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## INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN AND WHITE VALUES

**W**hen the first Europeans arrived in the Western Hemisphere during the sixteenth century, they sought the land and its natural resources for their own benefit, intent on enriching their homelands. First the Spanish, then the French, followed by the Dutch, the British, and even the Russians laid claims along the Pacific coastline for new empires. During the 1500s and 1600s, the conquerors of the new age of European imperialism in the Western Hemisphere scarcely recognized the Native inhabitants who utilized the natural resources for their own livelihood. Within a short time, they assaulted the Native populations and took whatever they wanted. They were unabashed in their greed, displaying an obdurate attitude that was shared by their successors in later centuries. Following the Industrial Revolution in the United States during the late 1800s, an increasingly urban America sought fuels to run its modern factories and railroads and later its automobiles and airplanes. With little government involvement (by today's standards at least), the "laissez-faire" attitude of capitalism became the guiding force of the economy as competition intensified for natural resources such as oil, coal, uranium, and water.

This study, consisting of various case histories of Indian-white competition for natural resources in Indian Country during the last 100 years, focuses on a struggle between two different cultural worlds, contrasting the values of American capitalism and the traditional values of the Indian nations. Incongruent in philosophies, goals, values, and cultures, American Indians and Anglo-Americans clashed and

remained intertwined in a growing crisis of competition, just as their forebears once were. The only things that they experienced in common were the land and its natural resources. As the white American capitalists took much from the Native inhabitants, the two orders of life clashed with deadly consequences. For the Indians, homelands were lost; for the Euramericans, new settlements, towns, and empires were built. And in the process, the land and its environment were severely depleted.

The first five chapters focus on certain basic elements of Indian society, presenting case histories of selected tribes with various natural resources, all of which have been profoundly affected by federal policies in the twentieth century. Chapter 1 focuses on the "person" and land relations, as told in the sad story of Jackson Barnett, a Creek full-blood. Chapter 2 is centered on the "family" or "extended family" unit and the exploitation of oil in land belonging to the Osage. The third fundamental element, "community," is explored in Chapter 3, which stresses the legal fight for water rights. Chapter 4 depicts the "tribal nation," the last concrete quality of the Native infrastructure. Here, the focus is on the Klamath, who survived but lost much of their timber to white capitalists. Chapter 5 is about the importance of "clan" (or "society" for Western tribes), explaining the significance of human relationships and respect for the plant and animal worlds—the natural environment. Chapter 6 considers the abstract element of "spirituality" among Indians, as exemplified in the efforts of the Sioux to reclaim their beloved Black Hills. These six basic elements are pertinent to the life of all Native America. They are internal and innate, giving Indian society cohesion—unless they are weakened by outside forces.

Woven throughout the last 100 years of Anglo exploitation of Indian people and their lands are recurrent themes of cultural dominance, ethnocentrism, and racism. The Anglo-American culture of the twentieth century is driven by capitalistic ambitions to acquire wealth. By contrast, American Indians are members of tribal nations whose philosophies stress a kinship and interrelatedness with all creation. And the conflicting dynamics of the two very different systems have yielded a history of anguishing human and environmental exploitation.

The roots of American capitalism are steeped in the early European settlement of the Western Hemisphere and actually originate in the struggle for land in Europe, where this resource existed in limited supply and quality. The privileged owned the land and all its natural resources, and rights of ownership became an important part of societies with class systems that passed land from one generation to the

next via inheritance. Generally, landowners were members of the wealthy noble classes who paid taxes on their lands, an obligation that was envied by those people who had no property of their own and felt fortunate to work the land for the wealthy. The possession of land represented status and power, compelling nations to go to war for territories against weaker rulers of smaller nations. Wood from the forests of the land meant ships could be built, and cleared areas permitted farmers to produce grains and raise livestock. Coal and oil supplied heat, and the discovery of silver and gold brought instant wealth.

Life for the first Europeans in America was a continuing struggle for survival. Families emerged as the basis of settlements, towns, and eventually cities, but individualism became a strong characteristic of the American experience and American capitalism. This trait soon became imbedded in the American character, as well; it was then coupled with an ethic of survival at all cost, even **killing** if necessary, as conflict and competition also became a part of the American experience. Soon, the Euramericans became the dominant population. The new American mainstream demonstrated a general unwillingness to share permanently, especially with people of a different culture—whether they were new European immigrants, Indians, Hispanics, or African Americans. The seeming abundance of natural resources and land in America seemed to validate John Locke's philosophy of private property, as expressed in his *Two Treaties of Civil Government* and his attack on the divine right of **kings** to rule.

Lockean ideas gained popularity in America, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Adam Smith introduced the concept of "laissez-faire" as an ideal of free enterprise in his book *The Wealth of Nations*—a concept that, when put in action, enabled the individual American to seek property with little interference from state and federal governments. This profit system inspired ambition, productivity, and innovation, but unfortunately, it also fostered greed and deception.

The late nineteenth century marked the rise of modern America and changes as described by Richard Hofstadter in his *Age of Reform*, but it excluded minorities, especially American Indians due to their traditional values. In the Indian nations, the reservations and the people also entered an era of change—an era of decline and poverty. A similar state of poverty exists in Indian Country today, as measured against the white American standards.

While the battle for natural resources continues throughout Indian Country, fundamental qualities of Indian life have also changed and are now vulnerable to total loss. These fundamental qualities, addressed in Part 1, consist of the "self" or "person"; the "extended

family" unit; the "clan" or "society"; the "community"; the "tribe" or "nation"; and the "spirituality" of relatedness. Although Indians are, of course, individuals, they fundamentally view themselves as members of a group. The basic unit of group emphasis is the family, and the kinship relationship of all families constitutes a community or village/town; more than one community forms a tribal nation. (Although many tribes have traditional clans or societies, some do not.) The kinship of the people is of utmost importance. In earlier times, when life was harsh and filled with danger, living and working in a group improved chances for survival, and group values consequently superseded individualism. Democratic equality within the group made everyone feel more secure, although societal development created a different status between the genders and within male and female groups. The need to belong to a group introduced social controls, determined behavior, shaped values, and restricted individual activity, such as accumulation of wealth, unless it benefited the people as a whole. Biologically, the people were related, but this relatedness extended beyond the concrete reality of life on earth. The people felt a relatedness with all things in a spiritual context. This philosophical relatedness provided emotional comfort, a perspective on the role of humans, and a worldview that everything is interconnected within a balanced order sanctioned by the Creator.

The opening chapter in Part 2 addresses the demands created by the mainstream lifestyle on the natural resources of Indian Country. The ways in which Indian nations and their tribal leaders have responded to these demands and organized nationally is discussed in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 demonstrates how tribes and their leaders have used the courts and the law to protect their tribal resources. Chapters 10 and 11 illustrate effective tribal leadership at work, in the context of a general environmental philosophy that offers a lesson for the world.

Throughout the twentieth century, Indians have found their traditional order of life challenged legally by non-Indians and the U.S. government. In fact, the continual emphasis on the non-Indian values of the mainstream, dominant culture overshadows the elemental qualities of traditional Indian life, as portrayed in this book. It is important to recognize that these fundamental qualities have survived in the tribal communities against great odds, even as issues related to the exploitation of tribal resources have been lost in the intricacies of federal policies, federal-Indian law, and competition for big dollars in a capitalistic marketplace.

For the white society, the Industrial Revolution unleashed the forces of free enterprise and optimistic demands that would be met at

the expense of American Indians and their lands. Profits were to be made by taking risks and by bending the law if necessary, which was particularly easy if there was little law to bend. Even today, society is largely ruled by “the profit motive harnessed to the powerful impulses of self-interest,” as Paul Blumberg noted in *The Predatory Society: Deception in the American Marketplace*. Clearly, the twentieth century is the age of American economics.

In the courts of the white people’s law, Indian rights regarding natural resources such as water and even the right to hunt and fish have been vigorously contested. Tribal leaders and the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT), founded in 1975, have had to fight hard to protect their natural resources and uphold their traditional philosophies. American capitalism has moved the Indian-white struggle for land and natural resources into the courts—the arena of federal-Indian law.

Placing all of this in perspective, the twentieth century has brought significant destructive changes to Indian Country. Tribal leaders, Indian people, and their legal rights, traditional values, and natural resources are in jeopardy. In a final stand, the leaders and their people will have to protect their lands from the ravishing excavations of energy companies. Every day of every year, the tribes are required to defend their natural resources. The realization that American capitalism’s encroachment upon Indians has involved fraud, exploitation, and murder would no doubt shock Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and John Maynard Keynes, considered the three great economists of all time.

As America has developed within the last 100 years, wealth has become a determining factor of one’s place in society. The possession of wealth also brings power, especially in politics and in community, motivating many white Americans to concentrate their energies on acquisition and destruction of obstacles that stand in their way—unfortunately including American Indians. Greed has become the driving force in seizing land and using its natural resources without regard to the consequences, without concern for the future. Sadly, this has set a precedent for other Americans of different backgrounds and for the rest of the world. The tragic outcome of this ethic can be seen in the brutal exploitation that Indians have experienced, as individuals and as a community, throughout the twentieth century—the age of greed.