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**ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIANS
ON
NORTHERN GREAT PLAINS
RESERVATIONS**

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Missouri River Basin Investigations Project
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by

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Bureau of Indian Affairs

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Under the general topic of rural development and economic growth, I have been asked to discuss economic opportunities for Indians. My remarks will be largely about Indian people living on or near reservations in the Northern Great Plains and about conditions existing on or in the vicinity of these reservations.

What is an opportunity? A dictionary definition which I think will serve the purpose of this paper defines opportunity as "a combination of circumstances favorable to the purpose." The ultimate purpose of economic activities is the satisfaction of recognized wants but this goal usually is achieved indirectly through the medium of monetary income. Economic opportunities for reservation Indians therefore require combinations of circumstances favorable for them to earn satisfactory incomes.

Circumstances must be favorable to the persons involved in order to qualify as real opportunities. Available land, capital, management and other factors of production cannot be evaluated in terms of economic opportunity apart from the ability and willingness of people to make effective use of them. A combination of circumstances otherwise favorable for creating satisfactory income may be unfavorable because of the human component of the combination. Development of the human factor often is the key to economic growth. Education and improvement in skills and in work habits and attitudes often unlock the doors to economic advancement.

I have frequently been asked whether Indian people are fundamentally different from their non-Indian rural neighbors. In basic qualities and talents, perhaps not, but in background there appear to be differences between the two groups which influence their responses to the economic and social environment surrounding them.

Customs, beliefs, habits, points of view and ways of thinking of the European peasant, the forebears of most of the Northern Plains whites, differed markedly from those of the Indians' ancestors. The ancestors of Indians of the Northern Great Plains, such as the Sioux, Crow, Blackfeet, Assiniboine, Northern Cheyenne, Arapahoe and Shoshone, were nomadic hunting people dependent heavily on the buffalo for a livelihood.

The Golden Age of the Buffalo Economy

Early in the 18th century a great technological advancement in the economy of these Indians began with introduction of the horse, the rifle

and steel tools such as the butcher knife. These and other products of the white culture which were compatible and useful to their way of life were readily adopted by the Indians. The increased effectiveness of the Indians in the production of food, clothing and housing, and in transportation and communication made possible by these innovations resulted in what might be called the "golden age" of the Plains Indian. Its zenith was reached by the middle of the 19th century.

Relative to the pre-horse age the Indian people at that time were well fed, well clothed, well housed, generally satisfied with their culture and well adjusted to their environment. The division of labor and responsibilities between sexes and between the young and the old was well defined. The women managed the household, skinned the animals, prepared the food, made the clothing, set up and cared for the lodges, and did much of the work involved in moving camp. The men did the hunting and fighting.

There were strong incentives in those days for young men to become skilled in the arts of war and the chase. Acquiring and improving such skills, procuring game, scouting for favorable camping grounds, and defending their people and their hunting grounds occupied much of the time of the adult males. The successful hunter, the skilled guide and the resourceful warrior were acclaimed and honored by the community and their views respected around the council fires. These satisfying rewards were an incentive to vigorous and sustained effort. There also was abundant opportunity for leisure time pursuits--dancing, ceremonials, visiting, and games, among which were included prestige games such as horse stealing and raids on neighboring tribes. Much Indian tradition stems from this age.

By the time the battle of the Little Bighorn was fought on June 27, 1876, the end of the era was near. The Sioux and Cheyennes triumphed over Custer, but the fight to retain their cherished way of life was being lost. The time for great changes in the life of the plains Indians had again arrived.

The Reservation Economy

This time the changes were not welcomed. The disappearance of the buffalo was deplored; confinement to reservations was resented and adoption of the white man's culture resisted, particularly by the older fullbloods. They felt their ways to be superior to those of the whites and much better suited to their particular needs and desires. They were not anxious to be assimilated into the dominant white culture.

The most pronounced effect of the shift from a "buffalo" to a "reservation" economy probably was on the adult male population. Their position was changed drastically under the early reservation economy. Food rations replaced the products of the hunt as the principal source of food. There was little hunting to be done, there were no hunting grounds to protect from hostile neighbors. Raids on neighboring tribes were prohibited and

horse stealing had become a crime instead of an exciting sport. What has a man to do?

The forces that had stimulated acquisition of skills and vigorous, active, highly motivated life under the "buffalo economy" became weak under the "reservation economy." Men became idlers because they saw little reason to do otherwise--lacking effective incentive, some became apathetic regarding economically productive activities. The notion that the Federal Government was obligated to provide for the Indian gained considerable acceptance among them. The fact that there was some basis for this attitude did not remove its eroding effect on self-reliance, ambition and acceptance of responsibility. Under these conditions some men appear to have achieved what someone defined as real peace of mind--the ability not to worry about where the world is going but to sit back, relax and enjoy the ride.

Perhaps the most debilitating effect of reservation life was its destruction of incentive to productive effort in the economic field. This has given rise to the mistaken idea that the Indian male is generally lazy. This notion is refuted by his performance under the "buffalo economy" and by his response to acceptable incentives when they are provided at the present time.

Lingering Influences of the Old Economies

Both the "buffalo" and the "reservation" culture contained elements affecting economic progress that differed appreciably from the culture of the thrifty, hard-working, enterprising, self-reliant European peasant. Important among these differences are attitudes toward sharing of economic goods, savings and investments and concern for the future.

Sharing of economic goods was a natural and vital characteristic of the old economy under which the family, frequently including uncles, aunts, cousins and adopted relatives, tended to function as an economic unit. Bands and tribes were essentially extended family units. Through sharing, the aged, the incapacitated, the young, the unfortunate and the less able were helped by the more able, but each was expected to do his part. Sharing of game reduced waste through spoilage and tended to even out the supply of food. It is said that under the old society there were no orphans and there were no hungry, no cold, no destitute individuals unless all were hungry, cold and destitute.

Many Indians still feel a sense of security on the reservation not found elsewhere. Sharing is still a force among reservation Indians. Refusal to share often brings social censure - acceptance of gifts or of dependence on others usually carries no social stigma. Adherence to this old virtue has its drawbacks under modern conditions. Sharing with relatives and associates has brought financial difficulties to many and accounts in some degree for the rapid disappearance of large funds received by individuals from land sales and mineral leases. It tends to discourage savings and capital investments and stifles individual effort. It often bars the

door to economic opportunity and progress. Sharing causes welfare agencies some concern, for example, when the grandchildren celebrate with funds Uncle Sam intended for care of the grandparents.

In the old economy there was little need for economizing. True, there was some storage of seeds, berries, and herbs for winter use and some curing of meat for periods of scarcity but nothing comparable to storage and processing of foods at present. Food was replenished constantly through the hunt and sharing reduced the need of individuals to store against poor luck on the hunt.

Except for horses and weapons, capital goods were not a big factor in the old Indian economy. Excessive stocks of clothing, blankets, etc. were burdensome when moving camp, so also were excessively large lodges. Frequent moving made sanitation less of a problem than in permanent settlements. This background may account in part for the present greater readiness to spend for automotive transportation than for houses and modern plumbing. The need for saving, storing and investing to assure future income and security was not part of the old Indian culture. Family and community organization and the practice of sharing made individual saving for such purposes unnecessary. This background tends to make individual thrift and investment less attractive to the average reservation Indian today than to non-Indians.

The old Indian economy did not involve extensive provisions for satisfying future needs except through the training of its people and the protection of their hunting grounds. Economic efforts, therefore, were directed largely to immediate satisfaction of wants. Game, fruits, fuel and other natural products were taken and used in their natural state with relatively little alteration. The Indian learned to enjoy things immediately when he received them. When the chase was fruitful, there was plenty to eat and feasts were in order. In periods of shortage, belt-tightening was accepted stoically. The tendency to spend money quickly for immediate perceptible satisfaction is consistent with this background. This places a high premium on immediate satisfaction of wants, discourages savings and investment and places a correspondingly high discount rate on future income. It also tends to place a high value on leisure time which is one form of immediate satisfaction.

How much heritages from the old culture affect responses of reservation Indians to present circumstances is difficult to assess, but their cultural background cannot be entirely ignored in a realistic appraisal of economic opportunities for reservation Indians.

Present Sources of Income

Present sources of income show that economic opportunities actually are being exploited. Data in Table I are for four reservations which the Missouri River Basin Investigations staff of the Bureau of Indian Affairs has studied. Economic conditions on two of these -- Northern Cheyenne in Montana and Standing Rock in the Dakotas -- are relatively poor whereas economic conditions on the other two -- Crow in Montana and Wind River in Wyoming -- are

relatively good. Two tribes occupy the Wind River Reservation. Shoshone Indians generally are more nearly adjusted to the dominant non-Indian culture than are the Arapahoes.

TABLE I

Average Income Per Family on Four Reservations, Missouri River Basin

Source of Income	Northern Cheyenne 1950		Standing Rock Reservation 1955		Crow Reservation 1952		Wind River Reservation 1957			
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	Shoshone		Arapahoe	
Agriculture	285	25	172	13	421	16	642	17	149	4
Wages	429	38	567	43	763	28	897	23	791	22
Total earned	714	63	739	56	1184	44	1539	40	932	26
Lease & Royalty	63	6	125	9	1128	42	2307	60	2624	74
Welfare Assistance	255	22	307	23	165	6				
Other	104	9	168	12	209	8				
	1136	100	1339	100	2686	100	3846	100	3564	100
Number of families	(337)		(848)		(467)		(376)		(422)	

Number of Families Reporting Wage or Agricultural Income and Average Income Per Family Reporting

Source of Income	Northern Cheyenne		Standing Rock		Crow		Shoshone		Arapahoe	
	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$	No.	\$
Agriculture	97	990	106	1325	117	1681	132	1829	97	647
Wages	195	741	415	1159	291	1225	165	2045	233	1444

The total income per family ranged from \$1,136 at Northern Cheyenne in 1950 to \$3,846 for Shoshone Indians at Wind River in 1957. Earned income showed a similar relationship. It constituted 63 percent of the total income at Northern Cheyenne but only 26 percent for the Arapahoes at Wind River. On all reservations the income from wage work was greater than the income from agriculture, the disparity between the two being greatest for the Arapahoes and least for the Shoshones. Earned income on the relatively poor reservations --Northern Cheyenne and Standing Rock -- was supplemented by substantial welfare assistance payments whereas lease and royalty income exceeded all other sources of income at Wind River.

Most of the lease and royalty income at Wind River is from tribal oil and mineral lease money disbursed to enrolled members as per capita payments.

On the other three reservations it is largely from allotted land leased to non-Indian farmers and ranchers. The number of families who received welfare payments varied from 80 percent at Northern Cheyenne to none at Wind River. The percentage receiving wage income was highest at Crow (62%) and lowest for Shoshones families (43%), but 35 percent of the Shoshones received income from agriculture compared with 11 percent of the Standing Rock families. The fact that from 11 to 35 percent of the reservation families received income from agriculture indicates considerable interest in Agriculture. The average income per family receiving income from agriculture and from wages is shown in the lower part of Table I. Except at Wind River the income from Agriculture per family receiving such income exceeded that from wage work.

Economic Opportunities in Agriculture

Some understanding of the land situation is essential to an evaluation of economic opportunities for Indians in Agriculture. Under the old economy, the land was owned in common. An individual could hunt on it, set up his lodge where he wished, gather berries, cut lodge poles and make what other use he desired of any portion of the land. The Allotment Act of 1887 was designed to replace common ownership. It was based on the general principles of the Homestead Act of 1862. One of its purposes was to provide the individual Indian with land on which to make a living as a farmer or stockman. It was not expected that all Indians would become successful farmers or stockmen, but it was thought that settlement on tracts of individually owned land would tend to increase the income, responsibility and economic independence of many Indians.

The land area owned by Indians and held in trust for them by the United States has greatly diminished during the past century. At present there are around 13,000,000 acres of trust land in the Missouri River Basin. Roughly one-third of it is used by Indian operators but the extent of use differs widely among reservations, varying from little use to virtually complete use. The proportion of trust land in tribal ownership also varies from reservation to reservation, Table II.

Most trust land is not owned in complete ranch or farm units as is non-trust land. Some allotments are owned by one person but most allotments are owned jointly by heirs having undivided interests. Allotments are interspersed with tribal and alienated lands. Consolidating land holdings into suitable operating units by straightening out land ownership and land use patterns, which in some cases are confusedly and intricately entwined with Indian custom and complications of inheritance imposed by Federal regulations, presents some vexing but not insurmountable difficulties.

Some vestiges of common use of land still remain. It is not uncommon for Indians to locate their dwellings on tribal land, on the land of some relative, on heirship land in which they own only a partial interest, or even on fee land owned by non-Indians. For example, a number of houses belonging to Standing Rock Indians are located on railroad rights-of-way. Indian custom recognizes ownership of buildings apart from the land on which

TABLE II

Acres of Trust Land on Four Reservations, Missouri River Basin

Reservation	Tribal		Allotted		Total		Used by Indians	
	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%
Northern Cheyenne Standing Rock Crow Reservation	219,510	50	216,264	50	435,774	100	95,870	22
	169,707	18	788,802	82	958,509	100	431,329	45
	261,061	16	1,354,869	84	1,615,930	100	242,390	15
Wind River	1,753,151	93	135,751	7	1,888,902	100	1,832,235	97
Total	2,403,429	49	2,495,686	51	4,899,115	100	2,601,824	53

the buildings are located. The old custom of common ownership may explain in part the present tendency to retain and increase tribal land holdings but to sell allotted land. An Indian may advocate retaining allotted land owned by others and vigorously oppose any sale of tribal land and yet at the same time be doing his best to sell his own land. On the other hand, this may merely express a common human tendency to desire personal exception from rules considered to be in the common interest.

Economic Opportunities in Livestock Ranching

Most land held in trust for Indians is range land suitable only for livestock production. Most of the present income from agriculture is from range livestock. How much of an opportunity does ranching present to Indians?

A recent study of 250 Indian operators running 20 or more head of cattle on Blackfeet and Crow Reservations gives some indication. Approximately one-fifth of these 250 stockmen had livestock enterprises comparable in size with family-operated cattle ranches in the Northern Great Plains. In 1954 these Indian ranches had a little lower investment, appreciably lower calf crop, and markedly lower receipts and expenses but about the same net income per head of cattle as Northern Great Plains family-operated cattle ranches. (See Table III)

Indians can increase income from cattle ranching in three ways: (1) by improved operations on existing ranches, (2) by increasing the size of the small ranches and (3) by increasing the number of Indian-operated ranches. Management practices directed to higher calf crop and increased returns per head would increase net income. There are about 2,000 Indian livestock operators in the Missouri River Basin, only about one-fifth of whom operate economic family-size units. To bring the other four-fifths to family size of 150 head of cattle would require approximately 4,000,000 acres of land or

double the acres now used by Indian operators. This would still leave about 4,000,000 acres of trust land not used by Indian operators--enough for about 1,000 additional family-size ranches or a total of 3,000 ranches if all trust land were used by Indians. In some cases Indians have certain preferences and other advantages over non-Indians in leasing, but they generally compete with non-Indians for the use of trust land.

TABLE III
Comparisons of selected production and financial items among family-operated cattle ranches in the Northern Great Plains, Blackfeet Reservation, and the Crow Reservation, 1954 ^{1/}

Item	Unit	N. G. P.	Blackfeet	Crow
Cattle per ranch Jan. 1	Number	142	134	137
Average calf crop Per head of cattle	Percent	80	76	69
Total investment	Dollars	492	434	364
Total cash receipts	Dollars	64.45	38.36	39.96
Total cash expense	Dollars	38.41	16.50	13.79
Net cash income	Dollars	26.04	21.86	26.17
Value of prerequisites	Dollars	6.91	2.27	5.05
Inventory Changes and Depreciation	Dollars	-6.15	-1.55	-6.64
Net ranch income	Dollars	26.80	22.58	24.58

^{1/} From Table 15, Montana Experiment Station Bulletin 532.

Agricultural extension services, formerly given by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are now the responsibility of the State Extension Services so the same assistance and information are available to all ranchers. Special sources of credit are available to Indians in addition to those serving non-Indian operators, but many have been unable to meet the security and experience requirements for obtaining loans. Indian trust property is exempt from property taxes, which gives Indians some competitive advantage.

Thus, although there are deficiencies in quantity and quality, services are available to assist Indians in solving ranch production, marketing, and organization problems and in overcoming difficulties imposed by the fractionated heirship pattern of land ownership. In some aspects, such as increasing the quality of livestock, in preventing overgrazing of ranges, in repayment-in-kind cattle loans and in pooling cattle for marketing, some noteworthy results have been achieved. Beneficial effects of expert assistance are not so apparent in solving the more difficult problems relating to sharing, to saving and thrift, to deferment of immediate satisfaction of wants for future

advantages and to accepting personal responsibility for effective management of funds and resources. The Indian family itself has had to struggle with these problems without very effective assistance from the outside.

Are There Opportunities in Irrigation Agriculture?

Reconnaissance studies made by various agencies indicate that there are 800,000 acres of potentially irrigable land on the Missouri River Basin Indian Reservations, much of which is trust land. At present 300,000 acres are under constructed irrigation works of which about three-fourths is being irrigated. However, less than 50,000 acres are being operated by Indians - most of this land being on cattle ranches.

Northern Plains Indians haven't taken to irrigation crop farming. The transition from the "buffalo economy" to livestock ranching is not so difficult as the transition to irrigation farming -- the confining, wearisome handwork of which under Indian tradition is more like "women's work."

Establishing irrigation farms by Indians presents all the difficulties mentioned in connection with livestock ranching and more. To operate irrigated farms successfully, the Indian operator would need more training and supervision than to operate livestock ranches. Greater changes in work habits and greater development of managerial ability would be necessary. Prospects for achieving such development lie largely with young people in the future rather than with the present generation of farm operators. Real opportunities for achieving economic success by operating irrigated crop farms do not appear to be available to substantial numbers of Indian people at present.

Opportunities for Wage Work

I have already noted that the income from wages was approximately double the income from agriculture on the four reservations. Some of this income was earned on the reservation, largely from agency and tribal employment, and some was earned away from the reservations at seasonal jobs. The situation with many seasonal workers who return to the reservation for the winter months is unsatisfactory because they require welfare assistance during the winter.

The number of jobs at the reservation is sadly deficient, relative to residents physically capable of full-time employment. Studies by the Missouri River Basin Investigations staff of the Bureau of Indian Affairs show that less than half of the time of employables residing on the four reservations was utilized in economically productive pursuits. Only one-fourth to one-third were fully employed. From one-eighth to one-fourth reported no economically productive work of any kind during the year covered by the studies. (Table IV) The condition has been growing worse because of increased resident population and decreased opportunities for local farm employment caused by mechanization and enlargement of farms and ranches.

More jobs on or in the vicinity of the reservations are highly desirable, but prospects for increased employment at many reservations are not very encouraging. Establishment of light industries is being fostered by the Bureau

of Indian Affairs and holds some promise, but such developments are not likely to meet the growing need of reservation people for jobs. Large numbers of children are growing up on the reservations. The proportion of people under 20 years of age is appreciably greater for the Indian than for the non-Indian population. The situation at Standing Rock Reservation depicted by the chart on the next page is typical of Missouri River Basin Reservations. Reservation population is increasing, whereas rural non-Indian population shows decreases in some localities.

TABLE IV

Number of Employable Persons and Percentage of Time Spent in Productive Work, Four Reservations, Missouri River Basin

Reservation	Year	No. of Persons	Percentage of Persons Employed					
			Full Time	75 to 99%	50 to 74%	25 to 49%	1 to 24%	None
Northern Cheyenne	1950	227	25	4	8	14	26	23
Standing Rock	1955	537	26	3	8	12	35	16
Crow Reservation	1952	458	26	8	11	19	24	12
Wind River (total)	1957	721	28	6	9	12	17	28
Arapahoe	1957	378	23	6	10	14	18	29
Shoshone	1957	343	34	7	7	10	14	28

Reservation	Percent of workers employed in				Percent of total available time used by persons doing				
	Agri- culture	Agr. Wage and Work Wage		Total	Agr. and Wage	Wage Only	No Work	Average	
Northern Cheyenne	25	13	62	100	--	--	--	--	--
Standing Rock	13	7	80	100	63	75	45	0	41
Crow	21	13	66	100	70	75	48	0	50
Wind River (total)	25	19	56	100	51	81	64	0	46
Arapahoe	16	18	66	100	39	78	59	0	42
Shoshone	37	19	44	100	56	85	72	0	50

Preparing for Jobs Away from Reservations

Jobs away from the reservation offer the greatest number and the most promising opportunities for most reservation people to become fully self-supporting. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has long promoted education as one of the best means of assisting young people to become economically and socially adjusted and self-sufficient. It remains the most important factor in social and economic progress. The results are encouraging. Opportunit-

ies for high school education are open to all. Many scholarships are now available to assist Indian students in obtaining training beyond the high school level.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs recently has been placing great stress on training reservation people for jobs in industry and commerce and on assisting families to relocate and become established in industrial and commercial centers. Vocational training services include vocational counseling and guidance, institutional training in recognized vocations and trades, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training for periods not to exceed twenty-four months and assistance in securing employment after training is completed. Relocation services help Indian people move to urban areas and to find jobs and satisfactory places to live. Transportation, subsistence until the first pay check, medical insurance for one year, and cost of shipping household goods ordinarily are furnished.

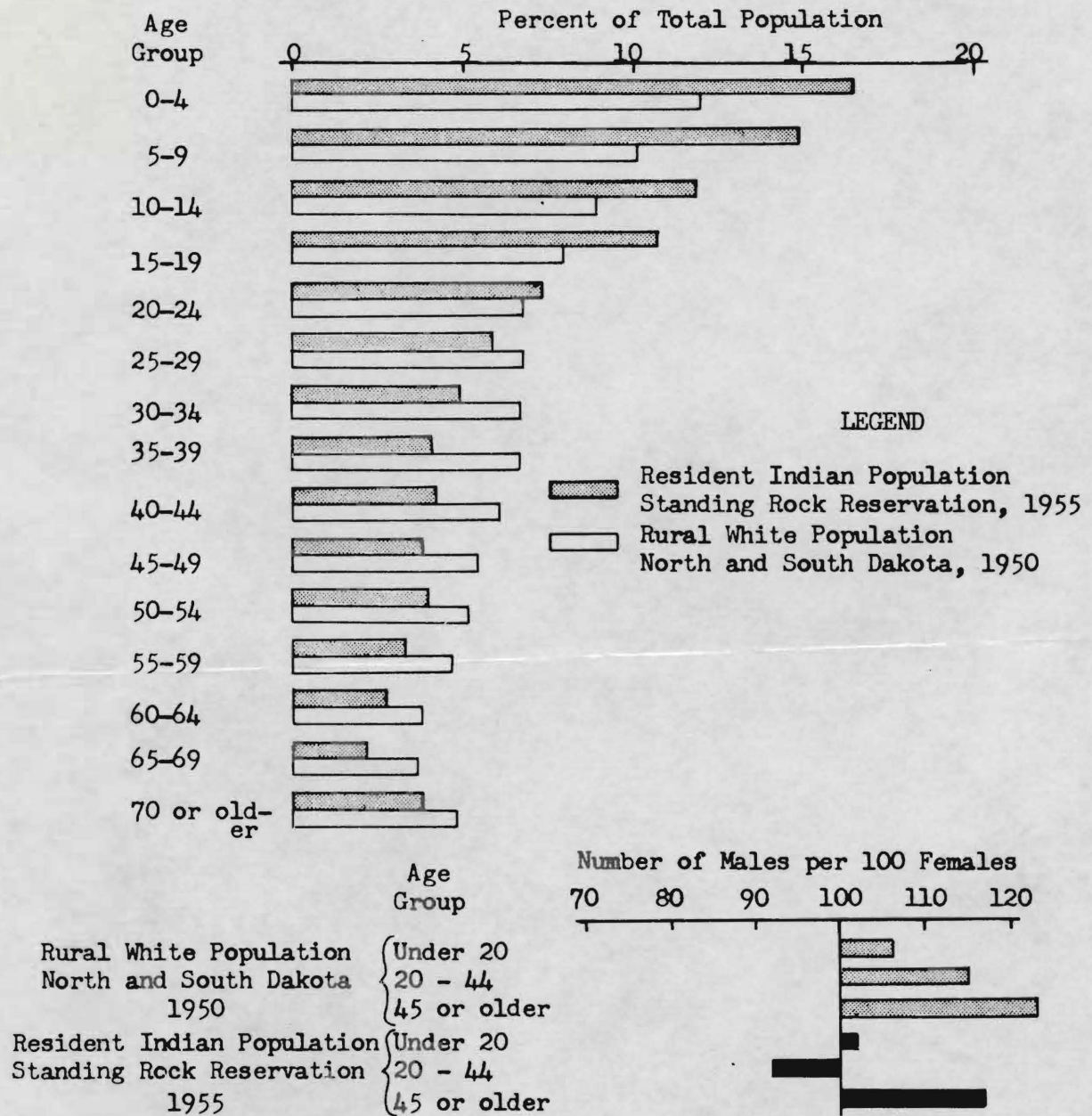
That many Indians can successfully compete for jobs in industry and business is demonstrated by the substantial number who have established themselves away from the reservations. Movement from the reservations began long before relocation services were initiated. Approximately half of the persons enrolled at Missouri River Basin reservations are residing away from the home reservation. A number of these reside at some other reservation or in the vicinity of reservations, but roughly one-third of the enrollees are located well away from reservations.

Supplying labor and talent to urban industrial and commercial areas has long been one of the major economic and social contributions of rural areas to the national economy. Prosperity generally encourages and recession discourages migration from country to the city. The condition of the urban and industrial parts of the economy is important to rural people. What happens to the general economy is felt directly at the reservation level. For example, the recent recession resulted in temporary loss of work by some relocated Indians who had become partly established in various industrial areas. These lay-offs caused some of them to return to the reservation. Their return to the reservation tended to dampen the enthusiasm of others at the reservation who were considering or had been considering relocation to urban areas.

Magnitude of Under Employment at Reservations

There probably are around 12,000 employables among the resident Indian population in the Missouri River Basin. Indian range resources, if used and properly managed by Indian livestock operators, would provide employment for about one-fourth of these. Another one-third might find fairly satisfactory employment on or near the reservations and at seasonal jobs away from the reservations. This would be a substantial increase over the present in time used for productive pursuits, but would leave approximately two-fifths of the time of employable reservation Indians still unutilized. Thus if more local jobs are not developed by establishing industries much time will continue to remain unutilized unless families move to places where employment is available. Correction of this condition would involve moving 4,000 to 6,000 of the present

Figure 1 Distribution of Population by Age and Sex



The larger percentages of Standing Rock Sioux Indians in the younger age groups compared with rural white populations in North and South Dakota are typical of Indian population distribution on reservations throughout the Northern Great Plains.

The tendency for resident female Indian population in the 20 to 44 age group to exceed the male population is also rather common and contributes to certain social problems on the reservations.

families from Missouri River Basin reservations and 300 to 400 additional new families each year.

Moving this number of families and locating jobs and housing for them is a sizeable job in itself but providing real economic opportunities to Indians involves more than this. The Indian must be brought to the job not only physically but also psychologically and incentive-wise, if transplantings to industrial and commercial urban areas are to take permanent root and flourish.

Most Indians are not lacking in mentality or energy to acquire skills and to work effectively when they want to. In trying to establish effective incentives to call forth the desired effort, it is well to recognize that the economic goals and motivating forces underlying Indian culture are not always the same as those of the dominant culture. Incentives must be acceptable and important to the Indian to stir him to action.

In this paper I have pointed out some aspects of Indian culture which affect responses of Indians to economic opportunities and have discussed some opportunities presently available to reservation Indians. In many respects, the situation facing reservation Indians in the Missouri River Basin is the same as that for non-Indian people in rural areas where resources are inadequate to support the present and prospective future populations, but in my opinion, correction or improvement of the reservation situation is by far the more difficult and urgent. The greater difficulty stems from human rather than from physical resource factors -- factors associated with value systems and goals and with deep-lying motivating forces. The nature and psychological depth of the adjustments which many Indians must take to accommodate themselves comfortably to modern urban industrial life are, I feel, inadequately understood by most of us.

