

## INTRODUCTION

To much of the world, one of the most important aspects of our oft-times challenged cultural prowess, past and present, is the contribution to the historic lore and the continuing cultural fact of the American Indian. If anyone chooses to question this they will have to admit that the Indian contribution to the world picture of America has been and still is the most glamorous, romantic and intriguing.

I speak of world interest but of course the glamour and fascination exist for us too, even if perhaps to a lesser degree. But while we may outgrow our interest or take it for granted, other people cherish and retain theirs and actually take the trouble to acquaint themselves with the many-faceted Indian personality more than we do. Sadly, the average American boasts an almost voluntary ignorance of factual Indian history and/or contemporary life. Sadder yet has been the insensitive disregard for the cultural as well as the physical needs of a great people whom we seem to have tried quite consciously to beach along the swift current of modern life.

Of course there have been some, too few, devoted Indians and non-Indians who have sincerely tried to help the Indian to help the Indian to help himself. However, a general unconcern has tended to shunt him off onto a vaguely integrated sidetrack where he has joined other ethnic groups successfully derailed by this method of depriving "special" groups of their human direction, their personality, and all-important individuality.

Most of us will admit, with varying degrees of intensity ranging from the desultory to passionate indignation, that our Indian brother has had a bad deal from us and a rough go of it to survive. We admit that what has been done for him must be classified in the disastrous category of "too little and too late." But suddenly we find that this very survival-spirit is a phenomenon which is demanding respectful public awareness of the Indian as an indomitable, dignified, creative human being. And as our respect grows for him so does the Indian's appreciation of himself, and so as the wheel turns we find the Indian back in the American family... going full steam ahead.

One reason for this could be the growing realization on the part of many Americans that in our desperate need for cultural identification in the world and to it, we must look back to the Indian heritage. Unquestionably its cultural influences are indelibly stamped on ours, and at long last we have to admit them and accept them gratefully.

We have finally become conscious of an interest, which amounts almost to passion in older civilizations, in "primitive" beginnings. We have come to realize the term "primitive" is universally synonymous with sophistication, and that it is a quality long missing and much sought after in the American way of life.

How ironically wonderful and exciting it is that the young Indian, in accepting the recent opportunities and challenges of re-identifying with his "sophisticated" past and bringing it into the light of present needs, is illuminating not only his own until now questionable future but the questioning one of his non-Indian brother as well.

The stultifying tendency we all have shared of cataloguing the Indian racially and culturally as an old people, apart and past, is being overcome by their own young people. They are proving themselves very much of the present, and have become living proof of that cheering proverb "The Past is Prologue," and... the best is yet to come.

VINCENT PRICE  
Chairman,  
Indian Arts and Crafts Board