

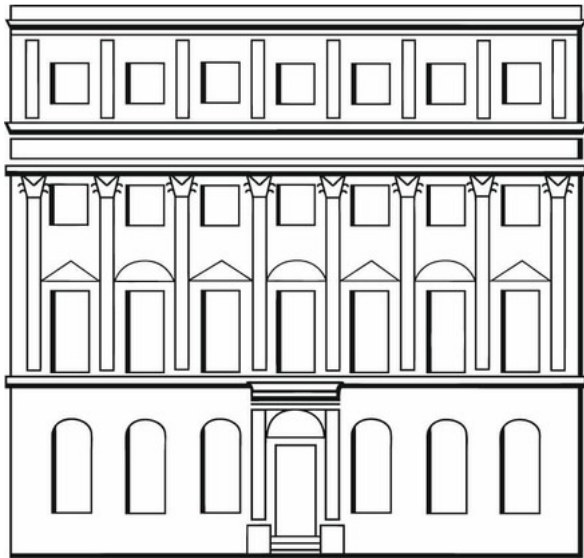
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Urbanization of Indian Identity

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The Federal Indian Relocation Programme of the 1950s and the Urbanization of Indian Identity

DONALD L. FIXICO

Following the Second World War, the world changed and altered the minds of bureaucrats about American Indians. This new view reintroduced the idea of assimilating Native peoples into the American mainstream. Government officials wanted Indians integrated into urban areas, forcing them to move from their reservations and rural homes to cities. Once again, as under the notorious Indian Removal Act of 1830, Indian people felt the firm hand of federal paternalism changing their lives for what was supposed to be a better one. Instead, numerous problems occurred during the transition from reservation living in a traditional culture to an urban mainstream culture. Even more, a hidden agenda involved the securing of tribal lands. While the following pages address the problems of forced removal for Native peoples to cities in America, they also raise questions for analysis in a larger context. With the displacement of Indians from their tribal homelands on reservations to urban areas, who stood to benefit the most: American Indians in new urban homes with unstable jobs, or non-Indians who saw capitalist profit in the natural resources of reservations, which consisted of only 2 per cent of the land in the United States. Indians became victims in the relocation programme of removal, but motive is in question while reasons can be provided for enacting the urbanization of Indian Americans. This story is about the relocation of Indian people to urban areas and their experiences, but there is more to it than that.

Generally, the relocation experience frustrated many Indians moved to urban areas during the 1950s, 1960s, and extending into the early 1970s. This essay is an analysis of the multiple

experiences of Native people who went on relocation and became quasi-assimilated to form a new identity called the 'urban Indian'. Some of these memories are the experiences of my own relatives. This cultural transition of reservation to urban was one of socio-cultural adaptation. Living 'off-reservation' represented a means of survival after relocation officials persuaded many individual Indians to leave dilapidated homelands for a presumed better life in cities.

The United States government introduced 'Relocation' as a federal programme offered to all American Indians from 1952 to 1973. This innovative programme had two goals: to help American Indians find jobs and housing in cities, mainly in the western half of the United States; and, more importantly, to convince them to leave their homes, their reservations, and the traditional areas that they had come to love. Simultaneously, the federal government enacted the termination policy under House Concurrent Resolution 108 passed by the 83rd Congress. This new Indian policy ended the federal trust relationship with many tribes, communities, and individuals. In all, there were 109 cases of termination, with the Menominee tribe being the first case that finally occurred in 1961. Termination removed all federal protective measures from Indian lands, including individuals, and this dreadful policy finally ended almost at the same time as relocation in 1973. Until then, bureaucrats in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and congressmen argued that both relocation and termination liberated Native peoples to enjoy full citizenship and all the privileges like everyone else.¹

Relocation officers processed Indians like numbers through an experimental system of moving them from rural areas that nobody initially wanted, to cities where nobody cared about Indians.² During these years, American Indians became another group in cities, just like European immigrants and others who went to America and were exploited—Irish, Chinese, Polish—different peoples who were taken advantage of and cheated by American capitalism. As a result, American Indians became the

¹ See Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1986).

² William Willard, 'Outing, Relocation, and Employment Assistance: The Impact of Federal Indian Population Dispersal Programs in the Bay Area', *Wicazo Sa Review*, 12 (Spring 1997), 29–46 and Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 2000).

unwritten chapter in the fictitious saga *The Jungle*, by Upton Sinclair. They had been cheated in the previous 100 years, and the century before that.

Former Cherokee Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller described going on relocation as a child with her family. In rural Oklahoma, she said,

I never like the idea of moving away. I can still remember hiding in a bedroom in our house of rough-hewn lumber, listening while my father, mother, and oldest brother talked in the adjoining room about the benefits and drawbacks of relocating our family. We younger children tried to listen through the door. We were terrified. They were talking about possible destinations. They spoke of places we had barely heard of—Chicago, New York, Detroit, Oakland, and San Francisco.³

The Mankillers, a family of nine, took a train from the backwoods of north-east Oklahoma to Kansas City and transferred to another train to San Francisco. Mankiller described:

My folks had the vouchers the BIA officials had given them for groceries and rent. But when we arrived, we found that an apartment was not available, so we were put up for two weeks in an old hotel in a notorious district of San Francisco called the Tenderloin. During the night, the neighborhood sparkled with lots of neon lights, flashily dressed prostitutes, and laughter in the streets. But in the morning we saw broken glass on the streets, people sleeping in doorways, and hard-faced men wandering around. The hotel was not much better than the streets. The noises of the city, especially at night, were bewildering. We had left behind the sounds of roosters, dogs, coyotes, bobcats, owls, crickets, and other animals moving through the woods. We knew the sounds of nature. Now we heard traffic and other noises that were foreign. The police and ambulance sirens were the worst. That very first night in the big city, we were all huddled under covers, and we heard sirens outside in the streets. We had never heard sirens before. I thought it was some sort of wild creature screaming. The sirens reminded me of wolves.⁴

For Indians, the new life in cities proved to be confusing and harmful. An article in the *Christian Science Monitor* described the reality of a Native family relocating to a city. The story itself depicted a true picture of what relocation was probably like for a Native family in an unfamiliar situation.

³ Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller a Chief and Her People* (New York, 1993), 69.

⁴ *Ibid.* 71.

Tony and Martha Big Bear and their family had just arrived in Los Angeles from the reservation. Everything was new to Martha and she never said a word and scarcely raised her eyes while holding the children during the bus ride to the relocation office. The first thing the relocation officer did was to advise Tony about spending money wisely. A \$50 check was drawn up for Tony and he was told how to open a bank account. The Big Bears were then temporarily lodged in a nearby hotel.

Although Tony wanted to be a commercial artist, he settled for a job in an aircraft plant. The Indian Bureau placement officer persuaded Tony to accept this job first and then he could check into the art field later after he became familiar with Los Angeles and when his family had a more permanent place to live. Everything was moving too fast for the Big Bears. The field office helped Tony find an apartment—a 'slum,' according to most people, but it was better than anything Martha was accustomed to.⁵

The experience of the Big Bears could have been more difficult. For many families, it was. Sometimes factories closed down and welfare agencies had to aid relocated families. Promised jobs fell through. Nearly all relocatees experienced difficulties of one kind or another. A writer for the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine described an incident of an Indian family of seven, struggling in the city. The situation involved Little Light, her husband, Leonard Bear, and their five children. From a Muscogee Creek community in Oklahoma, they found city life harsh. 'Today they are slum dwellers in Los Angeles, without land or home or culture or peace.' The author described meeting Little Light and her children

in the chairless kitchen-dining-living room of a small shanty on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Five children, black eyes round with wonder in their apricot faces, sheltered against her skirt. The walls were unpainted, the floor a patchwork of linoleum. Through an archway, another room was visible where three beds crowded together. A two-burner stove stood on a box, and on the only other piece of furniture in the room—a battered table—rested the remains of a dinner; some white, grease-soaked bags which had contained hamburgers and fried potatoes prepared by the restaurant a few blocks away.

In response to the interviewer's questions, Little Light spoke of how her husband went out drinking every night, of people in

⁵ Kimmis Henderick, 'U.S. Helps Indians Move', *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 6 Mar. 1956.

stores laughing at her, and about the need for a doctor for her sick child. She wanted to return to Oklahoma, but there was not enough money to go back. The woman stared solemnly, and her face became distorted as she lamented: 'They did not tell us it would be like this.'

The federal government introduced the relocation programme by offering its services to all qualified American Indians. The qualifications were not strict. This was an experimental project that started with the Navajo because of a severe blizzard that occurred during the winter of 1947-8 in the Four Corners area. The Navajo and Hopi were starving and their livestock were dying, compelling the federal government to move them to Denver, Salt Lake City, and Los Angeles. Housing and jobs awaited them with assistance from relocation officials. The Navajo had served admirably during the Second World War, especially as code talkers in the US Marine Corps, starting with twenty-eight of them. In all, an estimated 25,000 Indian men and several hundred Indian women served in the Second World War. Another 10,000 Native Americans served in Korea and an estimated 43,000 served in the Vietnam War when relocation ended in the early 1970s.

At this time, President Harry Truman appointed Dillon S. Meyer as the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs to start both the relocation programme and the new Indian policy of termination. Meyer, a conservative Republican from Ohio, had recently left the directorship of the War Relocation Authority that involved relocating Japanese-Americans from the west coast to hinterland camps during the war. His new appointment as Indian Commissioner was not probably to be a friend to American Indians, but rather to get a difficult job done. While Meyer served as Indian Commissioner when termination and relocation began, newly elected President Dwight Eisenhower appointed a former banker from New Mexico, Glenn Emmons, as the new head of the BIA in 1952.

In the beginning, most Indians did not know what relocation was about. Indian activist Russell Means lived in California at the time and said: 'What the hell was relocation? Eventually, I learned that the [Dwight] Eisenhower administration had come up with yet another plan to depopulate Indian reservations. The idea was to integrate Indians into urban ghettos so that in a few

generations we would intermarry and disappear into the underclass. Then the government could take the rest of our land and there would be no one left to object.⁶

The BIA made relocation services initially available in Oklahoma, New Mexico, California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Chicago, with the first official relocatees arriving in Chicago in early 1952. The small numbers of Indians relocating in the 1950s grew enormously by the mid-1960s. In all, from 1952 to 1973 an estimated 100,000 Native Americans relocated to metropolitan areas, and later in plains states, to Oklahoma City, Tulsa in Oklahoma, and Wichita in Kansas.⁷ Western cities and those on the west coast proved to be popular, making Los Angeles the urban Indian capital of Indian Country. Russell Means wrote that 'relocation applicants ostensibly were limited to three preferences among seven cities—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Chicago, Saint Louis, Dallas, and Cleveland. . . . In general, most people were lucky if they ended up with their third choice, unless they were willing to wait—sometimes years until the quota for a particular city opened up.'⁸

It did not take much to qualify for the relocation programme. Because the government wanted it to succeed, the criteria were not hard. A person had to be between 18 and about 45 years old, and in good health. The applicant had to be capable of working and learning a job skill. Any prior job experience in the mainstream proved to be helpful, although it did not guarantee being placed in a job that was found by relocation officials.

In my own home community around Shawnee, Oklahoma, relatives and friends moved to Wichita, Kansas, to work in the aeroplane industry for Boeing Aircraft. Other Indians and friends of my family went on relocation mostly to Dallas, and my grandfather ended up in southern California. Many Indians from Oklahoma went to California, to Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area. Many relocatees returned home to reservations broke and filled with stories about the big city. Some accounts were adventurous. Daunted by urban frustration, they felt compelled to try relocation again and this time went to visit

⁶ Russell Means with Marvin J. Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York, 1995), 68.

⁷ Kenneth R. Philp, 'Stride toward Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952-1960', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 16 (Apr. 1985), 175-90.

⁸ Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 77.

other cities. Many stayed permanently and many found that the big city life was not meant for them.

In the early years of the relocation programme, 54 per cent or more than half of the relocatees came from Indian agencies at Aberdeen, South Dakota; Billings, Montana; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Another 46 per cent, including my relatives, came from the south and south-west, from Anadarko and Muskogee, Oklahoma; Gallup, New Mexico; and Phoenix, Arizona. The heavy migration of Indians to cities occurred from 1954 to 1961.⁹ These first relocated Indians caused a major demographic shift of the Native American population from reservations and rural areas historically known as Indian Country.

The first relocatees felt cultural shock as they soon learned about elevators, stop lights, subways, and electrical implements that they had never seen before. The constant crowds of urbanization made the relocated Indians apprehensive about what they were doing and what might happen to them next. In such a foreign reality, they were on their own with little prior experience of living off their reservations, except for the Indian veterans. The relocatees felt abandoned by relocation workers and they needed help on a daily basis for the first couple of months. In addition, they soon learned about prejudice, racism, and street-life ways in the cities. Forced into new lives, Native Americans found that the federal government exercised increasing control over them in its plan to make Indians invisible via assimilation, and they would eventually lose their native identity.

Finding life hard in southern California with little job experience and almost no education, one angry Indian called relocation an 'extermination program' and said that President Eisenhower believed 'the Indians would be integrated by taking all the youngsters off the reservation, the old would die off, the young would be integrated, and the land would become free for public domain, and all the people could grab it'.¹⁰

Other new urban Indians found modern institutions, such as buying on credit, too overwhelming, and their inability to make instalment payments caused indebtedness, and possibly

⁹ Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 138.

¹⁰ Joseph C. Vasquez, interview by Floyd O'Neil, 27 Jan. 1971, Los Angeles, California, Interview no. 1009, box 53, acc. no. 24, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

bankruptcy.¹¹ This was learning things the hard way, by experience. It was unfortunate for relocatees that the school of experience gave tests first, before one could study for them.

Realizing that Native Americans needed job training, Congress passed the Indian Vocational Training Act in 1956,¹² and the government offered loans and assistance to companies that would move or establish factories near the estimated 250 reservations. American Indians received on-the-job training, pre-training for certain occupations, and job placements. After 1957 relocation became known as the Indian Employment Assistance programme until it ended in 1973. In the early 1970s the federal government funded urban counselling centres and sites with opportunities to serve Native Americans as central points for socialization and community life. Such centres emerged with others funded independently in Oklahoma City and Tulsa in Oklahoma; two sites in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas; the Lincoln Indian Center in Lincoln, Nebraska; three Indian centres in Rapid City and one in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; and the Mid-America Indian Center in Wichita, Kansas.

Working with Indians arriving in Minneapolis, a social services director at the Minneapolis Native American Center witnessed the frustrations and hopelessness of Indian people. The director lamented the disillusionment of relocation goals and hopes, saying, 'I think everybody who comes to the city has a dream—a dream of making it, a dream about improving their lives. But then prejudice slaps them right in the face and they're worse off. Call it culture shock. When your bubble is burst, there's nothing left but to go back home and start dreaming again.'¹³

Tragedy struck the lives of urban Indians as the pressure of socio-cultural alienation became too great to handle. One young Indian woman received bad news about her brother, and her roommate managed to save her from ending her own life. The

¹¹ L. Madigan, 'American Indian Relocation Program', 17; James O. Palmer, 'A Geographical Investigation of the Effects of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Employment Assistance Program upon the Relocation of Oklahoma Indians, 1967-1971' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1975), 104; and US Congress, Senate, discussion on the success of the Relocation Program, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 14 Mar. 1957, *Congressional Record* 103: 3643.

¹² 'Adult Indian Vocational Training Act', PL 959, 3 Aug. 1956, *US Statutes at Large*, 70: 986.

¹³ Howell Rains, 'American Indians: Struggling for Power and Identity', *New York Times Magazine*, 11 Feb. 1979, section VI, 28.

roommate recalled the 'Queen of Angeles Hospital being nearby because my roommate tried to commit suicide and we had to rush her over to the hospital. . . . She was Blackfeet . . . from Montana . . . her brother got killed in Vietnam and when she got the news she kind of freaked out. And she stayed drunk for about three days and locked herself in the bathroom.'¹⁴ She wanted to commit suicide, one of the leading causes of death for American Indians as the number of Indian suicides continued to increase in the 1980s.

Self-destruction in many cases involved alcoholism. The urbanizing effect of relocation robbed many American Indians of their confidence and self-esteem. They had nowhere to turn, except to each other. A common occurrence was for relocatees to gather and talk about their frustrations and problems. Many times local bars in the various cities became meeting places on a regular basis. These Indian bars became infamous over the years, with some not staying in business very long. Columbine in Los Angeles, Red Race in Oklahoma City, and other bars were popular hangouts. Franklin Avenue in the twin cities was lined with bars for Indians to frequent, and they did. A bar culture among relocated Indians developed in cities, much like among the Irish in Boston, Samoans in Seattle, and other ethnic groups who had their favourite places. It is there that they talked about their families, concerns, and problems.

In July 1968, in response to police brutality, Clyde Bellecourt and other concerned Indians met with attorney Gus Hall at 1111 Plymouth Avenue in Minneapolis to found an organization which came to be known as the American Indian Movement (AIM). Several noted individuals, such as Dennis Banks (Ojibwa), Clyde Bellecourt (Ojibwa), Eddie Benton Benai (Ojibwa), Mary Jane Wilson (Ojibwa), and George Mitchell (Ojibwa), were instrumental in the early formation of the movement. 'I was constantly frustrated when I was trying to be a white man', said George Mitchell, a full-blood Ojibwa and co-founder of the American Indian Movement. 'I am proud of my Indian dress. I'd rather see this country become a rainbow culture. I'd like for us to be able to see different peoples and their different ways.'¹⁵

¹⁴ Ned Blackhawk, 'I can Carry on from Here: The Relocation of American Indians to Los Angeles', *Wicazo Sa Review*, 11/2 (Fall 1995), 21.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Wheeler, 'Indians have Found a Mecca in Minneapolis', *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 13 Sept. 1976.

Indian patrols were organized to scrutinize police, and started to locate drunk Indians before the police found them. The patrols carried citizens' band radios to intercept police calls, so that they could witness police arrests and make sure that the arrested Indians were not abused. Some carried Polaroid cameras. Patrol members began wearing red jackets. Later, a black thunderbird emblem was added and the Indian Patrol was referred to as 'shock troops'.

At this time the coalition became a structured organization, a non-profit corporation with an Indian board and staff. Some people say Indian women of the new organization renamed it the American Indian Movement. Vernon Bellecourt stated: 'AIM members were going to call the organization the Concerned Indian Americans, CIA. They couldn't use that! So a couple of older, respected women said, "Well you keep saying that you *aim* to do this, you *aim* to do that. Why don't you call it AIM, the American Indian Movement?" That's how we got our name.'¹⁶

AIM fought back in the twin cities, fighting the police who brutalized Indians caught in or near bars, mainly along Franklin Avenue. One strategy used by the police was to open the doors of a paddy wagon, back it up to the front door of a bar, and herd everyone into the wagon. There was no chance to escape, except by fighting the police. AIM organized itself into patrols with radios to intercept police reports about where the next raid was going to occur. Taking cameras with them, the AIM patrols photographed the police arresting Indians as evidence and a means of stopping the beating of Indians.

One relocatee described the whole situation as problems with change, saying,

It [confusion] really starts when we are born on a reservation, because while we are there, we are geared to a lifestyle that is not very comfortable to take along with us into the city. When we get there, we don't know really what do we leave and what do we pick up to develop a healthy personality and to develop some character out here, because we really haven't the kind of discipline and the kind of character built in and the kind of responsibility on the reservation that we need out here [in the city]. . . . I look at the self image, the self respect, the personal

¹⁶ Vernon Bellecourt interview in Peter Nabokov (ed.), *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000* (New York, 1991), 375.

worth, this kind of thing, and I don't know what it was like before the reservation got here. This is one of the things that has done a lot to harm the Indian person.¹⁷

Humiliation and frustration drove many Indians back to their reservations and rural communities. This returning experience has been called 'returning to the blanket' in a pejorative reference that Indians had failed in adopting white ways and wanted to remain in the secure confines of the reservation with dependence on the federal government for assistance. But it was much more than this. Close to their traditions and values of the old ways, Indians continued to see things and understand life in their Native cultures. They thought in circularity with a perspective of connecting all things, human and non-human. Their ethos held respect for all things in a kind of 'natural democracy' based on respect and acknowledging all relationships, human and non-human. This Native ethos involved a tandem reality of the physical and metaphysical reality, understanding all relations as they were a part of this scheme of life.

This so-called 'Indian problem' of relocation and urbanization had to be understood by Indians themselves and solved by them. They had to gain information, knowledge about urban life, and courage to stick it out in the cities. Betsy Kellas, a Hopi, grew up in Arizona and lived in southern California during the 1960s and 1970s. She was educated in the public school system and recalled feeling alone as an Indian person. After graduating from California State University at Northridge, she worked as a counsellor at Urban Indian Center in Los Angeles. She described the urban Indian youth experiencing personal problems of being Indian. Betsy said,

It is exciting to work in the Center because most of these [young] people have problems. Many of the parents work, and the children only have a mother. They have to work just to keep going. They are examples of the society, of persons shut out by society. They have not been given a chance. They need to be themselves, and they need more than skills. They need to have opportunities to express themselves. The children are

¹⁷ Richard Woods and Arthur M. Harkins, 'An Examination of the 1968-1969 Urban Indian Hearings Held by the National Council on Indian Opportunity Part V: Multiple Problems of Adaptation', Training Center for Community Programs in coordination with Office of Community Programs, Center for Urban and Region Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, October 1971, 28.

so quiet. They cannot come up and tell you what is bothering them. They just hold it inside. They need people who will listen, and find out how they feel. The Indians need to find out how to express how they feel [about] themselves, and let it be known. . . . The Indian people need a chance to see what the world is about. They will know where they are at. They will know they are at the bottom, and how much they have to work to get up where they want to be.¹⁸

A former director of the American Indian Center in Chicago, John Walker (Sioux-Ottawa), described the second generation of urban Indians in the big city. And their urban struggle was no easier. 'All of a sudden, we were left in a vacuum', said Walker, who was born and raised in Chicago. He found it difficult to establish credibility in the Indian community whose elders were from reservations.¹⁹ Unsure what to do, the urban Indian was left abandoned to find his or her own way of survival in the big city. George Scott, Education Director of the Chicago American Indian Center, stated: 'Indians don't know how to deal with the cities. They need some basic orientation.' Furthermore, Scott felt that some Indians were fulfilling stereotypes and the expectations of others, since they had no guidance.²⁰

It was not all right to be Indian, since racism and prejudice towards 'Indian-looking' Indians still occurred, especially in border towns off the reservation. These were the roughest places for Indians, even more than the cities. Sometimes the biggest racists against Indians were Indians (mixed-bloods) themselves, who could pass as whites. One Native person described a woman who was mean to her while they grew up. The Indian woman said that after a workshop years later for the Eureka City Schools, the offender, now a schoolteacher, came up to her and blurted out an apology while crying. The Indian woman described: 'She had big alligator tears, and she said, "You know, I'm half Hupa and our folks were so ashamed of being Indian that we destroyed everything. Baskets, everything." They were burned because they didn't

¹⁸ Roger W. Axford (ed.), *Native Americans: Twenty-Three Indian Biographies* (Indiana, Pa., 1980), 37.

¹⁹ Allan Parachini, 'Chicago's Indian Ghetto Where Hopes Slowly Die', *Chicago Sun-Times*, 2 May 1976, Folder Indian News Clippings 5, Box 35, Theodore Marrs Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor.

²⁰ Minutes of First Meeting of the Task Force on Racially-Isolated Urban Indians, December 12 and 13, 1969, Box 114, Folder Urban Indians 4 of 4, White House Central Files, Leonard Garment Papers, Richard Nixon Materials Project, National Archives, DC.

want anybody to know that they were Indian. I understand now that that's just the characteristic of people. If you want to cover something up you make fun of somebody else.'²¹

Surviving urbanization in the big city was intimidating. Many relocatees failed, but the struggle went on since the reservations' economies offered much less. With few jobs on the reservations, many American Indians had no choice, but to try a new life in the big city. The first point of survival was to understand the situation of Indian cultures being alien to other people in big cities. This cultural alienation would always be there so that the relocatees had to find a comfort zone of taking on and adjusting to the urban mainstream and its ways. This was a constant struggle and an individual battle for everyone to wage. Learning to be like a white man in the city was new, but not for those with previous urban experiences. Russell Means described the humiliation of being shown the simplest things when asked if he had bought an alarm clock to get up in time for work. He said:

Yes, sure. Then a huge fat woman came into the [relocation] office to teach me how to live in Los Angeles. She began with a telephone. She grabbed my right hand and shoved my index finger into the dial of a rotary phone and 'taught' me how to dial. She told me about prefixes and made me practice dialing. I was thinking that those had to be the stupidest people I had ever met, but that was my first experience with government bureaucrats. While the fat lady was gripping my hand and showing me how to dial, I looked at her and the counselor. With all the sincerity I could muster, I said, 'What will they think of next?'²²

Such individuality was not a part of Indian life and Indian people found themselves at an acute disadvantage. Their communal ways did not work in the urban mainstream that stressed individual desires and individual goals. Urban Indians had to make quick adjustments in their thinking and form new goals that mirrored those of mainstream America. Feeling estranged from the other peoples in the cities, urban Indians began to realize that they had to socialize with other individuals. As they made the effort, they often found themselves rejected by people living in cities. This was disheartening. In addition to this new socialization process, they had to take on new attitudes, values with a different

²¹ Judith Anne Antell, 'American Indian Women Activists' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1990), 24.

²² Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 82.

outlook on life, if they were going to survive in cities. In urban areas, they had no land to call their own. They rented apartments and houses. Seeking lower rents and finding other Indians, they began to form Indian neighbourhoods in the poorer parts of cities, the ghettos. Their new neighbourhoods represented a new kind of home space without land. This was a new kind of tribalism or re-tribalization that formed new groups such as Chicago Indians, Los Angeles Indians, Bay area Indians, and Seattle Indians. This newly formed identity was one that transformed tribalism on reservations into Indianness in cities.

Racism and discrimination proved to be serious problems for Native Americans. While it proved difficult enough to make the switch to urbanization, other Americans often rejected Indian people. Racial differences were an enormous problem during the 1960s in America and for the following decade of the 1970s. African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans suffered from racism.

Having little or no familiarity with American Indians, the urban mainstream believed old stereotypes. Because Indians looked different and their skin was darker, they were rejected by the urban mainstream. Wilma Mankiller described her childhood years in schools following relocation and moving to Daly City, California. She said:

In Daly City, I was getting ready to enter the seventh grade. The thought of that depressed me a great deal. That meant having to meet more new kids. Not only did I speak differently than they did, but I had an unfamiliar name that the others ridiculed. We were teased unmercifully about our Oklahoma accents. My sister Linda and I still read out loud to each other every night to lose our accents. Like most young people everywhere, we wanted to belong. Also, there were changes going on inside me that I could not account for, and that troubled me very much. I was experiencing all the problems girls face when approaching the beginning of womanhood. I was afraid and did not know what to do. Besides having to deal with the internal changes, I was also growing like a weed and had almost reached my full adult height. People thought I was much older than twelve. I hated what was happening. I hated my body. I hated school. I hated the teachers. I hated the other students. Most of all, I hated the city.²³

²³ Mankiller and Wallis, *Mankiller a Chief and Her People*, 103.

American Indians found themselves and their tribes involved in the red tape of '389 treaties, 51,000 statutes, 2,000 federal court decisions, 500 attorney general opinions, 141 tribal constitutions and 112 tribal charters'.²⁴ Jack Haikey, editor of the Los Angeles Indian Center's publication *Talking Leaf*, believed that the Indians' special legal relationship with the United States had helped to isolate Indians and caused them to be misunderstood by the mainstream.²⁵

In the mid-1970s, anthropologist Garrick Bailey of the University of Tulsa conducted a study of urban Indians in Oklahoma, and he found a number of public myths about American Indians. 'The average non-Indian Oklahoman believes the Bureau of Indian Affairs spends vast sums of money on the Indian', reported Bailey's study. 'They believe the bureau takes care of every need of the Indians and even gives them a monthly allowance check. The general consensus is that the Indian receives far too many benefits from the government and there is a great deal of resentment against Indians because of these alleged benefits. This resentment is strongest among the poor whites and other minorities', concluded the report. In sum, 'The urban Indian is one of America's forgotten people. To the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to the Indian Health Service, and all too frequently to his own tribal leaders, he no longer exists.'²⁶ Bailey debunked the public belief that the government took care of Native Americans. In fact, the opposite was and remains closer to the truth. The Bureau of Indian Affairs proved to be ineffective, stifling tribal communities with rules and regulations. Where the BIA found itself limited in its supervision of Indian affairs, tribes one by one found resources to take care of their own people by the mid-1980s.

²⁴ Georgia Anne Geyer, 'Indians Have Trouble Raising Family in City', *Chicago Tribune*, c.1963, Box 282, Folder 28, Fred Harris Papers, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

²⁵ Ronald Ham, 'Urban Indians Misunderstood', *Northwest Leader* (Los Angeles), 20 Nov. 1975, Box 35, Folder Indian News Clippings (3), Theodore Marrs Papers.

²⁶ In his study, Professor Garrick Bailey obtained his information from the Senior Workers Action Program of Oklahoma County, Nutrition Program for the Elderly, Area Development Education Placement and Training Program, Head Start, Youth Development Program, and Oklahoma City Housing Authority. See Bill Sampson, 'Urban Indians "Forgotten"', *Tulsa Tribune*, 22 Sept. 1976, Box 4, Folder, News Clippings (3), Brad Patterson Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor.

The federal relocation programme initiated the creation of a new subculture when Indians took buses or trains or drove their cars to big cities. This 'off-reservation' experience occurred over and over again, with each Indian person leaving his or her home in rural areas. Arriving in an unfamiliar urban environment meant establishing a new home space and learning the ways of a new culture. Parallel to the travels of their warriors of the previous centuries, these urban pathfinders represented the first generation of a new modern culture in American Indian history.

The gathering of urban Indians represented another parallel to the past, such as 'making camp' to establish a new community. Although the relocation officials sought to desegregate Indians by sending them on various job assignments and finding individual housing for them, native people looked for each other. As Indians found Indians, members of various tribes met other Indians. This Indian to Indian gathering began to dissolve tribal barriers and initiated a pan-Indian effect. The growing movement of relocated Indians in cities began demographically to affect the population of native people. With each year of relocation, the residential presence shifted to urban regions. Ultimately the number of urban Indians was greater than the reservation population. Even more, the second generation of urban Indians began to identify with cities as their homes instead of the reservations that their parents came from.

By the 1970s, the typical dichotomy of reservation and urban Indians had changed. With the dual identity of reservation Indians and urban Indians, the federal government found itself involved in a trichotomy in Indian affairs. This situation added to the complexity of federal supervision of Native Americans. At the same time, the federal government under Jimmy Carter, and especially under Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, promoted privatization of industry and entrepreneurship.

The attention of the federal government shifted from reservation tribes to the urban scene. Urban Indian frustration with inadequate housing such as unliveable apartments, low-paying jobs, and bad working conditions led to Indian protests. Interestingly, such protests happened as early as 1964 in the Pacific north-west over tribal fishing rights, and they led to others. The American Indian Movement emerged in the summer of 1968, voicing concerns about urban conditions. The Alcatraz

takeover in the following year captured more national headlines. As more urban Indians voiced their concerns, the American Indian Movement became the source of a national Indian voice, forcing the federal government to listen through its protests and occupations in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

A new leadership established itself that rivalled the tribal leaders on the reservations. Now the federal government had various sets of Indian leaders to deal with. In fact, the protests and takeovers took attention and federal concern from the reservations and tribal leaders. AIM leadership consisted of young men and women who had attended boarding schools. Some even had some years of a college education, such as Leighman Brightman in California and Clyde Warrior in Oklahoma. Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, Anna Mae Aquash, and most others had gone to Haskell, Chilocco, and other boarding schools.

The modern Indian leadership could be profiled as youth oriented, boarding-school educated, some with a college education, outspoken, and angry. Modern urban leaders knew of past injustices committed against their peoples, possessed knowledge of treaties, and were willing to risk harm to themselves against police, sheriffs, federal agents, and even the US Army.

Relocation had a profound effect on Native Americans. By the 1980s more than half of the Indian population lived in cities. Critics, especially many relocated Indians, blamed the government for inadequate urban housing, and low-paying jobs that were seasonal or temporary. Furthermore, cultural alienation proved to be a major problem. Living off the reservation for the first time and learning to cope with the urban mainstream proved too hard for many relocatees who returned to reservation life. Although critics called relocation a form of Indian removal, the relocated Indians eventually survived the city life and began to develop urban Indian communities throughout the western cities and in other urban areas. The relocation plan had failed to integrate Indians into urban communities, thereby colonizing the Indian identity. The population shift of the majority of Indians from reservations to urban areas finally resulted in about two-thirds of the total American Indian population living in cities. Largely, urban Indians lived in western cities such as the twin cities area, Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, Dallas, Albuquerque, Phoenix, and Los Angeles, the largest urban Indian concentration.

The effects of relocation caused a gathering of Indians in certain neighbourhoods. In Minneapolis and St Paul, urban Indians met socially and lived near Franklin Avenue. Tribal barriers began to dissolve such that Indians of different tribes began to form Indian neighbourhoods. The native neighbourhood in the mission district in San Francisco was called the Reservation. Uptown became identified as the Indian area in Chicago's northside. As Indians identified with cities such as Chicago, Dallas, and the Bay area, a new urban tribalism manifested itself. The common ground became the city as young Native men and women married people from different tribes and races. Tribal traditions became mixed and cultural knowledge decreased. Unfortunately, tribal languages became lost with each generation of relocated Indians. By the end of relocation, fewer than one-third of Native Americans spoke their languages. Using English every day made them forget their languages.

As urban Indians began to succeed in relocation, they became frustrated for other reasons that were justified. As Indian children attended schools, they felt that they were studying a foreign culture which was the mainstream. The history of the United States did not include them in the textbooks used in classrooms. Values of the urban mainstream were different. Racism and discrimination against Indians and other minorities became obvious. As a response, Indian neighbourhoods began to experiment with forming alternative schools. Milwaukee and its Native people of Ojibwa, Menominee, Oneida, Potawatomi, and other tribes formed the Milwaukee Indian Community School. In the twin cities, concerned Indians and AIM organized the Heart of the Earth School in 1972. In Chicago, Little Bighorn High School was founded. Also in Chicago, the first urban Indian college was founded in Native American Education Services, Inc., known as NAES College, in 1974.²⁷

The forming of alternative schools showed that Indians in cities wanted to invest in their children's future. They wanted to offer a curriculum in their own schools that would help prepare their children and offer courses that would help to teach their cultures and histories to their youth. These were mixed tribal schools, furthering the pan-Indian development in cities.

²⁷ Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 2000), 135–60.

By the end of the twentieth century, an estimated four generations of Indians had been urbanized. At least five generations had attended boarding schools. Ironically, boarding schools used to be institutions that American Indians dreaded. Threatened and mistreated, even abused in these school institutions, now urban Indians created school institutions of their own. Now, American Indians altered institutions and created them to suit their own needs.

The survival of three generations of Indians in cities had created an urban Indian identity. By the end of the 1970s, Indians were more in control of their lives. Many graduated from college and worked as teachers and in other professional areas. By the 1980s, an Indian middle class had emerged. Professional Indian teachers, lawyers, doctors, and others formed a small core that associated with others who wanted a better life for their families. By the end of the twentieth century, the numbers of Indians in professional areas increased, but they were still small.

The results of the relocation of native people produced an urban Indian identity. As a part of urban families, city Indians became increasingly individualized. They learned to adapt to urban life, but also surrendered much of their cultures, tribal values, and languages in the process. This provoked the question: what kind of new Indian had they become? Had they become more like the mainstream person? How did they survive the domination of federal paternalism? Urban Indians had forged a new identity of their own.

For each urban Indian who experienced relocation, moving to the city for the first time was never forgotten. Memories would haunt them of being lost, not knowing where to go, and depending on strangers for help. From tribal cultures based on communalism, urban Indian identity was based more on individuality. Urban Indians found themselves among non-Indians on a daily basis. They experienced themselves as minorities, different by culture, values, logic, and in appearance. They had to adapt to new surroundings. For some urban Indians, they felt 'Indian' no more.

The worst situation involved those Indians who could not adapt. Many Indians could not make the adjustment to urban living. The pressures proved to be too great as social and cultural alienation presented insurmountable obstacles. In the end, many

American Indians could not deal with these problems compounded by discrimination, prejudice, and racism. Feeling overwhelmed, many urban Indians with these feelings took their own lives. Committing suicide was their escape from urban pressures and feelings of rejection and not fitting into the urban mainstream.

One researcher discovered that in Minnesota in 1969, in more than 700 foster homes that had Indian children, only two had an Indian parent. Furthermore, a survey of placements of Indian children in Washington State in 1974 revealed that 114 of 159 children were placed in non-Indian homes.²⁸ In a statement in early April 1974, former Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota and chairman of the Oversight Hearing on the Welfare of Indian Children noted that

25 percent of all Indian children are either in adoptive homes, foster homes, or boarding school. In Minnesota one out of every four Indian children were removed from their home to foster care; in Montana, the rate was 13 times that for non-Indian children; 16 times high in South Dakota; and in the State of Washington, 19 times higher. In Wisconsin, it was 16 times more likely for an Indian child to be removed in comparison to non-Indian families.²⁹

As Indians came into contact with other people on a regular basis, mixed marriages occurred. An Indian person working in a factory, for example, was glad to see another Indian, but more often it was a person from a different tribe. Mixed-tribal marriages happened, thus resulting in children of more than one tribal affiliation.

Mixed marriages also began to occur with people of other races—Mexican-American, African-American, and especially Anglo-American. Since white Americans dominated the urban mainstream, many young Indian men and women married whites, resulting in bi-racial children, often with bi-cultural problems. The most important concern was social acceptance of the mixed marriage and the mixed-blood children. While Indian blood diminished, Indian identity continued. Many Indians

²⁸ Minutes of First Meeting of the Task Force on Racially-Isolated Urban Indians, 12–13 Dec. 1969, Box 114, Folder Urban Indians 4 of 4, White House Central Files, Leonard Garment Papers, Richard Nixon Materials Project, National Archives, DC.

²⁹ 'Senate Probes Child Welfare Crises', 'Indian Family Defense', *Bulletin of the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc.*, 2 (Summer 1974), 1.

suffered identity crises and felt tormented by mainstream pressures.

One Indian mother living in the San Francisco Bay area said that other Indians said she did not act like an Indian. She had married a white American man and did not feel close or obligated to her Indian relatives. She had arrived in the city when she was 11 years old and was brought up in the white world and 'could handle it'. She felt assimilated and voluntarily rejected her Indian family and cultural background.³⁰

Of the Indians in the San Francisco area, among Indian mothers with a high school education or above, 71 per cent preferred their children to marry Indians, and of the mothers with less than a high school diploma, 59 per cent said the same.³¹ This preference has been carried out, but the percentage of non-Indian spouses is high. One-quarter of the Indian youth in the San Francisco area are mixed-bloods whose fathers are non-Indian. This means that they will face problems of identity, self-recognition, and heritage at an early age. Children seem confused, as one parent might teach Indian values and cultural practices such as the language, while the other parent uses the English language. Overall, children who can handle such a situation are usually well adjusted.³²

One Navajo person in Gallup wondered, 'what is in store for us in the future? Because we have lost most of our traditional values which bonded us together in the past, we must find new ways, new values and new customs that will restore the stability and the respect in our relationship. Otherwise chaos will continue to rule, destroying the fiber of our society, leading the moral decline and eventually to the disappearance of us as a people and a nation.'³³ Pat Locke, a Chippewa-Sioux, and Director of Planning Resources in Minority Education for the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), stated in 1976 that 'Today's Indians must learn to walk both the white path and the red path. Both are important for survival.'³⁴

Indian Americans have sometimes experienced a form of schizophrenia about their Indian identity and newly acquired

³⁰ Ibid. 36.

³¹ Ibid. 68.

³² Ibid. 72.

³³ 'Navajos Need New Values', *Gallup Independent*, 30 Jan. 1976, Box 35, Folder Indian News Clippings 3, Theodore Marrs Papers.

³⁴ Josephine Robertson, 'Pat Locke: Liaison between Two Cultures', *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 2 Feb. 1976.

mainstream identity. This is an individual experience that affects family members differently. For the majority of urban Indians, it becomes a continuous effort of making adjustments and changes while retaining connection to traditional ways. The perpetual internal question asked is 'how much Indianness have I lost?' Some urban Indians found it easier than others, while some preferred life on reservations or in cities living like everyone else. This torment between urban and reservation explains why many relocated Indians returned to the blanket of preference. They desired the former ways on the reservations rather than individualization as urban Indians in cities and making efforts to form urban Indian organizations and communities.

The next generation of urban arrivals helped to build urban Indian communities. The population of American Indians and urban Indians has rapidly increased, especially during the last two decades. In 1960 the Indian population was 551,669 and in 1970 it was 827,091.³⁵ In the 1970s, the Indian population grew three and a half times faster than the mainstream population.

As American Indians made the adjustment to urbanization, the third generation of urban Indians found life hard, but less harsh than the previous one and much less than the original relocatees who went to various cities such as Denver, Chicago, and others. They worked in various jobs, mostly those that nobody else wanted, especially dangerous ones in high steel as Mohawk iron workers.

Relocation following the Second World War was much like the removal of Indian people from their Native homelands from the east and other parts of Indian Country to Indian Territory and other designated areas that became reservations and also felt like prisoner-of-war encampments. Indians fell victim again, as they had in the mid-1800s, when many tribes had experienced forced removal to lands in the west in a government effort to clear their lands east of the Mississippi to open them for white settlement. They felt abandoned and forgotten by government officials who had made many promises. In the end, the relocation programme created a brain-drain effect, with the promising future Indian leadership going to the cities. With a less effective leadership on reservations, tribal lands became increasingly

³⁵ Task Force Eight, Final Report, 11.

vulnerable to mining companies and timber companies who desired coal, oil, uranium, gas, and timber on Indian lands that had little protection until twenty-five tribes themselves formed the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) in 1975. CERT sought to identify natural resources on tribal lands and to force the federal government to release tribes from long-term leases with energy companies. This common situation raised important questions about the true intention of the relocation programme, particularly whether this was a deliberate attempt to seize certain desired tribal lands and reap the natural resources from them in the form of land leases. By the late 1970s at least twenty-five companies were mining natural resources in the Black Hills, timberlands were lost on the Klamath Reservations in Oregon and on the Menominee Reservations in Wisconsin, while the Four Corners area on the Navajo Reservation became the largest strip-mining site in the world.

Overall, an estimated one-third of the coal west of the Mississippi river lay beneath tribal lands on reservations. Tribal lands in twelve states possessed large oil reserves below ground. One-third to one-half or more of the estimated reserves of uranium in the United States existed in the Four Corners area.³⁶ Ironically, reservation lands possessed enormous amounts of coal, oil, gas, uranium, and water, which was the most precious resource of all.

On the local scale, relocated Indians suffered in the cities in a strange urban environment. As tears of adjustment ran dry and when hope was almost gone, the irony—and another resemblance with the removal policy—was that Indians survived as communities, not as individuals. In the worst of times for relocated Indians, many found strength and learned to laugh at themselves as they became strong, starting new homes and working new jobs in strange lands called urban Indian America. Surrounded by non-Indians who were in control of almost everything and frequently experiencing feelings of powerlessness, many Indians in cities thought to themselves: ‘they didn’t tell us it would be like this.’

³⁶ Philip Reno, *Mother Earth, Father Sky, and Economic Development: Navajo Resources and their Use* (Albuquerque, N. Mex., 1981), 133.