



Big Foot in death. Photographed at the Wounded Knee battlefield on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota

OPEN SORE AT WOUNDED KNEE

by Allyn Cadogan

A year ago I met a man who ranted heatedly at the terrible way the Negroes are treated in the States. I replied that Canadians had no room to crow in view of the attitudes borne against Indians here.

He dismissed my comment with, "Oh, the Indians; they have their reservations. The Negroes DESERVE fair treatment."

I hope my article does not display an undue amount of bias; however, it was meant to discuss only one aspect of Indian life.

General Philip H. Sheridan of the U.S. Cavalry first made the much-quoted remark in 1869 that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." When questioned as to the slaughter of women and children, he supposedly replied, "Nits make lice," thus reducing the Indian to a level with vermin, at least figuratively.

The image of the "dirty redskin" has been maintained almost unthinkingly by the white majority throughout the last three centuries; stories, legends movies and television have kept the image alive in modern times.

In 1779, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution that "...no land be sold or ceded by any of the said Indians, either as individuals or as a nation, unless to the United States of America, or by the consent of Congress." The government had allowed the nation's original inhabitants to keep the land in question only because no one else wanted it or could think of a use for it.

Once the buffalo had been annihilated, the white man lost interest in the Dakotas' rolling hills; there was plenty of timber elsewhere, and the Apaches were allowed to keep their acres in Arizona. The Apaches still have well over one and a half million acres, but when gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota, the Sioux no longer had sole property rights.

Today the Sioux land is rented out to cattle men at appallingly low rates. The returns supposedly contribute to the Indian welfare; my mother receives her portion of this rent money--anywhere from \$.97 to \$1.45 yearly.

The average income of a reservation Indian is less than \$1500 annually, less than any minority group in the country. The unemployment rate fluctuates between 45 and 98 per cent on the Dakota reservations.

One girl, a member of the Indian settlement on Alcatraz Island, told of the job opportunities on her reservation: The government hired Indians to make army guns for \$1.60 an hour, but only one member of each family was allowed to apply.

The Menominee Tribe in Wisconsin was well on their way to becoming self-supporting when the government decided to terminate their reservation nine years ago. They had a profitable sawmill and lumber business. Since termination, however, they have cost the state over \$2 million in welfare.

The Fort Apache Indian Reservation has been more fortunate; last year they grossed \$1.5 million after they had turned their reserve into a sort of fishing resort.

On the other hand, conditions are desperate on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Many families there live in abandoned cars, tents, empty chicken coops or tiny dirt-floored huts, and this in an area where winter temperatures go down to 35 degrees below zero. Robert Sherrill describes an old woman he met there:

(She) was patching her hut with mud in preparation for the...winter...and on the radiator of an abandoned car...she was drying the hooves and ankle bones from a cow. There was no meat on the bones, but she said she would boil (them) and a few strips of hide and make soup...later on this winter...She carries water from a creek a mile and a half down the hill. She is 77.

There is no plumbing in about 75 per cent of the homes on this reservation, and some families carry their water up to 12 miles. The U.S. Public Health Service claims it lacks the funds to install plumbing. Getting adequate housing for these people would also seem to be an impossible task.

Urban Renewal simply refuses to build roads on the reservation, and the government will not build houses more than one-quarter mile from a paved all-weather road. Neither will they sell houses to anyone with an annual income of less than \$2805.

These two conditions eliminate about 95 per cent of the people on Pine Ridge Reservation.

These people are willing to work, but there is none offered; what they do get is seasonal--mostly fire-fighting in the summer. They own good grazing and farm land, but simply do not have

the capital to back their own enterprises. It is said to be easier for an Indian to borrow money for a car than for a tractor.

Robert Kennedy visited the Pine Ridge Reservation five years ago. Apparently appalled at the conditions there, he promised improvements.

He was killed before being able to do anything personally; the government, however, did attempt to carry out his promise, and the "...reservation has a brand-new landing strip...long enough to accommodate jet liners, but...no Indian on this reservation owns even a Piper Cub. Most could not afford a kite."

White Americans are finally coming to a conscious realization that Negroes are people simply because blacks have screamed little else for the past ten years. Repetition is an old advertising gimmick that really works, and it would seem that militancy is the only way to get attention nowadays.

The Indians have quietly co-operated for three hundred years and have gotten nowhere; they have been given little more public notice than alley cats. Government restrictions and red tape have made a mockery of the Indian's needs.

The general prejudice against Indians has been rationalized by saying that they are dirty, they live in squalor, and drunkenness, they do not work. However, it is the government that has created and enforced these conditions of the Indian's sub-human existence, originally through fear, but now, it would seem, through tradition.

The general white attitude is

probably best demonstrated by a donation of clothing sent by "sympathetic" middle-class ladies to the settlement on Alcatraz: "...Blue satin slippers lay there, and tinsel dancing shoes, both pairs quite worn..."

Although I am nearly one-quarter Sioux Indian myself, I had never been aware of an "Indian problem" till I moved to Canada four years ago. The first thing I noticed was the general attitude towards anyone even looking as if he came from Indian stock (for some reason people usually ask if I'm Italian).

In Winnipeg, I met a dark complexioned, slightly hefty girl. I asked if she was Indian and she was quite insulted; she told me she was French.

A friend of mine worked with Indian children in Inuvik last summer and he described attitudes which I found hard to believe: The adults, he told me, more or less pounded it into their children's heads that to be Indian was a great disgrace.

My friend had trouble telling Indians from Eskimos and asked one small boy which he was. The boy merely hung his head and was speechless with humiliation at being identified with either group.

My friend tried to tell the children that they should be proud of their heritage, but this was frowned on by older members of the community, and when he later divided the children into baseball teams, called the Cowboys and the Indians, the children were delighted, but the adults horrified. He was later fired for "stirring up trouble."



"HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS?..."