

INDIAN WORK

National Committee on Indian Work

SELF-DETERMINATION IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

We've always, I think, thought of acculturation as a kind of one-way process in which the Indian ceases to be an Indian and becomes a white man. That's been an objective, whether we want to admit it or not, in historical diplomacy. I think, for the first time, that it is not a one-way process at all. Acculturation means a two-way, a reciprocal, kind of thing in which there is a realization of a one-world, or is composed of both elements, or many for that matter.

—M. Scott Momaday

This statement, and many others like it, indicate the realization of the plural nature of the cultural growth in the Americas. Far too long, the foreign elements of modern European thought have been made to seem as being synonymous with everything American. Of course, this is a totally false impression. But, all too often, the element that is forgotten is the Native American paths of knowledge and understanding.

Events of the recent past have highlighted the changing role of the Indian and Eskimo populations within the larger society in the United States. Through a variety of published sources and aggressive actions, such as at the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, D.C. and at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the broader population has at least become aware of a few issues confronting the Native American peoples. At the same time, these events and renewed knowledge have forced many Indian and Eskimo people to come to grips with their own multi-national heritage. After four hundred years of a comparative "dark age," Native Americans are finding renewal in their lives and their perspectives.

The Native American peoples of the United States, whether by traditional or activist methods, have declared that they are no longer prepared to accept an inferior position in their own homeland. Recalcitrant peoples no longer merely follow uncritically the expressed desires of investors, missionaries, government employees, and traders. The efforts of the various transplanted European institutions have failed to destroy the basis of American civilizations. In this century, and especially within the last decade, there has been a radical renewal of the native languages, native religious expression, corporate organization, and use of land to the benefit of tribal groups and the society around them.

With the coming realization that civilization is strengthened within a pluralistic framework, respect must become a way of life, as tolerance is more widespread. In the same way, defensiveness and isolation will no longer remain the necessity it has been in the recent past. Even as the realization of pluralism becomes more widespread, there is a meagerness and spottiness to the efforts of the Church and State to carry out the much-acclaimed task of promoting the renewed strength and self-determination of the Native American elements in this country.

The most obvious element offered by the dominant institutions, such as the Church and the State, as well as being sought after by Indian and Eskimo peoples, is a duplication of the immense material advances made by the majority of the American population. Native culture has increasingly embraced not only the technological gadgetry of European thought, but also the scientific outlook at their base. The new modes of communication, transportation, medicine, hygiene, and sanitation, and the achievement of higher standards of economic existence, are set goals for large segments of the Native American population.

Education, using European methods, is eagerly sought by Indian and Eskimo people. This element has always been a priority, as evidenced in nearly every major treaty between the United States and the various Indian nations. But, through mismanaged application (under Federal control, in some instances, and local school boards), this

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desire on the part of many Native American people has been perverted into channels of mere training and indoctrination. Education must become more sensitive to the individual's needs, as well as expanded beyond the limits of Western European thought. This is not only true in terms of historical interpretation of events, but use of native languages and all areas of knowledge. For example, present mathematical insights arising from the European adaptations of Arabic numerals should be challenged by mathematical concepts arising from recorded Mayan systems. While present mathematical systems incorporate Arabic numerals with the concept of zero, at the expense of Roman numerals, the Maya used a single system of mathematics that combined numerical systems that corresponded to an Arabic and a Roman system, using the concept of zero as a part of the integral whole.

More important, but less visible, in a period of social action and system analysis, are the spiritual values and insights of Native American peoples. The Indian and Eskimo spiritual perspectives are particularly important, but are essentially not understood by the larger society. It is in the confluence of Native American spirituality and the Christian religious order that there is offered renewed strength to all, rather than flights from reality into narrow cultural bias. All too often, the spread of Christianity in America has been presented as a coercive process by which native peoples were forced into a Christian structure. Rather than resistance, the Indian pattern has been to make the Christian faith an integral part of their own spirituality. Christianity is not limited to European forms of expression, but can find beauty in American forms that exist nowhere else.

Progress is meaningless if it merely enforces acceptance of one cultural set of values and thought over another. It is rather difficult to believe that the so-called "advanced" peoples are "advanced" in some universal sense, when force rather than free interchange and mutual respect is the primary means of providing for that advancement.

The Church and State have begun a process by which mutual understanding and enlightenment can take place. It has only begun and must be continued through mutual support, one segment of society for the other—one world view for another.

GRANTS MADE BY THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON INDIAN WORK FROM THE INDIAN/ESKIMO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUND 1969-1973

Indians of All Tribes (Alcatraz Indians)	12/19/69	\$ 2,000
Northern Cheyenne Recreation Project	2/10/70	\$ 3,500
Upper-Midwest American Indian Center	2/20/70	\$ 10,000
Alaska Federation of Natives	2/25/70	\$ 10,000
SEND (Self-help for Native Dakotans)	2/25/70	\$ 2,000
Cook Christian Training School	2/25/70	\$ 10,000
DNH Development Corporation	2/25/70	\$ 5,000
Oklahoma Community Development for Indians	3/11/70	\$ 2,000
Wisconsin Demonstration in Indian Education Opportunity	4/27/70	\$ 10,000
Paiute-Shoshone Cultural Studies Program	4/28/70	\$ 3,500
Chief Ojibway Original Products	4/28/70	\$ 5,000
Jones Ranch Navajo Community Deep Well	4/28/70	\$ 6,968
Task Force on Racially Isolated Urban Indians	4/28/70	\$ 2,500
Project Lighthouse	4/30/70	\$ 2,125
Executive Council—secretarial help in administration of community-development fund	5/03/70	\$ 5,537
Alaska Federation of Natives	5/25/70	\$ 10,000
