



Richard Wilson, outgoing president of Oglala Sioux. (D. McGuire photo.)



Albert Trimble, who became president of Oglala Sioux on April 12th. (D. McGuire photo.)



Selo Black Crow, leader of Lakota Treaty Council. (Gallacher photo.)

What the Oglala Sioux want

by David Corkery
Second in a Series

PINE RIDGE, SOUTH DAKOTA (PNS) — The near civil war raging on Pine Ridge Reservation — at the cost of an estimated seventy lives since the Wounded Knee confrontation three years ago — has gone far beyond a struggle over land and power. The traditional Oglala Sioux are fighting to secede from the United States.

They never legally joined. The 1968 treaty ending the wars between the Great Sioux Nation and the United States was an agreement between two sovereign nations.

Today the traditional Oglala people see sovereignty as their only hope for survival. Leaving the reservation for the cities means an isolated existence in a foreign culture for which they are unprepared — a form of psychological suicide. Alcoholism and suicide are common results.

But staying on the reservation under the power of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) means, for most, dying at the age of 42. BIA policies, in the words of traditional leader Louie Bad Wound are "an attempt to destroy the Indian completely — not only his culture, his religion, his language, but the totality."

Largely as a result of BIA policy, ninety percent of Oglala lands are now controlled by ranchers with little or no Indian blood. With unemployment at seventy percent, the reservation's 900 federally-funded jobs are monopolized by mixed bloods who share the white culture.

Recognition of Sioux sovereignty — secession — means gaining control over tribal lands and government.

The BIA itself, in its original June 1975 Pine Ridge Commission Report, agreed that the key issue underlying the ongoing crisis was recognition of the sovereignty granted by the 1868 treaty.

But the White House, a BIA source told PNS, forced omission of this portion from the final published version.

To the traditionalists, the treaty issue is not just a bargaining chip to gain reform of the BIA or financial compensation for Sioux lands taken.

The traditional Oglala people have been taught from birth that they are a sovereign nation — their sacred lands illegally occupied by White America.

They have organized their own government — made up of their 33 traditional chiefs and headmen, and separate from the tribal council — called the Lakota Treaty Council.

"Lakota," meaning "friend" or "ally," is the word traditionalists use to identify their tribe. "Sioux," they say, is derived from the French word meaning "cutthroat." The Oglala people are one band of the Lakota nation.

The Treaty Council has already met

with President Ford and other government officials in Washington, out of which came a Presidential Treaty Review Commission. They have opened an office in New York to press their case before the UN and are appealing for legal recognition of their sovereign rights from the World Court in Geneva.

Meanwhile, at Pine Ridge, the council has been recognized by newly elected President Al Trimble as his principal advisory body.

RE-EMERGING NATIONALISM

The power of the sovereignty issue has grown as a direct result of the increasingly bloody polarization on the reservation between the traditionalists, on one side, and the mixed bloods who share the white culture and monopolize the reservation's land and jobs, on the other.

At one time, the traditionalists asked for federal intervention to stem the reign of terror they claimed Wilson and his supporters waged to preserve that monopoly. After repeated futile efforts, they are now convinced that the U.S. government is actively siding with Wilson's forces as a way of preserving white control over the reservation.

As a result, they are pushing for total separation from the federal government and white America.

With sovereignty, the traditionalists believe, they would be able to begin erasing the impact of White America on their land and culture.

The plan to discard the representative system of tribal government — with its elected council and president — imposed on them in 1934 by the BIA and legally ratified in an election held only in English, barring the participation of many traditionalists.

In its place they would put the old form of tribal government, with a council of chiefs and headmen who consult with their people on every issue and do not act until tribal consensus has been reached.

Less tangible but perhaps more important, they would rebuild their traditional culture and religion — the system of values that binds them together and has been severely threatened by the white culture brought to the reservation by the federal BIA.

Traditional leaders point to a statement made in the late 19th century by J.D.C. Atkins, the commissioner of Indian Affairs, "must be imbued to the exalting egotism of American Civilization so that he will say 'I' instead of 'We,' and 'This is mine' instead of 'This is ours.'"

Young traditional activist Tim Tiger echoes Atkins' words when he explains that "In old Indian ways, and even nowadays on reservations, what people have belongs to everyone. The center of life isn't money for Indian people, it's the well-being of the (Lakota) nation. But for white people, it's each man for himself."

Selo Black Crow, a leader of the Lakota Treaty Council, points to the difference

between white and Indian attitudes toward the land. He speaks of the whites' "two-headed god of money and progress" that is "raping for the land. The Sioux see themselves as 'keepers' and 'protectors' of the land — not 'owners'."

Further, Black Crow points to a concept of justice, totally at odds with the white system, in which offenders are cleansed and forgiven through special ceremonies.

NEW TRIBAL PRESIDENT

The man who will play a key mediation role between the federal bureaucracy and the traditionalists as they press for recognition of sovereignty is Al Trimble.

Though Trimble grew up on Pine Ridge Reservation, he has worked the past twenty years for the BIA, largely on other reservations.

After the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation he was named BIA Superintendent at Pine Ridge — and during his sixteen months in that post he says he learned first-hand the suffering of the traditional people under Wilson and the BIA.

As he began to work to bring back control over jobs, land and the police to the traditional Sioux, he became a thorn in Wilson's and the BIA's sides. Wilson freely admits putting pressure on the BIA, successfully, to remove Trimble.

In addition to experience with the BIA, Trimble has worked closely with Congressional leaders, including South Dakota Senator James Abourezk (Democrat), head of a Federal Policy Review Commission undertaking the first major comprehensive review of Indian policy since 1934. (A report is due late this year.)

Beyond the treaty issue, Trimble and his supporters will be working to neutralize the Wilson power structure — in Trimble's words, "to diminish fear and anxiety on the reservation by getting rid of Wilson's goon squad."

They will also attempt to decentralize control of police, education and other services on the reservation — putting them in the hands of local citizens in each community.

If the Oglala's fight for recognition of sovereignty fails, no one here knows what will happen. They have a deep religious faith that their God — whom they call Great Mystery — will never let the Sioux nation die. If it should, they are sure revenge will be visited on those responsible.

Their faith seems, to this writer, the kind people die for.

As Selo Black Crow says, "When my people ratified the 1868 treaty at Fort Laramie we picked up our sacred pipe and we asked the Great Mystery to put the treaty into the seven stars of the Dipper."

"The only way you can destroy the 1868 treaty is if the stars of the Dipper fall. And that will be the end of the world."

American merchants promoted slave trade

Early-day changes that profit-minded British merchants "forced" slavery on the American colonists haven't stood the test of time or research, says an Oregon State University historian who is an authority on 18th century America.

Darold D. Wax points out that "a remarkable number of merchants in the colonies at one time or another invested funds in the African slave trade. In fact, there were very few of the leading mercantile houses that did not eventually try the African trade."

Plainly, Americans found slavery as profitable as did the British merchants, he notes. New York, Boston and Newport, Rhode Island, were the major slave trade ports before the American Revolution.

Taxes placed on imported slaves by the colonies "were seldom motivated by a desire to prohibit the slave trade," Wax has found from extensive study of colonial America.

"Far outweighing any humanitarian impulse to end the trade through taxing it were the need for revenue, fear of slaves insurrection, over-extension of credit, and the desire of some to limit slave importations and thus enhance the value of Negroes already in the colonies."

One 18th century writer referred to selling slaves as "by far the most profitable trade that we have in this part of the world."

Inexperienced, transient or casual traders sometimes suffered serious losses, however, because "they lacked an appreciation of the skills necessary for successful involvement in the slave trade," Wax emphasized.

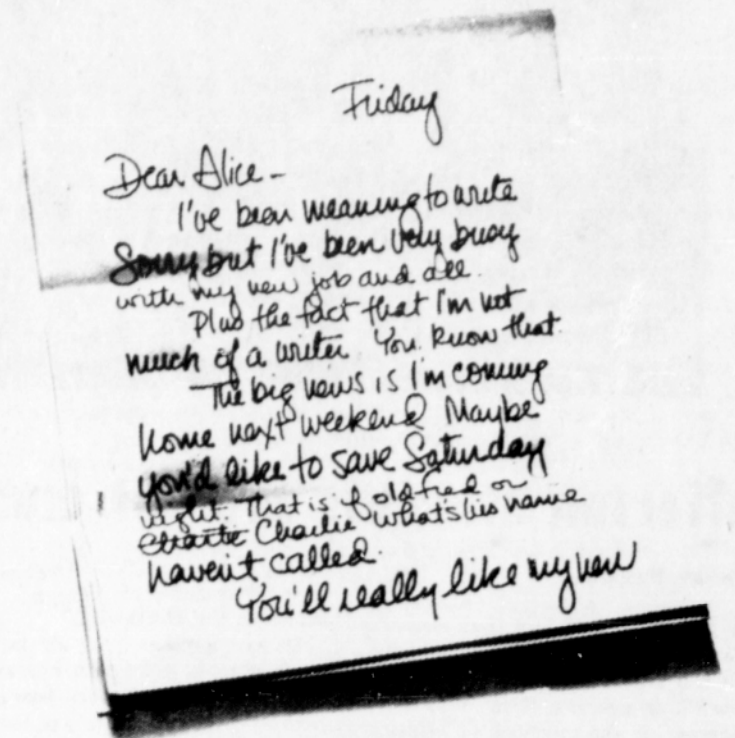
"The trade in Black slaves diverged from other forms of commerce in critical ways: slaving vessels carried human cargoes which had to be fed, cared for and watched over to prevent mutiny. To embark on a slaving voyage without an understanding of the peculiarities of the African trade was to court almost certain disaster."

Sickness sometimes took a heavy toll, Wax has learned from his study of slave trade records and diaries. One diarist observed: "Some Drowned themselves

Some Starved and others Sickened and Dyed."

The Oregon State University historian has written twenty papers on the slave trade and the institution of slavery and is

planning a book on the subject. He is co-author of a widely-used college textbook, "A History of Colonial America." Wax also is a member of the Oregon Bicentennial Commission.



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Tax meeting changed

The Business Tax Workshop regularly held by Internal Revenue Service on the third Thursday of each month in Portland will be conducted on April 22nd this month.

Short indicated that the workshop will resume their regular scheduling, the third Thursday in each month, in May.

The workshops begin at 1:00 p.m. and are conducted in room 1578 in the new Portland Federal Building. Each session covers tax requirements for small businesses and are excellent opportunities for persons beginning a new business to learn how to set up an adequate record-keeping system for federal tax purposes.

The half hour IRS film "Hey, We're in Business" is normally shown at 3:00 p.m. and is followed by a new feature — The Business Topic of the Month. The topic for April will be "Depreciation" and May's topic will be "Recordkeeping" (Businessmen and tax practitioners are welcome to attend either the entire workshop or the business topic section).

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Rangel charges FBI job bias hurts enforcement

Congressman Charles B. Rangel (D-NY) has charged that the minimal number of minority persons employed as FBI special agents constitutes implicit discrimination and impairs effective and just law enforcement in minority communities.

In a letter recently released, Rangel urged FBI Director Clarence Kelley to take immediate action to increase the number of minority special agents. According to figures supplied by Kelley, only 106 (1.2 percent) of the FBI's 3,514

special agents are Black, and 121 (1.4 percent) are Spanish-surnamed.

"This is disturbing not only because of the implicit discrimination involved, but also because it reflects on the FBI's capacity to effect equitable law enforcement in minority communities," Rangel said.

Rangel pointed out that the efforts of FBI personnel, particularly on undercover assignments, are likely to be fruitless unless the agents are of the same ethnic heritage as the residents of

the community in which they are operating.

Rangel emphasized, however, that the issue of minority representation goes beyond considerations of the FBI's effectiveness.

"The functions of the Bureau have a direct and substantial impact on law enforcement in the nation, and by extension, the administration of equal justice for all Americans," Rangel said. "If the FBI is insensitive to minority people in its hiring practices, what assurance can there be that the same insensitivity will not be practiced in the Bureau's enforcement operations?"

The only way to resolve the problem, Rangel said, is to substantially increase the number of minority persons serving as special agents. Therefore, he said, the FBI should initiate a hiring policy that will result in the immediate future in a responsible proportion of special agents from minority backgrounds.

"Only then will there be any chance that the FBI's law enforcement efforts can be both effective and just in minority communities," Rangel said.

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