

we consider these bills to be one of the two most important measures confronting Indian people for the past several years.

The purpose of titles I and II of S. 1843 and H.R. 15122, entitled "To establish rights for individuals in their relations with Indian tribes, and for other purposes," is that of protecting the individual members of tribal groups from discriminatory or unjust treatment at the hands of their rival governing bodies and tribal courts by extending to Indian reservations the guarantees set forth in certain of the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution. It may be argued the intent of the proposed Federal legislation is to strengthen tribal government, not to destroy it.

For many modern-day Indian communities, the form of government and the procedures followed in the administration of justice are recent innovations, introduced in the past 50 years. Traditional forms of government, where they in fact existed, have long since disappeared from the scene to be replaced by new forms patterned after Anglo-American systems. Perhaps for these tribes the provisions of S. 1843 might well be considered an improvement, and for some the proposed legislation may indeed be needed.

However we, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, are unique in such features as our form of government and our history. Before the arrival of the first Europeans in 1540 we were already living peacefully in villages situated along the Rio Grande and other river systems in New Mexico; not only were we already living here, but our ancestors had lived in various regions of the Southwest for many centuries before 1540.

Our ancestors comprised the most advanced and sophisticated tribal groups in North America north of Mexico; and at the time of Coronado's entry it is debatable whether we or the Spaniards were, in fact, the more civilized. Our ancestors were overcome by the force of Spanish arms, and they became subjects of the Spanish Crown because that was the price of survival—they lost some of their independence and ceased to be the free people they were before the conquest; but they did not lose their language, their religion, their form of social organization or the other essential features of their way of life. This heritage they jealously and artfully protected; and it is this heritage that has been handed down generation after generation, century after century, and persists to this present day.

For this reason we look upon ourselves as unique among present-day American Indians. Our traditional way of life did not break down and disappear like that of most tribal groups; it has undergone change in the past century or more, but the change has been gradual—and because it has been gradual our people have not suffered to the extent other tribes suffered when their way of life suddenly underwent violent change.

Admittedly we Pueblos differ from our American neighbors in many ways, especially in our system of government and related features of our internal tribal life. But despotism, injustice, and mistreatment of our people are not among the elements that distinguish us from our neighbors and fellow citizens. We are, perhaps, more like a large family in each pueblo than we are like a nation. Within the family we have our own way of doing things; but like the members of a family we respect one another. And above all else, we respect the traditions that have come down to us across many generations.