SITUATION OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

Questions have been raised from time to time in the United Nations about the situation of American Indians in the United States. It has been said, quite falsely, that the American Indians are dying out, and that the United States is following a policy of extermination in regard to them.

On the contrary, the Indian population of the United States is increasing at a faster rate than the national rate of increase and they are taking, and being encouraged to take, an increasing part in every aspect of our national life. About two thirds of the Indians in the United States live on lands which they own, the title to which is guaranteed by treaties or statutes. The others have left the land and established themselves as individuals in our communities, as farmers, laborers, doctors, lawyers, educators, housewives and neighbors. There are many people in the United States, several million in fact, who are part Indian, who have some Indian ancestry; Americans are generally very proud to have had such an Indian ancestor.

American Indians today are participating citizens in our democracy, free to develop in any way they wish, either within their tribal organizations or as individuals living off their reserved lands as ordinary members of our communities. The days of war between Indians and whites in our country are long past. Thousands of them have been assimilated into American communities. At the same time there is a vigorous interest in helping Indians who desire to continue their tribal life, solve their problems and share fruitfully in the productive skills and resources which have enriched the United States as a whole.

Because so many people think of the Indians as dying out the census figures as to what is happening to the American Indians will be of special interest. There are now more than 400,000 Indians in our country. The number is increasing every year, and at an extraordinary rate. Around the close of the 19th century there were only about 250,000 Indians. This means that there are more than half again as many Indians today as there were at the beginning of this century. In recent years, the rate of increase among Indians has been greater than for our population as a whole. Moreover, our census figures do not include many persons with Indian ancestors who no longer live on reservations; over a third of our Indians have left the reservations, and unless they ask to be listed as Indians they are merged into the general population and may not show up in the census figures. Indians in the United States are a developing group, and promise to become an even larger part of our American people.

Now let us look at the situation of Indians in the United States who live on reservations, within their tribal organizations, and the way they share in our American life. First of all, Indians are free to come and go on their reservations. These are nothing more than areas of land in which the Indians' ownership is protected by the United
Also, it should be emphasized that there are many different Indian tribes in our country. These tribes differ greatly from each other. For instance, there are today over 200 different Indian languages, and the Indians speaking one language often cannot understand the other Indian languages at all, so that they must depend on English or Spanish to talk with members of other tribes. Likewise, their manner of living is very different. It is impossible to generalize about so many separate peoples. Their ways of life differed widely before the voyages of Columbus, and they have continued to differ widely as they have progressed. Some Indian reservations are in the rich industrial states of our seacoast, such as New York and California. Most reservations, however, are in the interior western states. On some there is ample pasture for livestock, while on others timber has been developed as a business enterprise. Oil was struck on the land of a few Osage Indians in Oklahoma, but the wealth they received is not typical of other tribes. Most of the western reservations are not highly productive, and provision must be made to amplify the resources of tribes on them.

Indians are American citizens, like everyone else born in the United States. Many Indians were granted citizenship long ago through treaties with Indian tribes or by Acts of Congress. To make certain none were left out, Congress passed a special law, the Citizenship Act of 1924, stating that all Indians born in the United States are citizens of our country.

Indians have the vote in every state on the same basis as other people, whether or not they live on reservations.

Indians have, furthermore, all the civil rights under our Federal and our state constitutions that any of us have. They enjoy the same religious freedoms, and many tribes continue to observe their various native religions, of which their famed chants and dances are but a part. They exercise freedom of speech like the rest of us, in their own meetings and in public meetings of all sorts, in their own publications, and on the radio. Through their Councils and officers or in any grouping they wish, they deal collectively with government officials, and they also work with such officials individually on personal matters.

In our courts, they have the same protections of due process of law as anyone else. Except in the case of major crimes of violence, tribal courts and tribal justice are generally recognized by the State and Federal Governments as the main source of authority on Indian reservations.

On or off reservation, Indians are free to hold any type of employment, private or governmental, without restriction. Indeed, Indians have special hiring and retention rights to employment in
Federal positions set up to provide services for Indians. Our country has had many high officials of Indian blood. One of the recent Vice Presidents of the United States, Charles Curtis, was part Indian, a descendant of Indian Chiefs in the Osage and Kaw tribes. Members of Indian tribes have also been elected to the United States Congress and to State Legislatures of Oklahoma, Montana, Nevada, Washington, Alaska, and elsewhere. They have also been elected as Judges of State Supreme Courts and to many other public offices.

Besides these freedoms, freedoms possessed by all Americans, the Indians on reservations have other freedoms especially theirs. For instance, their land is not taxed if it is held in trust by the Government, although they are subject to all other taxes.

Under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, each Indian tribe voted whether to accept or reject a plan formalizing their tribal self-government, and over 70% accepted this opportunity. These tribes have the right to incorporate for business purposes and to obtain loans from a special credit fund set up by the Federal Government for advanced education, cooperative and tribal undertakings such as livestock, producers and consumers and arts and crafts associations, fisheries, dairying, tourist services, fur and other industrial enterprises, and for land purchases. Most of these benefits have also been provided for Indian groups who did not desire to accept the Reorganization Act as a whole but later asked for the particular advantages provided under it. The responsibilities tribal organizations have undertaken under this Act have greatly expanded their scope of independent action and participation in the management of their own affairs.

These Indian community corporations have Federal recognition and assistance. The Indian Reorganization Act aids tribes that wish to retain their own distinct characteristics without in any way restricting the individual rights of their members as citizens.

Much has been written in our press about the Navajos in the last few years because there has been much suffering among them. The Navajos live on a reservation high on the plateaus of our southwestern states of New Mexico, Arizona and Utah. It is a very large reservation, comprising some 16 million acres, on which the Navajos have hunted, raised sheep, and cut timber. This reservation of lands within their original homeland was officially created back in the 1860's when the tribe numbered only about 9,000 persons. Today, there are 70,000 Navajos, nearly eight times as many, and their increase reflects in part the lower death rate that has prevailed among them for the past fifty years. Their livestock herds have increased tremendously also, over taxing the capacity of their grazing lands and bringing the tribe to the edge of disaster. The Navajo reservation has some lumber, grazing land, and other resources, but it has not had enough water for adequate farming. There are a number of ways in which the Navajos can improve
their situation, and they are now making decisions on how to proceed. However, we do not expect them to work out their problems alone; through the special Indian Service of our Department of the Interior, the Federal Government cooperates with their leaders, encourages them to seek education and training, plans with them how best to use and conserve their resources, improve their health still further, and take advantage of modern industrial opportunities. Some of the Navajos may decide to change their occupations altogether. A ten-year program has been started with funds appropriated by Congress to invest approximately $90 million for development of local resources. The task will be to raise the general economic and educational standards of the whole tribe.

The reservation Indians face special health problems, for usually they live in small groups or so scattered that it is impossible for doctors and hospitals to serve them easily. However, they receive the same social security benefits other Americans do, and these include special assistance for the aged and for children without parents, for the physically and mentally handicapped and for those temporarily unemployed. The Federal Government provides hospitalization for the majority of Indians. These services are comparable to many of our free hospitalization services in our cities and are far more comprehensive than are ordinarily provided for non-Indians in rural areas.

Unusual health problems of the Indians have also been given attention by the Federal Indian Service. An Indian Service doctor worked out the application of sulfa drugs to treat trachoma, and his discovery has greatly reduced the danger of this eye disease for people everywhere. Special attention has also been given to tuberculosis. Certain segments of the American population have prevalence rates of tuberculosis higher than the average for the entire country, for which the prevalence rates are relatively low. Some of the Indian groups fall into this class. For these groups and all Indians living on reservations, special education in tuberculosis control is provided through Public Health nurses. There is also mobile x-ray service which reaches the Indian people in their home areas. Hospital facilities are provided for the care of tubercular patients. The Indians were one of the early groups in which BCG vaccination was begun and have had more extensive coverage than any other group of American people. Those Indians working and living off reservations are entitled to receive services from regular State and local health departments, as is the case with other citizens.

The Federal Government also provides special schools for Indians in remote areas where public schools are not available. In all there are over 300 of these special Indian schools, paid for directly by the Federal Government. Less than half of the Indian children in school, attend these special schools. The larger part attend the local public or State schools along with the white children of near-by communities, and the Federal Government usually contributes to the cost. There are
also some privately supported religious schools on Indian reservations. Indian children have the same opportunity for education as white children, and the Federal Government assists promising students on to college and graduate schools. It has been difficult to provide for Indian children on certain reservations, such as the Navajo, because they live scattered over a large area and the roads are poor. The Government provides boarding schools for Indian children who cannot go to day schools; some of these are small reservation boarding schools and some are larger schools at central points, primarily for high school students.

Indian farmers on reservations are eligible to receive the same type of services from agriculture experts that farmers off reservations do. In the United States the Government supplies expert advice to farmers, free of charge, on soil use and conservation and many other aspects of agriculture. Indian farmers also have special services, at a cost of nearly ten million dollars yearly, on forest and range management, irrigation construction and maintenance, road building and the construction of other utilities.

It would save our Government money if we had no such services for our Indian tribes. The taxes that cover much of the expense of the schools, the hospitals, the social services, and the salaries of officials serving out Indians are paid by all the people of the United States, and not just by Indians. Many of the special services out Government provides for the Indians date back to early treaties and legislation which grew out of the settlement of our country. The payments the Indians received for their lands included rights to occupy certain reserved areas, and in addition various continuing payments, tax exemptions, equipment and services through which they might share the "know-how" the white men brought with them. Different arrangements were made with different tribes. The United States Government still honors these arrangements. They are provided in addition to the basic services provided by the government for all United States citizens as a matter of right.

Many Indians are achieving wide recognition in civil life. Mr. N. B. Johnson, former President of the National Congress of American Indians, is a Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. Miss Evelyn Yellowrobe, a member of the Sioux tribe, is a teacher of Speech at Vassar College. The Vice-President of one of our large oil companies, the Phillips Petroleum, is an Indian, Mr. W. B. Keeler. The late Congressman William Stigler from Oklahoma was a member of the Choctaw tribe. Maria Tallchief and her sister Marjorie, Osage Indians, are notable ballet dancers, and have been featured regularly by the New York City ballet. Mrs. Henry Roe Cloud, a Chippewa Indian now living in Oregon, was named as the American "Mother of the Year" in 1950. She was also chairman of the Indian Affairs Division in the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The former curator of the Museum at Rochester, N. Y., Mr. Arthur E. Parker, is a member of the Mohawk tribe.
Over half of the personnel in the Indian Bureau of our Federal Government are Indians, and many of them hold executive positions.

Some 25,000 Indians were in the armed services in World War II. They served with distinction. Major General Clarence Tinker, who reorganized our air forces after the attack at Pearl Harbor, was an Osage Indian. Some of our Indian veterans have returned to their reservations and are helping their people adapt themselves intelligently to the modern world.

These are only a few illustrations of the work Indians are doing in our country today.

The American Indians are free people. It took many years for us to learn to live at peace with one another; but we have done so, and for almost a century now we have been Americans together. Gradually we have come to share more of each other's culture and skills, and to understand each other better. Freedom, as we see it, is not something that our Government bestows on us or on the Indians, or on anyone else. Freedom is something to which we are born and it grows as we use it daily; in our speech, as we differ from each other; as we worship, each in his own way; as we work and as we think.

Our major problem is to help our Indian citizens to recognize what they can do with the freedom that they have. Our goal is to equip them so that they can strengthen both their own society and our nation. Toward this goal we are making substantial progress.