

A Public Declaration to the Tribal Councils and Traditional Spiritual Leaders of the Indian and Eskimo Peoples of the Pacific Northwest

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is a formal apology on behalf of our churches for their long-standing participation in the destruction of traditional Native American spiritual practices. We call upon our people for recognition of and respect for your traditional ways of life and for protection of your sacred places and ceremonial objects. We have frequently been unconscious and insensitive and not come to your aid when you have been victimized by unjust Federal policies and practices. In many other circumstances we reflected the rampant racism and prejudice of the dominant culture with which we too willingly identified. During this 200th Anniversary year of the United States Constitution we, as leaders of our churches in the Pacific Northwest, extend our apology. We ask for your forgiveness and blessing.

As the Creator continues to renew the earth, the plants, the animals and all living things, we call upon the people of our denominations and fellowships to a commitment of mutual support in your efforts to reclaim and protect the legacy of your own traditional spiritual teachings. To that end we pledge our support and assistance in upholding the American Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 95-134, 1978) and within that legal precedent affirm the following:

- (1) The rights of the Native Peoples to practice and participate in traditional ceremonies and rituals with the same protection offered all religions under the Constitution.
- (2) Access to and protection of sacred sites and public lands for ceremonial purposes.
- (3) The use of religious symbols (feathers, tobacco, sweet grass, bone, etc.) for use in traditional ceremonies and rituals.

The spiritual power of the land and the ancient wisdom of your indigenous religions can be, we believe, great gifts to the Christian churches. We offer our commitment to support you in the righting of previous wrongs:

to protect your peoples' efforts to enhance Native spiritual teachings; to encourage the members of our churches to stand in solidarity with you on these important religious issues; to provide advocacy and mediation, when appropriate, for ongoing negotiations with State agencies and Federal officials regarding these matters.

May the promises of this day go on public record with all the congregations of our communions and be communicated to the Native American Peoples of the Pacific Northwest. May the God of Abraham and Sarah, and the Spirit who lives in both the cedar and Salmon People, be honored and celebrated.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Thomas L. Blevins
Bishop, Pacific Northwest Synod, Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Dr. Robert Bradford
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Northwest

The Rev. Robert Brock
N.W. Regional Christian Church
The Right Rev. Robert H. Cochrane
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
The Rev. W. James Halfaker, Conference Minister
Washington North Idaho Conference,
United Church of Christ

The Most Rev. Raymond G. Hunthausen
Archbishop of Seattle

The Rev. Lowell Knutson
Bishop, North Pacific District,
American Lutheran Church

The Most Rev. Thomas Murphy
Coadjutor Archbishop,
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle

The Rev. Mikra G. Talbert
Bishop, United Methodist Church, Pacific Northwest
Conference

-Courtesy of Americans Before Columbus.

Take A Look at This!

The following is just a sample of what our people were subjected to in those early days when the white man first came to our land.

*Department of the Interior,
Office of Indian Affairs,
Washington, January 11, 1902*

The Superintendent,
Grande Ronde School & Agency, Oregon.
Sir;

This Office desires to call your attention to a few customs among the Indians which, it is believed, should be modified or discontinued.

The wearing of long hair by the male population of your agency is not in keeping with the advancement they are making, or will soon be expected to make, in civilization. The wearing of short hair by the males will be a great step in advance and will certainly hasten their progress towards civilization. The returned male student far too frequently goes back to the reservation and falls into the old custom of letting his hair grow long. He also paints profusely and adopts all the old habits and customs which his education in our industrial schools has tried to eradicate. The fault does not lie so much with the schools as with the conditions found on the reservations. These conditions are very often due to the policy of the Government toward the Indian and are often perpetuated by the Superintendent's not caring to take the initiative in fastening any new policy on his administration of the affairs of the agency.

On many of the reservations the Indians of both sexes paint, claiming that it keeps the skin warm in winter and cool in summer; but instead, this paint melts when the Indian perspires and runs down into the eyes. The use of this paint leads to many diseases of the eyes among those Indians who paint. Persons who have given considerable thought and investigation to the subject are satisfied that this custom causes the majority of the cases of blindness among the Indians of the United States.

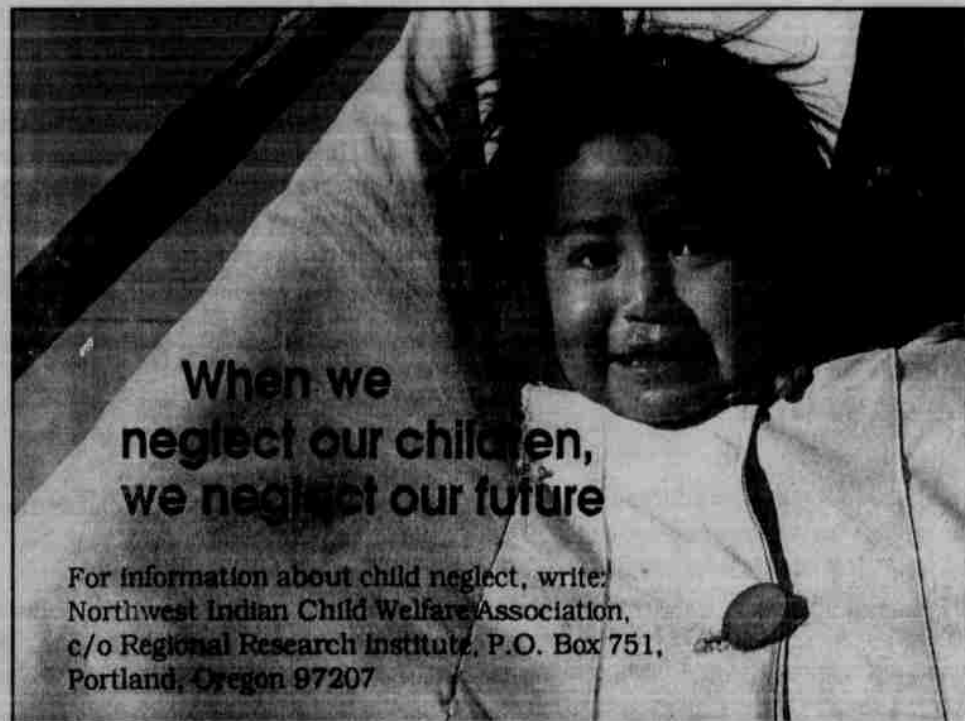
You are therefore directed to induce your male Indians to cut their hair, and both sexes to stop painting. With some of the Indians this will be an easy matter; with others it will require considerable tact and perseverance on the part of yourself and your employees to successfully carry out these instructions. With your Indian employees and those Indians who draw rations and supplies it should be an easy matter, as a non-compliance with this order may be made a reason for discharge or for withholding rations and supplies. Many may be induced to comply with the order voluntarily, especially the returned student. The returned students who do not comply voluntarily should be dealt with summarily. Employment, supplies, etc., should be withdrawn until they do comply and if they become obstreperous about the matter a short confinement in the guard-house at hard labor, with shorn locks, should furnish a cure. Certainly all the younger men should wear short hair and it is believed that by tact, perseverance, firmness, and withdrawal of supplies the Superintendent can induce all to comply with this order.

The wearing of citizen's clothing, instead of the Indian costume and blanket, should be encouraged.

Indian dances and so-called Indian feasts should be prohibited. In many cases these dances and feasts are simply subterfuges to cover degrading acts and to disguise immoral purposes. You are directed to use your best efforts in the suppression of these evils.

On or before June 30, 1902, you will report to this Office the progress you have made in carrying out the above orders and instructions.

Very respectfully,
Commissioner.



**When we
neglect our children,
we neglect our future**

For information about child neglect, write:
Northwest Indian Child Welfare Association,
c/o Regional Research Institute, P.O. Box 751,
Portland, Oregon 97207