

## **PART I: A NATIONAL TRAGEDY: SUBCOMMITTEE FINDINGS**

### **I. The Failure of National Policy**

It is a pity that so many Americans today think of the Indian as a romantic or comic figure in American history without contemporary significance. In fact, the Indian plays much the same role in our American society that the Jews played in Germany. Like the miner's canary, the Indian marks the shifts from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere; and our treatment of Indians, even more than our treatment of other minorities, reflects the rise and fall in our democratic faith.—FELIX S. COHEN—Yale Law Journal, February 1953.

#### **A. OVERVIEW**

A careful review of the historical literature reveals that the dominant policy of the Federal Government toward the American Indian has been one of forced assimilation which has vacillated between the two extremes of coercion and persuasion. At the root of the assimilation policy has been a desire to divest the Indian of his land and resources.

The Allotment Act of 1887 stands as a symbol of the worst aspects of the Indian policy. During the 46-year period it was in effect it succeeded in reducing the Indian landbase from 140 million acres to approximately 50 million acres of the least desirable land. Greed for Indian land and intolerance of Indian cultures combined in one act to drive the American Indian into the depths of poverty from which he has never recovered.

From the first contact with the Indian, the school and the classroom have been a primary tool of assimilation. Education was the means whereby we emancipated the Indian child from his home, his parents, his extended family, and his cultural heritage. It was in effect an attempt to wash the "savage habits" and "tribal ethic" out of a child's mind and substitute a white middle-class value system in its place. A Ponca Indian testifying before the subcommittee defined this policy from the standpoint of the Indian student—"School is the enemy!"

It is clear in retrospect that the "assimilation by education" policy was primarily a function of the "Indian land" policy. The implicit hope was that a "civilized Indian" would settle down on his 160 acres and become a gentleman farmer, thus freeing large amounts of additional land for the white man. But in addition, there has been a strong strain of "converting the heathen" and "civilizing the savage," which has subtly, but persistently, continued up to the present. Two stereo-

types still prevail—"the dirty, lazy, drunken" Indian and, to assuage our conscience, the myth of the "noble savage."

Regretfully, one must conclude that this Nation has not faced up to an "American dilemma" more fundamental than the one defined so persuasively for us by Gunnar Myrdal in 1944. The "Indian problem" raises serious questions about this Nation's most basic concepts of political democracy. It challenges the most precious assumptions about what this country stands for—cultural pluralism, equity and justice, the integrity of the individual, freedom of conscience and action, and the pursuit of happiness. Relations with the American Indian constitute a "morality play" of profound importance in our Nation's history.

## B. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE—400 YEARS OF FAILURE

The subcommittee has conducted a detailed and comprehensive analysis of our past and present failure as a nation to develop and implement an enlightened policy for the American Indian. The subcommittee feels that a full understanding of the historical roots of our present failures is essential, if problems are to be resolved and a more enlightened policy effected. The historical perspective which follows is an abridgment of the thoroughly documented historical analysis which can be found in appendix I of our report. We would urge all who are interested in the development of our present national policies to read the material in Appendix I.

### 1. MISSION PERIOD

The goal, from the beginning of attempts at formal education of the American Indian, has been not so much to educate him as to change him.

With the Jesuits, it was to acquaint the Indian with the French manner, French customs, the French language. With the Protestants, it was to Anglicize the natives and, in the process, prepare them for a "civilized" life. The Franciscans, working in the Southwest, also sought to bring Indians into the mainstream, but they were less interested in making Europeans of the Indians than were other missionaries. Regardless of the religious group, they all had the same goals: civilize and Christianize the Indian.

Beginning with the Jesuit mission school for Florida Indians in 1568, formal education of Indians was dominated by the church for almost 300 years. Jesuits and Franciscans were the first groups to try to remake the Indian in the mold of the white man, but the cause was taken up vigorously by Protestants when they gained a foothold in America. Education was adopted as the best means of accomplishing the task, and as early as 1617, King James I called upon Anglican clergy to provide funds for educating "children of these Barbarians in Virginia." The eventual result of his request was the establishment of the College of William and Mary—"a college for the children of the infidels."

Other schools for Indians were also started, but none were completely successful in achieving their "civilization" goals. For though

the Indian students often left school with an understanding of the principles of Christianity and a solid grasp of reading and writing skills, they still shied away from the white man's way of life. One observer of the times noted, with obvious frustration, that after the Indians returned home, "instead of civilizing and converting the rest, they have immediately relapt into infidelity and barbarism themselves."

### 2. THE TREATY PERIOD

The signing of the treaty between the United States and the Delaware Tribe in 1778 established treaties as the primary legal basis for Federal policies in regard to the American Indian. The earliest treaty containing a specific provision for education—a promise by the government to provide a tribe with teachers "in the arts of the miller and sawer"—was signed in 1794. Similar provisions, usually given in exchange for Indian lands, were common elements in treaties for the next 80 years.

The purpose of the treaties did not differ much from the reason behind the missionaries' activities. Both the government and the missionaries sought to civilize the Indian. But whereas the religious groups acted primarily out of altruism, the government thought more in terms of the value of possessing Indian lands. Government leaders recognized that if Indians could be converted from hunters into farmers, the Indians would require less land and would be easier to contain. Such a policy would naturally mean more land available for settlement by white men. Education of Indians was seen as the means of accomplishing the conversion.

Between 1778 and 1871, when the last treaty was signed, Indian tribes ceded almost a billion acres to the United States. In return, Indians generally retained inalienable and tax-exempt lands for themselves, and Government pledges to provide such public services as education, medical care, and technical and agricultural training. Congress began appropriating funds for such services in 1802, when up to \$15,000 was made available annually "to provide civilization among the aborigines." The basis for most Indian education programs was an act in 1819, though, which provided for an annual "civilization fund" to be used to convert Indians from hunters to agriculturalists. The act was in effect until 1873.

Responsibility for the education of Indians was placed in the hands of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a position created by Congress in 1832. The early commissioners viewed Indians as barbarous and heathen people "wedded to savage habits, customs and prejudices," and thus their educational policies revolved around controlling the Indian through coercive assimilation. As Commissioner L. Lea stated in 1850, the Indians must "resort to agricultural labor or starve." During this period the Government established an extensive program of manual training in agriculture and the mechanic arts in order to civilize the Indian. As early as 1838 the Government was operating 16 manual schools serving 800 students and 87 boarding schools serving about 2,900 students.

After 1871 the Government no longer engaged in treaty-making with Indian tribes. During this period it had committed itself to obligations in almost 400 treaties.

## 3. THE ALLOTMENT PERIOD

The last three decades of the 19th century were years of anguish for the Indian, as he fought in vain to defend his homeland from first plundering settlers, and then, the might of the U.S. Calvary. With the murder of Sitting Bull and the massacre of a Sioux band at Wounded Knee, S. Dak. in 1890, the conquest of the Indian was complete.

Three years prior to the final battle, though, the U.S. Government had initiated a means of dissolving the Indian land base legislatively. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 provided for land allotment to individual Indians as a means of breaking up the tribal structure and giving Indians an opportunity for a more civilized life. The actual results of the law were a diminishing of the Indian tribal economic base from 140 million acres to about 50 million acres, and severe social disorganization of the Indian family.

This land policy was directly related to the Government's Indian education policy because proceeds from the destruction of the Indian land base were to be used to pay the costs of taking Indian children from their homes and placing them in Federal boarding schools—a system designed to dissolve the Indian social structure. The Bureau of Indian Affairs had started building its boarding school system in the 1870's, often using abandoned Army posts or barracks as sites. Such schools were run in a rigid military fashion, with heavy emphasis on rustic vocational education. They were designed to separate a child from his reservation and family, strip him of his tribal lore and mores, force the complete abandonment of his native language, and prepare him for never again returning to his people. Although many changes have taken place over the years, some boarding schools still operate in 19th century converted Army posts and occasionally conduct practices which approximate the approach of the late 1800's.

Many Indian families resisted the assault of the Federal Government on their lives by refusing to send their children to school. Congress responded by authorizing the Secretary of Interior to withhold food or subsistence from those Indian families whose children weren't in school. In 1919 it was discovered that only 2,089 of an estimated 9,613 Navajo children were attending school, and thus the Government initiated a crash program of Navajo education. But because of a lack of schools on the reservation, many Navajo children were transported to boarding schools throughout the West and Southwest, without their parents' consent. The conditions at these boarding schools, where the children were often used as the labor force, received widespread attention with publication of the Meriam Report in 1928.

## 4. THE MERIAM REPORT AND THE NEW DEAL PERIOD

Probably the most significant investigation ever conducted into the field of Indian affairs was published in 1928. The Meriam Report, a survey of social and economic conditions of the American Indian, was prepared by the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. (then known as the Institute for Government Research) under the direction of Lewis Meriam of the University of Chicago. The report led di-

rectly to one of the most creative and innovative periods in Indian affairs.

The major findings of the Meriam Report were that (1) Indians were excluded from management of their own affairs, and (2) Indians were receiving a poor quality of services (especially health and education) from public officials who were supposed to be serving their needs. These two findings remain just as valid today as they did more than 40 years ago.

The report was highly critical of boarding schools, both because of their inadequate facilities and the manner in which they were operated. It condemned the practice of taking children from their homes and placing them in off-reservation boarding schools. It stressed repeatedly the need for a relevant instructional curriculum adapted to the individual needs and background of the students. It chided the schools for failing to consider or adapt to the language of the child. It asked why Indians could not participate in deciding the direction of their schools. And it suggested that public schools, with their traditional curriculums, were not the answer either.

"The most fundamental need in Indian education," according to the report, "is a change in point of view." The Indian family and social structure must be strengthened, not destroyed. The qualifications of teachers in Indian schools must be high, not poor to average. The Federal school system must be a model of excellence.

The Meriam report had a substantial impact. Soon after John Collier became Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the Roosevelt administration in 1933, a series of new approaches were initiated which sought to overhaul completely the Federal Indian policy. The key legislation of the period, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, ended the allotment period and laid the groundwork for more autonomous tribal government. The act, which was submitted to and discussed with Indian tribes before being submitted to Congress, has been called the Indian bill of rights.

In education, Collier started programs in bilingual education, adult basic education, training of Indian teachers, Indian culture and in-service teacher training. During Collier's 12 years as Commissioner, 16 boarding schools were closed and 84 day schools were opened. Whereas in 1933 three-fourths of Indian students were enrolled in boarding schools, in 1943 two-thirds were attending day schools. The progress of the 1930's and early 1940's came to a halt with the advent of World War II, though, as a lack of funds joined with a congressional attitude of "de-Indianizing the Indian" to put an end to Collier's programs.

## 5. THE TERMINATION PERIOD

In 1944 a House Select Committee on Indian Affairs offered recommendations on achieving "the final solution of the Indian problem." In almost every instance, the committee called for a return of the pre-Meriam policies. It criticized reservation day schools for adapting education to the Indian and to his reservation way of life. It said "real progress" would be made only when Indian children of elementary school age were once again taken from their homes and placed in off-

reservation boarding schools. "The goal of Indian education," according to the committee, "should be to make the Indian child a better American rather than to equip him simply to be a better Indian."

The House committee's attitude was indicative of the swing the pendulum was taking. By 1948 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, at the urging of Congress, was setting criteria for determining a tribe's readiness for withdrawal of Federal services. In 1949 Commissioner John Nichols argued that development of services, not termination of them, was needed, but his plea went unheeded. When Dillon Myer became Commissioner in 1950 the termination policy was at full throttle. It was a return to the dominant policy of the Federal Government—coercive assimilation of the American Indian. The goals were to get rid of Indians and Indian trust land by terminating Federal recognition and services and relocating Indians into cities off the reservations—a policy viewed as a major catastrophe by the Indians.

In 1952 the Bureau of Indian Affairs closed down all Federal schools in Idaho, Michigan, Washington, and Wisconsin. Loans to Indian students authorized in the Reorganization Act of 1934 were discontinued. The following year a number of boarding and day schools were closed, as Indian students were transferred into public schools. Those Federal boarding schools in operation utilized a forced assimilation approach, educating children far from their homes (Navajo children in Oregon, Northwest Indians in Oklahoma) so that they would forget their family and the reservation way of life.

The legislative base for the termination policy was laid in 1953 with passage of Public Law 280, which transferred Federal jurisdiction over law and order on Indian reservations to individual States, and House Concurrent Resolution 108, which called for the end of Federal services to Indians. Little time was wasted in implementing the policy. In 1954, 10 termination bills were introduced, with six of them passing. The termination period was brought to a partial halt on September 18, 1958, when Secretary of the Interior Fred Seaton announced that no tribe would be terminated without its consent. Despite his statement, Indians had developed a fear of termination which was to continue through the 1960's.

#### 6. THE 1960'S

Alvin M. Josephy of American Heritage magazine has described the result of the Indian policy of the 1950's as "termination psychosis." Throughout the 1960's Indians exhibited an all-pervading suspicion of Government motives in Indian affairs. They were confused, disoriented, and filled with anxiety and worry, according to Josephy. In effect, the termination policy had told the Indian tribes that if they demonstrated economic progress they would be punished by a withdrawal of Federal services.

Attempts to counterattack the termination psychosis were a significant part of Indian history of the 1960's, but the failure of a new policy framework to emerge during this period meant that most of these attempts were futile.

The first formal reaction to termination in the 1960's was publication of the Fund for the Republic study by the Commission on Rights,

Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian. This January 1961 report focused attention on the injustices of termination policy, the paternalistic attitudes and practices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the inadequate services provided Indians. It argued for reorganization of the Bureau's education program and increased Indian involvement in determining programs affecting Indians. Both of these issues were to dominate Indian education during this decade.

Six months after the Fund for the Republic report was issued a conference of Indian leaders was held in which a "Declaration of Indian Purpose" was formulated. The Indians repudiated the termination policy of the 1950's and expressed their desire to play a decisive role in planning their own programs. Like the Fund for the Republic report, the conference indicated a reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs was essential. But the Indians made it clear they wanted to play an important role in determining the reorganization.

The Kennedy administration responded to the Indian people with its own study of Indian affairs, a task force headed by Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. The July 1961 report suggested a wide range of new activities in Indian education, from increased funds for scholarships to the encouragement of Indian parent participation in the formulation of school programs. The recommendations would certainly have improved Indian education, but their implementation was almost impossible, given the Bureau's organizational structure—a matter with which the report did not come to grips. The report repudiated termination and suggested that economic development on Indian reservations be the basis of a new Federal Indian policy. As a result, between 1961 and 1965 the Bureau of Indian Affairs shifted its policy direction and embarked on a program of economic and community development. But nothing was done to refashion the Bureau into an effective instrument for executing the new policy and programs.

One of the most significant accomplishments in Indian affairs during the 1960's was the enactment of legislation—the Economic Opportunity Act—which gave Indians the opportunity to participate in and control their own programs. Head Start programs, for example, were the first meaningful effort to provide early childhood experiences for Indian children. Upward Bound, Job Corps, and VISTA all had significant Indian participation. But in terms of demonstrating the importance of Indian initiative and self-determination, and the ability of Indians to effectively carry out their own programs, the Community Action Programs on Indian reservations have been the most important innovations of the 1960's. More than 60 Community Action Programs, involving 105 Federal reservations in 17 States, presently exist. The most important experiment in the field of Indian education in the 1960's was the establishment of the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. The initiative for the project, as well as some of its funds, came from the Office of Economic Opportunity, which worked closely with Dr. Robert Roessel, who became the school's first director.

Established on July 27, 1966, as a private, nonprofit organization, the school is run by a five-member Navajo school board. Only two of the school board members have had any formal education and weekly school board meetings are conducted in Navajo. The school is com-

mitted to the involvement of Indians in "their" school. Tribal elders, for example, are used to teach traditional materials. Culturally-sensitive curriculum materials have been developed, and the bilingual approach to the teaching of English is used. The school is regarded not just as a place for educating Indian children, but as the focus for development of the local community. Rough Rock has become a symbol of Indian participation and control and educational innovation, and has been extraordinarily influential in shaping a new policy in Indian education.

A second landmark in Indian education legislation of the 1960's was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The law provided funds for improving the education of disadvantaged children. In 1966 Indians in Federal schools were involved in title I of the act (innovative programs for disadvantaged children), and in fiscal year 1969 approximately \$9 million was appropriated specifically for Indians in Federal schools. Disadvantaged Indians in public schools also benefit from the legislation. Other titles of the act have aided in the development of special supplemental centers and the establishment of regional educational laboratories, some of which are doing significant work in Indian education. Drop out prevention and bilingual education titles of the act are also benefiting some Indians.

The programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided some optimism for Indian education in the mid-1960's. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, with Carl Marburger serving as Assistant Commissioner for Education, talked about making the Federal Indian schools an exemplary system, utilizing bilingual approaches and a culturally sensitive curriculum. But the continual problem of working within the Bureau's educational structure, together with less than full-hearted congressional support, made Marburger's exemplary system just a dream.

Another major attempt to formulate a new policy on Indian affairs was the 1966 Presidential Task Force Report. The report recognized the necessity of coming to grips with one of the fundamental questions—reorganization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs—and recommended transferring the responsibility for Indian affairs from the Department of Interior to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The report placed education as the priority item in improving Indian affairs, and strongly endorsed Indian control and an exemplary school system.

The report concluded with a clear warning against acting precipitously and without full explanation and consultation with the Indian tribes. Nevertheless, the President seized upon the idea in a way which aroused Indian anxiety. When the proposed transfer was hinted at by Secretary Gardner at an Indian manpower conference in February 1968, Indians reacted as if it was a termination proposal (the assumption was that the various functions of BIA would be scattered throughout HEW), and the matter was dead before it ever got openly explained and discussed.

These Indian control and exemplary school system items became the major recommendations of President Johnson's message on Indian affairs on March 6, 1968. The President rejected termination as a policy and suggested it be replaced by self-determination. He called for

increased funding for the OEO programs which had proved so successful and stated his intention to make Federal schools a "model community school system." The recommendations were not new, nor was the President's silence regarding the Bureau of Indian Affairs organizational defects, which would continue to retard any massive efforts at reform.

The 1960's began with determined effort to seek a new policy which would alleviate Indian termination fears and reorganize the Bureau of Indian Affairs so that it could effectively provide an exemplary educational program for Indians. The 1960's are ending with those same problems unresolved.

### C. ALCOHOLISM AND MENTAL HEALTH

The subcommittee found that in recent years, the number of suicides and alcoholics among the native population has greatly increased. In Alaska, for example, it has doubled. According to the chief psychiatrist for the U.S. Public Health Service in Alaska:

If mental health problems are broadly construed to include not only mental illness and alcoholism, but also child neglect and delinquency and other behavioral problems, then mental health problems are the major health problem of Alaska natives today.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a new phenomenon. It dates from at least the mid-19th century. All experts agree that the problem today is very serious and getting worse.

In the Northwest, the subcommittee found adolescent suicide problems of epidemic proportions on the Quinault Reservation in Washington, and on the Fort Hall Reservation in Idaho. The termination of the Klamath Reservation in Oregon has led to extreme social disorganization of that tribal group. Many of them can be found in State mental and penal institutions.

In South Dakota, the subcommittee found suicide attempt rates more than twice the national average, a delinquency rate for Indian adolescents 9 times the national rural average, extensive and severe alcoholism problems on every reservation, an alarming amount of glue and gasoline sniffing among prepubertal Indian children, almost 1 in 5 adolescents had no adult male in the house, and the number of Indian children in foster homes was almost 5 times the national average.

The subcommittee was informed by the Public Health Service psychiatrist serving the Navajo Reservation in Arizona that there are many severe problems among young Navajo adults—drunkenness, child neglect, drunken and reckless driving. "Alarming numbers of people have lapsed into an alienated, apathetic life marked by episodes of delinquency and irresponsibility.<sup>2</sup> In Gallup, New Mexico, just off the reservation, more than 675 Navajos per month are arrested for public intoxication.

The subcommittee has noted serious and growing problems of suicide attempts and alcoholism on many reservations in the Southwest. For example, on one Pueblo in New Mexico last year, *there were five suicides involving Indian men under the age of 25.*

<sup>1</sup> Indian Education Subcommittee Hearings, pt. 1, 1969, p. 584.

<sup>2</sup> Hearings, 1968, pt. 3, p. 1126.

The subcommittee found one tribe in western Oklahoma where practically every male between the ages of 18 to 30 has a serious drinking problem. Strangely enough, if they survive to age 30, a complete reversal often takes place. The subcommittee findings leave no doubt that alcoholism broadly defined is one of the most serious problems affecting the Indian population today, yet it has attracted little serious attention, and what data that is available is generally inaccessible, unorganized, scattered, and unknown.

Excessive alcohol usage appears to be closely interrelated with other manifestations of social disorganization in Indian communities. Indian accident and arrest rates are notoriously high, and the majority of accidents as well as homicides, assaults, suicides, and suicide attempts are associated with alcohol. The vast majority of arrests, fines, and prison sentences in the Indian population are related to alcohol, and Indian arrest rates are also notoriously high. In one State penitentiary, Indians constitute 34 percent of the inmates whereas only 5 percent of the State's population is Indian. The majority of the crimes were committed while under the influence of alcohol.

On one central plains reservation, there were in 1 year 2,585 arrests for disorderly conduct and drunkenness in a population of 4,600 adults. Over a 3-year period, 44 percent of males and 21 percent of females had been arrested at least once for a drinking-connected offense. Of these, two-thirds had been arrested more than once, and 10 percent had been arrested more than 10 times. Thirteen percent of the entire population ages 15 to 17 had been booked at least once on a charge related to drinking. On another reservation with a total population of 3,500, in 1968, there were 1,769 arrests related to excessive drinking, 10 percent of them juveniles. In 1960, alcohol-related arrest rate for all Indians was 12.2 times that of the U.S. population generally. Drunkenness alone accounted for 71 percent of all Indian arrests.

In a study of high school students in a plains tribe, 84 percent of the boys and 76 percent of the girls claimed they drank. Thirty-seven percent claimed they drank frequently. Another survey of Indian high school students found 339 out of 350 who disliked their hometown because of excessive drinking. On this reservation, 70 percent of all juvenile offenses involved alcohol—a total of 420 in a recent year.

A recent publication by the Public Health Service identifies the following as causes of the Indian alcoholism problem:<sup>3</sup>

1. Alcoholic beverages were introduced by the white man to the American Indian and have often been used for purposes of calculated exploitation. (The English translation of the Indian name *Manhattan* Island is "The Place of the First Big Drunk.")

2. Psychologically, excessive drinking originates in feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness which are closely related to socioeconomic and educational failure. Drinking is an expression of individual anger and serves as a vehicle for acting out aggressive and hostile feelings.

3. Alcohol often serves as a focused activity for a group of people, and group drinking tends to take on pathological forms—drinking until the supply of alcohol is exhausted or all members of the group are intoxicated.

<sup>3</sup> Preliminary report of the Indian Health Service. Task Force on Alcoholism, January 1969, pp. 33-43.

4. The American Indian lives in a state of severe grinding poverty. Ninety percent of his housing is atrocious and beyond rehabilitation; he suffers the worst health conditions in our Nation; his unemployment rate is 50 percent and the average family income is \$1,500 per year. These conditions lead to feelings of anger and frustration, coupled with strong feelings of personal inadequacy and powerlessness.

Conditions within Indian schools, particularly boarding schools, have done a great deal to bring about the causes of problem drinking and very little to prevent them.

The dimensions of these mental health and alcoholism problems have not been adequately investigated nor defined, but they are clearly very large.

#### D. CHEROKEE EDUCATION—PAST AND PRESENT

One of the most remarkable examples of adaptation and accomplishment by any Indian tribe in the United States is that of the Cherokee. Their record provides evidence of the kind of results which ensue when Indians truly have the power of self-determination:

a constitution which provided for courts, representation, jury trials and the right to vote for all those over 18 years;

a system of taxation which supported such services as education and road construction;

an educational system which produced a Cherokee population 90 percent literate in its native language and used bilingual materials to such an extent that Oklahoma Cherokees had a higher English literacy level than the white populations of either Texas or Arkansas:

a system of higher education which, together with the Choctaw Nation, had more than 200 schools and academies, and sent numerous graduates to eastern colleges; and

publication of a widely read bilingual newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

But that was in the 1800's, before the Federal Government took control of Cherokee affairs. The record of the Cherokee today is proof of the tragic results of 60 years of white control over their affairs:

90 percent of the Cherokee families living in Adair County, Okla. are on welfare;

99 percent of the Choctaw Indian population in McCurtain County, Okla., live below the poverty line;

The median number of school years completed by the adult Cherokee population is only 5.5;

40 percent of adult Cherokees are functionally illiterate;

Cherokee dropout rates in public schools is as high as 75 percent.

The level of Cherokee education is well below the average for the State of Oklahoma, and below the average for rural and non-whites in the State.<sup>5</sup>

The disparity between these two sets of facts provides dramatic testimony to what might have been accomplished if the policy of the

<sup>4</sup> Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education Hearings, pt. 2, p. 918.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 920.

Federal Government had been one of Indian self-determination. It also points up the disastrous effects of imposed white control.

Cherokee education was truly a development of the tribes itself. In 1821 Sequoyah, a member of the tribe, presented tribal officials with his invention—a Cherokee alphabet. Within 6 years of that date Cherokees were publishing their own bilingual newspaper, and the Cherokee Nation was on its way toward the end of illiteracy and the beginning of a model of self-government and self-education.

The Cherokee Indians established a government of laws in 1820 and, in 1827, a constitution patterned after that of the United States. Their nation was divided into districts, and each district sent representatives to the Nation's capital, which had a two-house legislative structure. The system compared favorably with that of the Federal Government and any State government then in existence.

The Cherokee education system itself was just as exemplary as its governmental system. Using funds primarily received from the Federal Government as the result of ceding large tracts of land, a school system described by one authority as "the finest school system west of the Mississippi River" soon developed.<sup>6</sup> Treaty money was used by Sequoyah to develop the Cherokee alphabet, as well as to purchase a printing press. In a period of several years the Cherokee had established remarkable achievement and literary levels, as indicated by statistics cited above. But in 1903 the Federal Government appointed a superintendent to take control of Cherokee education, and when Oklahoma became a State in 1906 and the whole system was abolished, Cherokee educational performance was to begin its decline.

Authorities who have analyzed the decline concur on one point: the Cherokees are alienated from the white man's school. Anthropologist Willard Walker simply stated that "the Cherokees have viewed the school as a white man's institution over which parents have no control." Dr. Jack Forbes of the Far West Regional Laboratory for Research and Development said that the Federal and State schools operated for the Cherokee have had negative impact because of little, if any, parent-community involvement. Several researchers have also commented upon the lack of bilingual materials in the schools, and the ensuing feeling by Cherokees that reading English is associated with coercive instruction.

Alfred L. Wahrhaftig makes the point that the Indian child communicates in Cherokee and considers it his "socializing" language. English is simply an "instrumental" language one learns in school, a place which the Cherokee student sees no value in attending anyway.

In the 1890's Cherokees knew there was a forum for their opinions on how their children should be educated, and they used that forum. Wahrhaftig's study showed. Cherokee parents haven't lost interest in their children's education, just their faith in a white-controlled system's ability to listen to them and respond. "Cherokees finally have become totally alienated from the school system," he reported. "The tribe has surrendered to the school bureaucracy, but tribal opinion is unchanged."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 870.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 920.

## E. SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL FINDINGS

### I. Policy Failure

*The dominant policy of the Federal Government towards the American Indian has been one of coercive assimilation. The policy has resulted in:*

- A. The destruction and disorganization of Indian communities and individuals.
- B. A desperately severe and self-perpetuating cycle of poverty for most Indians.
- C. The growth of a large, ineffective, and self-perpetuating bureaucracy which retards the elimination of Indian poverty.
- D. A waste of Federal appropriations.

### II. National Attitudes

*The coercive assimilation policy has had a strong negative influence on national attitudes. It has resulted in:*

- A. A nation that is massively uninformed and misinformed about the American Indian, and his past and present.
- B. Prejudice, racial intolerance, and discrimination towards Indians far more widespread and serious than generally recognized.

### III. Education Failure

*The coercive assimilation policy has had disastrous effects on the education of Indian children. It has resulted in:*

- A. The classroom and the school becoming a kind of battleground where the Indian child attempts to protect his integrity and identity as an individual by defeating the purposes of the school.
- B. Schools which fail to understand or adapt to, and in fact often denigrate, cultural differences.
- C. Schools which blame their own failures on the Indian student and reinforce his defensiveness.
- D. Schools which fail to recognize the importance and validity of the Indian community. The community and child retaliate by treating the school as an alien institution.
- E. A dismal record of absenteeism, dropouts, negative self-image, low achievement, and, ultimately, academic failure for many Indian children.
- F. A perpetuation of the cycle of poverty which undermines the success of all other Federal programs.

### IV. Causes of the Policy Failure

*The coercive assimilation policy has two primary historical roots:*

- A. A continuous desire to exploit, and expropriate, Indian land and physical resources.
- B. A self-righteous intolerance of tribal communities and cultural differences.