

N.Y. Times, March 5, 1982

## Indian Rights, Rediscovered

The U.N. delegate, Jeane Kirkpatrick, calls it "more massive than any other human rights violation that I'm aware of in Central America today." President Reagan was so upset he used a major address to deplore the Nicaraguan junta's forced relocation of 8,500 Miskito Indians. And Secretary Haig illustrated his charge of "atrocious genocidal actions" with a photograph of a bonfire of Indian corpses.

That photo, unfortunately, turned out to be the record of an atrocity four years ago — by the former Somoza dictatorship. But never mind the zeal. Such enthusiasm for Indian rights deserves encouragement. What is happening in Nicaragua is a familiar variation of a cruel pattern: an unoffending people with a distinctive culture is being cut up in a larger quarrel.

The Miskitos inhabit land contested by the supposedly civilized, on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast, and smack in the path of a border war between Nicaraguan leftists and Honduras-based rightists.

The Indians have certainly been abused. All too typically, the Sandinist revolutionaries felt they had to "integrate" them into the dominant culture by teaching them Spanish and Marxism and giving them pills against diseases spread by non-Indians. When the Miskitos resisted — their second language is English, and they are devout Moravians — the rightists took up their cause. Then the Managua regime blundered again, by sealing the region to visitors.

By all means defend the rights of this innocent people. But why stop there? No defense of human rights can be credible if confined to the violations of only hostile regimes.

No offense against human rights is so persistent

as the mistreatment of native Americans. They have been butchered and enslaved for centuries; their lands have been stolen, their bodies infected and their cultures trampled. In the United States, of all places, this should be a sensitive issue.

As the Reagan Administration can learn, simply by asking around, the atrocities against Indians in the Americas continue in many places:

In Chile, about 500,000 Mapuches living on 3,000 reservations are menaced by a 1979 decree that abolished their claim to lands awarded them more than a century ago.

In Paraguay, the pathetic remnants of the Tobamaskoy tribe have been forcibly moved to arid land, where their extinction seems likely.

In Brazil, disease and greed imperil the Yanomami, perhaps the last large South American tribe to have so far escaped the embrace of "civilization." Their traditional lands are being invaded by mineral prospectors and their resistance to European diseases is negligible.

In Peru, about 15,000 Campa and Amuesha Indians are needlessly endangered by a highway that would connect what the Government bills as "men without land to lands without men," in the Amazon. The United States has earmarked a quarter of a million dollars in aid to this project, which could still be modified to spare the Indians.

In Guatemala, the rightist military regime has been clearing Indians out of the western Peten region, for security and oil exploration. Perhaps 70,000 Guatemalans, most of them Indian, are now refugees in Mexico. The killing of Indians has become commonplace, with left-wing guerrillas committing their share of atrocities.

If Indian rights are really the concern, there's much work to be done: