

Chapter 10 The Upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s

I. The 1961 Declaration of Indian Purpose

By the early 1960s, anger among Native Americans had reached a critical point, just as it had among other minority communities. In June of 1961, a week-long conference was held in Chicago which was attended by over 400 people from 65 tribes. Together, the attendees prepared a statement and sent it to President John F. Kennedy. Soon after, many of the same people would come together to form the National Indian Youth Council. Then other coalitions formed and, by the mid 1960s, the "Red Power" movement was in existence. Here is the Declaration of Indian Purpose sent to the President.

In order to give due recognition to certain basic philosophies by which Indian people and all other people endeavor to live, We, the Indian people, must be governed by high principles and laws in a democratic manner, with a right to choose our own way of life. Since our Indian culture is slowly being absorbed by the American society, we believe we have the responsibility of preserving our precious heritage; recognizing that certain changes are inevitable. We believe that the Indians should provide the adjustment and thus freely advance with dignity to a better life educationally, economically, and spiritually.

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We believe in the inherent right of all people to retain spiritual and cultural values, and that the free exercise of these values is necessary to the normal development of any people. Indians exercised this inherent right to live their own lives for thousands of years before the white man came and

took their lands. It is a more complex world in which Indians live today, but the Indian people who first settled the New World and built the great civilizations which only now are being dug out of the past, long ago demonstrated that they could master complexity.

We believe that the history and development of America show that the Indian has been subjected to duress, undue influence, unwarranted pressures, and policies which have produced uncertainty, frustration, and despair. Only when the public understands these conditions and is moved to take action toward the formulation and adoption of sound and consistent policies and programs will these destroying factors be removed and the Indian resume his normal growth and make his maximum contribution to modern society.

We believe in the future of a greater America, an America which we were the first to love, where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness will be a reality. In such a future, with Indians and all other Americans cooperating, a cultural climate will be created in which the Indian people will grow and develop as members of a free society . . .

It has long been recognized that one Commissioner cannot give the personal attention to all tribal matters which they deserve. He cannot meet all callers to his office, make necessary visits to the field, and give full attention to the review of tribal programs and supporting budget requests. In view of these conditions, we most urgently recommend that the present organization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs be reviewed and that certain principles be considered no matter what the organizational change might be.

The basic principle involves the desire on the part of Indians to participate in developing their own programs with help and guidance as needed and requested, from a local decentralized technical and administrative staff, preferably located conveniently to the people it serves. . . . The Indians as responsible individual citizens, as responsible tribal representatives, and as responsible Tribal Councils want to participate, want to contribute to their own personal and tribal improvements and want to cooperate with their Government on how best to solve the many problems in a businesslike, efficient, and economical manner as rapidly as possible . . .

We believe that where programs have failed in the past, the reasons were lack of Indian understanding, planning, participation, and approval.

A plan of development should be prepared by each Indian group, whose land or other assets are held in trust, whether such lands or assets are fully defined or not; such plans to be designed to bring about maximum utilization of physical resources by the dependent population and the development of that population to its full potential; such plans to be prepared by the Indians of the respective groups, with authority to call upon the agencies of the federal government for technical assistance, and the ultimate purpose

of such planning to be the growth and development of the resources and the people;

That requests for annual appropriations of funds be based on the requirements for carrying into effect these individual development plans, including credit needs and capital investment, and the annual operation budget for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to include sufficient funds to cover the costs of preparing plans and estimates similar in operation to a Point IV Plan.

Source: *American Indian Chicago Conference Proceedings*, University of Chicago, June 13–20, 1961, reprinted in Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, eds., *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*, 2nd edn. (University of Nebraska Press, 1999 [1971]).

Study: George P. Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960–1975* (University of Arizona Press, 1998).