The Influence of the Red Power Movement on the Politicization and Leadership of Wilma Mankiller

EMILY SULLIVAN

Ever since winning its independence from the British, the United States federal government's relationship to the Native American tribes that reside within its borders has been a source of conflict and uncertainty. In 1950, under the direction of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Dillon S. Myer, the government began to implement what it hoped to be the "final solution" to the Indian problem. Policies adopted during this time period were designed to terminate the sovereign status of all Native tribes and assimilate former tribal members into mainstream American society as quickly as possible. In order to facilitate rapid assimilation, the federal government encouraged many Native families to leave their homes on rural reservations for a better life in the nation's booming industrial cities. As a result, between 1952 and 1960 more than thirty-five thousand Native Americans flooded cities such as Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco (Smith and Warrior 8). Myer believed that once all Native tribes disbanded, the government's involvement in Indian Affairs, including the appropriation of a substantial amount of federal aid, would finally come to an end. However, the policies of relocation and termination produced a generation of Native Americans who felt out of place in their new surroundings and longed to reconnect with their tribal heritage (Smith and Warrior, 7-8).

In the late 1960's urban Indians began meeting at Indian Centers throughout the nation, where they learned that they were not alone in feeling as though the federal government disconnected them from their tribal roots and allowed them to become isolated and invisible. When a fire destroyed the San Francisco Bay Indian Center in the fall of 1969, several young local Indians decided to send a message to the federal government. On November 20, 1969, seventy-eight

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Author's Majors: Political Science and Criminal Justice
Minor: Legal Philosophy