

It was argued that Indian occupancy of lands created no valid rights; and proposals were advanced to expropriate the Indian lands against the will of the Indians and without payment of any compensation.

However, Congress firmly stood by its policy of respect for the land occupancy rights of the Indians. In acquiring lands for the expansion of the Nation and the use of the settlers, Congress recognized the just principle of voluntary purchase and sale for a negotiated price in its dealings with the Indian tribes.

Thus, up to 1871 the Federal Government pursued a program of negotiating and making treaties with the Indian tribes, whereby portions of ancestral tribal lands were retained by the tribes as "reservations," and the Indian title to the balance of the lands was "extinguished" by voluntary cessions by the tribes and upon payment by the United States of agreed prices.

After 1871, the Federal Government acquired Indian lands by executive agreements which were subject to ratification by both Houses of Congress.

By such treaties and agreements made with Indian consent, the United States purchased the great bulk of the lands of the Indian tribes of the first 48 States at prices which, in the aggregate, have conservatively been estimated to exceed \$800 million—indeed a vast sum considering the national budgets of those early years of our Nation's history.

Further, despite the loss of many millions of acres during the years 1880–1934, by reason of improvident governmental policies, it has been estimated that more than 50 million acres of lands of these States have been retained to this day in tribal or individual Indian trust ownership.

Once again, now, in this sixth decade of the 20th century, when the matter of dealing with the existing land occupancy rights of the native groups of Alaska has come to the fore, we are hearing from some quarters the same baseless and inequitable arguments and the same discredited assertions and complaints which were advanced during earlier periods of our Nation's history and which Congress has repeatedly rejected.

Some argue that the claims by the native groups of Alaska of land occupancy rights are invalid.

Our answer is that our land occupancy rights are the same as the occupancy rights of the Indian tribes of the first 48 States. Our occupancy rights are entitled to the same respect, honor, and protection that have been uniformly accorded to such rights under Federal policy and laws.

Further, we answer that if there is any serious doubt about the validity of our occupancy rights, we ask only that Congress give us our day in court so that we may have a judicial determination of the validity, scope, and extent of our existing occupancy rights, and then afford to us full Federal protection of such rights as are judicially established.

From some lips fall the familiar complaints that native occupancy of lands is impeding the economic development and progress of the State of Alaska.

Our answer is that, though we have the right of complete beneficial use of our aboriginally occupied lands and all the resources