



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Much has happened in our country since the last annual conference of the National Congress of American Indians--much of tragedy and much of accomplishment.

I am sure I do not need to recall to you that shattering event of last November. The friendship of the late President Kennedy for the American Indians and his warm, personal interest in seeing that the full resources of the Federal Government were employed in their behalf is well known to you. Our loss is great.

Yet, we can count ourselves fortunate in that the loss of one great President has led to the gain of another.

President Lyndon Johnson, moving forward with dedication to assume the commitments of his predecessor, has given them dimensions of his own. He has pledged himself to a war against injustice and a war against poverty and he has made it plain that he considers the American Indians to be in the forefront of such a war.

In a recent address to the graduating class of the University of Michigan, the President elaborated upon what he felt could be done to conquer poverty. He told that group of young Americans that, through the conquest of poverty, the people of this country will be free to explore the routes leading to the Great Society.

"The Great Society, "President Johnson said, "rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice--to which we are totally committed in our time.

"The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community, It is a place where man can renew contact with nature, It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to understanding"

More than many other people in this country, the Indian people, I believe, have an understanding of what President Johnson meant when he referred to the Great Society. I believe, along with Oliver LaFarge, that the deeply embedded desire of most Indians is to prove themselves whole men in our world without ceasing to be Indians. But poverty--chronic, soul shattering poverty--blocks fulfillment of that desire.

The American people, all of us, will make a most important choice about our future and the future of our country in November.

From the viewpoint of the American Indian and his welfare, the choice seems clear-cut.

Many and serious problems confront this country's first inhabitants, but the platform just dictated for one of the major political parties by its candidate completely ignores the Indians and their problems.

In Barry Goldwater the Republican Party has a candidate for the highest office in the land who is acclaimed for his camera studies of picturesque Indians, but who in the past 12 years has opposed nearly every major effort to improve the big picture of poverty and neglect on Indian reservations.

A program for Indian people cannot be grown in a sterile atmosphere guided by a man who stands on a platform of callous silence and who writes:

"Conservatism therefore looks upon the enhancement of man's spiritual nature as the primary concern of political philosophy."

What can one say about "leaders" who are "for" Indians in the abstract but who work and vote against tangible programs which would enable their children to obtain decent educations, live in modern housing, and have greater employment opportunities.

The whole history of American progress is woven on the loom of community action. It is beyond my comprehension to understand the concepts of those who believe that every child is born with a hidden bootstrap that will command his destiny if only he has the gumption to pull it.

The whole sorry history of "land allotments" and tribal termination has emerged from such shallow thinking and if we do nothing else this year-...let us void the mistakes of the past.

The causes of Indian poverty have historic depth and some of these causes stem from the fluctuating nature of Federal-Indian relations.

For this reason, as our Government prepares itself for a frontal attack on Indian poverty, it is worth our time to consider for a moment the long, winding trail which it has already trod in its relations with Indian tribes.

Following the Revolutionary War, we dealt with Indians in much the same way as had our British forbears. At this time, our emphasis was primarily on controlling trade with the various tribes. Both England and France retained a great interest in the North American continent and the Indians were potentially useful allies in the event of future conflicts with these foreign powers. The role of the earliest Indian Commissioners was principally a diplomatic one. We might call them "commercial attaches" with portfolios from the War Department.

Later, as the government of the United States affirmed itself, relations with the Indians shifted. Diplomacy gave way to conquest, expulsion and resettlement, emphases which were to persist until after the Civil War.

The Allotment Act of 1887 has been the root of much of the poverty suffered by Indians today, although its architects had no such intention. Tribal holdings were individualized, and a 25 year period was allowed for "acculturation". The framers of the legislation had visions of Indian families moving easily and gracefully into the white man's way of life, tilling their allotted lands, raising chickens, and a few cows, owning a team of horses, and working from dawn to dusk with Sundays off to go to church. Few people understood that many Indians could not adapt to the shackles of such life when they had been accustomed to roaming the lands. As a result, two-thirds of the allotted lands--the best of the lands--

slipped out of Indian ownership. Public disillusionment led to renunciation of the Allotment Act--but not for nearly fifty years.

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 ushered in a new era in Indian Affairs, although I feel it was an era still much misunderstood. Frequently I hear references to the period of the 1930's as one in which Indians were encouraged to return to tribalism and to isolate themselves further from the mainstream of American life. With these conclusions, I could not disagree more.

The official record clearly demonstrates that the Indian Reorganization Act, as interpreted by the administration of Commissioner John Collier, was an instrument which, like the Allotment Act of 1887, was designed to achieve acculturation. However, the approach was from an entirely different philosophical base. Whereas the Allotment Act had called for the individualization of Indian lands, the Indian Reorganization Act encouraged the consolidation and enlargement of the tribal land base. Whereas the Allotment Act called for destruction of Indian communities, the Indian Reorganization Act urged their creation or preservation and their strengthening. Whereas the Allotment Act provided for destruction of Indian culture, the Indian Reorganization Act supported the continuation of those elements of the Indian way of life which could enrich the cultural heritage of the Nation and provide stability and security for Indian tribes and individuals during the period of assimilation.

Thus, the emphasis in Indian Affairs growing out of the Indian Reorganization Act was on the development of the individual within his own community. This emphasis is not unlike that of the Area Redevelopment program commenced in 1962 and the Economic Opportunity Act which President Johnson has proposed to Congress this year.

It is unfortunate that World War II and its aftermath interrupted and perverted the great social experiment begun in Indian affairs during the 1930's, for we shall never know how much farther down the road toward the elimination of Indian poverty we might be today had that experiment enjoyed three decades of continuous support, rather than the single decade allotted to it.

For much of the period since the end of the Second World War, the Federal Government's approach to Indian affairs has been dictated more by frustration and impatience than by understanding of the issues and realistic attempts to resolve them.

Indian affairs assumed the characteristics of that period of the 1950's which Archibald MacLeish once described as "a time out, a between time, a limbo, a Gaza Strip of history to be lived by unliving."

It was my awareness of conditions, as the result of my service on the Indian Affairs Sub-committee of the United States House of Representatives, which led me in 1961 to appoint a special task force to study the problems of Indian administration and to make recommendations for the benefit of both the Indians and the Nation.

The deliberations of that Task Force involved many thousands of people, Indians as well as non-Indians. Bill Keeler, as its Chairman, brought to the assignment an intimate knowledge of Indian needs and an ability to translate Indian desires into recommendations that form the framework of present policies. The Task Force included other people well known to you, also--Commissioner Philleo Nash, Associate Commissioner James Officer, and Deputy Commissioner John Crow, who served as a special adviser. Working with the Task Force on many occasions was Assistant Secretary John A. Carver. The continued presence of these men in the Department of the Interior has assured consistent efforts to carry out the goals laid down by the Task Force.

Those goals were: maximum economic self-sufficiency; full participation in American life; and equal citizenship privileges and responsibilities for all Indian people. Those goals recognize that Indian citizenship can never be fully realized, regardless of statutory rules, unless the Indian people are in a social and economic position to important--to wish to participate--to merge the wisdom and special qualities of their cultural heritage with that offered them by the rest of American society.

The past three and one-half years have been a test of how effective we have been in moving toward those goals. Some people say that the Indian Bureau is the advance guard in the war on poverty, I would say that the preliminary scouting has been done, and the areas of attack pinpointed: They are education and economic development, the bread and butter of any society in these times.

We are focusing on primary targets: Housing, vocational education, development and use of resources, credit to stimulate business and industry, and technical aid to tribes to generate foresighted planning in the use of settlement funds and other monies coming their way.

But when we talk about the 400 public housing units that have now been constructed, and the 3,000 planned, we need only to look around almost any reservation to see the need for 60,000 new homes for families who have lived too long in squalid shacks.

When we talk of the 3,500 adults enrolled in vocational training programs, we are talking in terms of less than one percent of the reservation Indian population--and I am certain that more than one percent could benefit from the chance to learn a skill that will put cash in the family sugar bowl.

When we point to the great gains in high school graduations among Indian children--and they great--we must still remember that only about 6,000 young people from the reservations entered college or technical training last year.

When we talk of promoting industry in order to promote job opportunities, we can point with pride to the record of 40 plants in operation on or near reservations, employing 1,500 workers, and to several other plants under construction promising additional jobs, But on the other hand are the fifty percent or more of able-bodied men and women who cannot find jobs for lack of training or local opportunity.

Funds invested in economic development--Bureau funds, tribal funds, and, greatest of all, private funds--are a sign of forward thinking and planning, We can point with pride to pyramiding credit for economic development: nearly \$20 million in Federal funds, over \$25 million in tribal funds--and \$100 million in private funds are now invested in enterprises that are creating jobs. This total of \$150 million may seem like a great deal of money--but it actually adds up to barely enough for a modest venture here and there, We are only scratching the surface of potential for development of enterprises on the reservations making use of the human and natural resources available.

There is no need to recite further statistics to an audience such as this. Suffice to say that it is going to take time and it is going to take money--and, above all, it is going to take will and effort on the part of the Indian people themselves--in order to plug up the seepage of our greatest resource, our human resource, into the spiritual swampland of chronic poverty.

Time, money, and will--the ingredients of victory over poverty.

Time is running out in the sense that the rate of change in the world around us is continually accelerating. Man's knowledge is doubling every ten years, they say, Meanwhile jobs for the unskilled

are declining to a point where they are probably now less than five percent of the entire job market. We have to step up our own pace tremendously in order to make up for lost time.

Money--we have more money than ever before to spend in the battle against poverty. Until 1960, there had been less than three billion dollars spent by the Bureau during the entire preceding 160 years. But Congress has, in the past few years, been generous. Since 1960, more than \$700 million has been authorized, and we have been able to break land, so to speak. But with the backlog of a century to eliminate, we cannot expect miracles of accomplishment all at once. Therefore, we are looking to the Economic Opportunity legislation to lend new dimensions to our present efforts.

If Congress enacts the Economic Opportunity legislation this summer--and we are confident it will--then there will be more funds available to the Indian people, not only through the Bureau of Indian Affairs but through the extension of many other services of many other Federal agencies.

And it is around the Economic Opportunity Act that I wish to consider the element of personal will and interest in self-improvement.

The proposed Economic Opportunity bill, paralleling the primary directions of the Indian Bureau, focuses on education as the basis for economic development. It recognizes that poverty has many causes, and that there is no instant cure. But it is premised on confidence that the American people, together, will make an unyielding long-term commitment to root out the many causes of poverty and will approach the task with willingness to try new ideas and new programs.

The bill directs attention to the needs of many young people for special education and training opportunities. It approaches the school dropout problem not from the static argument of "stay in school" but from the enticing prospect of a chance to live in a new environment, to learn a Skill, to earn while learning. The legislation would establish residential centers for vocational training and work experience--the youth camps of which you have already heard much. (I might add here that some of these camps will be designed for girls, although most of them will, in all likelihood, be for boys.)

The Department of the Interior has already developed plans to help establish these camps on public lands, Where youngsters can learn the ways of woodland existence and contribute to the improvement of forest and park areas, fish and wildlife refuges} and grasslands now eroding for want of vegetation, check dams and brush control.

With the concurrence of tribal authorities, some of the camps may be located on reservations. They can be of tremendous value to the tribes, not only as places where Indian youth may find inspiration to broaden their educational horizons, but where work on soil and forest conservation projects will help improve the natural resources.

The camps are, of course, only one aspect of the Economic Opportunity bill. It would broaden employment and training opportunities for adults who have been on jobless rolls for long periods, and would provide grants to finance agricultural enterprises and loans for family businesses.

Other provisions call for urban and rural community action programs to help mobilize entire communities for concerned attacks on poverty.

Here, again, are direct implications for Indians. One of the causes of Indian poverty has been a lack of cohesiveness in years past among tribes as organizational units. Community action programs mean

action by the people of the community--action in whatever directions they feel would help improve their social and economic condition.

Community action calls for cooperation of Federal, State and local agencies and tribal authorities. We are already working with such agencies as the Public Housing Administration, the Area Redevelopment Administration, and the Public Health Service, and State and local health, education and welfare agencies. The interties would become stronger, we expect, under the Economic Opportunity program.

President Johnson has said that the Indian people are in the forefront in this war on poverty. What does this mean? I think it means that, despite the fact that the Indian people are among the poorest in the Nation, they are among the most likely to derive important benefits from the war on poverty.

The strength of the Indian culture--the closeness of family life, the oneness with nature, the generosity of spirit, the talent for learning--all of these are large assets to a people who are striving to move away from poverty.

I am reminded of a paragraph from the final chapter of John Collier's memoirs:

"These tribal Indians were keepers of something more than only their specific traditions and institutions of language, of ritual, of discipline, of art, of toil. They were among the keepers of that one value which men must live by even to the end, and forswearing which, they worse than perish. That value was the conception of public good as the one and controlling consideration, and of public good as being no solely material thing, but the affirmation of the Spirit by man."

The Indian people, then, must surely understand that the price of sustaining the best of the Indian way of life need not be physical poverty. Quite the contrary, poverty inhibits the full flowering of the spirit in man. Because the Indian people have a heritage of convictions that has sustained them through a century of torment, they are now in a position to render leadership in, as well as become beneficiaries of, a national war on poverty.

I leave you with this thought, and with confidence that you will become active participants, for your own sake and for the sake of the country, in the war on poverty that should become mankind's greatest monument to peace.

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I leave you with this thought, and with confidence that you will become active participants, for your own sake and for the sake of the country, in the war on poverty that should become mankind's greatest monument to peace.

<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/address-secretary-interior-stewart-l-udall-national-congress>