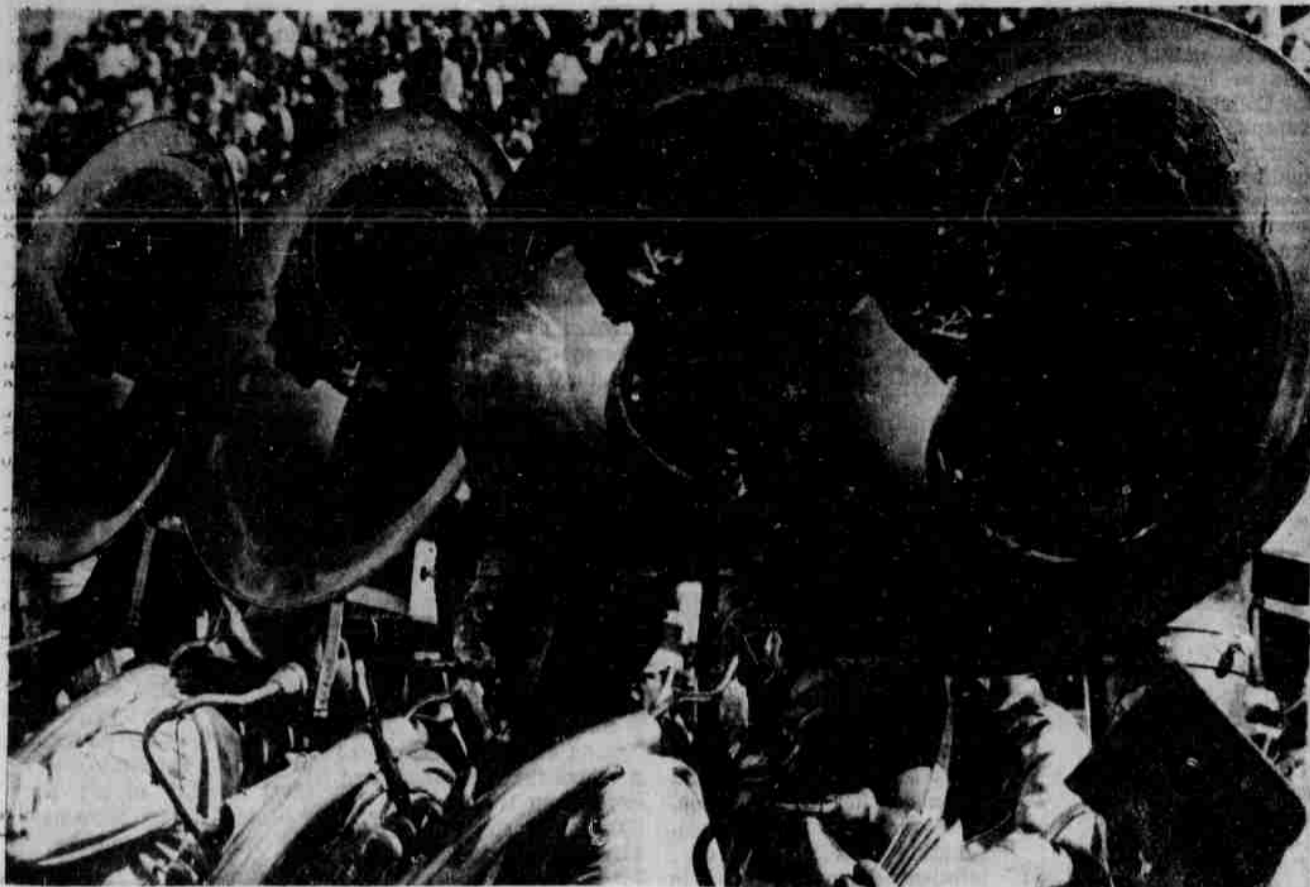


# Reflections . . .



# Discussion centers on Indian 'agony'

Indians may not exist in 100 years unless they become more militant or the whites become more compassionate.

"That's sad, but that's the way it is," commented a discussion leader during Saturday's conference on "The Agony of the American Indian" held at Milford's Riverside Park.

Indian speakers, group discussions and movies presented the problems of Indians in America to an audience of 150.

The lowest standard of living in the United States is on Indian reservations, according to Rev. Homer Noley, conference coordinator. Substandard housing is the rule on most reservations and only a small fraction of homes have electricity or running water.

Prices in reservation stores are 40% to 300% higher than off the reservation, but the average family income is only \$1,500, Noley said. The federal poverty level is set at \$3,000 annual income.

Health care for Indians is at the nation's lowest level; illiteracy is at the highest.

National unemployment is at 5%. For Blacks the rate is 9%. Among Indians it's 50%.

Grade school-aged Indian children on some reservations are sent to boarding schools and separated from

their homes and families for 9 months. Sociologists point out that close contact with the family is most important to children of this age group.

Indians who leave the reservation seeking a better life often find no improvements. Many urban Indians can find only substandard housing. The reservation doesn't train or prepare them for jobs or education.

Eugene Crawford, of the Omaha school system, told of a little girl who had "trouble" getting to school daily. She didn't know what a traffic light was.

The Indian school drop-out rate is 77%, and even higher in some communities. Indian youth also have the highest suicide rate in the country, up to 100 times the national average in some areas.

Crawford said that the Indian culture is being destroyed and the Indian is made to feel like, "an immigrant or foreigner in his own land."

"History books talk about the Indian contributing to America, you know, teaching the settlers to drop the flint with the corn. They contributed the whole North

American continent," he continued.

The speakers at the conference stressed that solutions to the Indian's problems are hard to find. A panel of Indian students said Indians were tired of being studied; tired of being told what to do; and tired of being pitied.

Noley said Indians are now suspicious of "do gooders" and "hobbyists" who wanted to join the Indian's cause for

personal advantage. Indians are by nature shy, he said.

Some participants expressed disappointment that there are no dynamic or radical Indian spokesmen, or as one student said, "There doesn't seem to be a Red Eldridge Cleaver."

Others in the discussion complained that something must be wrong with middle-class whites if they can see these problems and fail to be moved.

# . . . of victory

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