

# Judeo-Christians inhibit native rituals

By DEBBIE MILLER  
Of the Emerald

## Indians battle for land, culture

One man's religion and culture is another man's crime and profit.

A variety of perspectives on religion and culture between Christian-Jewish citizens and Native Americans has resulted in many affronts to Indian lifestyle and religious customs, according to reports from across the country.

Abuses of Indian religion include confiscation of sacred items and loss of ceremonial lands, but the real loss at stake is the Native American's first amendment right to freedom of religion versus federal regulations and actions.

"It is definitely a clear-cut case of interference of religious freedoms," says English Prof. Barre Toelken. He has extensively studied Native American folklore and the ceremonies that are a part of it.

According to Toelken, the different ways the Christian-Jewish religions and Indian religion view nature is at the root of the conflict. He says the fact that Christian-Jewish see nature as a resource and the Indians see nature as a relative with their families and bodies, has created misunderstandings throughout history regarding the religious rights of Indians.

"The missionaries didn't think the Indians had a religion," he says, "because they do not have a single supreme deity."

Toelken adds that because of land sales and reservation boundary shifts, religious leaders do not have access to sacred sites on the lands once owned by their tribes. In Oregon along the Columbia River, tribes lost their fishing areas when dams were built on the river. Toelken says these areas were not only important fishing grounds, but had deep religious meaning as well.

"These tribes saw the salmon as relatives coming back to contact them," he explains. "These sites are especially important to the older, more traditional tribal members."

More recent abuses of Indian religion have taken place across the United States. In South Dakota, several raids have been made in the mistaken belief that turkey feathers were illegally taken from eagles, and that certain illegal drugs were being used in religious ceremonies.

U.S. Sen. James Abourezk, D-S.D., has introduced a congressional resolution to insure that Congress would not infringe on the religious freedoms of Native Americans in passing any new laws. If approved, the resolution would allow the federal government to follow the lead of Montana and California, two states that have officially acted to uphold Indian religious rights.

In Oregon, Indians' problems deal more with property rights than religious rights, according to Charles Wilkinson, assistant professor at the law school. He says, though, that archeologists have



Drawing by Margaret Munger

invaded religious areas and have taken many items sacred in Indian religious ceremonies.

Theodore Stern, University anthropology professor, says the skulls of Captain Jack, the Klamath chief in the 1860's, and many of his followers were taken years ago to be put into the Army Medical Museum in Washington, D.C. Later the skulls were trans-

ferred to the Smithsonian Institute where they will remain until they are returned to the Klamath tribe.

Although an agreement has been reached to return the skulls, Stern says the transaction is being delayed while the buried skeletons to the skulls can be located.

Another recent victory regarding property rights has been won by the Siletz tribe of Southwestern

Oregon against the federal government. According to Wilkinson, who represented the Indians, the Siletz Restoration Act was signed by Pres. Carter on Nov. 18, 1977, that returned the tribe to its full federal status following termination in 1954.

"It is phenomenal that such a small group as the Siletz could get a bill through Congress," Wilkin-

son remarks. "It shows their dedication to giving their culture a chance to survive." He adds that the only other tribe to be restored to federally recognized status was Menominee Indian tribe of Wisconsin on December 22, 1973.

Pauline Ricks, who is running for one of the nine positions on the Interim Tribal Council to be elected Saturday, remembers the termination of her tribe. She says it was the policy of the government to terminate tribes to assimilate Indian people.

"They painted a pretty picture for us," she says. "They talked of better education, money and deeds to land." The actual results were "disastrous."

Ricks says termination split families as well as the tribe. "Some of my sister's children are on the tribal roll and others aren't." She adds that most members of the tribe left the Siletz area completely after all their lands were sold, and families are coming from as far away as Washington, D.C. and Alaska to vote in Saturday's election.

"Restoration has touched every one of us," she says. "I have seen people from back home that I haven't seen for 20 years. We were brought up knowing our relatives, but our children are just beginning to meet their cousins for the first time."

"Although the health and education benefits were badly needed," Ricks adds, "the most important thing is we have our identity back. The children who were born after termination had no tribe to identify with. Now we can say we're Indian people."



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