

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

The Seminole survey thus far has been a statement of fact. Necessarily only an approximation to truth in certain details, it is yet sufficiently accurate so that few cognizant of actuality will quarrel with the picture. I have purposely refrained from comment on the facts. Honest men often start from the same premises and arrive at different conclusions. What to me looks like missionary futility, local apathy, and Federal incompetence, others may label by more charitable names.

It now, however, becomes necessary to state my interpretation of these facts and to point a way out of the wilderness. I shall have no quarrel with him who reasons differently, provided he accepts as his major premise that the foundation of fact which I have laid is a structure essentially sound.

SECTION 1. THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Let us have definite objectives. What are we aiming at in this particular problem of Indian administration?

At the last we, the dominant element in American civilization, are not doing the aiming. Nature has decreed the ultimate goal. It is amalgamation. Five hundred Seminoles surrounded by the rapidly increasing white population of Florida are destined to be absorbed as inevitably as a lump of salt thrown into Lake Okeechobee is destined to be dissolved. A thousand years hence there will not be a drop of recognizable Indian blood in the State of Florida.

SECTION 2. FIFTY YEARS HENCE

As to certain developments of the next half century we also can prophesy with considerable surety. Fifty years hence no one will question that Seminole Indians are full-fledged citizens of Florida. Adult Indian men and women will go to the polls on election day unchallenged; they will pay the taxes required of all citizens in similar economic circumstances; Seminole children will attend the public schools in the same classes with white children. All Indian citizens under the age of 50 will speak English; they will have acquired English from their increasing contacts with white Americans whether or not they attend school. The number of Indian white half-breeds, now counted on the fingers of one hand, will have markedly increased. Most vestiges of tribal organization, except the Green Corn Dance, will have vanished. Seminoles, each standing on his own feet, will have become Floridians. The original American, now a social outcast, will again be an American.

SECTION 3. THE IMMEDIATE GOAL

Ought we, then, attempt to make a "white man" out of the Seminole as rapidly as possible, inasmuch as absorption is his ultimate fate?

Emphatically, no.

There is something infinitely precious, vastly worth cherishing in this remnant of primitive culture persisting into the 20th century surrounded by industrial civilization. The metamorphosis will come fast enough, do what we will. And the transition from a good Indian to a poor white man is going to be a thing painful to look upon—progress stumbling along by-paths of tribal disorganization, moral degeneration, and the disintegration of personality.

Why do we set aside national parks? To preserve rare bits of nature from development and devastation, that man of the machine age may on occasion look up to a snowcapped mountain. Why do we decree that egrets and flamingoes and the roseate spoonbill shall not be quite exterminated? That all grace along the Tamiami Trail shall not surrender to the signboard.

Now the Seminole and his culture are akin to the snowcapped mountain and the roseate spoonbill. Let him be an Indian so long as he may. What father wishes to see his son don long trousers and turn his back on the old home? The Seminole represents the childhood of the race.

Let us help the Seminole maintain his unique qualities and virtues; let us help him to stand on his own feet with dignity in the presence of the civilization in which he is destined to blend; and let us always keep open avenues by which the transition from a primitive hunter to a unit in a society based on private property and the wage system can be accomplished gradually and with ease.

But let us never, in pursuit of the desirable, lose sight of the actual.

SECTION 4. ECONOMIC ACTUALITY

Of present actualities, the most important with the Seminole as with most people, is the economic situation. With something like \$330 of cash income annually for the average family of five, the Seminole is not at the moment badly off. What actual want is experienced results from two phases of the Indian's improvidence; the first is the 50 per cent of his income that goes for liquor; the second is the seasonal character of his income.

In my computation of Seminole income (see p. 40) I arrived at a grand total of \$38,000. Of this, \$25,000, or 66 per cent, derives from the sale of fur and alligator skins. Now be it noted that the open season for taking fur-bearing animals shall be from the 1st day of December to the 1st day of March, three months of the year only (in Collier County it is November 20 to February 15, until 1934). All the fur taken by the Indian between March and December is trapped illegally; the venison and turkey sold is in contravention of Florida law, and letters from the State game commissioner indicate that the Seminole can not hope to be permitted to break the law indefinitely. That leaves alligator skins as the one legal all-year-round source of income from his hunting, and alligators are getting scarcer and more scarce. The Seminole, therefore, is in a precarious position economically,

inasmuch as 25 per cent of his pitifully meager cash income is likely to be lost to him without notice—on the day the State game department shuts down on his illegal operations.

Can the Seminole reasonably expect to derive the major portion of his income from hunting and trapping for another 50 years? I have stated my belief that with proper conservation there should be more game in south Florida 50 years hence than there is to-day. The Science News Letter of December 20, 1930, states that—

Canada, renowned for its fur trade, is now surpassed by Louisiana in the number of pelts produced.

The fur-bearing marshes of Florida are fully as extensive as those of Louisiana.

The Seminole's position as a primitive hunter could be secured to him indefinitely if the proposed Tropic Everglades National Park were extended to include that portion of the Big Cypress where most of his camps are located, and he be given preferential rights therein. What will undoubtedly happen, however, is that Indians as well as whites will be denied all hunting rights within the national park.

The position of those Seminole hunters now dwelling in the Big Cypress will remain fairly secure if the Monroe County Reservation, which the National Park Service insists must be included in the proposed national park, be exchanged for an equal acreage in Collier County north of the Tamiami Trail, the title vested in the United States, and this 100,000 acres kept for the exclusive use of the Indians. If the national park is established, depriving the Indian of all hunting rights south of the Tamiami Trail, this solution seems the only one fair to the Seminoles.

At best, however, dependence solely upon game is a poor gamble for a man as near the margin of subsistence as is the Indian.

Another element in the situation which makes the Seminole's economic position precarious is the fact that most Indians in Florida have no right to the land on which they now live. Thirty Indians make the agency at Dania their home and three or four families are camped on the Hendry County Reservation. The rest are squatters. They can be dispossessed at a moment's notice. Time after time they have been driven from their homes and clearings, their hogs shot down like wild animals. The Seminole to-day is a squatter making a considerable part of his living by the breaking of game laws.

SECTION 5. LIQUOR CONTROL

Before considering possible new sources of income, a word about the liquor situation. I stated that at least half of the cash income of the Seminoles goes to bootleggers—a storekeeper at Immokalee last week told me the figure should be 90 per cent. Is there any hope of winning in a knockdown and drag-out fight with the liquor interests?

I am pessimistic. Law enforcement has made here an unconditional surrender. The Seminoles are scattered all over South Florida and South Florida is sopping wet. I feel that if liquor consumption on the reservation at Dania, within a hundred yards of the agency headquarters, can not be ended, the buildings had better be burned down. Elsewhere, until the Indian prohibits himself from excessive drinking, the problem is likely to remain. The question then presents itself,

What is the use of increasing the Seminole's income if increased wealth is simply going to increase whisky consumption?

My answer is that there is a saturation point for bad liquor. Many a man with an income of half a million drinks more liquor in a year than does a Seminole Indian, but he does not drink up the half million. With an average income per family of \$330, the Seminole drinks 50 per cent of it; if his annual income were increased to \$1,000, he could double his liquor consumption and still consume only a third of his income. In my opinion, a society which has created this liquor situation is bound to help the Seminole better his economic position regardless of whether, or to what extent, the bootlegger profits.

How, then, can it be done?

SECTION 6. NEW SOURCES OF INCOME

TILLING THE SOIL

In considering new sources of income for the Seminoles, let us not start out with the mistake of trying to make them over into dirt farmers. These Indians are not by nature primarily tillers of the soil. Agriculture in Florida is highly specialized—citrus, garden truck, tropical fruits, florists' supplies—industries which must pay dividends on from \$500 to \$3,000 per acre, industries requiring fertilizers and sprays and a complicated technique. Many a white man goes broke every year gambling on beans and tomatoes—this is a game wherein the Indian is doomed to defeat.

By all means encourage him to cultivate garden truck for home consumption; let him sell some if he can. But to make truck farming or citrus growing the goal of his economic ambition seems to me extra hazardous advice.

Where, then, lies his hope of economic security if hunting and trapping should fail? I have just three suggestions for bettering the economic position of those Indians who elect to remain in the swamps: (1) Cattle for the men, (2) handicrafts for the women, (3) better hogs for both.

CATTLE

Two paragraphs in the problem of Indian administration (Institute for Government Research, 1928) are particularly pertinent to the Florida situation:

Ample evidence demonstrates that stock raising is the most promising form of agriculture and, in fact, the most promising of all pursuits for a large number of Indians. Not only does the average Indian show considerable aptitude for this work, but enormous areas of Indian land are of little value except for grazing. By far the largest body of self-supporting Indians in the United States, the Navajo, are dependent almost entirely upon their flocks for a living. If it is possible for the Navajo to wring a living from their barren deserts by sheep raising, it would seem that any tribe with a considerable area of grazing land should be able to succeed with livestock, if only they could be induced to put into the business a fraction of the energy, skill, and perseverance exhibited by those desert dwellers of the Southwest.

A vast acreage of Indian land in the United States is at present leased to white ranchmen or in some cases used very little, if at all, by anyone either Indian or white. * * * The Indian Service should work out at once a long-time program looking toward the eventual utilization of all these grazing resources by individually owned livestock of the Indians. Such a program will include among other features provision for instruction by competent livestock men, * * * the use of reimbursable funds, and the tribal flock or herd.

Captain Spencer's objections to the reimbursable plan are readily understandable. If cattle were turned into the Hendry County Reservation and the Indian told, "They are yours," he would probably say:

"All right, me kill 'em when want 'em."

Is that, then, the end of the matter? It seems to me that we, the representatives of the civilization which drove the Seminole out of the cattle business, have got to start at the very beginning and remake him into a cattleman. The Okeechobee Indians still ride horses, otherwise the Seminoles in Florida have forgotten every vestige of cattle technique. Mr. Byrd, the present caretaker on the Hendry County Reservation is an experienced cattleman, perfectly competent to handle the initiation of this development. Buy a few head of ordinary Florida range cattle, which can be had on occasion at less than \$20 a head, buy a beef-type bull, and let him begin to build a Government herd. The Cypress Indians will probably look on the first year or two. Then some of the boys will learn to ride and use a rope. Take them into Government employ as the herd increases. In the course of years some will surely develop enough business sense so that cattle can safely be sold to them on terms they can meet.

I am aware that the Federal Government has for some years been opposed to this general proposition. If the Government is unwilling to take the risk, I believe private philanthropy will. There has recently been organized in Miami a group of women under the presidency of Mrs. Hicks Allen, president of the Miami Women's Club, who are eager to be of practical assistance to the Seminoles; here would be an excellent place to begin.

HANDICRAFTS

Seminole women are deft and clever with their fingers. The winter tourists who flock to Florida constitute the finest market for artistic Indian handicraft in the world; any amount can be marketed if it be good in design, material, and workmanship. The economic possibilities of weaving, pottery, basketry, mats, beadwork, beaten silver in markets like Miami and Palm Beach are endless. To-day the Seminoles lack standards. Send down a woman expert in these lines to instruct them, then help develop a market at fair prices. Seminole women will work their hands off if shown the way.

HOGS

It costs no more to raise a heavy lard-type hog than a razorback. Those Indians who will consent to take up residence either on the Hendry County Reservation or the Martin County Reservation, where they can be protected in their rights, should be assisted to buy boars of the better breeds.

SECTION 7. THE GATEWAY TO INDUSTRIAL PURSUITS

With assistance in the livestock industry and handicrafts, the economic future of those who elect life in the swamps will be secure regardless of the future game supply.

In time there will be others, young men and girls, who may elect another course. For them education must open another gateway.

But make no mistake, the moment you educate the Seminole beyond elementary reading and writing you unfit him for the old life in the swamps. Do not expect him to go back. Prepare him for an entirely new life. Of this shift the Meriam Survey says:

Fortunately the evidence tends to show that the Indians make good workers in industrial pursuits. This shift into industry can not be made hurriedly or as a wholesale movement if it is to be successful.

The practicable plan would be to bring Indian young people directly from the reservation to the more promising occupations by means of thorough training in school, rather than by way of day labor and domestic service.

There is abundant evidence that the Seminole shows more aptitude for mechanics than for dirt farming.

SECTION 8. SEGREGATION BY FORCE

How can education reach the Seminoles as now scattered? Obviously it can not, except through camp work. The difficulties of doing anything for them in an educational way are so manifest that a few sincere well-wishers advocate their segregation on an accessible reservation. The late Hon. Clement S. Ucker, a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, was one of these.

I am convinced this end could not be attained without employing force. The Okeechobee Indians would never consent to leave their northern prairies and join with the Miccosukees of the Cypress; the Miccosukees are thoroughly at home only in their Collier County swamps. Coercion is ruled out; public opinion has progressed beyond the ethical deformity of the Seminole wars. While present dispersal makes certain problems enormously difficult, I can see no sufficient virtues in compulsory education and social control to justify the alternative.

SECTION 9. CONCENTRATION

Concentration of the Seminoles gradually in three or four places by appealing to their self interest is entirely justifiable. That is what cattle on the Hendry County Reservation, security of tenure on the Martin County lands, and the exclusion of white hunters from the Monroe County Reservation (or an equal acreage north of the Tamiami Trail) amounts to. Whether or not the effort will be successful remains to be seen. It will, at best, require many years.

SECTION 10. THE SCHOOL AT DANIA

If physical barriers prevent the school from going to the Seminole until concentration becomes a fact, Seminole children desiring an education must be brought to the school. The Government now maintains an elementary school at Dania. Although the history of certain western boarding schools gives no occasion for optimism, I see nothing for it but the conversion of Dania into a small boarding school. I would not change its elementary character. As soon as pupils acquire some proficiency in English, they can be transferred to the public schools in Fort Lauderdale; after the eighth grade they are ready for the trade schools in Miami or elsewhere.

This is a problem of the future. Scarcely a Seminole to-day could be induced to let his children leave home; the matter should not be pressed.

SECTION 11. THE INDIGENT AND SICK

The Dania plant originally was intended for the sick and indigent. It should be used primarily for that purpose, plus a boarding school when the need arises. One can not very well drive off the able-bodied who have already been encouraged to settle there, but in the future able-bodied Indians had better be directed to the economic opportunities on the Martin County and Hendry County lands.

For those who do not require hospitalization, Dania already has an infirmary. A woman died a couple of weeks ago in one of the Okeechobee camps. She had been at Dania, where, if a public health nurse were in charge, there would be every facility for looking after her. A competent physician comes to Dania from Hollywood for \$5 a visit. The woman insisted on going back to her camp in the swamps. There she was visited regularly until her death by the physician from Okeechobee at \$18 a visit. Very few are the cases which can not be moved and treated at Dania better than in camp. So long as the Indian Service pays the piper, it certainly should call the tune.

SECTION 12. THE COMMERCIAL VILLAGES

To the commercial villages in Miami, St. Petersburg, and others which may spring up, I would grant no quarter. I am well aware that there are things to be said in their favor—where could a Seminole desiring to spend some time in Miami stay if Musa Isle and Coppinger's Tropical Gardens were abolished? He would be welcome in no hotel, he has not the money to go to a hotel if he were welcome. But these places point the road to stagnation and death. I am not so concerned with the venereal problem as with the fact that earning one's living in competition with rattlesnakes and alligators leads nowhere.

Having come to that decision, what steps are open to the Federal Government? At present the Indian Service pays all the medical bills for these as for all other Seminoles. This medical service I would cut off absolutely, forcing these camps to look after their own employees.

During the past summer Coppinger's village was deserted, except on the weekly occasion of the docking of a certain boat which brought sightseers. Regularly a truck was sent to the reservation at Dania to take a load of Indians down for the day. I consider that the end justifies cutting off the rations of all Indians who accept this demoralizing employment.

SECTION 13. LANDS

So long as the lands in Hendry and Martin Counties are unused, there is no land problem. What is needed is a feeling among the Indians that they will be defended in their rights to these lands. Many of them do not know that they have any rights; many of those who know about the Hendry County fiasco are frankly scornful of Government good faith. When I told Lewis Tucker of the Okeechobee band that Mr. Marshall was going to keep white hunters off the Hendry County Reservation this fall, he replied with a sneer:

"Guess hunting season come, same old thing."

SECTION 14. WHEN SHALL THE UNITED STATES WITHDRAW?

A very simple program: Cattle, hogs, the development of handicrafts, all possible curtailment of liquor, and a gateway of education through which Seminole children shall be permitted, but not urged, to pass out into industrial pursuits. Who shall lead along these paths?

An illiterate, non-English-speaking squatter, without capital, set down in a liquor-drenched environment, is going to make slow progress along these lines without assistance. The United States Indian Service has been at this job now since 1891 and has barely taken the first step along any one of these paths. Wherein would the Seminoles in Florida be worse off to-day if the Government had taken Creel's advice in 1911, "That the work for the Seminoles in Florida be closed up as soon as possible and the position of special agent abolished"?

"We set aside lands, we built a fence, for 10 years we paid his doctor bills."

In that sentence you have the sum total of Federal achievement. If the United States Government wants to quit with that record, well and good. I shall have no quarrel if the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior decide that the interests of the Seminole will best be served by Federal withdrawal from Florida. My recommendations, however, are based on the contrary assumption that on the whole it is better to carry on for another quarter century.