

American Indian Problems of Access and Cultural Continuity

Thomas Vennum, Jr.

That you may not destroy the [wild] rice in working the timber, also the rapids and falls in the streams I will lend you to saw your timber. Also a small tract of land to make a garden to live on while you are working the timber. I do not make you a present of this. I merely lend it to you. This is my answer. My Great Father is great, and out of respect for him I will not refuse him, but as an exchange of civility I must see and feel the benefits of this loan, and the promises fulfilled. (*Recollections of an Ojibway chief regarding negotiations with the federal government leading to the St. Peter's treaty of 1837*)

For more than two decades visitors to the Festival of American Folklife have been treated to a rich cross section of American Indian cultures. In recontextualized settings on the Mall, members of many tribes have shared their repertoires of songs and dances; constructed their wigwams, tipis, and brush arbors; coiled, glazed and fired their pottery; woven their baskets, seamless yarn bags, and saddle blankets. Festival visitors do not see these traditions in their natural contexts—on distant reservations or in pueblo plazas. Admiring the skills and enjoying the presentations, we assume that they must be well and flourishing in their home communities. The Festival this year addresses the issue of what is required to keep such traditions alive today. At home many of these

craftspeople and performers face economic hardship, their talents and aesthetic knowledge are ignored or considered obsolete, and the materials required to support their efforts are inaccessible or endangered.

Traditional lifestyles throughout the world depend upon a myriad of factors for their survival. While we seem to take their continuation for granted, our oblivious attitude to environmental dangers is paralleled to a great degree by our ignorance of the problems threatening the equally fragile cultural ecosystem. The healthy survival of certain crafts, for instance, depends upon a correct alignment of social and economic agendas with the natural environment. The Great Basin basketry traditions of Nevada tribes are threatened with extinction by colliding interests of Indians and non-Indians. Much of the Truckee Meadows willow habitat has already been plowed under for housing development. Where once the Paiute, Shoshone and Washoe customarily moved out early each spring to collect willow stems alongside streams where the bush grew naturally, today most remaining willow is on restricted private property, fenced in for cattle grazing or farming. In the arid climate of Nevada the willow, a thirsty bush, competes with cattle for limited water, so ranchers have attempted full-scale eradication of the plant, weeding it out or spraying it with herbicides. The traditional technology of basketry requires splitting the stems lengthwise into splints, and the centuries-old means of doing so involves holding one end of the stem between the teeth. Thus basket-makers, even if they can find willow, risk

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Wuzzie George, a Northern Paiute from Stillwater, Nevada, creates splints for weft used in weaving baskets. While one end is held between the teeth, each stem is split into three sections. The pith is removed from the inside of each strip and the splints shaved with a pocketknife. (Photo by Margaret M. Wheat, courtesy University of Nevada-Reno Library)

exposing themselves to toxic chemicals in working with the material. The decreasing access to willow and well-grounded fear of its contamination discourage Nevada Indians from searching it out. Many have given up basketmaking as a result.

In a study of traditional arts and crafts, the anthropologist Nelson H.H. Graburn points out a number of factors upon which their persistence depends. As with Nevada willows, the availability of traditional raw materials is a crucial determinant. But beyond that, notes Graburn, are the knowledge of skills and the aesthetics of the art, a continued demand for the items—either for local consumption or through markets outside the culture—and time for the artisan to work in creating the object without distraction. The question most frequently posed by Festival visitors to craft demonstrators is “How long does it take to make?” For in our consumer world of instant gratification, we are understandably curious about the time, skills and effort demanded of true artisans. Our relentless search for “bargains” leads invariably to

the next question: “How much does it cost?”

Prestige gained by the craftsman from his or her home community is essential in maintaining a tradition, and if the item has some significant role in the belief systems of the people, that too will enhance its chances for survival. Concludes Graburn: “Much as we are nostalgic about these loved arts, people do not go on making them for our pleasure if our society and technology have destroyed the incentive to do so. They go off and become bus drivers or betel-nut sellers...” (1976:13).

The American Indian program at this year’s Festival of American Folklife intends to address head-on the entire issue of *access* in a broadly conceived interpretation of the term. Simply put, what are the problems Indian people face maintaining their traditional cultures and thus their cultural identity as tribes and as individuals? Almost always the answer will identify impediments imposed by the dominant Euro-American society, motivated by economic, political, or social considerations. Access to natural



Datsolalee, Washoe basketmaker, in the 1920s with two of her prize baskets. She is considered by many to have been the unsurpassed master of the craft, based on the uniqueness of her designs, the perfection of her shapes, and the tightness of her work. (Photo courtesy Nevada State Museum)

materials such as willows is an obvious problem; others are more subtle.

The general despoilment of the environment and exploitation of natural resources on the American continent have resulted in the disappearance of many animal and plant species long held sacred by Native Americans—species ritually required in religious ceremonies and healing, often providing the very basis of a tribe's material culture. Along the northwest coast, for example, the clear cutting of vast stands of old-growth redwood and cedar by the lumber industry has impinged on the native cultures of the area, who formerly used timber for canoes, longhouses and totemic figures, and bark for medicine, clothing, dyes, baskets and musical instruments. Many of these clear-cut areas are being reseeded by the industry, but now with Douglas fir that grows much faster and can be harvested earlier for profit. Meanwhile, the decline of cedar and redwood is hastened by their increasing value as ornamental wood for Japanese furniture and rot-resistant American patio and sun-deck construction. Such materials are no longer as accessible to the people who for centuries have lived among the northwest

coastal forests. For them, these life-giving trees were sacred, figured prominently in their legends and belief systems, and were treated accordingly with respect rather than exploited for commercial advantage.

Access to traditional food sources is another problem addressed by the Festival. When American Indians were forcibly settled on reservations, the land chosen was often far removed from their traditional homelands. Foods customarily associated with their subsistence economies—especially wild game—were no longer available. Restricted by reservation boundaries, Indians found the more practical—or the only—alternative was to turn to the canned goods of the dominant society. Elders expressed a general distaste for these items, often citing their consumption as a cause of poor health. Complained Josephine Clark of Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota: “Well, long time ago people didn't get sick like they do now, you know. Sometimes I blame the food we eat now. Maybe it's the food that does it...See, the Indians all had their land. They had [wild] potatoes, they had [wild] rice, they had maple sugar, they had deer meat, they had ducks—all these wild stuff, you know, they eat. They never bought anything from canned stuff. And they fixed their food their own way.” (*University of South Dakota*: tape 241, p. 24)

Indian access to recognition is perhaps the most subtle of the themes considered in this year's Festival program. Ironically, in our educational system Americans are rarely reminded of the great debt owed to the original inhabitants of the continent. Indian people began sharing their foodstuffs before the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth Rock; later they showed how to cultivate corn—a crop now at the foundation of American agriculture and the world economy. They taught centuries-old technologies and never-bettered strategies for survival in the wilderness, from making canoes, snowshoes and toboggans to tapping maple trees for sugar and harvesting pumpkins, squash and wild rice. The symbiotic relationship that developed between Indians and fur traders was in fact essential to the westward expansion and development of the North American continent.

To address the question of access to recognition, this year we have brought spokesmen from the Iroquois Nation. Through competition in games on the National Mall and in workshops on our narrative stage, they will remind visitors that the game of lacrosse, increasingly popular on high school and college campuses, was originally an *Indian* game. It was intricately bound up with legend and ceremony and widely played throughout the eastern half of North America at the time of European contact—facts little known or credited to the Indian, even by many who now play the sport. When the great Indian athlete Jim Thorpe was stripped of his Olympic medals, the action was as racially motivated as the decision in 1880 by the National Lacrosse Association to declare Indians “professionals” and effectively exclude them from international competition.

The Collision of Cultures

The problems of access, of course, began with the arrival of Europeans in what Indian people (and some historians) have come to refer to as “The Invasion of North America.” In the process of colonization and increasing territorial expansion, there was an inevitable collision of cultures and displacement of native peoples. Driven by economic forces of the fur trade and the zeal of missionaries, the Ojibway living at the east end of Lake Superior at the time of contact were induced to become middlemen and guides for traders and missionaries, and their language became the *lingua franca* of barter throughout the area. Acquiring firearms from traders, they systematically drove out less powerful peoples from the area where the Ojibway are settled today: northern Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Indians were viewed as inferior “savages” whose way of life and landbase simply interfered with the expansion of the frontier, justified as it was by the theory of “Manifest Destiny.” In the 19th century, a number of expedient but drastic measures were adopted to solve “the Indian problem,” ranging from concentrating tribes onto reservations (thus acquiring their former lands and restricting their movements) to removing



Willows destroyed by cutting along a stream in Carson Valley, Nevada. (Photo by Catherine S. Fowler)

them to distant territories (such as Oklahoma, when southeastern tribes were forced to march on foot in “The Trail of Tears” in the late 1830s). In some cases outright genocide was seen as the only solution, such as the attempted extermination of the Apache in the southwest. Our Yaqui participants in this year’s Festival are descendants of political refugees who fled north from Sonora, Mexico, in the early 20th century, as soldiers deliberately attempted to kill off the tribe.

The very way that reservations were created affects current problems of access. Usually land was selected that was deemed “unsuitable” for the White man’s needs, which often meant barren or rocky topography useless for farming or lumbering. In one of the greatest recent ironies, five of the twelve sites initially selected by the U.S. Department of Energy for dumpsites to contain radioactive waste were on Indian land, one of them belonging by treaty to the Menominee. When the Menominee Reservation was plotted, it did not include Lake Shawano, traditionally the source of their wild rice. The new reservation land was so rocky that it precluded farming to substitute for the loss of wild rice, their traditional subsistence crop. But a century later, the Wolf River batholith on the reservation was eyed covetously by the Energy Department as the perfect crystalline rock to contain nuclear waste.

Reservations resulted from treaties entered into between the Indians and federal government. At the time they were negotiated Indians were generally unaware of the government's hidden agenda. In surrendering vast tracts of their lands, they understood that Whites merely wished to extract timber and minerals from the areas and then perhaps move on, little realizing that the land would be opened for settlement by non-Indians. In exchange for their concessions, Indians were adamant and specific about their continued right to practice aboriginal pursuits on ceded territories, perpetually free to hunt, fish, forage and gather materials. As Chief Martin of the Ottawa Lake Ojibway protested to the Governor of Wisconsin in 1843, "We have no objections to the white man's working the mines and the timber and making farms. But we reserve the birch bark and cedar, for canoes, the [wild] rice and [maple] sugar trees and the privilege of hunting without being disturbed by the whites."

For many reasons, Indian people never attempted until recently to exercise fully these off-reservation rights. In court cases, treaty language—never very clear—has been interpreted and reinterpreted, not always in the Indian's favor. Still, following certain landmark court decisions such as the Voigt decision (1983) affecting northern Wisconsin, Indian people suddenly find free access to practices and resources that have gone untapped for more than a century. In newly attempting to exercise their old rights—be they salmon fishing in Washington, or out-of-season deer hunting in Wisconsin—or even to regain territories illegally taken from them such as Oneida lands in New York, native peoples have engendered a new wave of resentment from their non-Indian neighbors, leading to protests, demonstrations and even ugly physical confrontations. Upstate New Yorkers, outraged over Cayuga land claims, fail to understand why they should be affected by legalities they know nothing about; northern Wisconsin sports-fishermen are angered when Ojibway spear walleyes in the traditional manner—a right granted in their 1854 treaty and upheld in court. Anti-treaty rights groups have been

formed with names like "Equal Rights for Everyone," insisting that they should not be affected by events more than a century ago. "This is 1989," they argue, "not 1854." Gaining access to the law and justice in redressing wrongs has been a long and arduous struggle for Indian people.

Reservations were but one solution to "The Indian Problem." In the latter half of the 19th century, programs to assimilate Indians into the great American "melting pot" were intensified. Ultimately the aim was to award them citizenship and suffrage rights that accompanied that privilege. To prepare their entry into society, every effort was made to eradicate their traditional cultures. Missionaries moved onto reservations to stamp out "heathen" religious practices; Indian children were trooped off to federal boarding schools, where they were deliberately intermixed with children from other tribes, forbidden from wearing traditional dress and given uniforms, punished for speaking their native tongues, and otherwise forced to conform to a non-Indian model.

Meanwhile, the reservations themselves—the last remaining landbase for most tribes—came under siege with the Dawes Act of 1887, which effectively broke up the communally held reservation property by allotting the land to individuals. Ostensibly this was to instill a "free-enterprise" spirit in Indians, induce them to take up farming in place of traditional hunting and foraging, and encourage personal initiative over tribal decisions. In actuality, the act was merely a ruse to further divide and conquer Indian people. Many Indians predictably sold off their allotments for short term gains; a period of land grabbing by unscrupulous non-Indian entrepreneurs siphoned off much of the rest. The result today is that many reservations resemble "checkerboards" of White/Indian land tracts. In some instances, tribes now own less than 10% of their original reservations.

Indian and White Attitudes to Property

In addressing the history of the access problem, it is important to contrast the Euro-American concept of land use with Indian attitudes towards land and property. Despite the fact that the majority of tribes in



The ancient Indian game of lacrosse, adopted by Whites in Canada in the mid-19th century and increasingly popular today on campuses, continues to be the major sport of many Indian peoples. These players were featured in a game at the 1975 Festival of American Folklife. (Photo by Jim Pickerell)

the east as well as riverine peoples on the Plains were settled agriculturalists, Europeans regarded Indians as nomadic peoples, roaming over large areas of land at will. There were no Indian mechanisms for surveying land to establish boundaries, no maps to delineate ownership, no fences or walls to contain properties; indeed, the very concept of private land was foreign to Indians. Indians nevertheless had a very accurate sense of geography based on topographical and other physical features. They relied on natural boundaries such as rivers, mountains, lakes and other landmarks, or they knew special areas to contain certain species. Although land itself was not owned individually, its resources could be claimed by a person or family. Indian people had various means of indicating usufructory rights to certain areas: the trees in a maple sugar grove were marked with a distinguishing slash of an axe, or wild rice on a lake was sheaved and bound using some distinctive twist or colored yarn to indicate the customary harvesting area of a particular family. Winter trapping areas were similarly

known, and transgressions by outsiders were dealt with severely according to Indian customary law.

At the root of Europeans' consternation was the failure to appreciate Indian ideas that land was communally and not personally owned. (This explains why Indian land claims in court today are pressed by sovereign Indian *nations*, not individuals.) In fact, an elaborate political interrelationship based on kinship operated to *ensure* property in communality, such as the marriage alliances binding together the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. Oblivious to these principles of ownership and sharing, Europeans were used instead to systems of private sedentary agriculture. What appeared on the surface to be perpetual nomadism needed to be checked or contained, Europeans asserted, if the continent were to be "properly" developed.

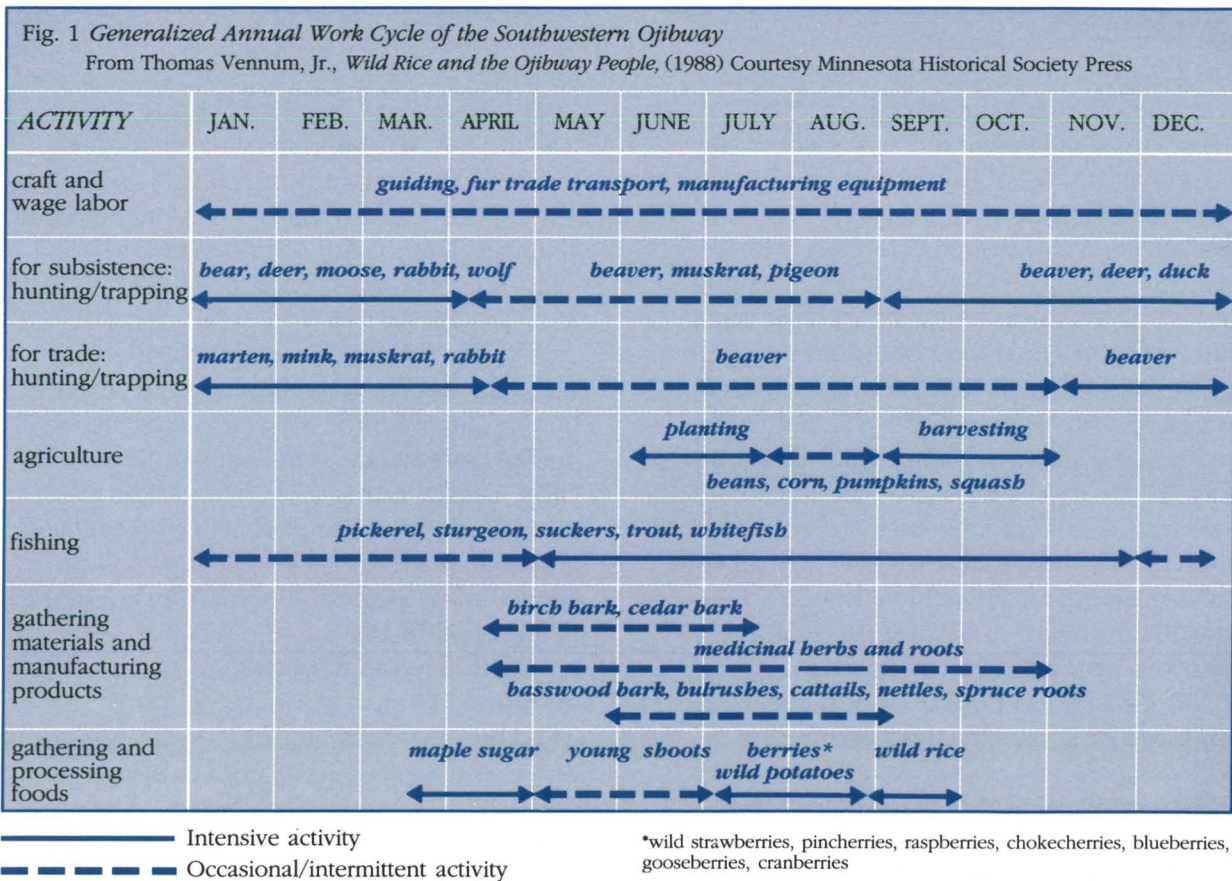
To be sure, many Indian people *had* to move in pursuit of food sources, as they practiced a subsistence economy. Their strategy for survival developed over centuries naturally led them to change locations

seasonally, as each item—animal or vegetal—“ripened.” In the case of the Ojibway, for whom wild rice was foremost a vital staple but later paramount in value as a trade item, a seasonal rhythm had evolved, closely synchronized with the natural environment. In the summer months Ojibway were concentrated in villages by lakes or rivers, engaging in fishing, some gardening, and berry gathering. In late summer they moved to the wild rice lakes to harvest, process and store rice for their winter needs. Then they traveled to areas most heavily populated with deer for their hunting. During the winter months they fanned out in single family units to hunting and trapping territories—each area large enough to ensure a sufficient game supply for the winter. Come spring they moved into the sugar bush to tap maple trees. With the arrival of summer they returned to the lakeside villages and the cycle began anew.

It should be apparent that forced settlement on reservations drastically reduced the

Ojibway’s ability to pursue their traditional subsistence economy and threatened their food supply. When reservation boundaries were drawn, they often excluded the band’s traditional rice lakes or sugar groves. Trapping and hunting were greatly reduced, and increased reliance on the foodstuffs of the dominant society was forced upon them. As a hedge against wild rice failures on the reservation, and taking advantage of the fact that treaties protected foraging rights even on territories ceded to the government, Ojibway began deliberately to sow wild rice seed in rivers and lakes previously lacking stands.

As settlers poured into the newly ceded territories, converting forests to farmland, they destroyed much of the former habitat of natural species. The resulting loss of game only exacerbated the situation for Indian people, as they continued to be deprived of the natural resources that had been the foundation of the traditional culture. Skills and craft traditions became obsolete as the





The traditional Indian technique for harvesting wild rice involves one person poling a boat through the stand while another bends stems over the gunwale and thrashes them with flailing sticks to release ripe kernels into the boat. The action of the boat and harvesters ensures that sufficient amounts of seed rice falls naturally into the lake to reseed the bed. (Photo by David Noble)

natural materials disappeared; the harvesting of birch trees for pulpwood, for example, hastened the decline of canoemaking. Today in the western Great Lakes region one can rarely find birch trees large enough to supply the bark needed for a canoe. As spruce forests were cut and stumps removed to render the land tillable, Ojibway lost access to spruce roots used traditionally to sew together bark sheets for wigwams, canoes and pails. Spruce stumps—ideal for parching wild rice because of their slow, steady burn—were no longer available.

One justification given in dispossessing Indians of their land was that they were not using it to its fullest productivity. This old European land-use theory continues to plague the world—its application in Brazil is the driving force of genocide throughout the Amazon rainforests. What is ignored is that Indians maintained a proper balance with their natural environment, practiced ecologically sound economies, and produced sustained yields for most of their needs. This approach is at odds with the western obsession to increase crop production and to harvest every last kernel. When these methods were applied to former Indian staples, the result often met with disaster. For example, when non-Indians first entered the wild rice



Mechanical wild rice harvester in Manitoba, 1971. Wild rice, an annual aquatic grass, requires that a certain amount of the seeds fall into the water and sink to the bottom to reseed the beds. These machines, which collect 90% of the rice, devastated many wild rice stands and were banned in Minnesota. (Photo by Dave Bonner, courtesy Supply and Services Canada, Photo Centre)

business in this century, they designed machinery to collect and process much larger volumes of rice than Indian technology had ever accommodated. Ojibway had mainly harvested only enough of this annual grass seed for their own needs; they allowed the remainder of the kernels to shell out naturally into the lake, fall to the bottom, and reseed the bed for the following year's crop. In fact, the traditional Indian means of harvesting rice by knocking ripened kernels



Dance of the Mandan Buffalo Band, depicted by Karl Bodmer, an artist accompanying Prince Maximilian of Wied in his exploration of the Missouri River, 1833-34. Members wear buffalo headdresses. Wrote Maximilian, "The men with the buffaloes' heads always keep in the dance at the outside of the group, imitate all the motions and the voice of this animal, as it timidly and cautiously retreats, looking around in all directions."

with flails into a canoe guaranteed that a good portion of the seed rice fell into the water. The Indians had always recognized this as good resource management, but incredibly the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources described the Indian harvesting method as "wasteful" in that so much of the crop was lost to the lake.

One of the first inventions to assist in the development of the wild rice industry was the mechanical harvester. A pontoon floating apparatus that worked like a lawnmower, it cut off every stalk of rice at water level and delivered its ripened panicle to a conveyor belt. These machines were so thorough in their collecting capacity that in their path of devastation there was little if any rice left to reseed the lakes naturally. Not only would such machinery, if widely adopted, put many Indian harvesters out of work, it had the potential of destroying many old rice stands forever. Accordingly,

the mechanical "picker" was prohibited by law in Minnesota in 1939.

Undaunted, industry-minded wild rice developers in the late 1960s turned their attentions to growing wild rice in artificial paddies, where all the advantages of modern agronomy—pesticides, fertilizers, controlled water levels and mechanization for all stages of processing—could be applied to produce the maximum harvest. When this technology was adopted recently by California growers, it created an enormous surplus; in 1986, more than 10 million pounds glutted the market. Since Minnesota paddy growers were faced with surplus rice, they began to "dump" it at fire-sale retail prices in towns near Indian reservations. The price Indians need to charge for their hand-harvested, natural lake rice is considerably higher. As a result, the market has shifted against them; many Ojibway have given up harvesting and selling their rice for the income it formerly



Beef issue to Standing Rock Sioux on ration day at Ft. Yates, North Dakota, 1876. Because buffalo, the traditional subsistence food, were nearly extinct, the government had to substitute cattle. Once every two weeks they were corralled, shot by police and issued to each family for butchering. (Photo courtesy National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

provided them. This income, though modest, was one they have come to count on for various purchases, such as, for example, back-to-school clothing for their children in the fall.

Resource Exploitation and Cultural Usurpation

At the root of many Indian problems of access to resources is the prevailing non-Indian attitude towards the natural world—that it exists to be exploited by man for short-term personal wealth and pleasure. It is important, however, not to romanticize “the noble Indian as ecologist” as some have done. Indians practiced sound conservation for pragmatic reasons. Although their respect for nature was reflected in various rituals such as “first feast” thanksgivings, or actions such as putting a pinch of tobacco as an offering in the ground when removing some root or plant or apologizing to a bear

before killing it, their motives were as much practical as spiritual.

Recent ethnohistorical studies of Indian resource management suggest that Indian use of the “gifts” of nature was strategically planned for the well-being of the community; special attention was given that the resource not be strained or depleted, thereby ensuring the same bounty for future generations. Today overproduction leading to depletion of resources is but one of the threats to the natural environment, depriving Indian people of traditional foods and materials. Waste and pollution are equally culpable. The wanton slaughter of bison—often merely for target practice from moving trains—had a devastating effect on many Plains tribes whose culture was so totally dependent upon this animal. Once numbering nearly fifty million, the bison were brought to the verge of extinction—at one time only several hundred survived. Often

the only items desired by the White man were bison tongues (a table delicacy) and furs for lap robes; the carcasses were simply left to rot. Such waste was viewed as a sacrilege by Indians for whom nearly every part of the animal had some use. Even dried dung was an essential fuel on the treeless Plains. After a kill, meat that was not consumed fresh on the spot was preserved for future use: sun-dried for jerky, or dried, pounded and mixed with fat for pemmican. Hides were sewn together for tipis or tanned for moccasins and other apparel, and sinews were converted into "Indian thread," tendons twisted together for cordage; even the stomach paunch and heart skin were used as containers. Bones were converted into tools, and the buffalo skull was retained for use in sacred ceremonies of the Sun Dance. When Plains tribes such as the Sioux were forced onto reservations, as part of their treaty rights they were promised annuities that included food supplies. Due to the near extinction of the bison, the government was forced to substitute beef cattle in their annual rations to the Sioux.

Pollution of all sorts has deprived Indians of access to traditional resources and occupations. Mineral tailings, oil spills, acid rain, herbicides and pesticides have all adversely affected the food chain and rendered inedible foods formerly relied upon. Mercury dumping by a paper mill in Dryden, Ontario, so severely polluted the river system that commercial fishing had to be banned by the government; summer resorts closed, so Indian fishing guides became unemployed. An Exxon mineral strike in northeastern Wisconsin, if developed, could well pollute Mole Lake downstream, the principal wild rice resource for Sokaogan Ojibway. The establishment of canneries in the 1890s in Alaskan areas of sea otter concentration polluted the environment and caused the sea otters to abandon their hauling grounds, where marine mammals habitually congregate when they leave the water.

Another form of pollution—the introduction of exotic species and diseases—has also taken its toll. Coastal Indians in eastern Canada may have been exposed to deadly viruses and bacteria by European fishermen

long before the "discovery" of America. Early records of the Jesuits confirmed the high mortality rate of native populations once infected by smallpox and influenza against which they had no immunity. Exotic plants and animals introduced to the New World habitat often threatened indigenous species upon which Indians relied. Russians "planted" foxes throughout the western Aleutian Islands to be harvested for their pelts. Unchecked and rapidly multiplying, the foxes became a menace to the native bird populations that the Aleuts required for food and clothing. Wild rice plants are threatened by the German carp that feeds on its roots; in some beds they compete for space with purple loosestrife, an exotic plant. As the American frontier moved west, the grazing areas of natural species such as bison and elk were usurped for cattle and sheep, and where natural species were deemed to threaten the newly imported ones, farmers and ranchers destroyed them with poisoned bait.

In a particularly outrageous action touching on the access issue, cattlemen in Wyoming in 1971 were found to have killed more than 500 eagles from helicopters, claiming the birds to be predators on lambs. (In fact, eagles only rarely prey on livestock.) The irony of that event is a particularly bitter one to Indian people, whose access to eagle feathers is severely hindered by laws protecting endangered species. While law enforcement agents were slow to prosecute ranchers for wanton eagle slaughter, federal agents in Oklahoma aggressively applied the law by arresting 22 Indians and six non-Indians, bringing them to trial and convicting them for possession of eagle feathers. The eagle is a sacred bird to Indians, its feathers symbolizing life itself. For centuries eagle feathers have been incorporated into sacred ritual paraphernalia and used as badges of honor. Now, the onus of proof is on Indians to show that feathers in their possession are exclusively for religious purposes.

At the same time denying Indian people access to elements of their traditional cultures, the dominant society redefined "The Indian" according to its own dictates. We



Yaqui Pascola and Deer dancers wearing strung cocoon rattles (*tenevoim*) around the ankles and legs. These essential religious regalia for dancers are made of the cocoons of a giant moth of the Sonoran desert. They are not found in southwestern Arizona and must be purchased at great expense from Mexican Yaqui. (Photo taken with permission in November, 1976, by Jim Griffith)

have selected items from Indian culture to form stereotypes that have then been exploited for commercial purposes in a number of ways. Concurrently, America was expropriating what it could of Indian cultural elements. The game of lacrosse has been mentioned. Sculpted Indian figures emerged to hold cigars before tobacco shops; the stoic “fighting” image continues to be imparted to sports teams by naming them “Braves” or “Warriors”; Indian people cringe today watching the antics of the feather war-bonneted mascot at Washington Redskins football games. Indian musical themes, some of them sacred in origin, were grist for American composers, who expropriated them from their usual contexts and

gave them Western harmonic settings in their “Indian Suites.” One Indian melody, in fact a sacred song of the Native American Church, was borrowed as a jingle-tune to advertise carpeting. Top-line fashion designers turn to turquoise, silver, buckskin and classic Indian patterns to combine them into expensive cocktail attire. For an automobile we accept the name choice and symbol design of “Thunderbird”—a powerful spirit in Indian sacred beliefs—but would recoil should Detroit venture to call its latest model a “Jesusmobile.”

Solutions and Challenges

By raising the issue of Indian access at this year’s Festival, we hope to stimulate

further dialogue between Indian people and the general public. More attention needs to be paid those aspects of their culture that Indian people feel cut off from, through education and increased media attention. Indians in many places have initiated their own solutions to these problems.

Indian resource management is increasingly a viable alternative to federal and state control over traditional resources. Successful wildlife management efforts on many reservations have demonstrated Indians' ability to produce sustained annual yields without succumbing to the temptations of short-term gains. After nearly a century of absence, bison and elk herds have been reintroduced on Plains Indian reservations. The National Park Service has cooperated with tribes in moving animals from over-stocked herds, such as in Yellowstone Park, to establish new herds on reservations under the supervision of tribal wildlife managers. There are of course problems attendant to such efforts: ranges must be carved from existing cattle grazing areas and heavily fenced in, not only to contain the buffalo herd but to protect it against poaching. Modern veterinary attention must be applied to check diseases, and the herd must be culled periodically to keep it at manageable size. To assist funding for herd management, South Dakota Sioux have implemented occasional trophy hunts, both for outside game hunters as well as local residents selected through lotteries. Buffalo meat is gaining increased popularity throughout the country as a rich protein source low in fat; many who have tried it prefer it to beef, and a consumer market is slowly developing for this resource. Meanwhile, as in the old days, some bison are slaughtered by tribal people for feasts; fresh bison skulls are now available for the sacred Sun Dance, which is enjoying a resurgence on the Plains. The general attitude expressed by Dakotan people shows an appreciation for this renewed contact with their past culture; most say it makes them feel good "just having the buffalo around." Success with bison reintroduction is leading to similar efforts with elk and big-horn sheep.

Elsewhere, Indian groups have banded to-

gether to attack common access problems. The Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Association, whose membership now includes eight reservations from three states, has been active on the conservation front through annual meetings and a bi-monthly publication, *Masinaigan* (the Ojibway word for newspaper). They support dialogue with Departments of Natural Resources and enlist the services of university researchers to assist in many activities: developing walleye hatcheries to restock lakes, studying the threats to wild rice beds from exotic plant species and fish, seeding lakes with wild rice, reintroducing a number of bird species, exploring pollution control and easement possibilities along vital streams, and conducting a general education campaign through public forums. This last item is a vital one, for combating racism has become an essential goal in the wake of tensions and confrontations ensuing from treaty rights decisions.

Meanwhile, access issues continue to plague Indian cultures in many areas. Improved marketing possibilities must be developed for craftspeople who receive but a fraction of the retail price of their products, given the enormous markup of middlemen in the trade. Some solution must be found to marketing Indian processed natural foods like wild rice. And Indian sacred places, from Blue Lake in New Mexico to the High Country of northern California, must be preserved and protected from the threats of development for ski resorts or cut off from Indian people by construction of logging highways. Legislation needs to be enacted to stop clear-cutting of National Forests. Federal agencies must more aggressively prosecute environmental violations adversely affecting Indian traditions, such as illegal covert logging on Indian land and destruction of endangered species by farmers and ranchers. In this way we can redress the many wrongs that have prevented Indian people from practicing these traditions so vital to a healthy culture, for only when people regain control of their cultural tools can they begin to deal effectively with the many social problems facing them.

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