

"Hanto Yo" protest grows, ABC may scrap series

by Nancy Butterfield
of The Indian Voice

"The protest mounted by Sioux tribal leaders and scholars against Ruth Beebe Hill's "Hanto Yo" gathered momentum last month, attracting the attention not only of the national media, but of ABC-TV executives as well.

The best selling novel, published by Doubleday in 1979 portrays the lives of several generations of Sioux families from 1750 to 1835. It has been billed as "the story of the American Indian told for the first time from the inside," and promotional literature is replete with claims of the book's "authenticity." ABC's David Wolper, who plans to produce a TV mini-series of Hanto Yo, has likened it to "the Indian version of Roots."

Sioux linguists and scholars have identified numerous errors in the translation of language, the depiction of the social and political organization of the tribe, and the interpretation of metaphysical concepts.

But probably the passages in the book which Sioux people find most offensive are the descriptions (p. 89) of a Lakota woman consuming the afterbirth of her newborn baby, and the so-called "Ceazin Ceremony" (oral homosexual acts involving male tribal members) which is described on p. 313.

A review of the book prepared by the Lakota Studies Department of Sinte Gleska College, Rosebud, South Dakota, states that consuming of the afterbirth by the mother is "not a part of the normal Lakota way of bringing a child into this world. In fact, the

substance that accompanies the baby at birth was buried, burned, or placed somewhere where it was not disturbed by animals. To handle it in any other way is to invite personal tragedy. The consumption of the afterbirth by a Lakota mother is definitely not an authentic or traditional practice."

Regarding the "Ceazin Ceremony," the Sinte Gleska review says, "in the minds and memories of the Lakota people we interviewed, this ceremony is non-existent. If it ever existed, then it happened with a socially deviant person. Socially deviant persons neither were honored, nor would a ceremony ever be allowed for them."

Outraged at what they feel is the blatant exploitation of their history and culture for profit, Sioux Tribal Councils, organizations and individuals have passed formal resolutions condemning the book and the proposed TV series.

A number of large-city daily newspapers have recently picked up the story. While most have reported merely on local demonstrations as a news event, others, notably the *Seattle Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*, have provided in-depth coverage of the issues and personalities involved.

In a copyrighted journal article May 1, Tomas Guillen of the *Seattle Times* supported the findings of Indian investigators who found the background of Hill's Sioux collaborator, "Chunksa Yuha," (Lorenzo Blacksmith) to be grossly misrepresented.

Guillen, at the insistence of his editor, independently obtained documentation of Blacksmith's boarding school records, (see *The Indian Voice*,

March 1980) disproving his claim to have had no white contact until age 12 or 13. Guillen also received letters from the University of Kansas and Northwestern University in Illinois indicating that, contrary to Blacksmith's biographical statement, he had received no degrees from either institution. And Guillen obtained confirmation of Blacksmith's 1932 robbery conviction and subsequent prison sentence from Yankton County, South Dakota, which had been first discovered by *The Indian Voice*.

Donna Joy Newman, *Chicago Tribune* reporter, published similar findings in her April 3 article, which articulated the concerns of Sioux people who are trying to keep "Hanto Yo" from becoming a nationwide TV mini-series.

And finally, *Time Magazine* published a full-page article in its May 5 issue which concluded "(ABC's David) Wolper, who sees a golden television property turning to lead, has proposed setting up a Sioux advisory board. For the lobbyists, that is not enough: at week's end they were still demanding that the TV project be killed."

This is, according to JoAllyn Archambault, a Sioux P.H.D. candidate at Berkeley, the only solution which is acceptable to the Sioux people.

Archambault, who has worked nonstop to organize opposition to "Hanto Yo" since the book's first appearance, has been present at several recent meetings with ABC executives, David Wolper and Stan Margulies.

Network officials began to take the protests seriously after

their offices were deluged with mail from tribal councils, Indian individuals and non-Indian support groups, expressing alarm and outrage that "Hanto Yo" would be televised.

ABC executives and attorneys agreed to meet with Sioux leaders to discuss the proposed series, and according to Archambault, "they offered us a number of compromises, including air time on TV talk shows to present our objections to the book and membership on an advisory board to work with producers and directors of the movie.

"But we presented a unified front, and told them we are irrevocably committed to having the filming stopped."

Archambault, who is receiving some financial help from Marlon Brando to organize opposition to "Hanto Yo" nationwide, appeared at a press conference in Seattle May 1. Held at Daybreak Star Center, Headquarters of All Tribes Foundation, the press conference featured a panel of distinguished Sioux scholars, including Vine Deloria, attorney and author of "Custer Died for Your Sins," JoAllyn Archambault; Victor Douville, Chairwoman of the Lakota Studies department; Sinte Gleska College, Rosebud, South Dakota; Roberta Wilson, Director of the Tribal Administration Program, University of Washington; Dale Running Bear, authority on the Lakota and Dakota languages; and Katherine Oneita, communications director for UIATF.

In her opening statement, which was carried by all three of Seattle's network stations,

Archambault said, "This book has been reviewed by a wide range of Lakota scholars and traditional people and judged erroneous and misleading. In every instance, Sioux people who are knowledgeable about their culture, history and language find the book's portrayal to be insulting, offensive, pornographic, and occasionally pathetic. We think that Ruth Beebe Hill has used the Sioux people as a screen on which to project her own sexual fantasies and intellectual speculations."

The opposition to "Hanto Yo" has had some interesting results. While David Wolper initially lauded the book as "the most definitive work on the American Indian ever written" he now says he regards it as "a good fictional novel", and insists that his film would rely on the book for only about 10% of its content.

Hill herself, who has been contacted by a number of reporters for comments on the controversy which surrounds her book, has referred inquiries to Blacksmith, who does not answer his telephone or return the calls.

Informed sources have told us that, following a May 12 meeting with more Sioux leaders, David Wolper has decided to postpone production of "Hanto Yo" film until 1981. There is confusion however, about the significance of that decision.

As Celia Thomas, Indian education director for the Tacoma area express it, "we don't know if he's trying ease his way out of an agreement with Hill, or if he hopes that by putting it off for a while, we will all forget about it and go away."

Anti-"Hanto Yo" resolution proposed

Indian multi-media association close to being formed

Two hundred and fifty Indian media professionals gathered at Anaheim, California for the fourth Annual National Media Conference on May 12-14, to exchange ideas and to explore current Indian media policies. Participants came from Alaska, Canada and inland United States.

William E. Hallett, BIA Commissioner, Washington, D.C. was keynote speaker for the conference which is sponsored by the Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium, Lincoln, N.E. and by the American Indian Film Institute, Culver City, C.A.

Frank Blythe and Michael Smith announced that Albuquerque, N.M. is the tentative site for next year's conference. Blythe is Executive Director of NAPBC. Smith is President of AIFI.

The conference is the only national meeting which draws Indian press, film, and broadcast personnel together

at the same time, notes Laurell Schuerman, NAPBC Assistant Director.

NIMC IV conference participants took a step toward formalizing an Indian multi-media association when the closing conference assembly passed a resolution establishing an ad hoc committee to study formation of an Indian media association to encompass all of North America.

A separate organization "AIRS"-American Intertribal Radio Society-was chartered at the meeting. Plans for that group were formulated earlier this spring at the National Public Radio conference in Kansas City.

In other matters, the conference assembly took note of Sioux tribal and Sioux Alliance opposition to the controversial book "Hanto Yo" and requested that the sponsoring organizations distribute the resolution to the mass media and to those associated with the proposed television production of the

book.

Conference participants also called for the publication of a national Indian media personnel directory.

Throughout the three-day meeting, concurrent workshops ran on topics focusing on print and broadcast production techniques, facilities and programming development, and fund raising. Presentors from federal agencies in Washington, D.C. interfaced with Indian media professionals who work on "the firing line."

Banquet guests, Indian film star Will Sampson and television personality Teyanna Torres, presented "Indian Man" and "Indian Woman of the Year" awards to Richard LaCourse, Washington State, and Rose Robinson, Washington, D.C.

Indian opera star Bonnie Jo Hunt performed at the banquet. Closing day luncheon attendees were entertained by Indian comedian Charlie Hill.



Decathlon Survivors

The Personnel Personalities took the trophy at the steno pool Decathlon held on June 1. The winners are Margie Earl, Carol Jenkins, Conna Converse, Chris Converse, and Julie Mitchell. MayAnn Gabriel is not pictured with her teammates due to a broken shin bone suffered on the obstacle course. Other injuries included a broken finger suffered by Andy Lucas, as well as bee stings and rope burns. Despite the injuries, fun was had by all.