

HISTORY IS A WEAPON

"Let My People Go": An Address delivered at the conference of the Society of American Indians in Lawrence, Kansas

by Carlos Montezuma (Apache, September 30, 1915)

Somehow or other the idea prevails that the Indian's sphere of action in this life and in America should be limited within the Wigwam, and when an Indian boy or girl goes away to school you hear the hounding voices saying, "Go back, go back to your home and people." These good people and many others seem to convey the idea that Indians are strangers in America; and strange to say, these people have the whole world for their action, and they are far away from their place of birth, and when they came the Indian was here; and, of course, the Indians, too, must have the whole world for their sphere of action.

There are hundreds of Indian employees in the Indian Service. To a casual observer this may appear as though the United States Government is magnanimous, considerate of its wards by giving employment to the schooled Indian boys and girls and to others who can fill positions and pass civil-service examinations. Man is the outcome of his environment. If employed in the Indian Service of the Government, that person will carry with him the atmosphere of that service, be he from any race. Anyone who conscientiously and unselfishly starts in the Indian Service to sacrifice his ambition in behalf of the Indian in time will fall into the rut, get tired, disgusted, and lose interest, and finally see no use, and he will fall into the level of his surroundings and stick to his job. He has lost sight of the grand object that he had at first, but he sticks to his job.

Just so with the Indian employees in the Indian Service; their personality is destroyed. To keep their positions, to be in the swim, they must not express themselves: they have nothing to say. They stick to the Indian Service and hate to lose their jobs.

Indian employees in the Indian Service are working against the freedom of their race.

Truth hurts, but it is never wrong, and in the long run it conquers. The Indian Bureau is the only obstacle that stands in the way, that hinders our people's freedom. It seems so strange, so incredible, and so unheard of that we Indians must fight and kill the very organ that was organized to free us in order to free ourselves.

What is the Society of American Indians good for? Dare we say? Dare we run? Dare we cower? And dare we hide when our duty is so plainly written before us? As a society with the greatest object for our people, it should be no longer possible to evade the issue; the responsibility rests with us to be message runners to every camp and to let every Indian know that it remains with every individual Indian to be free.

It is appalling and inexplicable that the palefaces have taken all of the Indian's property—the continent of America—which was all he had in the world. The Indian asks for public school, college, and university education for his children. To refuse such a noble request would be as cruel as to give a stone when he asks for bread. Will the department defray the expenses of any college or university Indian students? The Indian Bureau's motto seems to be, "Eighth grade and no more." And therefore we may assume that the Indian Department does not want the Indian educated. It may be wise, and is afraid that they will make too many lawyers who will fight to a finish. It may be that the Indian Bureau fears something may happen from the Indian's knowledge of doing something.

To dominate a race you do not want to educate them. All one needs to do is to make them believe black is white and get them to believe everything you do is all right. Let them live Indian life. Let them fear you. Let them quibble among themselves. Give them plenty of sweets and tell them things will come out all right. for them not to worry, but leave it all to their "Washington father"; for he is "good medicine." and all will be well. Blessed is the superintendent who has this executive ability.

The life of the Indian Bureau is supported by plausibilities and by civil service. No discredit to the principles of civil service, but when it comes to clinch and hold the lid down and keep the Indians from their liberty by its good name, then it is time that a loud protest should come from the Society of American Indians. The merit system has a limit when it stands in the way of human rights.

The Indian Bureau is willing and anxious to do everything for the Indians, but! It says: "If there is anything wrong, we can remedy it ourselves, because we are in a position to know the needs of the Indians, and do not believe, but!"

"Thou good and faithful servant" cannot be applied to the Indian Bureau; from a lamb it has grown to be a strong monster. It looks with furious glare at every movement we make, lest we take away the Indians from its blood-stained paws, because it pays to continue the same old policy, to keep us within due bonds.

The Indian Bureau could dissolve itself and go out of business, but what is the use? Just think, 8,000 employees would be jobless and there would be no \$11,000,000 appropriation. By dissolving it would be killing its hen that lays the golden egg. Having nursed the Indians for so long, they might be lonesome living without Indians. There is no other race to draw upon to keep the wolf from the door. The last thing it thinks of is to let go of the Indians. It will fight to the last ditch, because they are its bread and butter; they are its money and have sacrificed their services to the cause. Therefore it is useless to look within the Indian Department for relief. It must come from the outside—from Congress and the people.

Some may ask, Can we not adjust or reform the Indian Bureau so that it will accomplish something for the Indians? The Indian Bureau system is wrong. The only way to adjust wrong is to abolish it, and the only reform is to let my people go. After freeing the Indian from the shackles of Government supervision, what is the Indian going to do? Leave that with the Indian, and it is none of your business. Leave an Indian and a Yankee on a desert to live or die. I will vouch on an Indian every time—that he will make a living. This idea that the Indian will starve to death when the Indian Bureau is abolished is all talk. and there is nothing to it. He has to settle everything for himself. He has to do the same as you and I—and that is freedom.

The Indian Bureau has not left the Indians but is awfully busy with a third party. The third party wants this and wants that, backed by Congressmen and by Senators and by a long list of petitioners. The Indian Bureau jibes in with the third party, and they both agree that the Indian has too much land. "He has no use for so much. Let us open up a part of it to the public, sell the land, and deposit the money to his credit in the Treasury, and have the interest money paid to him quarterly." If the Indian wants 50 cents and the tribe has \$200 in the Treasury. the department takes the 50 cents from the \$200, and the Indian believes it comes from Washington by taxing the public. That honest, if you can call it honest. method is called the reimbursement mind.

Reimbursement charity is the most damnable charity conceivable, and it takes away as much burden from the Indians as that good and kindhearted old lady did when she held her heavy market basket out of the wagon on scaling the steep hill so that the poor horses would not have such a heavy load to pull up the hill. The Indians have to pull the heavy load up the hill of the Indian Bureau system, while the Indian Bureau rides and thinks it is helping us by holding its heavy basket out of the wagon.

What did the Indians get for their land that is flooded. How much did the Indians get for the land that irrigation ditches pass through? How much did the Indians

get from the forest reserve and the natural park reserve? These are the questions yet to be settled, if the Government has not protected us as its wards.

Is the Indian's reimbursement fund Government appropriation, or is it the Indian paying himself?

Has the Indian no right to express himself or to be consulted and give his approval and disapproval of the construction of a dam on his domain?

Has he no right to say what part of his reservation may be sold?

Coming down to the fine point, has the Indian any right to open his mouth, to think for himself, or to do for himself, or even to live and breathe for himself?

Not at all; not at all! The Indian Bureau—the Indian Bureau does it all. If there is such a place as hell, O, it's like hell! O, it's like hell to me.

Fairly speaking, the *Century of Dishonor*, by Helen Hunt Jackson, bears a tale that is mild in comparison to the present Indian administration.

The iron hand of the Indian Bureau has us in charge. The slimy clutches of horrid greed and selfish interests are gripping the Indian's property. Little by little the Indian's land and everything else is fading into a dim and unknown realm.

The Indian's prognosis is bad—unfavorable, no hope. The foreboding prodromic signs are visible here and there now; and when all the Indian's money in the United States Treasury is disposed of; when the Indian's property is all taken from him; when the Indians have nothing in this wide, wide world; when the Indians will have no rights, no place to lay their heads; and when the Indians will be permitted to exist only on the outskirts of the towns; when they must go to the garbage boxes in alleys to keep them from starving; when the Indians will be driven into the streets, and finally the streets will be no place for them, then, what will the Indian Bureau do for them? Nothing, but drop them. The Indian Department will go out of business.

In other words, when the Indians will need the most help in this world, that philanthropic department of the Government that we call the Indian Bureau will cease to exist; bankrupt with liabilities —billions and billions—no assets. O Lord, my God, what a fate has the Indian Bureau for my people.

If we depend upon the employees of the Indian Bureau for our life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, we wait a long while. They are too busy looking after the machinery of Indian Affairs; they have no time to look ahead; they have no time to feel the pulse of the Indian; they have no time to think of outside matters; they have no time to adjust matters. "Well, what time have they?" you may ask. All of their time is devoted to the pleasure and will of their master at Washington that we call the Indian Bureau.

Blindly they think they are helping and uplifting. when in reality they are a hindrance, a drawback, and a blockade on the road that would lead the Indian to freedom, that he may find his true place in the realms of mortal beings.

The reservation Indians are prisoners; they cannot do anything for themselves. We are on the outside, and it is the outsiders that must work to free the Indians from bureauism. There is no fear of the general public; they are our friends. When they find out that we are not free they will free us. We have a running chance with the public, but no chance with the Indian Bureau.

The abolishment of the Indian Bureau will not only benefit the Indians, but the country will derive more money annually from the Indians than the Government has appropriated to them. Why? Because by doing away with the Indian Bureau you stop making paupers and useless beings and start the making of producers and workers.

'It doesn't do any good to blame the people or
the time - one is oneself all those people. We
are the time.'

- James Baldwin

