

ON OUR OWN

a slide-tape presentation

approximate length: 15 min.

MUSIC begins

Long ago there was a time when Indian peoples knew peace and happiness...When the tribal way of life was strong, the people were protected and sheltered by the collective strength of the tribe. For all of human history, the tribal way of life has been the most successful form of human society.

No form of human society has achieved greater personal freedom or greater creative fulfillment than has the tribal society.

Abundant resources provided the means to sustain the tribal way of life.

Then came the white man....

and the struggle to preserve tribal lands, customs and lifestyles began. Not long after helping the American colonists in their war against British tyranny, Indian tribes in North America had to contend with the first of a long series of official U.S. policies aimed at destroying tribes in order to seize vast lands and resources.

With the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1831, the United States Congress placed a death sentence on Indian tribes which lasted more than half a century. U.S. expansion westward was led by military confrontations against tribal societies. Where tribes effectively resisted U.S. military force, treaties were negotiated and territories were reserved by tribal leaders to separate tribal people from U.S. citizens. Those tribes unable to resist were herded to new lands. East Coast Indians such as the Cherokee and Seminole were torn from their lands and transported at gunpoint to reservations in territories to the west and south.

Even the most remote tribes eventually had to contend with white settlers and soldiers who sought to solve tribal claims to land and resources by wiping out the Indian way of life. The white man's bullets killed many of the mightiest Indian warriors and their followers. New laws ignored Indian rights, but the greatest damage to the well-being and dignity of Indian peoples resulted from the undermining of tribal cultures.

(MUSIC UP)

In hopes of saving some of their lands and resources for their own use, many tribes reluctantly signed treaties. The United States government gave the Indians scraps of food...and a lot of promises.

By 1887, the white man's appetite for land and resources extended to the land which had been reserved for the exclusive use and occupancy of Indian tribes. In order to get at the resources of these reservations, Congress passed a piece of legislation called the General Allotment Act. Among Indian people, this Act has come to be known as the "Divide and Conquer Act" because the intent of the law was to break up tribal societies by dividing tribal land holdings among individuals. Many individual Indians were persuaded to become tax-paying citizens, landowners and farmers. Many others refused to go along with the Allotment policy and chose to stick it out with the tribe instead.

(MUSIC begins)

The very existence of tribes and tribal families was threatened with possible extinction as a direct result of the confused land ownership status created by the Allotment policy. Indian was pitted against Indian as traditional tribal ideas conflicted with American ideas of land ownership.

By the time the U.S. government finally admitted its mistake in 1934, when the allotment policies were halted, the damage had already been done. Poverty and despair were commonplace among the people everywhere.

Tribal leaders could do little or nothing to help their people through these difficult times because the Bureau of Indian Affairs controlled individual allotments and tribal lands.

Indian people had been divided. Individuals were separated from the tribe.

But still, the tribes survived.

After World War Two, U.S. policy towards tribal people took a turn for the worse. The U.S. political mood had shifted to a new approach to Indian tribes--TERMINATE tribal societies completely.

In 1953, the Congress enacted a series of laws designed to TERMINATE the existence of Indian tribes. The first of these was known as House Concurrent Resolution 108....

it was intended to promote full citizenship of Indians by integrating them into urban American life. To carry out this idea, the BIA established the Indian Relocation Program. Families were deliberately moved to seven urban relocation centers where they were to receive training for jobs away from the reservation.

This time, Indians were supposed to be integrated into American urban life. Indians were to choose the American Way and reject the tribal way.

(MUSIC begins)

It didn't work out too well for a lot of Indians .
Some tribes, including the Klamath, Menominee, Siletz,
Paiute, Coughata, Wyandotte, Peoria, Ottawa, Catawba and Ponca lost
their entire reservations during this Termination Era of U.S.
policy.
Tribal people were supposed to spread out to join the melting
pot---to disappear.

On July 20, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon announced
a policy of self-determination designed to aid and strengthen
tribal governments and their communities. Under the new policy,
tribes were offered a chance to do it their own way for a change.
Termination was rejected as morally wrong. For the first time in
over 100 years, there was a U.S. policy which encouraged
Indian tribes to regulate their own lives and properties.
For the first time in generations, tribal people would make
their own decisions.

(MUSIC up)

Tribal revenues and new federal dollars were combined to
give new life and new hope to those living in tribal communities.
Tribal self-government re-emerged to build new schools,
health centers and homes.
Jobs were created for Indians in their own communities.
Laws and policies were developed by tribal governments
to overcome the damaging effects of former U.S. policy.
Tribal governments became the sole advocate of tribal rights.

Because of tribal self-government successes during the past decade, seeds of opposition have already begun to show themselves in the national government and special interest groups.

There are those who would like to see the tribal way of life disappear because they feel threatened by the emerging strength of tribal government as significant economic and political forces.....THEY are the new terminators.

A new form of opposition to tribal survival has emerged which is aimed at undermining tribal communities and their governments.

Political opposition from national and state governments is growing.

Organized commercial interests and individual land-owners are now systematically attempting to pit Indian against Indian once again.

This opposition to growing tribal success seeks to play on internal tribal weaknesses and differences in order to create an atmosphere of distrust and confusion. Termination attitudes have begun to pose strong threats to tribal existence.

(PAUSE)

Tribes looking to the future are on their own today more than ever before.

Confidence among our peoples in tribal institutions of religion, education and government is the single greatest power essential to the survival of the tribe. Internal strength and loyalty to tribal values must combine to meet the new threats

to tribal survival. Only the people can save the tribe.
We cannot afford to forget the sad lessons of the past.
Our lands and resources have been the objective.
With shortages in today's world, they are all the more
coveted by those who destroy tribes.
As Indian people, the best way we have to resist
external control over our destiny is to strengthen our
governments. Tribal governments must continue to
spearhead the defense of tribal rights and the tribal
way of life.
Only with internal strength can our people endure.

(MUSIC)

THE END

CREDITS