

TESTIMONY: State Tribal Relations Committee, Milwaukee ,WI

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by

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Opening Remarks:

Greetings, Mr. Chairman and esteemed members of the Wisconsin State Tribal Relations Committee Tribal leaders and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to address this body this morning. My name is Gwen Carr. I am from the Heron Clan of the Cayuga Nation of New York and I appear here today in my role as the founding Chairwoman of the **National Urban Indian Policy Coalition**. Formerly I worked at the **White House** in the Clinton Administration in Intergovernmental Affairs and as the **Deputy Commissioner of Indian Affairs** in Oklahoma which has over 30 Tribes within its borders. I have extensive experience in working with Indian People on and off reservation in many issue areas.

I am submitting three documents as background and reference material along with this oral testimony. They include, The Urban Indian Report to the White House Domestic Policy Council, An article I wrote on Urban Indians in the Poverty & Race Research Action Council Publication and Urban Indian America, by the National Urban Family Coalition an off shoot of the National Urban Indian Policy Coalition. I will be referring to all of these documents as well as my own personal experience working in Indian Country for over 20 years.

Some Context:

How Urban Indians got to be Urban Indians:

Over half of the total American Indian population live off of reservations, due to the Federal government's Relocation Program of the 1950s or the necessity of finding work to support their families on the reservation after World War I (Carr 1997). As mentioned above, the Relocation Program was designed to assimilate Indians into mainstream culture. During the 1950's and 1960's, the Urban

excluded from public block grants, minority assistance programs and start-up capital for businesses and mainstream markets. During the past 8 years, Urban Indian health clinic funding has been zeroed out in the appropriations budgets and only reinstated through vigorous lobbying efforts on behalf of Urban Indian health clinics.

Urban Indian health clinics were also told that to maintain funding they would have to serve other minority communities with the funding they received based on their own small numbers.

American Indians have historically been one of the poorest groups in American history leading the poverty and unemployment rates. They also have the highest high school drop out rate (75%) with few finishing college. The Indian Health Service (1988) reported that age-adjusted mortality rates for alcoholism, tuberculosis and suicide are considerably higher among Native Americans than the general U.S. population.

Urban Indians experience high rates of alcoholism and related consequences such as dysfunctional family life, fetal alcohol syndrome, violence, mental illness rape and homicide.

Urban Indians exhibit higher than national rates for chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and tuberculosis.

CHALLENGES:

American Indians were forced to leave their tribal lands, lose their freedom and give up their children to strangers for an entire generation, which led to;

(McLemore, Carr, Snipp, Waters.)

A loss of tribal identity

A change in their way of thinking

A loss of heritage (culture to include religious beliefs, customs and language)

Living in strange lands in absolute poverty

Significant depopulation

Higher morbidity and mortality

Poor socioeconomic and educational conditions

High levels of stress

be perceived to be a separate entity nor be in competition with their reservation families and communities. Urban Indians are Indian people who happen to live in urban areas. They are not any less Indian for doing so, no less fierce in their support of tribal sovereignty or necessarily alienated from their culture.

Identity versus Organizations:

While Urban Indians are Indians who live in urban areas, the organizations that attempt to serve their needs, have extremely challenging limitations and barriers which will be outlined in the testimony heard later today. Suffice it to say that Urban Indian organizations that are not funded by Tribal governments (SEOTS, HCN) have to compete with all other minority groups in competition for funding from mainstream entities. Again, the lack of research and significant data is a huge barrier in funding this growing population.

American Indian Chambers of Commerce in many urban areas have reported that Urban Indian business owners face exclusion from minority programs as a result of the lack of resources to carry out a disparity study on their business community or from lack of access to capital among many other issues. (Carr, 1997).

Urban Indian communities are the invisible minorities in the cities in which they live (Carr, 1997). An example of this would be the Native American community in Houston which has a sizeable Urban Indian population but they have no chapter house, cultural center, Indian Center, health care clinic or information referral center.

The National Urban Indian Policy Coalition (NUIPC) reported to the White House Domestic Council on Native Americans, in 1995, that the Urban Indian population has grown over 35% in the last three decades, making it a majority of the United States Indian population. **Over 70% of Indians don't live on a reservation and never have.**

Only 34 Urban Indian Health Programs serve over 3.3 million Indian people across the country. These programs funded by the Indian Health Service, range from outreach and referral programs to primary health care clinics. Urban Indians are not included in statistical data gathered for urban areas, but are dispersed throughout all census tracts in urban areas. As invisible minorities, they are

Yet another set of researchers, J. Milton Yinger and George Eaton Simpson, provided an interpretation of the experience of American Indians with urbanization and integration. In 1978, they noted

"At present, most Indians favor integration but resist forced cultural assimilation. They prefer partial assimilation. They want to adapt to modern life, keeping what they value in Indian cultures and adopting what they admire or need in white culture." They go on to say, "Two aspects of the nonmaterial culture that have persisted within the Indian world are the emphasis placed upon the extended family as the basic social unit and the importance of the role of Indian land." (Yinger, 1978)

As one can see from the dates of this information, the movement to assimilate Indians into mainstream culture has resulted in a significant lack of consistent and current data available on Urban Indians. The lack of these vital data results in **barriers** to access to programs and projects that rely on statistics and data to define a population and its needs (Carr, 1997).

The Urban **Indian America Report by the National Urban Indian Family Coalition**, (Casey Foundation, 2008) reinforces this long term lack of data other than simple population numbers. *"There is a critical lack of research on the issues facing Native families residing in urban areas and virtually no research focused directly on understanding and alleviating the many social ills this population currently suffers. There is also a lack of sufficient data to determine whether and how well the "urban safety net" meets the needs of the Urban Indian family"*

What is an "Urban Indian"

The separation of "Urban Indians" as somehow separate from their tribal families and communities is a serious dynamic in the relationships within Indian country. Urban is not a kind of Indian it is an experience. The separation of urban versus tribal Indian is yet another wedge between Indians across the country and fosters alienation, suspicion and competition between these populations of native people. **The MOST IMPORTANT** comments that have been universally expressed at national meetings over the past decade is that urban Indians do NOT want to

American Indian and Alaskan Native population nearly tripled, from 56,900 to 166,000 as a result of the relocation and termination efforts of the United States Government (NUIPC, 1995)

As American Indians increased their migration to the urban areas during the decades of the '50s, '60s, and '70s in search of employment opportunities, both voluntarily and encouraged through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) public policies, they struggled to fit into economic, institutional, and social systems that were outside their cultural reality. Previous academic research has documented the "urbanization" of American Indians in terms of population migration, housing and employment conditions both off and on the reservations, and contemporary policy formation and implementation at the time.

An example of policy makers' attitudes about Relocation can be summed up by a quote from the late **Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey** who optimistically wrote about the 'Relocation Program.'

"It is aimed at encouraging Indians to move off the less promising reservations and into industrial centers where work opportunities are more plentiful...a package program-vocational training and job placement with all expenses paid for trainee and family-has lured 50,000 Indians into successful urban living." It is interesting to note that the team who put together the Indian Relocation Program, were the same team members who created the manzanar Internment camps for Japanese Americans during World War II

During this time of urbanization and relocation, many American Indian people found themselves facing poor housing conditions including overcrowding, high rents, and discrimination in the renting process. Richard Woods and Arthur Harkins document these conditions in a report for the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota in 1969. Even though Indians faced substandard housing in the urban areas, Woods and Harkins conclude that those situations were a better alternative to what Indian people faced on the reservations. They also note that Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs devised for urban relocation had helped a handful of Indians with locating housing and provided a home purchase plan within Minneapolis. (Woods, 1969)

WHAT DO WE DO?

1. Conduct a Legislative Research study on Urban Indians in Wisconsin, publish the data and make it available to all urban and reservation communities, all state agencies and urban Indian organizations
2. Form a state Tribal relations Urban Indian Working Group that makes recommendations to the Committee on policies and programs to help off reservation Indian communities.
3. Rescind Public law 280, which creates many barriers to Wisconsin's Tribal Nations sovereignty and the Urban Indians in Wisconsin on EVERY level.
4. Work with Federal delegation to increase funding specifically for Urban Indian communities in economic development, health care, without lessening any Tribal government funds.
5. Assist economic development organizations serving urban indian populations in access to investment /loan capital and organizational administration funding.
6. Increase the outreach for Urban Indian families to use the Section 183 housing program for homeownership
7. Create off reservation Indian Credit Unions