems and litter taxes as alternatives or replacements for container deposit laws and other government regulations that make those companies responsible for their products and packaging.

Since the inception of Keep America Beautiful, hundreds of state and local KAB programs have been created and dozens of litter tax plans have been offered as alternatives to beverage container deposit legislation or bottle bills. These band-aid solutions, applied to the problem of litter and waste, have proven ineffective in stemming the flow of litter across America and have helped defeat bottle bill proposals in almost every state in the country. Bottle bills, not KAB, have kept hundreds of billions of cans and bottles from ending up as litter or landfill inventory.

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