



By Leslie Hemstreet

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, Europeans sailed to this hemisphere and started a genocidal campaign against the people who lived here. To this day, many are trying to continue this genocide both physically and culturally. To this day, the original people of this country struggle to keep their nations and their traditions alive. Five hundred years ago, outright murder was the chosen method. Europeans felt that they had a divine right to claim this land—and murder its inhabitants. Today, the connections between Euroamerican policies toward Native Americans and the genocidal results are more covert.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (B.I.A.) Indian Health Service sterilized indigenous women without their consent or knowledge. It took an American Indian Movement (AIM) occupation of the B.I.A.'s Washington headquarters in 1972 to bring this genocidal program to light.

Furthermore, the government has facilitated the contamination of reservation lands and waters from private companies digging for coal and radioactive minerals. The government's own energy and military projects have contaminated reservations with the deadly, radioactive byproducts of uranium mining. On the reservations many are dying of cancer and many children are born with birth defects. At one point people on the Navajo Reservation were even given radioactive mine tailings for building material.

Cultural genocide is so pervasive that many people do not understand how destructive it is. But native people face it with every media stereotype. Appropriations of Native American culture occur with every sports team named with a racial slur or stereotype. Can you imagine the uproar over a football team called the "Tampa Bay Honkies"? Native American cultural integrity is further demeaned by every car named "Cherokee" or "Navajo" or "Thunderbird." Have you ever seen a car named "Pilgrim" or "Celt" or "Scot"? How about "White Guy"?

Even more devastating, cultural genocide is still the U.S. government's policy despite legislative attempts to guarantee Native American culture, attempts rang-

ing from the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (A.I.R.F.A.) of 1978 to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. A.I.R.F.A. pronounced that "It shall be the policy of the U.S. to protect and preserve the inherent right of the freedom to believe, express, and exercise traditional religion." Nevertheless, in 1990, members of the Native American Church lost their jobs here in Oregon because they took peyote during a religious ceremony. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Native people are not entitled to freedom of religion because religious freedom is subordinate to the drug laws of the state of Oregon.

This year, George Bush approved a B.I.A. policy that gives the government the right to "terminate" a tribe whenever they find it convenient. They don't mean termination in the style of Arnold Schwarzenegger; that was overt policy 500 to 150 years ago (and is covert policy to this day.) "Termination" means that the government can call a tribe "extinct" whenever it is in the way of something the government wants, even though living members of the tribe may be there to contest. The legal status of hundreds of tribes is in danger. Once legal status is denied, the government can also deny claims to land, benefits, and fishing rights, as well as the tribe's right to tax and regulate businesses operating on their land.

Nationwide, the U.S. Forest Service and other government agencies are responsible for the devastation of sacred lands such as Vision Quest sites and burial grounds. These Native holy places are being cleared and slated for development in spite of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The U.S. Supreme Court gutted the A.I.R.F.A.'s protections for sacred sites in 1980 when it decided to allow the Navajo and Hopi's Rainbow Bridge area to be ruined by the construction of the Glen Canyon dam.

Here in Oregon, struggles over sacred sites such as Enola Hill and over essential

food gathering sites such as Mount Hood Meadows of Wy'East (Mt. Hood) are what brought the Sacred Earth Coalition together. Four and a half years ago, Dian Million and Susana Santos (Tygh, Warm Springs) called upon the religious and environmental communities to help preserve the sacred lands of Wy'East. The Coalition has been instrumental in so far forestalling development in these areas.

By organizing public support, the Coalition and others forced these areas into the headlines. Other groups filed several lawsuits regarding these issues. Even though they were thrown out of court, they helped to delay and call atten-



"Cry No More the Wind," watercolor by Susana Santos

tion to the decisions that the Forest Service was trying to push through. Now, because of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs's involvement, Cultural Impact Statements must be drawn up about both areas before they can be developed.

Furthermore, the last time we spoke to the Forest Service about Mt. Hood Meadows, Inc.'s attempts to develop and expand their ski resort, we were told that they were having financial difficulties and had indefinitely postponed their request to build a new ski lift in Heather Canyon. While this is encouraging, we must be persistent. We cannot fall asleep.

If we have had success, it has been because many diverse elements have worked on the problem from different

angles. Government agencies ignore Native tribes and environmentalists in isolation, but when they see us united and persistent, they cannot ignore us.

In the past year, the Sacred Earth Coalition has been running the Culture Shock Gallery. As well as being a congregation point, Culture Shock Gallery is a place for disenfranchised artists—such as women, gays and lesbians, artists of color, and political artists—to show and sell work. This 500 anniversary year, the Gallery has been focusing especially on Indigenous artists.

From July through September, we were very fortunate to be able to show the art of Leonard Peltier and Bob Robideaux. Both men have been instrumental in the struggle for land rights and native sovereignty. Wrongly convicted of the shooting deaths of two F.B.I. agents, Leonard Peltier has been a political prisoner for 15 years. The mass media alternates between ignoring him and portraying him as a terrorist. In displaying his art, we are enabling people to see another dimension

of Leonard Peltier, as well as a deeper perspective on Native American political struggles. Political paintings are an especially effective and appropriate educational tool because Native people have traditionally used oral and pictorial ways of teaching. People coming to view the art have expressed much surprise at how talented Peltier is as a realist. Most people have no idea that Robideaux and Peltier are fine artists, because of the mass media's narrow portrayal.

Leonard Peltier has spent 15 of his 48 years in prison. Much like all of Native American, who have spent 120 to 150 of their last 500 years on reservations. What are you doing about the 500 years? ■

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I DECIDE
 It took me a week to decide. I've always been maternally orientated. In today's society, it's hard not to be. Reproduction is necessary for survival; the gift of life prominently cherished. Few consider babies a parasitic responsibility, drastically altering a young woman's life. I was pressed for time. Life was growing and I had to decide its fate.
 As if from afar, I watched myself enter the clinic, watched slightly trembling hands count out \$250. I saw myself follow the white-clad figure to the small room and felt my gruesome attempt to return her bright smile.
 Thighs propped open, cold steel slid into me and expanded painfully. The hose sucked noisily, wetly slurping at my insides. Piercing cramps sliced my body and waves of nausea rolled endlessly. The sound of the hose turned hollow, declaring my emptiness. The steel, transformed into razor blades, was pulled from my body and oozingly, it wept. Dizzy, on weak legs, I walked from the clinic. My emotions were raw and warped, yet I recognized the faint thread of relief.
 I was able to have it performed legally and in sterile conditions. Every woman should have that right. No one should be able to decide for me, or condemn me for the decision I made. I can do what I want with my body and I did the right thing.
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