

Indian Issues and Anti-Indian Organizing

Introduction

This section examines the evolution of modern anti-Indian movements in North America, and the varied ways that Indian and Indian support movements have responded to them. It also contends that anti-Indian movements cannot be countered without an understanding of deeper economic, political, and cultural issues.

While the nature of relations between the first European settlers in North America and the Continent's indigenous people was at times ambiguous, it did not take long before the colonies and, later, the American state launched an all-out assault against the native population.

Native lands were also coveted by railroad, mineral, logging, and other interests, which widely advertised the promise of "free land."

Settlers were sent to claim land within the sovereign territories of many Indian nations, often unaware of or ill-prepared for the hostile reception they would face. The inevitable clash 'justified' a rescue by federal armed forces, thus securing the land for business interests. Tribal leaders were convinced, coerced, or tricked into signing a total of 371 treaties up through the 1870s, ceding almost all their land to the government, save for some small reservations. By Supreme Court ruling, these remaining tracts of land constitute "dependent nations."

While some Indian resistance was crushed by dramatic massacres, for the most part Native Americans were subdued by a combination of disease, alcohol, food rationing, the cooperation of Indian collaborators, and the theft of children for boarding schools — a situation not radically unlike today. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), until its transfer to the Interior Department, was part of the War Department. White homesteaders were used to police Indian people — some taking the task more seriously and viciously than the Army would have them, while others came to see Indian neighbors as good trading partners. In 1936, federal authorities established tribal councils on the reservations, with some superseding traditional forms of government.

Nevertheless, even against these overwhelming odds, the traditional cultures and religions (and even some governments) survived. Technologies and practices adapted to Western society, but the core values of Native peoples remained, including their strong relationship to the land.

**Native Americans have
survived against tall odds**

The Anti-Indian Movement

The modern anti-Indian movement was created out of a non-Indian "backlash" against gains made by Indians since the 1960s. At least three major factors motivate anti-Indian groups.

- 1) The call for "equal rights for whites." This concept is based on the assumption that increased political and jurisdictional power of the tribes infringes on the liberties of the individual American taxpayer. The use of civil rights imagery can reach such extremes that whites are described as an oppressed people victimized by "Red Apartheid." The legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is invoked to support an agenda to roll back Indian rights.
- 2) Access to natural resources. These resources can be fish or game, land or water, but the case is the same: no citizens should have "special rights" to use the resources. The case is made in anti-treaty pamphlets such as "Are We Giving

**Gains of the '60s Led to
an Anti-Indian Backlash**

SPEAR...



...THIS !!!

This sign was found in a tavern in the Eagle River, Wisconsin area prior to the 1987 spearing season.

America Back to the Indians?," "200 Million Custers," and the ironically titled book *Don't Blame the Indians: Native Americans and the Mechanized Destruction of Fish and Wildlife* by Massachusetts writer Ted Williams.

- 3) Economic dependency. In a rural reflection of the "Welfare Cadillac" myths used against urban African Americans, all reservation Indians are said to wallow in welfare, food stamps, free housing and medical care, affirmative action programs, and gargantuan federal cash payments — all tax-free, of course. (No one has to pay state sales tax on reservations, but otherwise Indians have had virtually identical tax obligations as non-Indians.) While any quick drive through a reservation will show the Third World conditions Indian people have to live under, anti-Indian groups maintain that these conditions are caused by alcoholism and the breakdown of the Indian family, rather than the reverse. In the same breath, the groups denounce any tribal effort to establish economic self-sufficiency, through appropriate industries, small businesses, tourism campaigns, gaming, or the sale of natural resources.

Anti-Indian groups deny any trace of racism, and will even point to members whose great-grandmothers were Indian in order to prove their point. There are also some racists who will make an 'exception' for Indians, whom they romanticize as noble savages resisting big government. Even such figures as Posse Comitatus leader James Wickstrom has written of Indians as a "pre-Christian warrior race" (not unlike Hitler's images of ancient Teutonic warriors) that is being driven off the land by "Jewish bankers."

The Northwest

The modern anti-Indian movement was born in the Pacific Northwest, and moved from there to the Northern Great Plains, the Upper Midwest, the Southwest, East Coast, and Canada. Along the Pacific coast, where tribal fish harvests form the basis of the traditional tribal economies, the backlash to Indian rights was first felt in the 1960s. In Washington, Oregon, and Northern California, these harvests were seen as a threat to the commercial fishing industry (despite the real threat posed by pollution and huge fishing trawlers). Washington anti-Indian groups mushroomed in the 1970s, after federal judge George Boldt ruled that tribal members were entitled to 50 percent of the state salmon harvest.

The leading anti-Indian group, ICERR (Interstate Congress for Equal Rights and Responsibilities), and several property owners' associations on Indian reservations were joined by such groups as Steelhead/Salmon Protective Association and Wildlife Network (S/SPAWN). The groups formed a base in state legislatures, in local communities, and among violence-prone vigilantes who regularly shot at and beat up Indians. At one point in the early 1980s, the anti-treaty forces got a statewide referendum passed, but could not sustain their movement after the state finally began to negotiate with the tribes on a government-to-government basis.

Meanwhile, in the Northern Great Plains, land and water disputes erupted between the tribes and white ranchers. The result was the formation of Montana groups like the East Slope Taxpayers Association, All Citizens Equal (ACE), and the Citizens Rights Organization (CRO); groups in the Dakotas like the Cheyenne River Landowners Association, and the North Dakota Committee for Equality; and Nebraska groups like the Concerned Citizens Council. Some of these groups have members living on reservations, which have been heavily allotted (divided) since the 1920s. Resident whites voted for Bennett County to secede from South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation, and other whites have opposed many forms of tribal jurisdiction.

Connections between some of these groups and organized right-wing networks also exist. The Center for World Indigenous Studies, based in Washington state, has documented links between anti-Indian groups and

Christian Identity and neo-Nazi organizations such as the Idaho-based Aryan Nations. In its report "Competing Sovereignties in North America and the Right-Wing and Anti-Indian Movements," the Center states that "individuals associated with the anti-Indian movement now appear to have occasional, if not frequent association with right-wing extremist groups."

The Midwest

In 1983 the United States Supreme Court *Voigt* decision affirmed the treaty rights of the Anishinabe (Chippewa) to harvest off-reservation natural resources in northern Wisconsin, northeastern Minnesota, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The decision upheld the treaties of 1837, 1842, and 1854, which secured United States access to the Lake Superior region's timber and copper. Many local settlers maintained a respectful relationship with the Chippewa through the 1800s — even protecting the Wisconsin Chippewa from forced removal — until the beginnings of sport fishing. Traditional Chippewa spearfishing in Wisconsin-ceded territory was outlawed in 1908. At the same time as the 1983 court ruling, mining companies began moving back into ceded territory, potentially endangering the fish, deer, and wild rice that the treaties guarantee to the Chippewa.

Anti-Indian sentiment in Northern Wisconsin — seemingly dormant since white vigilantes attacked Menominee Indians in 1975 — reemerged in opposition to the Chippewa in the 1980s. Some whites decried what they saw as the "rape" of the fish resource, vital to the local tourist economy, even though the Chippewa never took more than three percent of the fish. Among the local groups were Equal Rights for Everyone (ERFE), and the Wisconsin Alliance for Rights and Resources (WARR). The groups merged in 1987 with Protect Americans' Rights and Resources (PARR), led by paper mill foreman Larry Peterson. PARR committed itself to lobbying Congress to limit the legal power of the treaties. PARR had some clout in the state's powerful paper industry, which at one time unsuccessfully urged the state AFL-CIO to take an anti-treaty stance.

At the same time, protesters began gathering at boat landings on spring nights during the two-week Chippewa spearfishing season. They chanted taunts such as "timber niggers," "welfare warriors," and "spearchuckers," and carried signs reading, "Save a Spawning Walleye, Spear a Pregnant Squaw," and "Too Bad Custer Ran Out of Bullets." The often-drunk crowds threw rocks, bottles, and full beer cans. The image-conscious PARR leader-

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ship left it up to individual members whether to protest at the lakes. This initial timidity led to the formation of a more militant group, Stop Treaty Abuse (STA), led by pizza parlor owner Dean Crist.

Crist marketed an alcoholic beverage he dubbed "Treaty Beer," and organized mass rallies and civil disobedience, claiming to take his inspiration from Dr. King.

Starting in 1988, STA organized thousands of protesters to go to the boat landings, and the level of violence increased markedly. On the roads leading to and from the lakes, spearers' and other treaty supporters' tires were slashed, vehicles run into ditches, and elders nearly run down. On the landings, Chippewa were assaulted, threatened with death, harassed with whistles and mock drum chants, and pipe bombs were exploded. On the lakes,

spearfishing boats were rammed, swamped, and blockaded by protest boats, youths fired metal ball bearings with high-powered wristrocket slingshots, and snipers fired rifles from the shoreline. Spearer Walt Bresette said in 1990, "Currently, the only Chippewa who are spearfishing are those willing to risk their lives. Everyone else, through violence or threat of violence, has already lost their rights."

While the anti-treaty groups seem home-grown in the depressed northeastern counties of the state, some links are evident. Central Wisconsin is the headquarters of some right-wing populist groups, such as the John Birch Society and the Posse Comitatus. Crist was quoted in the Wisconsin State Journal in 1990 as saying that "David Duke is saying the same stuff we have been saying, like he might have been reading it from STA literature." In 1989, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported the formation of a death squad, armed with land mines and



Protesters at Lake Nokomis



Dean Crist, STA founder and anti-treaty activist

offering money for the assassination of two Indian leaders. The same year, notes were found of a phone call from the "ANUnderground" (a possible reference to the Aryan Nations) urging anti-Indian snipers to open fire on spearing boats on their way to the lakes. PARR leaders Wayne Powers and Darlene Hangartner also spoke at meetings of the state's minuscule Populist Party chapter; and Milwaukee Skinheads of the White Patriots League have attended PARR rallies.

Elsewhere in the Midwest, the potential still exists for similar anti-Indian movements to grow. Opposition to the Chippewa fishing in Michigan has developed since the 1979 *Fox* decision upheld treaty rights, resulting in groups such as the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) and Enough Is Enough. In northeast Minnesota, only the Fond du Lac Chippewa spearfish, with no protests yet apparent. In Northwest Minnesota, some non-Indian residents of the White Earth Chippewa Reservation have opposed Chippewa claims on lands illegally allotted (divided) earlier this century. White Earth Equal Rights Committee and Totally Equal Americans (TEA) have taken up the cause. (As with timber and water rights, the issue of land rights has serious economic implications.) Elsewhere throughout the United States, the anti-Indian backlash also centers on cultural/religious issues, such as Indian efforts to change demeaning team mascots, to preserve burial sites, or rebury their dead interred in museums and displayed as curiosities and tourist attractions.

National Groups

Anti-Indian groups throughout the continent are beginning to better coordinate their efforts. Both PARR and ICERR say they are national organizations representing thousands of members throughout the United States.

But they and other groups have united in a national coalition known as the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA). Its executive and advisory boards reflect participation from at least 13 states. CERA's national headquarters and president, Bill Covey, are based in Montana. CERA concentrates on pressuring Congress to modify or abrogate treaties. Perhaps the most insidious national groups are those that use legitimate sports or conservation images to cover for their anti-Indian activity. Among these groups are Trout Unlimited, the National Wildlife Association, and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The potential for local chapters of other environmental, sports, animal rights, or resort owners organizations to be manipulated into anti-Indian groups is significant.

The Pro-Indian Movement

The pro-Indian movement contains both Indian and Indian support groups. Many of the support groups were specifically founded in response to the formation of anti-Indian groups, but have since taken on a life of their own and tackled other issues. The movement supports treaty rights, and counters racism, as well as cultural and religious bias directed against Indian people. The support groups take it as their duty to counter racism in their own non-Indian communities. This is done through cultural events, media work, TV and radio programs, distribution of factual materials, and the development of school curricula on Indian history and culture.

Wisconsin Indian groups won the introduction of a mandatory public school curriculum in 1990, largely because legislators agreed that anti-Indian beliefs should not so easily be passed on to the next generation. PARR announced plans to picket schools in protest of the move. In a strange twist, such anti-Indian groups have focused more public attention on Indian values and traditions, resulting in the long term in a wider public understanding — precisely the opposite of their goals. Some Chippewa have publicly thanked PARR for agitating against them, since they have made more legal gains than they would have in its absence. Other Indian groups around the continent also see anti-Indian activity as an ironic opportunity for improving their situation beyond the status quo that existed before that activity began.

Many Indian activists are acutely aware of government policies of "divide-and-conquer" when it comes to their white neighbors. Even more so than most support groups, some Indian groups have developed a sophisticated analysis of non-Indian communities, tying declines in the economy such as unemployment and the closing of small businesses to the search for an Indian scapegoat. They tend to emphasize the outside "common enemy" — whether governments or corporations — that confronts their communities. Tied to this com-

mon enemy is often a threat to the environment facing Indians and non-Indians alike.

In South Dakota, Lakota (Sioux) Indians and white ranchers were at odds over water rights in the 1970s, until underground water supplies were threatened by mining and energy interests. Lakota leaders approached the ranchers with the news that, if corporate plans were allowed to proceed, there would be no water left in ten years to argue about. Together with environmentalists they formed the Black Hills Alliance, which successfully headed off major mining and coal slurry projects. This three-way alliance was repeated around the country, from the Western Shoshone fight to stop the M-X missile in Nevada, to the Cowboy and Indian Alliance (CIA) in Montana's coal country, to Wisconsin rural whites' support for using Chippewa treaties to stop metallic sulfide mines.

Legal Strategies

Pro-Indian groups use legal, educational, organizing and action strategies to lessen the appeal and impact of anti-Indian groups. Legal strategies center both on strengthening the treaties in federal court and on blocking harassment by anti-Indian groups. Any court victory for the tribes presents anti-Indian groups with a *fait accompli*, since few such decisions have been overturned on appeal. The risk is, of course, that decisions can go both ways, and Indian nations can find their sovereignty infringed by unsympathetic judges and courts.

In Washington state, the anti-Indian movement was largely marginalized by a court decision mandating that state and tribal governments co-manage natural resources in treaty-ceded territories. The decision gave the tribes legal standing to limit off-reservation projects that may endanger salmon. The interest of the resource was put ahead of either Indian or non-Indian interests, removing S/SPAWN's main arguments.

In Wisconsin, federal judge Barbara Crabb issued a mixed series of rulings on the treaties during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991, the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa asked her to keep protesters away from the boat landings, to order three county sheriffs to enforce laws against protesters, and to stop protesters from physical harassing tribal members, especially on the lakes. She rejected the first two requests, but granted the third — issuing an injunction that strictly limited STA's direct action options. The order was backed by undercover observers from the FBI and United States Marshals (who ironically were the main culprits in violence against the American

Indian Movement on the Pine Ridge reservation and elsewhere). Anti-Indian leaders also knew that the state's Hate Crimes Law could be used to stiffen penalties against them if they assaulted Indians. That law has since been ruled unconstitutional, however (see Legislative section). On the one hand, federal and state intervention may strengthen the identification of Indians with "big government" in the eyes of some populist-minded whites. On the other hand, Crabb's court order effectively scared hundreds of potential protesters away from the lakes, severely embarrassing both STA and PARR.

Education and Organizing Strategies

The most important long-term strategy employs both education and organizing. This is especially true in the white "border towns" near reservations, where even a small anti-racist minority can dramatically lessen anti-Indian sentiment. The use of reservation radio stations — such as WOJB on Lac Courte Oreilles (Wisconsin), and KILI on Pine Ridge — has proved invaluable in this effort. Many educational strategies focus on building cultural understanding, fostering knowledge about the legal basis of treaties, and promoting the idea of living in peace with one's neighbors.

Another approach is to refute the false claims made by anti-Indian groups about resources, welfare, and other issues. In doing so, it is important to recognize the irrationality of many of these claims, and realize they are put forth for deeper economic, political, and psychological reasons. In other words, if one "fact" is effectively disproven, it will quickly be replaced by another fraudulent claim. The "facts" are there to fill more substantive needs; only by addressing those needs, and putting forth an entirely new framework for viewing the conflict, can we hope to erode the grassroots base of anti-Indian groups. It is also important not to let these groups set the

agenda for debate, with irrelevant discussions about fish populations or blood quantum statistics, but to focus on issues to which *they* have to respond.

Indian activists are often very familiar with their adversaries in anti-Indian groups. They may have gone to school together, or have had business relationships. These ac-

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tivists often refrain from taking on hard-core racist groups directly, preferring to address their comments to the groups' followers, who may be genuinely affected by the groups' scare tactics, or are simply going along for the excitement. Native leaders go through pains to emphasize that their land claims are not made at the expense of local non-Indians. In a key 1980 speech,

American Indian Movement leader Bill Means said that the Lakota claim to the sacred Black Hills covered only state, federal, and corporate-owned lands, not private landowners. A subsequent claims suit by the Sioux Nation Council narrowed in on government lands.

In a 1987 article in the *Daybreak* newspaper, Native journalist Ismaelillo offered an original educational approach to land claims disputes. He wrote that many white settlers were, in fact, lied to when the federal government told them they had clear title to their new homesteads. By not telling them of the clouded title stemming from previous Indian ownership, the government committed an act of fraud. People or local communities whose lands may be covered by Indian land claims could, therefore, refrain from taking action against the tribe, and instead sue the federal government for compensation, with Indian support. In Wisconsin, the Chippewa have taken a similar approach, by trying to redirect sports groups' anger toward state government, which has tied its lowering of fish bag limits to spearfishing, even though it knew for years that the real damage to the fish population was caused by habitat destruction and mismanagement.

Two parallel networks were born out of the Wisconsin treaty crisis, which worked in different but complementary ways. Honor Our Neighbors Origins and Rights (HONOR) is primarily a church-based organization, involved in lobbying, and working closely with tribal governments. It has focused most of its educational work on racism, whether from PARR and STA, or from the anti-timber rights agenda of the Wisconsin Counties Association. The Midwest Treaty Network (MTN) is a looser alliance of grassroots pro-treaty groups, including reservation associations. Its base is mainly in the environmental and social justice movements, and it helped create the Witness for Nonviolence to actively monitor violations of Chippewa rights. Its educational work stresses positive economic and environmental uses of the treaties. HONOR and MTN have grown together in the realization that they need to confront both the racism emerging in the region, and provide alternative plans for change that can pre-empt such racism in the future.

Action Strategies

Ultimately, once people have been educated, they can be mobilized. A number of successful action strategies have been used by Indian and Indian support movements to directly counter anti-Indian groups.

For example, STA leader Crist marketed Treaty Beer nationwide as a fundraising and publicity gimmick, but didn't realize how his product would unite pro-Indian groups. Mass rallies at the Washington state capitol secured a denunciation of "hate in a can" by the governor. On the steps of the Wisconsin state capitol, community leaders poured the beer into a pink toilet bowl. A Chicago Indian group successfully petitioned

FIVE GOALS OF THE WITNESS PROGRAM

The MTN's Witness program had five purposes, not all easily coexisting in the same project:

- 1) To be a presence for all the Chippewa families at the boat landings, so they don't take 100 percent of the abuse;
- 2) To show by this presence that not all non-Indians oppose treaty rights, as is often conveyed in the media;
- 3) To prevent a high level of tension and violence, with a calming influence, and the deterrent use of cameras and recorders;
- 4) To actively use nonviolent tactics to defuse tense or violent situations;
- 5) To document harassment, intimidation, and violence that does occur, using detailed notes, photos, and audio/video tape.

local liquor stores not to carry the product. Three breweries that started canning the beer — in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Louisiana — were one-by-one threatened with boycotts by HONOR, and dropped the "true brew of the working man." Crist gave up after four frustrating years.

Some action strategies require more commitment and risk. At the height of some conflicts, activists have put themselves physically between Indian and anti-Indian forces in visible displays of support. During the 1973 Wounded Knee siege, and the 1986 Big Mountain crisis, non-Indians stood in front of government forces attempting to evict people from the land. A peace camp was also set up between Mohawk and government positions in 1990 by the Montreal-based Centre for Nonviolence Resources. All these efforts are a way to express that any assault on Indian people could also injure non-Indians.

This strategy developed in a highly organized and effective way in Wisconsin, with the Witness for Nonviolence. The Witness started informally during the 1987 spearfishing season when local women stood with Chippewa friends at the boat landings, in a gesture of moral support. Within two years, the multiracial Witness came to involve treaty supporters not only from all parts of Wisconsin, but from around the nation and world. By 1991, a total of about 2000 treaty supporters had documented anti-Indian harassment at the lakes.

Red Cliff speaker Andrew Gokee commented that "The more Witnesses on a given night, the more peaceful the lake will be." Even some protesters have been heard to say to each other, "Don't say that, the

"Witnesses will hear you." Other protesters have said to witnesses, "You white people are all traitors," and "We have red niggers, black niggers, and a few white niggers, too."

Witnesses are not pro-treaty protesters. At the Chippewa's request, they don't wear political buttons, carry signs, chant slogans, or carry on any unnecessary dialogue with the anti-treaty protesters. They are identified only by white armbands, and have signed a pledge of peace saying they will not participate in any conflict. Yet state and federal politicians tried to discredit Witnesses as merely the pro-treaty counterparts of PARR and STA, and as an obstacle to peace. This may be because one of the main targets of documentation has been the state-coordinated law enforcement effort, which has been spotty at best. While in some counties riot police helped protect the Chippewa, in counties with the largest PARR/STA memberships, many officers either looked the other way, or openly sympathized with the protests. The 1990 Witness report detailed incidents of racial intimidation, violence, and police response. The documentation was used not only for legal purposes, but for political purposes, such as responding to Gov. Thompson's contention that little racism was evident at the protests, and there were "no ugly incidents."

By 1991, the Chippewa and Witnesses regularly outnumbered the dwindling numbers of protesters during the spearing season. The media proclaimed 'Crist's Last Stand,' but it is abundantly clear that STA and PARR are down to a hard core that is far more racist and threatening.

Both a continuing Witness and police presence will be needed in the future. Some resort owners stopped supporting the groups because their racism and vio-

lence began to keep tourists away. And the fact that groups claiming to protect fish didn't lift a finger about threats from mercury and mining was not lost on environmentally conscious Wisconsinites. In a May 1991, *Wisconsin State Journal* poll, 59 percent of southern Wisconsinites supported treaty rights, and an amazing 42 percent of northerners agreed.

As each year passes, the Witness wrestles with various questions. Witness' obvious support for the Chippewa, such as standing between the protesters and the drum, can at times lessen the credibility of their documentation, unless it is collected by unimpeachable electronic means (such as camcorders). Also, protesters' attacks on Witnesses can become a media issue, detracting attention from attacks on Indians, unless it is made clear that Indians remain the primary target, and Witnesses are only present at their invitation.

Other potential pitfalls need to be addressed by Indian support groups. One is the stereotyping of working-class whites as "rednecks," without taking into account the similar economic forces working against both reservation and off-reservation communities. Local whites should be encouraged and supported to take a strong role in Indian support work. Another area to develop is a respectful relationship with grassroots Indian organizers, by keeping out of internal tribal politics. Non-Indians should limit their involvement in Indian issues to questions that revolve around non-Indian individuals and governments to limit Indian rights. Lastly, the cultural distinctiveness of Indian peoples needs to be protected not only from racists, but from romantic New Age consumerists of the "Wannabe" tribe, and from political activists who see Indian resistance as identical to other anti-racist struggles, lacking its unique national, cultural and spiritual dimensions.