

What Lies in Future For Native People?

I wonder what lies in the future for the Alaskan Native? By this I mean the village Native, the Native removed from his ancestral home — the Alaskan Native who by choice or chance left Alaska to reside in the Lower "48" or elsewhere in this wide world in his attempt to gain a more favorable way of existence.

Far too easily can we become so self-motivated that we alienate ourselves from our people and deny our birthright for a handful of gold. Is the ladder of success so high that one becomes afraid to look back where he began for fear of being lured back into what he thinks is the depths of degradation which he had now left?

LAND WITHDRAWALS

Another thing that concerns me is the vast overtake of land withdrawal as recommended by R.C.B. Morton. The "Act" specifically limits the land to be withdrawn at 80 million acres. Morton's theory is to protect the land for future use — by whom? Himself or other government bureaucrats?

The money the Alaskan Native received by the claims act, along with stock and royalties, is expendable, whereas the land is not. This land given by virtue of the Act is the heritage of our people. Now, where can any one culture exist without the land?

The Department of the Interior should be watched closely as I fear that if the Alaskan Native is not cautious, the Interior Department will keep on withdrawing until they have all that is theirs and ours.

I also feel that if the land is not wisely utilized, the outsider will benefit more than the Alaskan Native who will lose his way of life. Culture and people will die a slow and agonizing death.

BROKEN PROMISES

Too many promises have been broken already. The non-Natives are the ones who speak with honey on their lips but have venom in their bite. Look at our fellow Indians in the Lower 48 and how they live, even today, at the mercy of the "ones" in whom they place their trust. The people are broken. They have no spirit left. The ones who are trying are too late and who are doing it in the wrong manner for nothing is gained by violence.

The Alaskan Native has been pretty much assimilated into the White culture, the Western Civilization, yet they still are at the bottom of that same culture that was to bring them up to an equal status as their White brothers. The Alaskan Native was far better off before the Whites came. Now they are poverty-stricken, alcoholics and statistics on suicides.

It will take many moons before the Alaskan Native himself can derive any real benefits from the claims act. People have the wrong idea that now the Alaskan Native is on par with the once oil-rich Oklahoma Indians, but this is not the fact. The young people and their children will be the ones who benefit most providing the elected leaders move cautiously and wisely so they can increase the assets they now have in their hands.

Here in the Interior, there were two (2) ventures by a corporation (Native), already down the tube, so to speak. And, hopefully, a lesson has been learned as one profits by mistakes.

May the Great Spirit guide our leaders and help them keep the faith that we have entrusted to them. May they continue the quest for a better, more healthy way of life for the Alaskan Natives, as it is to them, the people must look for guidance, protection and understanding.

— JOHN HEFFLE, President

Association of Interior Eskimos