



## PAN-INDIANISM

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Pan-Indianism, as we use the term in anthropology, is an extremely complex and ever growing social phenomenon. It is seen differently by different people in different parts of the country. As an anthropologist, I feel comfortable dealing with social process which is firmly rooted in the small community, but such a complex social movement as Pan-Indianism, which takes in so much territory spatially and temporally, is a little beyond our methodology in anthropology and my competence. The best I can hope to do in this paper is to pick up the main threads of this social movement, to present fleeting vignettes along the way in the historical development of the movement, and to offer some ideas about the present breadth and direction of Pan-Indianism.

The basis for this paper is field work done in a Sac and Fox community of central Oklahoma in 1956 and among the Pine Ridge Sioux of South Dakota in 1958. Field work in the Southwest and among the Oklahoma Cherokee has added significantly to an understanding of the limits and spread of Pan-Indianism. However, much of the material in this paper comes from more impressionistic contacts with American Indian groups -- intimate involvement in Indian affairs for quite a number of years, extended visits to many American Indian communities, participation as a member at the Chicago Indian Center and the like. In a sense, this paper is an attempt to systematize many impressions, experiences and insights. Needless to say, there are many gaps in my knowledge of the Pan-Indian movement.

One can legitimately define Pan-Indianism as the expression of a new identity and the institutions and symbols which are both an expression of that new identity and a fostering of it. It is the attempt to create a new ethnic group, the American Indian; it is also a vital social movement which is forever changing and growing. But first let us look at its historic roots.

At contact, most American Indians lived in small closed tribal groups. In terms of Robert Redfield's folk urban continuum, which provides cultural criteria along a range of "ideal types" from simply organized, isolated, pre-literate societies, to complex, literate societies, one could say that most American Indian tribes were very close to the folk end of the scale.<sup>1</sup> They conceived of those outside of their group as a different order of being,

almost a different species. Most American Indians who still have a closed, bounded tribal outlook refer to themselves as "people," not "The People," as many anthropologists have translated this term. They mean simply "persons." Other tribes are referred to by specific names, but the name for their own society and the name we could best translate in English as "human being" is the same.

Among certain tribes of North America by contact times, there seemed to be a widening conception of who they were in relation to others. This was particularly true in the Southwest and the East. In the Southwest the evidence is not conclusive, but one would suspect from the level of technology and social organization that these tribes were not so closed and bounded, and that particularly in the Pueblo area the extensive trade between peoples had produced a widening of their conception of themselves.

In the eastern part of North America by the 1600's the evidence is fairly conclusive that people in these tribes were beginning to conceive of those from other tribal societies as at least half-way human beings. At contact there was wholesale institutional adoption of captives from other tribes, and, at the very least, incipient confederacies were forming which included tribes which spoke different languages. One can get a clue to this widening conception by looking at the terms tribes apply to themselves and to others. For instance, the Iroquois call themselves by a term which is best translated, "men of men," implying, of course, that there were other men although they were the best. The Cherokees refer to themselves as "real human beings," implying at least that there were other human beings in the world although the Cherokees were the "realest." In Cherokee the term for "European," at least as early as the 1730's, means simply "white people" or "white human beings."

Although tribal groups in the East were coming to define others outside their groups as human beings, there was as yet no conception of "Indian." To the Cherokee, Englishmen and Creeks were, although human beings, simply different kinds of outsiders. As one examines the historical record in the 1700's, it is clear that tribal groups in the East were beginning to see themselves as having something in common together as opposed to the Europeans. In speeches chiefs would comment on the general style of life in common among tribal groups in that area as opposed to Europeans, and more and more Indians began to have a common interest in opposing the white man. The final outcome of this trend was the political alliance of midwestern tribes in 1763 and the accompanying Pan-Indian religious movement. Later, in the early part of the 1800's, a similar movement led by Tecumseh involved even a larger number of eastern tribes.

In the mid-1800's when the eastern tribes were pushed to the edge of the Plains into what is now Kansas and Oklahoma, even larger political alliances came into being. Great inter-tribal councils were held constantly

in this period, and included not only the recently displaced eastern tribes but the native Plains tribes as well.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is on the Plains that we find the historic roots of modern Pan-Indianism. The horse not only enabled Plains Indians to become extremely mobile in hunting and "warfare," but also increased inter-tribal contacts. Even a sign language developed in the area to provide communication across linguistic boundaries. In the 1800's not only had intensive "warfare" and very mobile hunting developed, but tribes were beginning to ally with one another, camp with one another and inter-marry with one another. Most significant for the later development of Pan-Indianism, the Plains style of life was extremely attractive to tribes on the edges of the Plains area. Plains traits and institutions were spreading to other areas even at the time that Plains Indians were becoming pacified and settled on reservations. Indeed, the Plains style of life was very attractive to American Indians completely outside of the Plains area. This is one of the historic sources and causes of what is generally referred to as "Pan-Indianism" which I am suggesting now is in some degree an extension of the Plains culture area.

By 1870 Indian policy had entered what is referred to as "the reservation period." Most of the Plains tribes were settled on reservations by this time and were undergoing an intensive forced assimilation program. Further, Plains Indians had closer, more intensive contact with whites than other American Indian groups. The majority of young Indians in boarding school came from the Plains area. Whites were defining Sioux and Cheyenne on the reservations and in boarding schools as "Indians," and, as most of you know, the white conception of Indian is the feathered Plains Indian. The reservation system was at its extreme among these tribes, and pressure for assimilation was very strong. Indians began to find comfort in each other's presence in order to bolster their identity, not only in boarding school, but in inter-tribal visiting. The extreme spatial mobility of the Plains Indians is a very important factor in the rise of Pan-Indianism. Plains Indians think nothing of traveling hundreds of miles to attend celebrations at other Indian communities. In modern times, this mobility has fostered Pan-Indianism. And because Plains Indians come in contact with many social groups other than Indians in their travels, they have become urbane and sophisticated tribal people. In this process not only is their identity as "Indians" strengthened, but a conception of themselves as generalized human beings, in particular American, has developed.

I am suggesting two things: First, that modern Pan-Indianism had its roots in a developing commonality that American Indians began to conceive of particularly in the Plains area; Second, that this commonality was brought to a head by the reservation system, in the way whites related to different tribes as "Indians" and by the pressure for assimilation which pushed Indians closer together.

The result of all this was a Pan-Indian religion, the Ghost Dance, which swept the Plains area in the nineties. Somewhat later, the Peyote movement followed the same course. Both of these movements were paradoxically spread by the institution of the boarding school.

By 1900 the Sioux Indian was a Sioux and he was an "Indian." Further, the symbols of being a Sioux and being an "Indian" were consistent with one another. By the mid-part of the twentieth century, there had been a general cultural leveling in the Plains areas. Almost every tribal group has Pow Wows, a Pow Wow committee, a Woman's Club, a Veteran's Organization, and there is much visiting among tribal groups, inter-marriage, and fictive kin relations across tribal lines. In western Oklahoma, for instance, there is so much inter-marriage and inter-tribal activity that Indian languages are ceasing to become the daily language, and English, as the lingua franca, is fast replacing the native tongues. These Plains institutions and traits spread east and west, particularly into the Plateau area and into the Great Lakes country, having reached out to these bordering tribes even in the 1800's. With the advent of the new identity of "Indian" that was developing all over the country, these institutions and traits spread more rapidly and were acceptable symbols of "Indianness" to many groups.

In some tribes such as the Sac and Fox of Iowa and the Yakima of Washington, Plains traits and institutions as symbols of Indianness came to exist side by side with older local aboriginal institutions and traits. In other areas, such as northeastern Oklahoma and New England, where local aboriginal traits had disappeared, Pan-Indian, or "Pan-Plains," as one could call them, institutions and traits became the institutions and traits of the community. In some of these later tribes, as in New England or even in some of the Paiute groups, Pan-Indian traits and institutions which in fact conflict with the basic ethos of the tribes are taken on because they are of such symbolic comfort and reinforcement for identity as Indians.

Even national Indian organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians are in flavor Pan-Plains. It is from the Plains that the National Congress of American Indians gets most of its support, and if one attends its conventions, one sees that the symbols of Indianness are Pan-Plains symbols. There are "Indian Dances" nearly every night.

I think, in short, that Pan-Indianism consisted of two complimentary processes. On the one hand, traits and institutions of the Plains area have come to symbolize a new identity of "Indian" for many aboriginal tribal groups in the United States. In the Plains area itself, where this conception of "Indian" is possibly the strongest, a general exchange of traits and institutions and a cultural leveling has taken place. Plains tribes are coming to look more and more alike, in so far as specific traits go. These Plains traits and institutions have diffused to other tribal groups outside of the Plains area because they express this new "Indianness." In some tribes these traits exist side by side with older aboriginal forms. In other tribes

where aboriginal traits have disappeared, these new symbols of "Indianness" are the distinctive traits of the community. On the other hand, I am suggesting that this new identity sets up a new structure of interaction among individuals of differing tribal groups. Although local identification may be as strong as the new conception of being "Indian," social consequences follow from this structure. The disappearance of the native language, except for ceremonial occasions, in small tribes in Oklahoma is just such a consequence. Secularization may yet be another social and cultural consequence.

In the last decade, American Indians have moved to urban centers and Pan-Indian communities are forming around Indian centers in some of our larger cities. In most cases, the tone for the activities at these centers are set by people who have had previous experiences in Pan-Indian -- that is, Pan-Plains -- activities, and these symbols become symbols of a forming Indian community in the city. This causes many of the members of the tribes from the Southwest and eastern Oklahoma to avoid these Indian centers; in some cases, the center breaks into factions on this basis. Many of the people from these tribal groups outside of the Pan-Plains area do not see these symbols as "Indian," but as in fact "Plains," and these symbols are unacceptable to them as expressions of their new Indian identity. They tend to be less pragmatic than their fellow tribesmen in the National Congress of American Indians.

There are two very large concentrations of Indians who, as whole social groups, still have a modified closed tribal outlook. They are found in the Southwest and eastern Oklahoma, but modern urban influences are pressing in on these tribes very fast, especially in the Southwest. The few marginal people from tribes in eastern Oklahoma who begin to get a conception of themselves as Indian tend to leave the tribe at least socially and move into urban centers, to interact with other Pan-Plains Indians or at least functionally to become part of the western Oklahoma Indian community. In this area of eastern Oklahoma, it is the children of Indian people from small towns, and the children of recent inter-tribal inter-marriage, who follow this route.<sup>3</sup>

The Southwest seems to be more complicated. (For one thing, there has been a kind of "Pan-Puebloism" in the Southwest for many years now.) Young people with a conception of themselves as Indian in this area can join modified Pan-Plains urban communities in the Southwest, become involved in a local nationalistic movement such as we see among the Navajo, or become part of the Pan-Traditional movement. This last is a recent alliance between the traditional factions of some of the Southwestern and Eastern Woodland tribes.<sup>4</sup> For many years now tribes in these two areas have been split into two opposing factions, one oriented towards the traditional way of life, and the other toward the outside. Membership in these factions has almost become hereditary. Family names many times indicate whether a person is a member of one faction or the other. Over the years the tradi-

tional factions, in their resistance, have become very conscious, very aware and very ideological. In recent years the traditional factions of the Seminole, the Iroquois and the Hopi have joined forces, and now there is a new social type arisen on the American scene, the "traditional Indian."

So far this paper has dealt very little with the nationalistic flavor of Pan-Indianism which is becoming so evident in recent years. More and more of American Indian leadership is becoming nationalistically Indian. Nationalism has not yet affected the local Indian community, but it is certainly strong among the tribal "elite." There seems to be a general disillusionment among American Indian leaders regarding their own personal acceptance in the general American society and doubts about the kinds of relationships their people can have to that society. Nowhere is that attitude more pronounced than among young Indians, particularly young Indian college students, who are actively organizing. Indian Clubs and Indian Youth Councils are very much part of the campus scene at those colleges where there are appreciable numbers of Indian students. And they are very angry young people. They see colonial peoples all over the world emerging as nations and they see many of the minorities in the United States being granted concessions by the general society, but when they look at the American Indian situation they see poverty, a low rank position for most Indians, the destinies of their home communities controlled by forces outside of the community, and what they perceive as an inert Indian leadership doing nothing about the problem. Furthermore, they are angry at the general society for threatening their home communities with social oblivion. Talk of Indian identity is very much in the forefront of their conversations about Indian affairs. Now the American middle class has an annoying habit of absorbing the talented leadership of social movements, and even of incorporating the ideas of a critical social movement, as witness the recent "beat" absorption. However, there is an added dimension to these young peoples' attitudes about the general society. Some of them are very sophisticated young men and women. Their peers are American college students, the children of the middle class who are in the "center" of the system. Indian students, like other American college students, read Playboy magazine, Vance Packard, David Reisman and Jules Pfeiffer's cartoons. They are well aware of the loss of community and the loss of identity in American urban life. Their concern with Indian identity is not only a wish to preserve themselves and their home communities, but also a rejection of this frightening aspect of American society. This movement among Indian youth is the growing tip of the Pan-Indian social movement.

Of course, it would be a serious omission not to mention another important factor in Indian nationalism, rank deprivation. In the process of becoming "Indian," aboriginal tribal people in the United States have also become "American." Pan-Indian ceremonies not only act out the solidarity of the local group and the new "Indian" identity, but also a new commitment

to America. Most Indians in the Pan-Indian area conceive of themselves as, let's say, Sioux and Indian and American. (A minority think of themselves only as Indian and American.) The assignment of Indians as a social group to a low rank position by the general society then becomes a problem, to marginal Indians particularly. Many younger Indians violently reject such a definition on the part of the general society. In fact, many Indian college students find to their surprise that the general society is not open to non-whites as they have been led to believe, and some have a strong feeling of betrayal. Although they may reject this bad definition and verbally defend "Indian culture," the rank dilemma remains, and most younger Indians, who are cued to their local white neighbors in matters of rank assignment, are fearful of becoming associated with other minorities who may have an even lower rank position than Indians. Thus, many young Indian nationalists express what seem to be very anti-Negro sentiments.

As Pan-Indianism has grown over the years, I have changed my mind about the direction of American Indian acculturation. What quite a few of us in anthropology thought we saw regarding American Indian acculturation can be stated as follows: We saw American Indian tribal groups remaining as small societies, integrating into the matrices of their cultures various traits and institutions from western civilization while at the same time retaining much continuity with the past. We saw many individuals, however, leave those small societies and become part of the general American milieu. It is the process of individual acculturation that is being changed by the Pan-Indian movement. For one thing, the marginal people are not leaving Indian communities as it seemed they would. The Pan-Indian movement has formed a healing bridge between factions. For instance, it is possible now for a very marginal acculturated Indian from a Pan-Indian area to be accepted in his community by even the more conservative Indians if he participates in the institutions and symbols of this Pan-Indian life. Even if a marginal person leaves the community he can go to an urban center and become part of a more general Pan-Indian community. These urban "Indian" communities may, of course, be only temporary stopping places for individual Indians who will later become part of the more general middle class. However, many ethnic communities are old in American cities and are still very much alive. Further, the general problem of loss of identity and community in America may mitigate against even very urban Indians cutting their ties with other Indians altogether. One could even imagine a resurgence of local tribal identity in response to these conditions.

The Pan-Indianism we have so far discussed may be very productive, as nationalist movements often are, in literature and the arts, but it is also developing institutions which deal with people outside the community. Pan-Indian institutions such as Indian centers in cities, Pow Wow committees and so forth are institutions through which Indians can have some productive relationship to the general society. Indians in Indian communities

are beginning to learn more about the nature of American society, and are more able to deal with it in its own terms.

Pan-Indianism is the creation of a new identity, a new ethnic group, if you will, a new "nationality" in America. The twentieth century seems to be the century for pan-tribal movements all over the world -- in the New World, Asia, Australia and Africa. Research on the Pan-Indian movement would not only tell us, as anthropologists, a good deal about social and cultural process generally, but it could also give us some understanding into the "causes" of these types of movements among tribal people. Pan-Indianism is the oldest such movement and perhaps could tell us what lies in the future for parts of Africa and Asia.

Redfield has suggested that civilization has been built upon and spread by the slow incorporation of tribal groups; either these tribal groups became enclaves or they were incorporated as peasant villages.<sup>5</sup> However, this pattern does not seem to apply in the twentieth century, for the nature of the numerous pan-tribal movements around the world is, as far as we know, new on the scene of world history. I would like to suggest a hypothesis. The older civilizations were agriculturally based and in the nature of the case incorporated tribal groups as whole social units and at a leisurely non-threatening pace. Modern industrial civilization, through the vehicle of the bureaucratic nation-state and its institutions, demands not only the incorporation of tribal peoples but immediate incorporation and individual assimilation. Industrial civilization individuates and attacks the solidarity of the social group. A tribal group cannot tolerate such an attack. It is, furthermore, doubtful if the individual tribal person could survive as a personality under these conditions. The first reaction of tribes under this kind of stress is the banding together of tribal groups and a widening and bolstering of this new identity, in self-defense. Even when tribal peoples desire to be incorporated into an industrial civilization, they are unwilling to break up as social groups, and therefore try to come to some kind of compromise, such as partial incorporation while retaining the solidarity of the social group.

Perhaps the struggle we see in the world today is, in some sense, a struggle about how communities with a strong sense of social solidarity, particularly tribal groups, will enter the mainstream of industrial civilization.<sup>6</sup>

Carnegie Corporation Cross-Cultural  
Education Project

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," American Journal of Sociology, LII, 4 (January, 1947).



<sup>2</sup> Grant Foreman, Advancing the Frontier, 1830-1860 (Norman, Oklahoma, 1933)

<sup>3</sup> James Howard, "The Pan-Indian Culture of Oklahoma," The Scientific Monthly, XVIII, 5 (November, 1955), 215-220.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest L. Schusky, Unpublished Field Notes (Observations on Pan-Indians in Northeastern United States), 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Redfield, The Primitive World and Its Transformation (Ithaca, N. Y., 1953); Robert Redfield, Peasant Society and Culture (Chicago, Ill., 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Martin Orans, "A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition: The Rank Concession Syndrome Among the Santals of Chotonagpur," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Chicago), 1962.