

The American Indians made their war paint from colored earth, or stones crushed in a mortar or rubbed off onto a flat stone into a powder and applied with grease or water to the skin, with a paddle or primitive brush or with the hand. They did not use hair brushes. Some made their red paint from white clay burned red into a kind of brick dust. Favorite colors seem to have been blue, white, red, green, yellow and black. Hematite sometimes supplied them with red (oxide of iron). Other minerals supplied most paints. However, some green and blue paints were made from the scum on stagnant pools, dried and pulverized. Indians made long journeys to find materials to be made into paint. War paint was applied primarily for protection in battle and the designs were those prescribed by supernatural helpers seen in visions. If there was time before the fight began, every warrior covered himself with this magic armor, sang his sacred song and went through any other routines required by his "medicine". If a warrior society went to battle in a body, all would wear the paint required by their order. The man who had no vision bought this protection from someone who had. Sometimes the war paint belonged to the sacred shield or weapon carried by the warrior. If stars or crescents or other designs were included, leather patches in these patterns were cut out and stuck to the skin and painted around. They were then removed and the pattern filled in with contrasting paint. War paint also might indicate a man's war honors, or be intended partly to intimidate the enemy. When the fight was over, a victorious warrior painted himself all over with powdered charcoal, since the "fire" of war was out. Paint was often applied with the hand after it had been worked into a ball of tallow. When white traders arrived, the Indians soon learned to prefer vermillion to burned earth and other European paints to the old dull earth colors they had used before. Shells were commonly used for cups in which to mix paint. Sometimes paint, mixed with water, was sprayed on from the mouth (the primitive spray-gun).