



Contact: Stuart Harris, Publicity Director, 889-7500

For Immediate Release

Although missionaries of Christianity have made many converts, they have not succeeded in suppressing the tribal religion of the American Indian, reports Stan Steiner who has spent the last 20 years traveling and living among the Indians.

In a book, "The New Indians," to be published by Harper & Row on February 21, Mr. Steiner discusses the role of religion in the resurgence of tribal life and the growing unrest among the Indians.

The rituals of tribal religion still play a significant part in the day-to-day life of the Indian reports Mr. Steiner. The new Indian is a religious man, and his religion is rooted in his belief in the life of the land, he states.

Mary Lou Payne, Assistant Director of the Assn. for American Indians says, as quoted in the book, "The Oriental contemplated nature, the white man conquered nature, but the Indian lived in nature. The Indian interacts with nature. A lot of people can't understand why the Indian wants to hold onto the reservation. It is more than just land to him. There are religious ties in it."

Although the U.S. government has made attempts to integrate the Indian into the modern technological society, Mr. Steiner reports that in most cases, the Indian, drawn by the tradition of tribal life, prefers to remain on the reservation.

Even Indians who are successful on the "outside" are often drawn irresistibly back to the tribal ways of the reservation, he states.

When he returns, the expatriate finds that the land of the Indians has been dammed up, eroded and flooded, stripped, leased out, wasted and legally stolen, says Mr. Steiner. Many reservation Indians exist in substandard huts, beset by the highest disease and the youngest death-age rate in the country.

Nevertheless the Indians persist in returning home because the land is more than an ancestral home. Uniqueness as an Indian, their identity, psychological security, and their very religion are rooted in the land, writes Mr. Steiner.

Going to the city to be integrated or assimilated requires no governmental approval, writes Mr. Steiner. But, if he wishes to be a tribal Indian, he has to have permission. He is politically a child as long as believes in tribalism.

The cultural and emotional ties to their religion which exist today even among Christian Indians, have been reinforced by the activist leaders who are defiantly battling against the "cultural genocide," which they say threatens the Indian.

(over)

In the Pueblo of Isleta, New Mexico, where the people have been Catholics for 350 years, the village Monsignor was sent away by the Indians because he wanted to destroy their customs, reports Mr. Steiner.

His ejection came after the Monsignor admitted to the Pueblo Council that it was his duty to destroy pueblo traditions and religion.

Vine Deloria, Sr., a Sioux Indian and Archdeacon of the Episcopal Church, who has devoted the last thirty years proselytizing for the church, says that he still beats his tomtom in his suburban cellar, "Quietly so the Lord will not hear me. I feel better then. I feel Indian."

Although Reverend Deloria has lived among the white man and has worked with them, he expresses his distrust of them and his dislike of the white man's way of being a Christian.

"The white man did not practice his religion. He did not behave as a Christian. He lied to himself, and to us. He tried to destroy our religion and leave us with promises of Heaven.

"Christianity was not new to the Sioux; they had their own kind of Christianity," says Reverend Deloria as quoted by Mr. Steiner. "We just did not call it that. We believed in one God. We believed in our own kind of ten Commandments. And we behaved as though we believed in them. That's why it was easy to change to the white man's religion. It was there to start with."

His son, Vine Deloria, Jr., a leader and spokesman of the Red Power movement which seeks self-determination and political independence for the tribal way of life, also studied for the ministry, but was not ordained.

According to Deloria, Jr., he has not lost his faith in religion, but in the white man. "Religion is something they talk about," he says. "It's not spiritual to them. It's not something they feel in their heart. The white man has lost his soul. But he is so small-minded that he has confused his soul with God."

The political, historical and religious background of the Indian as it relates to their present struggle against cultural extinction is contained in Mr. Steiner's book, along with interviews with Indian leaders and a report on the action they are taking. Also included are 22 photographs, charts, tribal map, documents, and a bibliography.

"As the new Indians became more vital and involved in their new tribalism I sought to convince them to write their own book," says Mr. Steiner. "They would not. I came to believe that their distrust of the words of the white man was so deep that they froze at the thought of writing what was in their hearts."

Convincing his Indian friends of the need for the book, Mr. Steiner was chosen by them to write it. Hundreds of Indians and dozens of tribes cooperated in putting the book together.