

"WORKING FOR A GOOD LIFE FOR OUR PEOPLE"

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IITC Founding Speech, on European Traditions

I was asked to talk about the origins of the white man's way of thinking, so we would understand how we're going to go about working for a good life for our people.

Sometimes they say we should go to the school to learn about the "white man's ways", but they never tell us of the white man's traditions. To learn of these traditions, where his thinking comes from, is something that he doesn't even tell his own people. But he has his traditions.

We need to understand what is behind the thinking of these people who sit in Washington, with whom we deal with all the time. It's a hard kind of way to think. I don't mean it's difficult--I mean that the people who think that way are a hard people.

We can recognize what it is they are saying by our own experiences. But it is hard to tell from their words, because what they mean and what we think they are meaning are two different things.

Thousands of years ago in Europe, there was a teacher who was the most widely known teacher in the place where he lived. He went by the name of Plato. This man had students--kind of a first university. What he taught his people went a little bit like this. He said that human beings watching what's going on in the world don't see what's really going on. He said it's like a man sitting in a cave, watching the shadows on the wall of what's going on outside of the cave. What he knows is from what he sees in those shadows--that's all he knows. But the perfect knowledge comes from the real world which lies outside.

Plato had a student who became another great teacher of his time. That student's name was Aristotle. These people lived in Greece. Aristotle also had teachings for his people. He said that the world is organized between conditions of pure light and pure darkness, and all the world is somewhere on a line between these two conditions. There are things that are pure good, and things that are pure evil. He said that the ones that are purely good are the ones who live in the cities, and these he called the "civilized people," meaning city dwellers.

He said that in the world on the line between pure light and pure darkness, those who are civilized are on the side of pure light. Those who are barbarians represent pure darkness. He said that in the world of man, in the forests there are the beasts, and that someplace in the world there would be people who would be like the beasts. He describes those people as not speaking languages that are "civilized", such as Greek. He said they would not have cities or written languages. He said they were born in the world to serve the ones who live in the cities--he called them natural slaves.

A long time went by, and another kind of thing happened in Asia Minor. There arose a teacher another man. This man told the people that he was the Son of Man, and he told the people that he was to found a new way of living for the people where they would love one another, they would not be greedy, and they would go about the earth in a good kind of way. This man spent forty days and forty nights in the desert seeking a vision.

One thing he did that affects us is that while he was walking on this earth, he went to one of his students whose name was Peter, and said, "Upon this rock, I found this church." And he told Peter to go out and spread the teachings he had given in his lifetime. And the people who followed him said--he didn't say it himself--this man is the Son of God. The people who followed him said that this teacher was the most perfect being who lived on this earth. He was the closest to

being a pure spirit, just like the way Aristotle talked about.

Before he left the earth, this teacher told one of his students that he was to go out and he was to teach the other people about it. But he also said that the people should follow the Old Ways of the Judeans. And one of the things which the Judeans believed was that man was to go out, and he was to have sovereignty over all the things of the earth. He was to go out and to dominate all living things all across the world.

So these people--among whom was a man called Augustine--taught their own people, that living on the earth was one man, and that one man had that charge, and that he was descended from that most perfect being that ever existed, and that he held in his hands the sovereignty of the world. And that man was the Pope.

So for a long long time, in Europe, the world was seen to be that way. There was a man on top, and from him, going down to all the people and all the world, was those who followed him. He held life and death over all those people for a long time. And in their families, the man held the life and death and property of his family in his hands. That way of living was called the feudal system. That was in Europe. It is still Europe.

There came a time some fifteen hundred years after the teaching of that man, who they say gave the sovereignty of the world to the spiritual leaders of Europe, when a man called Christopher Columbus came along. He was one of the most prophetically-named persons in history. Literally, his name means, "Christ-bearing Colonizer." He set sail looking for Japan. He set sail for the west, thinking the world was only half the size it really was. So he landed in the Caribbean Islands and he was seeking two things. He came seeking wealth, and he came seeking power.

The first thing he saw when he landed was the native people of those islands walking about and before he thought of spices or gold or anything else, he thought of the people--slaves. That was the first entry he made in his journal. Shortly after he arrives in North America, hundreds and thousands of Spanish come. They land on the islands, and then they find the mainland--Mexico, Yucatan, Guatemala.

How are they going to get all this gold? How are they going to use this land?

They called the Spanish men who came here "conquistadores." About sixty years after Columbus landed, there was a debate in Spain in the Court of the King of Spain. It was held before a group of men called the Council of the Indies. They had to decide the question, "Is there such a thing as just war?" In that sixty years, the Spanish had come and had conquered. They had come around to the native people, and even before they knew who the people were, they conquered them.

At this time, there was a man who was a teacher at the University of Salamanca in Spain. His name was Sepulveda, and he taught his students about the Indian people. He taught them in this way. He said the Indian people in North America are not really people. He said that they are inferior kind of people, without souls, without intelligence. They do not speak Spanish or Latin. They do not build cities. They do not follow the writings of the Bible. He said that they are dark. They do not educate their children. They kill and eat each other. He said they fit Aristotle's concept of natural slaves--they are, he said, born to serve us, the Spanish.

That is what he told the conquistadores. He said the soldiers had one obligation: when you approach native people, you read to them this statement. You tell them to come forward, and put all their worldly goods, all their possessions, before you. And then, they will present themselves for service to the King of Spain. And he said, if they do not do so, then it is justifiable that they will be killed. It would be "just war." And all who survived that war could be enslaved by force.

He said that the Spanish had the right to take the land of the natives, because the Spanish Christians have a sovereignty that goes all the way back to Christ. He said that not only did the Spanish have the right to take the lands, but that it would be in the "best interests" of the native people to do so. He said that the native people would, in fact, have the better bargain. In return for the small contribution of their live's labors, they would get the donkey, the horse, the wheat, the rye, the barley. He said the Spanish would bring all the good things of life and thus the native people should be grateful that they were being enslaved, and that the native people should rush forward that they may serve the Spanish. He said it was God's will that it be done that way.

And of course, all who did not follow God's will would be killed. The Spanish did that. Ten million native people in Spanish America died because they would not put all their worldly possessions in front of the Spanish, because they would not recognize the sovereignty of the Spanish King.

Sepulveda was the world's first modern racist. Racism means a biological explanation of why people act a certain way, and why others are justified in taking what they have.

There was another man at that time. His name was Barthelomew de las Casas. He came to debate on the Indian's side in the debate before the Council of the Indies. He said that the Indians did have souls. He said they life at peace with each other, and that human beings should not be killed. He said that Indians were intelligent enough that they would willingly accept the religion of sovereignty and servitude to the King of Spain. He said the Indians should be persuaded to the Spanish way of life, rather than killing them.

Las Casas, then, was the world's first modern racist liberal. When the English first came to what is now "New England," the first people they ran into was the Pequots. The English, too, had a teacher, and his name was Cotton Mather. Once again, the white man and the Indian faced each other, and the white man wanted the Indian Land. And once again, Cotton Mather argued that the Indians did not have souls. Thus they could not possess land--they didn't even know enough to divide it up amongst themselves. And because they didn't follow the right way, they were "heathens." Mather said the native people live in darkness and despair, and that they would be better off dead.

This was the argument under which the English all but exterminated the Pequots, and almost the Naragansetts, and many other native nations. Extermination. Many wars went on.

Finally, the United States was born. The United States maintained that it had taken from Spain, France and England the sovereignty of the Kings of Europe, and that it was entitled to exercise that sovereignty.

They argue that in their treaties and their legal briefs. They say the U.S. had gained the sovereignty of the Duke of York and the Crown of England, and they bought some more from France. Now where does that sovereignty come from? The sovereignty under which the crown of England claimed much of North America comes from its history--since they considered that the native people couldn't own the land, then it could be "discovered" and claimed by a power entitled to sovereignty.

So the King of England got his sovereignty from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he got it from the Pope, and he got it from Peter, and Peter got it from Christ. That is the European idea of sovereignty. You look around the world, and you will see that there is another idea that still lives on--the idea of darkness and light.

Remember that the dark people are the barbarians and that just wars can be waged by civilized people who have a just right to the land and the services of their inferiors, and dark-skinned peoples of the earth.

Look into the writings of the first people who created the United States, to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. The first question which Thomas Jefferson tasked as president of the United States was how to create just wars against the Indians, who are peaceful. That is American history again and again. First, send people over into our territory to establish a "frontier." Send the worst of their people to make contact with the Indians, and when there is a fight, justify the war as an act of aggression. Claim the territory, sell it from under them, and when settlers move into their territory and the Indians respond to that, kill the Indians. Just war--they don't own the land, we settlers do, because we have a piece of paper, a sovereign right to claim land.

So again and again, there has been a policy of genocide and racism during the history of the United States. It has been a policy in which the United States Government has said it has the right to claim the land, a God-given right. In the beginning, the U.S. destroyed the people physically, with guns. But when the Indian people laid down their guns, the U.S. had to come up with new ways to destroy the people.

You remember that Cotton Mather said it would be better for the Indians to be dead. In the 1820's, they said it would be better for the Indians to move to the West. They said it would be better to move the Indians east of the Mississippi River to the west of the Mississippi River. They said it would allow them to be with "their own kind." So the first American Indian policy was born: the policy of removal which led to the Trail of Tears.

Over across the Mississippi, it was reasoned, the Indians would have "more time" to become civilized, "more like we are." Over there, they will be all in one place so our missionaries can meet with them. Over there, we won't be bothered with them--and incidentally, we will get their land.

When the policy of removal didn't work because settlers were already pouring into Kansas and Oregon, then they decided we've got to civilize these Indians since they won't fight us and give us the excuse to kill them. So the second great American Indian policy was born, and it was called allotment.

Even in the Congress, it was said this was the greatest land rip-off ever. But it was also said that it would make the Indian "responsible" for his own land. It would make him civilized, it would bring him up to "our standards", it will make a farmer of him. So land was parcelled out, and most of it was lost. Once again, something was done because it was "good for the Indians." But it turned out better for the white people themselves.

But after the Allotment Act, there was still land left, and some Indians left, although by now not much of either. There were Indians speaking other kinds of languages, and acting in other kinds of ways. The Twentieth Century came, and Teddy Roosevelt was president. Another kind of policy came--this one didn't seem to get a name although it is still going on today. It has lots of different names it goes under. "Those Indians live in different kinds of houses--we've got to get bungalows for them." Those Indians speak different kinds of languages--we've got to teach them to speak ours, and our religion too." Educate them--take the Indians out of their homes, take them to Eastern School, and they'll learn our concepts. We'll send them back and they'll carry the white man's ways back to their people."

And so they carry back the way the white man looks at the world, those traditions he has but doesn't know about. They will say that the land belongs not to the people, or to the buffalo or to the women, not to the Creator, but that the earth belongs to the white man, as he is organized in the United States Government, or the Canadian Government.

It's true, that way isn't it? Those people who are most educated in the white man's ways have their allegiance to the white way, back to the Congress, to the President, to the Government. They don't teach us in the school systems the

knowledge of the world--they teach us the way they think the world should be organized, and who is boss. That's what they teach in the schools.

They also teach us to be dependent upon them. They teach us to want to live in houses which they create, to have to spend our lives working for them to pay for those houses. They teach us to look to them for our needs and the answers to our problems.

And in the Twentieth Century, we see new projects and policies. One is called the Reorganization Act. There's one right now called Self-Determination. But they're the same policy--to take the Indians away from their traditional leaders and ways and put them in that tradition of leadership that depends on Washington, to put them in servitude to the people of the East, to put them under the heel of the white man. Self-Determination doesn't mean that. Self-Determination means giving elected systems and white oriented Indians the right to lease the Indian lands, to put the Indians into different kinds of debt causing them to remain in servitude to the white man, always of course, in his "best interests."

Self-Determination means the right to make certain decisions within the system which the white man created. The present leasing system isn't much different than the Allotment Act of a century ago--white people get to use the Indian land. When the white man uses a word like that, Self-Determination, he has his own definition. He doesn't mean that Indians will live their own way on their own land, or that Indians will be independent and be able to take care of themselves. It means that the Indian will serve the white man in his system.

We hear about "Law and Order" coming to the reservations. But we have to understand their theory of law. At one time, there was just one man who had arbitrary rule and they called him King. They believed that the King had the divine right to rule. Some even claimed to be the sons of gods. They had a debate about this several centuries ago. A man named John Lock argued that men should not have the right to rule, but that laws should rule. He said the legislative bodies should make up the laws, not the rule of kings. Locke, also said that the ones who would come to be the legislators, the lawmakers, would be the people who had vested property rights. And it is true in the United States that the people who make the law of the white man are the living breathing human beings who represent oil companies and railroads and coals companies--those are the ones who hold the sovereignty of the world.

They are not Kings anymore--they are corporations and very very wealthy people. That's the way of the white man today.

So we have all these new policies of the 1970's--self-determination, Education, Housing, Recreation, Industrialization. They are all the same words--they are all policies to keep Indian people in servitude of those who hold the sovereignty now with those other kinds of names like Exxon, Quaker Oats, Peabody Coal. These kinds of people have more power than the United States as a government. International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) was able to overthrow a government in South America, it is believed. They are corporate sovereign states with more power than most countries in the world. And they hold much power on our Indian lands.

If we ever had our rights, these companies might not get their coal, their oil, their land.

A long time ago, our people talked in very symbolic ways, the prettiest ways in which human beings talk with each other. They talked in terms of Spider Woman and Coyote and beauty. The white man talks in terms of hydrocarbon molecules, mathematic diagrams, and scientific method, terms which only a few of them understand.

It is a very interesting world that the white man is discovering right now. He is discovering that when the sun comes up in the east, it sets up what he calls photochemical reactions among the plants and animals, and that the earth acts as a living, breathing, alive thing. The white man is discovering too that there is a limit to the power the white man is using, and that maybe sometime

soon he will run out. Oil. Coal. That's how he controls the world. That's where the phantom jets come from. That's where the atom bombs come from. Without that oil, the white man can't eat. 45% of the food produced in this country is produced by oil--oil to clear the land, plow the soil, haul the food. The source of power the white man has is diminishing.

In the next few years, we will stand and watch tens of millions of people dying from lack of food. The world situation of starvation will spread out like a cloud over the face of the world, and sometime the cloud will reach this land. Our Indian people hold the answer to that. It is in the traditional way that we have a source of power that is real. The white man talks about power in terms of guns. But power is what creates life on this earth, and the traditional Indian people know how to use it to survive in North America. The white man had it, but he lost it. The only ones who hold it now here are the traditional Indian people. They know you have to be thankful to the sun for what it grows on this earth.

But if we're going to survive in the thirty years to come when there is no oil, when there are starving people all over then we have to keep and remain close to our lands.

And now we're going to have to see how that will be possible; how we can keep the white man's ways from our borders. How can we keep him from taking everything again? How can we keep his ways from our ways? We have to do more than get our treaty rights, because we have to go to him to get those things--to his people, to his Congress, to his president.

Our best power, the only thing that will give us a small chance is to change his mind. We've got to use the Indian ways to slow him down, change the way he thinks. Maybe sometimes we have to go to court--I don't know, that's up to the individual nations. Sometimes we have to go to the papers. Maybe sometimes we have to teach our own people. Maybe sometimes we have to attack it in a spiritual kind of way. Maybe sometimes we have to use other kinds of ways--but we have to use every kind of way we can think of to make him stop taking our land.

We're going to disagree among ourselves about how we're going to stop him. This one will have this idea, this one that idea. Everyone will have his own idea. We won't get together. Some will join the white man, some will run from him, some will stand and fight, some will go to his court, some will take up his religion. That's our history. But this time we have to understand we have to fight in every way we know how. We've got to use every possible way.

Our first thing though, has to be to go back to our traditions--that is the place where we will be of one mind. When we walk away from our traditions, we become confused. So when our confusion comes, we will have to turn to our traditions to hold our people together. But then when our brothers in one part of the country are fighting in one kind of way--even if that's not the way we might choose to fight--we have to support them.

One of the things that gets lost a lot of the time is that Indians run all over the country saying, "We want this," and "We want that." But a lot of things we say we want, the white man doesn't have. Especially self-sufficiency: you have to do that yourself. We can't get that from someone else.

Or maybe Indians say we want our language. We say we want the white man to give us our spirituality back--but he doesn't seem to have our religion, either. It's true he's trying to get us not to have it. It's true he tries to destroy it. But he doesn't have the power to give it back.

We talk about what we like--but we don't understand all the things that come along with it. We say we want sovereignty--but that means we have to be fairly self-sufficient, and that in turn means we have to live without a lot of the white man's things. And that's where our spiritual knowledge comes in--they tell us how to live. It's in our religion. So in order to have this sovereignty, we

Have to have our self-sufficiency and our spirituality.

We can't have the best of two worlds--you don't get the best when you try for two worlds; you usually get the worst.

Now for the talk about treaties, we talk about what the white man is doing to us and that's useful in educating our people. But we're not going to get our lands back until he's gone and we're going to be gone with him if we're like him. If we want to survive and to enjoy our country and to secure a good life for our children, then we have to see with a good mind and understand each action we take.

We talk about the Two Row Wampum, the two canoes going down the same river together, but the Indians staying in their boat, steering their own destiny. Some Indians though have the idea that if they want something from the white man's boat, all they have to do is reach over and grab it. But you know what happens to someone who reaches too far--they usually upset their own canoe.

Those who call themselves "progressive Indians" go away to these conferences and when they come home they have a program for alcoholism, and a program for drug abuse, and a program for this problem and that problem--but really it's all the same problem. It's all the same thing in one. We won't get things changed unless we start with whole things: the individuals, the families, the clans, and the nations. We have to rebuild everything from the ground up.

We talk sometimes idealistically. We can tell what it is that is happening bad for us. But there are some real common sense questions--like if you want to have a good life, you can't be a drunk. If you want to be true, you can't work for someone else. When we sit over here and say, "Well, now, we're going to try to get this land or this right back," sometimes we're way ahead of ourselves. Maybe when we're ready to get something, we're going to get it.

For example, at our reservation, we say, "We ought to raise up (traditional) chiefs." So we want to raise chiefs. Good idea--we should do that. But we have very few people around who really know enough to be good chiefs. So we have to start someplace else. So where do we start? With religion. So first we have to have the right idea, and then we have to take the right action.

It will be important to be together as we are here at this convention. It's a good feeling, to see these, the healthiest people in North America. It's pretty. I like it. I feel good here. From here on, we'll be able to go out and do these things together. Only a few years ago, there was no one around thinking about holding the people together, no one around to think about holding our lands. And now they're here, and I feel good about that.