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he title comes from the name of a funny movie Albert Brooks made a few years ago. It was about a yuppie couple in Southern California who, sick of their spiritually bankrupt lifestyle, cash in their expensive home, life savings, cars, and the rest of their possessions to create a "nest egg." This will give them the freedom to explore their full human potential, to be free, travel and "touch Indians."

They never make it to Indian Country, losing the nest egg in a Las Vegas casino. Mrs. Yuppie is reduced to working in a fast food restaurant in Arizona. (In the end Brooks goes back to his old profession with a renewed appreciation of material success; the movie wimps out and becomes sort of a cautionary tale about middle-class risk taking.)

The Lost couple might have chosen East LA or Compton, but they never consider touching Chicanos or African Americans. What we have here is a paradox: Indians are the poorest of the poor, yet Americans often plan vacations to their communities.

It's easy to laugh at such an absurd example of objectifying Indians. Yet in my experience, as a Comanche activist in the American Indian Movement in the 1970s, and one still committed to the Indian struggle, I find dialogue between Indian and non-Indian progressives consistently frustrated by the distinctive type of racism that confronts Indians. Often the left, feminists, and other movements who should be our allies have sought to "touch Indians" in ways both racist and destructive.

I Four key points about Indians

First, North America is Indian country. A very short history of North America: For thousands of years, as long as people have lived in Europe, hundreds of distinct peoples numbering in the tens of millions lived in North America.¹ Europeans invaded and after centuries of war and disease the Native population dropped to as few as three hundred thousand. The US and Canada are nations created on the destruction of Indian people and the theft of Indian land.

Because these are the unvarnished facts, any true history of this country, and any successful effort to change it must come from this understanding. Rapid City or Kenora are not Johannesburg. The US or Canada are not South Africa. But certain elemental truths are the same. Even

the most tortured lies and rationalizations fail to hide this basic truth. *The essence of the country is bound up in Indian land and African slave labour.*

Second, Indians live under a colonial system. The Bureau of Indian Affairs in the US and the Department of Indian Affairs in Canada have almost total control over the lives of Indians living on reservations and reserves. Indian language and culture was forbidden until just 50 years ago. Under a system established in the US in 1934 each federally recognized tribe has an elected tribal council that makes decisions for the tribe, as long as the BIA Area Superintendent agrees. Jobs, health care, housing, all social services are provided by this agency, which was originally under the War Department. All leases for mineral, oil and gas and grazing rights are managed by the BIA. This system has produced astonishing results: we are by far the poorest people in the United States. We have our own health system called the Indian Health Service: with a budget of \$1 billion a year a third of us die by the age of 45,² we suffer from diseases unheard of anywhere else in North America, and a staggering percentage of Native women have been sterilized.

Third, Indians face a particular, highly developed and highly ideological kind of racism. Chief, tribe, warrior, medicine

man; these are all terms invented by Europeans to objectify Indians (as is the term Indian itself). For chief, president or prime minister would be equally accurate. Why tribe instead of nation? Warrior instead of fighter or soldier? Medicine man instead of religious leader or minister? Because it makes Indians strange and primitive. These terms make us the "other." They make it impossible to imagine us as contemporary human beings, or players in our own destiny.

Indian names were usually translated into English. Sitting Bull, not the Lakota language name is what is used. But Beethoven is not translated into English; if so it would be Beet Patch's Fifth Symphony and sound as ridiculous as Sitting Bull. But only Indian names are translated. Another example very specific to Indians relates to genealogy. I am sometimes asked "How much Indian are you?" or "Are you a fullblood?" from people who have never asked black people, lightskinned or otherwise "How much black are you?" or "Are you a fullblood black?" It rarely occurs to many non-Indians how weird it is to use these terms reserved exclusively for Indians. (In fact, the only real answer is that there are two kinds of people: Indians and others. Citizenship in Indian nations never

Lost in America

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PAUL
SMITH

had anything to do with blood count or status until after colonization and the Indian Act.)

Recently someone gave me a fundraising letter that discussed the terrible conditions on reservations in South Dakota. This letter, written by a white person, advocated a project called "Adopt an Elder." Now, there are old people in West Virginia that could talk about wars between coal miners and the companies, or who embody Appalachian culture and oral tradition. But would anyone seriously argue that the way to solve the problems of the region would be for people in New York to adopt a hillbilly? Is the most effective way to fight a strip-mining really to send \$20 a month to an Appalachian elder? Why would this be suggested for Indians when it seems absurd for others?

Fourth, Indians are just plain folks. I would argue that our struggle is subject to the same laws of history and economics as the struggle of coal miners or southern blacks. We are not an impenetrable mystery, and for non-Indians to support us does not require an advanced appreciation of our religions, or culture. You don't even have to read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* or *Black Elk Speaks*, any more than you have to understand the history of quilting to support striking coal miners.

Since we are just plain folks, we also have differences just like other people. Among Afro-Americans today you find a Marxist left, Louis Farrakhan, the Republic of New Africa, Jesse Jackson and Republicans. Why should it surprise anyone that we, who in many ways come from more diverse histories than any other minority group, also have a wide range of political views?

II Romanticism from the standpoint of its victims

Some people have a chance to see firsthand the depth of racism to Indians in South Dakota. No objective observer in the 1970s of how South Dakota and South Dakotans handled the Indian movement had much trouble comparing it to Mississippi in the 1960s; and things have not changed that much.

That's one side of the coin. Another side must be of equal concern to progressives: romanticism. Although a precise definition doesn't exist, and opinions vary on what constitutes romanticism and what is legitimate interest in Indian culture, among Indians there is a strong feeling that we are ridiculed and portrayed in ways that no other minority group in this country has to endure. Sometimes this is obvious and ugly, like the professional sports teams called Redskins, Braves and Redmen. This country remains deeply racist, but it manages to avoid calling teams Darkies, Chinamen or Wetbacks.

Other times it seems benign or even positive. Some examples closer to home: in "feminist" circles preposterous books rip off Indian spiritualism and find a wide circulation. In many cities today a few hundred dollars will buy you an Indian spiritual experience: a sweat lodge, perhaps. A brief tour of any New Age bookstore will indicate the size of this growing industry.

I would argue that this often mindless appropriation of our culture, by our supposed allies, is also harmful to the Indian struggle.

Sometimes we cooperate out of a genuine belief that sharing our values and culture can be a useful way to advance our struggle. In the 1970s many in AIM, including some medicine men, felt that non-Indians (in actual practice almost always whites, and usually Indian fans) should not only participate in sweats but should even attend the Sun Dance. And for many, the idea of white people attending this sacred Lakota ceremony was anathema.

Sometimes it is just a meal ticket. I remember a Lakota from Pine Ridge (or maybe Rosebud) who toured Europe a few times and successfully raised money for his buffalo farm. Only when German backpackers showed up to visit the project they had generously supported was the buffalo farm revealed to be nonexistent.

Personally, I feel great empathy for the Indians who speak at New Age conferences on our spiritualism. I know that they know that I know that for them it's a job; better than some and worse than others, and anyway back home nobody's hiring.

Progressive non-Indians, however, must take this question seriously, since opinion among Indians may be divided on specific cases.

Many of us want to know exactly how is it different or more excusable for white folks to be fascinated with Indian culture than for Germans in World War II to become enthralled with Jewish folklore, Yiddish songs and dances and the mysticism of the religion. For all the vast differences in the situations, for us isn't such a crazy and overwrought example. After all, genocide isn't rhetoric for us, it's a fact. Any progressive German during that time had a very simple mission: fight Hitler. That was the only way to support Jews. Recording their ceremonies or adopting rabbis would not have been helpful.

During the Vietnam War North Americans on National Liberation Front tours of the country would often exclaim at the hardship of the people fighting the Americans; their need for clothing, food, medicine. The Vietnamese always told them the same thing: If you want to help us don't send food and medicine, *change the policies of your government.*

Progressive non-Indians must see their role with precisely the same clarity.

Progressive non-Indians must be leaders in the fight against racism toward Indians, and be willing to call romanticism the thuggish racism it really is. They must be

willing to explain to others why adopting elders is not useful, and why books by Castenada and Lynn Andrews rip off Indians instead of helping us. They should look for the issues on which Indians, blacks, latinos, asians and working-class whites can struggle on principled terms against common enemies. And they should look for ways to educate progressives on the true history of this country.

The new decade has already brought greater interest in the environment and New Age concerns than even the 1970s. Possibly, another energy crisis might occur, which would threaten increased exploitation of reservation resources. The demands on Indian lands, water, and other resources are often created by people very concerned about the environment, sometimes even with New Age consciousness. A more humane, environmentally concerned North America should be good news for Indians, yet this is not necessarily the case.

And, of course, 1992 will mark half a millennium since the European invasion. The federal government and many state governments are already planning commemorations. Believe it or not, there will be two sets of the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria (one from Japan, the other from Spain) which will be in New York July 4, 1992, and in San Francisco October 12. Some work by Indian organizations is underway, but there is clearly more to be done.

With media attention to rival the Bicentennial, 1992 might be the last, best chance for many years to raise important political and ideological issues. This work should be taken on by all progressive North Americans in one form or another, since it asks a fundamental question: "How did you get here?"

The question is too important for guilt, romanticism or cheap sentimentality. ♦

NOTES

1. According to recent estimates by credentialed anthropologists, between twelve and thirty-five million people lived in North America in 1500.
2. According to Indian Health Service testimony to the US Congress in May, 1989.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds was born in Wichita, Kansas in 1954. He returned to the Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation area in 1980 after completing his non-ceremonial education at the Royal College of Art, London, England, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pa. and the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. Hachivi is now a headsman of the Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) Elk Warrior society, a follower of both the Sacred Ceremonial Keeper and the Tsistsistas Earth Renewal Priests. Hachivi maintains his role as one of the many young care takers of the tribal ceremonial ways.

Within the artistic community Hachivi is an associate professor of painting at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. His drawings, paintings, video and public messages have been exhibited at Orchard Gallery, Derry, Northern Ireland, Documenta 8 Kassel, Germany, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, Exit Art, New York City and The Walker Art Centre of Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Olympic Exhibit "The Spirit Sings" are among those responsible for decimating its culture.

This billboard piece concerned itself also with another raging issue effecting the Native Canadian populations. Natives were protesting a Canadian government policy not to recognize as Indians any Indian women who marry white men and also their children. Making this policy

I ♦ IMPERIAL CANADA

"Imperial Canada" was presented at the Banff Centre, Alberta. The work was commissioned as part of an alternative exhibition organized to support the Lubicon Cree tribe. The exhibition, titled *Revisions*, supported the boycott against the Glenbow Museum which had assembled a \$2.6 million exhibit of Native artifacts for viewing by visitors of the 1988 Winter Olympics. The Lubicon Cree tribe stated that sponsors of the

even more bizarre was the provision that Indian men marrying white women would retain their Indian status.

A headsman of the Cheyenne Elk Warrior Society, Heap of Birds made this artist's statement in conjunction with his billboard text.

It is a racist-imperial nation that takes upon itself the outrageous privilege to determine who shall be considered Native in a land where the national lawmakers are immigrants. Native women in Canada are Native and so are their children; they always have been; they forever shall be.

A white Canadian law cannot make Indians nor can a white law un-make Indians. Through the war tactics of law, the white man seeks to extinguish the numbers of tribal people on paper; thus "legally" gaining the upper hand over the native populations of Canada in order to cheat the tribal Nations out of land claims that are truthfully theirs.

We are the indigenous hosts of this continent. Our way is to honour all beings who have chosen to share this earth.

2 ♦ BUILDING MINNESOTA

The oppression and slaughter of human beings by this white American society does not come from only hatred, it is the greed and potential growth of an economic hatred, it is the greed and potential growth of an economic apparatus that feeds the frenzy to kill and destroy people of colour, and other spirits that grow from the soil or move over the surface which is our earth. It is therefore proper that we inform the Minnesota public to Honour those 38 Dakota tribal citizens who were executed by hanging in Mankato, Minnesota in 1862 by the President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, and the citizens of Minnesota.

In respect, 38 Dakota/English red lettered metal signs shall be placed in the earth along the business zone of what was once called the Grain Belt. This is a proud "historical" district of the city of Minneapolis and the state of Minnesota which houses the grain mills and flour production with its canals and methods of shipping out the fruits of "American Progress."

It was the potential disruption of American commerce that cost the Dakota people their lives. The Native tribes of

the northern mid-west were not allowed the sovereignty and dignity to carry out their own economic livelihood through hunting and gathering. The Native land base of this region, as in all of America, did not have the right to exist intact in a prominent way and was automatically superceded by the invading immigrants and their hunger to cultivate and consume more of this earth.

As the 38 signs shall be offered along the water called the Mississippi, which remains the highway for American business, we seek to not only extract profit from our surroundings. We wish to honour the life-giving force of the waters that have truly preserved all of us from the beginning and to offer respect to the tortured spirits from 1862 that may have sought refuge and renewal through the original purity which is water.

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, 1990



3 ♦ APARTHEID OKLAHOMA

1989 marked the centennial of white domination over the Native nations which survive in the land now called Oklahoma. The non-Indian citizens of Oklahoma commemorate the land-run by celebrating the beginning of the seizure of over thirty Indian reservations in 1889, from what was once mandated by the US Congress as Indian Territory.

From this celebration, now promoted as the birth of the white state, we can truly understand the festivities as a blatantly offensive act on the part of the so called "Sooners" and their insensitive pioneer spirit.

The "Sooners" sought, 100 years ago, to seize Native lands for themselves, thus destroying societies and Nations which were forced to Indian Territory as refu-

gees. To recall those grave days in the form of a statewide joyous observance, i.e. picnics, parades, carnivals and playground programmes for school age students, is a disgrace.

These exercises in racism and cover-ups of true "American" history must be answered. On April 14, 1989 as the "Sooners" celebrated and paraded, over 250 Native supporters countered the invasion celebration by marching in protest through the high-rise buildings of downtown Oklahoma City carrying their grievances to the steps of the state capitol. In support of the march to the capitol five billboards titled "Apartheid Oklahoma" were deployed in Norman and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma-Indian Territory.

4 ♦ HARD WEED

The four-wheel drive bounced its way back through the overgrown upper canyon lands. It was coming late summer and many grasses were dying out while a few hardy plants, that held important duties, pushed their way up to stand green in the hot August sun.

Lightening Woman surveyed the surrounding countryside from the truck. She remarked upon the evidence of the many growing things that she had not visited for many years; after the privilege of hiking was stolen from her ageing limbs. The bumpy truck had restored the adventure of her youth and she shined brightly as a modern herbal resource that spoke of uses found long ago for spirits in plant life ever present.

As we drove a memory of tribal bison hunting came to her. A quest for meat of which the preservation of food was linked to a plant source. Can this source be seen today? Was it visible to our young memories? Was it even evident as an important entity as its leaves blew with the wind and surrounding greenery which insulates this earth?

She pointed out the window to a stand of tall green plants with violet flowers. This was an important find. When the green leaves were stripped off the grow-ing shank a sharp straight flexible rod appeared. This tool of the earth became the much needed pinning device used in securing the bison meat as it hung over the drying racks to be preserved by the heat of the sun.

Now in my memory I always look to August as the time of the growth of violet and green. I welcome symbolic thoughts of the gathering of resources, for ahead awaits the challenge of the winter season. This same chilling force has always tested the knowledge, reverence and creativity of both tribe and individual. In order to survive and prosper through life's obstacles one must grow accustomed to provocation and never loose sight of the hard weed.

