

Dealing with the IRA, other federal laws

by Pamela Cravez
for the Tundra Times

There is no Indian word for time, says Graham Holmes, one of the contributors to the book *Indian Self-Rule*, edited by Kenneth R. Philp. When a Sioux asks what time it is he is asking how many times does the thing strike.

Making Indians relate to the "tick of the clock" is the motive for much of the law made to govern Indian-white relations, according to this new book.

Indian Self-Rule is the result of a conference held in 1983. Indian leaders, policy makers and scholars from all over the country came to Sun Valley to discuss "Indian Self-Rule: Fifty Years Under the Indian Reorganization Act."

According to the forward, it is Alaska Natives who are today grappling with the IRA in their effort to preserve their culture and heritage in the face of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Beyond the forward, there is very little discussion of Alaska.

Ted Katcheak, former co-chair of United Tribes Alaska, does talk briefly about the IRA being all that is left to protect Natives and preserve their right to the land.

The only other Alaskan voice is that of Don Mitchell, formerly an attorney for the Alaska Federation of Natives. He comments on the problem of dependence on federal money in an era of budget cuts.

The real importance of this book to Alaska Natives, however, is the view it gives of dealing with the IRA and other federal laws.

The IRA, called the New Deal for Indians by some and the Raw Deal by others was passed in 1934. It changed how the government dealt with Indians.

In the late 1800s the Dawes Act provided that allotments be given to individual Indians. Under that act Indians could claim up to 160 acres of land they had traditionally used. Allotments made up a small portion of

Indian reservations. Other land on the reservations often fell to non-Indian purchasers.

The idea behind allotments and the Dawes Act was to assimilate Indians into the white culture. Indians were expected to learn to farm. At the same time, children in government schools were taught English, and they were punished for speaking their Native language.

In an effort to preserve the Indian culture and stop the flow of Indian land to non-Indians, John Collier and Felix Cohen helped write new legislation, the IRA.

The IRA authorized the federal government to purchase land on behalf of tribes and individuals. It provided a credit fund for business loans. And it provided loans for education.

Tribal authority would be based on a constitution.

Unlike other laws, the IRA was not imposed on Indians. It had to be voted in by individual tribes.

Some tribes voted for the IRA. Others didn't.

Some saw the IRA as formalized federal interference with tribal sovereignty. Others saw it as a means to sustain cultural roots.

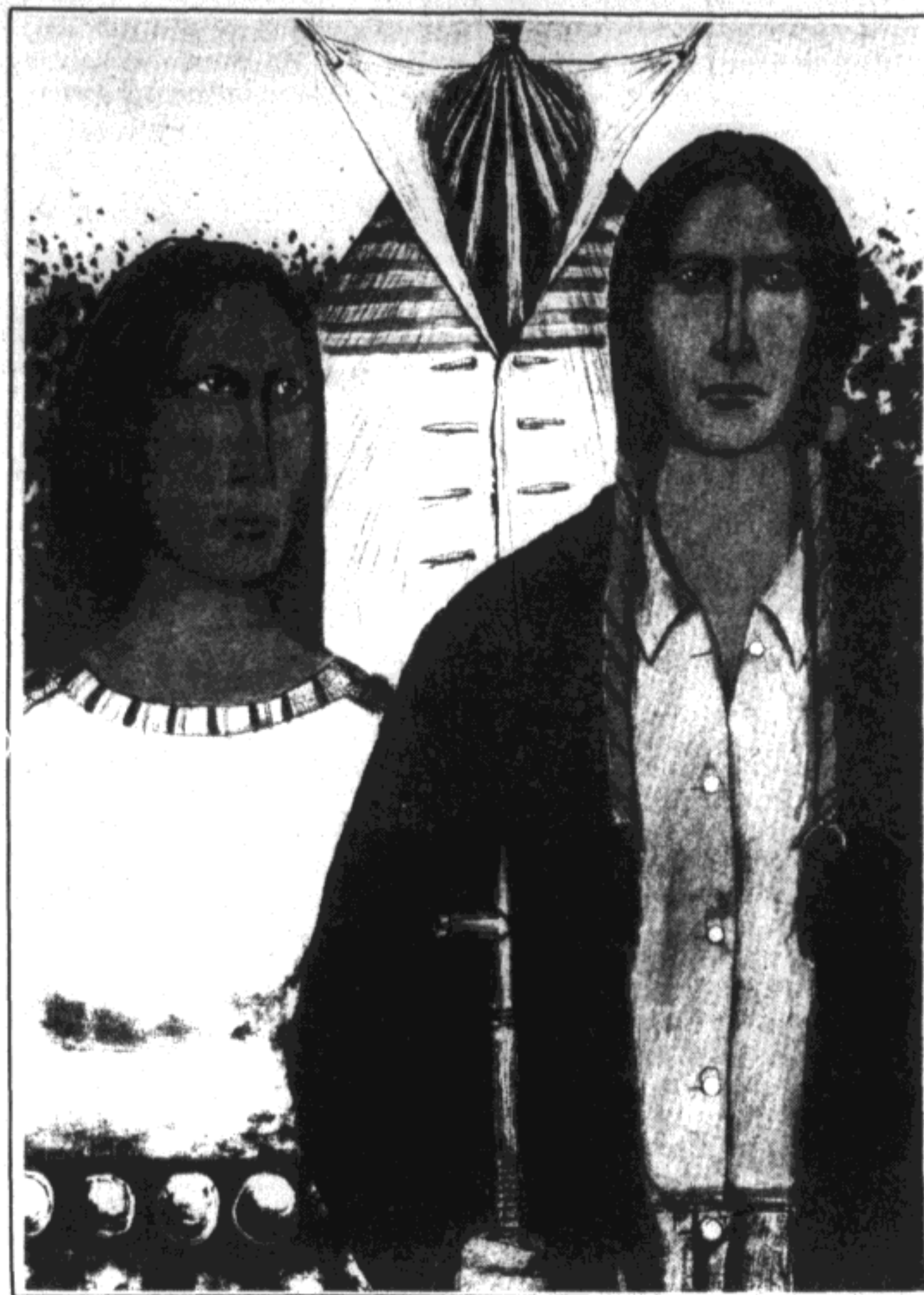
Congress proceeded to a radically different policy in the 1950s: Termination.

The federal government no longer took responsibility for tribes which officials believed could take care of themselves. Indians were encouraged to assimilate, move into urban areas and become a part of white America.

The resultant breakdown of tribal unity was devastating to many Indians. The Menominee, with the help of Indian activist Ada Deer, fought termination and got Congress to restore their rights.

It is Ada Deer's comment, "Do not agonize: Organize!" which marked the 1960s and the 1970s and the push for self-determination.

It is especially clear from this book that federal policy continues to adversely affect Indians. Questions of



Indian Self-Rule was edited by Kenneth R. Philp and published by Howe Brothers.

sovereignty and self-determination are dependent upon a stable economic base.

It hardly seems reasonable to put the fate of tribal sovereignty in the hands of the federal government. If there is any message is this book that is it.

Indians must establish the permanency of their own societies and use their own resources, according to the book.

It is, of course, not that simple. Federal law, whether it be ANCSA, the IRA or even 1991 legislation will continue to affect Alaska Natives.

This book shows how Indians in the Lower 48 have lived with federal law and the changes they have been able to make.

The book is available for \$21.50 from Howe Brothers of Salt Lake City, Utah.