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•INDEX•

A FAMILY SKETCH.....3
ART.....10
CIVIC CALENDAR.....15
CONTRA COSTA COL.....2
FILIPINO CIRCLES.....11, 12
HERE & THERE.....4, 5, 9

QUOTES & QUIPS.....3
RECIPES.....8
REMINISCING.....6, 8
THE OLD PROF.....12
THE RED MINORITY.....1, 7, 9
V. ANT ADS.....14
WASHINGTON PLAYGROUND....13

THE RED MINORITY

by Gerrie Kretzmer

The history of the Indian in America since the time of the white invasion indicates a marked contrast between treatment by the Spaniards in South America, and that of the English in North America. Though exploited by the Spanish, South American Indians were allowed to maintain their culture. In North America they were pushed off their lands and their population decimated by warfare and harsh peonage. The few who retain their culture survive on the fringes of white society rather than as a part of it.

Population estimates are unreliable but there may have been 1 million Indians in the Americas in 1492. In 1890 there were 248,253; in 1960 an increase to 523,591. One quarter of all Indians in the U.S. live in the Southwest, a scattering in California, Nevada and Utah, a large concentration in the North Central U.S., principally South Dakota, the second largest group in Oklahoma, and scattered in the southeast and northeast.

Recent mental testing programs conclude that Indians are innately as intelligent as any other ethnic group, but score poorly because of lack of motivation and language difficulties. For example, an Indian child might choose "dust" and "excitement" as a response to "crowd", rather than the "right" answer-- "closeness" and "numbers".

It is important for Americans of dominant status to understand the Indian. Action-displacing sympathy has bred a hard skepticism into most Indians long resigned to poverty and incompetence from the Bureau of Indian affairs. The Indian does not want to be assimilated into the American culture. Yet his future depends on the policy adopted by the white population, and to be successful this policy must be based on an understanding of Indian culture.

This culture has been influenced by white civilization by involvement with

the horse, the gun and alcohol. The Indian has diffused into white culture his achievements in art, and cultivation and knowledge of food plants. General characteristics of Indian societies are that they are pre-literate. That is, knowledge is transferred to youth verbally. The societies are also small and therefore relationships are personal rather than impersonal. Their economies were primarily hunting and gathering, with agriculture mostly women's work, and thus farming and gardening are exceedingly unnatural to an Indian man. Material wealth is shared and there is therefore no lack of the basic necessities. Since class distinctions are not strong, individuals have only limited power.

The personality of the Indian is one of reserve with a high degree of control over interpersonal aggression. There is autonomy of the individual, generosity, a superstitious fear of the world as dangerous, a practical joker strain, an ability to face reality, and a fatalistic dependence on a supernatural power which may influence actions and for which the individual is not personally accountable.

The relationship of the Indian with the white English government can be grouped into several time periods: 1) Community Diplomacy 1607-1778: The colonists dealt with the Indians in whatever manner seemed best to them, and were often at odds with the British Crown which attempted to protect Indian lands; 2) Control by Treaties 1778-1871: The new American government tried to follow the former policy of the British Crown; 3) Reservation Period-Forced Assimilation 1871: The Indians were made wards of the government, removed from their lands, the children were taken from their homes and sent to boarding schools, and tribal customs were discouraged. This was a failure and led to 4) the Reservation Period-"New Deal" when in 1934 a new philosophy aimed at integrating Indians into national life as Indians, and yet retaining their tribal culture.

(cont. on page 7)

Reminiscing

6.

Interesting and sometimes amusing articles from old Richmond and Point Richmond newspapers, courtesy of the Richmond Museum.

1914

From August 1, 1914:

"STREET PARADE TOO MUCH FOR NERVES OF EXPRESS WAGON HORSE"

"Cowboys, cowgirls, painted Indians, two bands and a steam calliope were too much for the nerves of a Richmond horse, broken to speeding automobiles and clamoring street cars. The horse,

hitched to an

Old's express wagon was tied near the corner of First and Macdonald when the Wild West parade approached on its return to the big "top."

The stolid old express horse took one look at the terrifying and strange collection of beasts and humans; then with a frightened tug at its fastenings it broke loose and dashed up Macdonald Avenue directly into the crowds gathered to see the street procession. The crowd evaded the frenzied animal, but it was not stopped until it reached Ninth street.

(N.B. - That this is not a press story is evidenced by the fact that the runaway horse was caught by a delivery man and not by the lasso of one of the

Irwin cowboys.

WITH DON CHURCH

1915

From August 6, 1915:

"RICHMOND'S FINEST ARE WEARING NEW SKYPIECES"

"Richmond's finest today received their new caps.

They're something distinctively individual, if that will cover it.

In fact they are the latest from New York. The policemen of that city are always leading in the newest of police paraphernalia.

Inspector George Betts, the first to receive one of the new



"lids" strutted up before a mirror and with his head cocked to a forty-five degree angle placed the new head-piece on his knob. As he strutinized it first in the back, then on the side, and finally in the front, he found that something was detracting from its appearance.

It was the rubber collar which he had on.

"Well, if I've got to look like one of those dude cops of New York, I might just as well throw this dang thing away and put on one of those new fandangled collars that make you look like a Lord Fauntleroy."

And he did.

(cont. on page 8.)

7.

(cont. from page 1.)

The Indian Reorganization Act brought an improvement, but today the reservations still have a 40% unemployment rate, grossly dilapidated housing, 30% illiteracy, 2/3 the life expectancy and less than a third of the average income of other Americans, and rampant disease including a tuberculosis incidence 7 times the national average.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has no hard data on population dynamics, income, employment or education. It does not have even one trained statistician on its staff. Indian schools breed despondency, cultural inferiority and alienation. The dropout rate exceeds 50%. The BIA has mismanaged land, timber and water resources and has built up intricate relationships with grazing, timber and mining interests in the West. Termination policies where carried out in Oregon and Wisconsin have had terribly adverse effects. Without a land base, Indians will soon cease as a distinct culture.

The key focus should be in providing Indians with employment which would give self-confidence. The basic economic problems of Indian communities could be solved by the provision of 40,000 jobs. Loan funds to finance tribal enterprises and incentives to attract industry are recommended. Conservation projects, housing construction, recreational site development would create jobs.

Interpersonal relations between Indians and whites have varied from conceiving him as a "noble savage" to "savage beast", and he has been treated accordingly either with benevolent pity or disdain and contempt. There is a correlation between the attitudes and the proximity of white people to the Indians. Whites who live near reservations tend to look upon the Indians as a lower class group with a tendency toward drunkenness. Those who work in Indian agencies are often prejudiced, and of limited imagination and flexibility. The traders range from helpful to

exploitative. Missionaries suppress native custom and therefore have little influence. White employers are unable to understand either the "slowness" of the Indian or his disappearance from work to attend a ceremonial or help his family. His inability to adjust to a white working schedule is incomprehensible to a white man who knows that a day's work brings a dollar.

The question is whether it is possible for Indian groups to become self-reliant and still retain their own ways of life. Though they are wards of the government in a manner distinctive from all other American groups, they are also minority people and are discriminated against wherever they live close to whites. The Indian population is growing at a faster rate than the national population and too fast to be supported by the areas now assigned to them. Indians are becoming increasingly self-governing and the tendency is to remain Indian in a cultural and social sense. The pressure to acculturate creates behavioral difficulties in many, as does discrimination. And their progress toward full equality is retarded by the pressure of vested interests in ownership of valuable lands and mineral resources.

Thus the "last battle" is to save what is left of their lands and to save their Indianness. There is a new young Indian--educated, well-traveled, who has studied the ways of the white man. He wants self-determination and an Indian way of life. He demands the opportunity to participate in the formation of legislation and policies affecting his people. He is rediscovering Indian values where every living thing is loved and man lives in harmony with the natural world--where all his religious beliefs are integrated into everything he thinks, he sees, he does.

The Black Nationalist wants the material things of white society. His tribal identity and culture were lost in the slave marts. But the Indian has never

(cont. on page 9)