We Don't Want Your Modern Ways!
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Hopis Protest a US Government Utilities Project That Rips up Their Ceremonial Chambers, Kivas

1992 was the 500th anniversary of Columbus' "discovery" of America. But few Americans had the heart to celebrate the man and mentality that reduced six million native American Indians (some say 50 million) to 250,000 by 1900, then herded them into human cattle pens called "reservations," and made all their ceremonies illegal. Coerced by threats, beatings and jail terms to abandon their ways, most did. Reservations then lapsed into twilight zones of despondent, identity-less Indians.

But today, in a global power surge of self-respect, indigenous peoples are rejecting White man's ideas, reseeding their old ways, and claiming sacred lands. Healing feathers are being waved, medicine fires lit, nature spirits invoked though dance and children taught to touch the earth as Mother, protect the "Standing People," (trees), and stay close to the Great Spirit through ceremony.

Still the tug-of-war between native, grow-your-own food, ceremonial lifestyle and the White way of canned food, plastic clothes, cheap TV and expensive cars exists in all tribes. Except one. A Hopi clan in the red-rock area of northern Arizona have never broken with their ancestral ways. Presently, they are anguishing over a government project running water and electricity to their village through trenches that will cut open their underground ceremonial chambers.

Hopi elder Thomas Banyaca, explains: "Before the White man, everything was in balance-rain, peace, flowers. We were always happy. We boys and girls played games in the cornfields and rode burros up the canyons to the springs and stayed overnight. When the White man came, he made us stop our ceremonies. The rain stopped. They made us go to his schools. At first, we refused. Then they sent people

to capture our chiefs. Those Hopis who gave in to his pressure were called "Friendlies." We who refused were called "Hostiles." Our refusal to break with the Creator caused a great break among our people. We were evicted from our own village by those who cooperated with the government. We moved to Hotevilla to live the traditional Hopi way. Still the government came here and put us in jails, Alcatraz. My father was put in irons. They kidnapped me and put me in a boarding school. In 1966, a company began the largest coal strip-mining operation in the world on Black Mesa using water to pipe the coal 273 miles for refining, thus drying up our springs and bringing down the moisture. Without that moisture, it won't rain, creating sickness, blindness, cancer. We are not supposed to disturb the earth, just take what we need."

In July, Northwest Indians Judi Pope and Ghost Wolf, friends of the Hopi, drove from Oregon to Hopiland to help coordinate an NBC (a major US TV broadcaster) documentary on the Hopi. They filed this report:

"The Hopi people have lived for 10,000 years in almost total isolation, on desolate desert land. They carry their water to their homes perched atop rock buttes called mesas. They pray to the rain to grow their corn and live without modern conveniences, by choice. Now generators pump television into the villages where the so-called non-traditional Hopis live. The government's Bureau of Indian Affairs, in alliance with the Tribal Council, is now digging trenches to bring water, sewer lines and electricity to Hopis who don't want these. With the introduction of conveniences and television, Hopi traditional elders foresee only self-destruction. As Hopi spiritual elder Martin Gashweseoma said, "The bulldozers are on the land, and we do not want what they bring. We know our instructions, and we are following what Creator told us to do. The government must leave us alone."

Hopi Medicine people claim that where water was piped to non-traditional Hopi villages, the people there are getting diseases they didn't have before.

In an unprecedented strategy, Hopi spiritual elders composed a letter petitioning political leaders, including President Clinton, to stop the government project.

The petition prophetically read, "Foreign machines bite savagely into the

bosom of Earth Mother. The great Water Spirit of the Earth is withholding its blessings as is the Wind Spirit who is keeping the rain clouds away. Even the gophers are angry and are eating our corn before it can grow. We must correct our ways, and take care of Mother Earth. If we do not, we are going to face terrible destruction by Nature. Wars will come like powerful winds, bringing both purification and destruction." Ceremonial Chief eldest elder, Dan Evahema, over 100-years-old, concludes, "It's too expensive to live the White man's way. We want to live the Hopi way with the earth and the corn."

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Our Brothers

Like Hindus, the Hopis (literally "Peace")-and other Native American tribes-revere the earth as sacred, view all life as interconnected and know the laws of karma and reincarnation, inner worlds, spirit beings and the power of prayer and ceremony. What Hopi elders are doing in Arizona is a useful example for Hindus who lament the loss of ancestral custom, but do little or nothing about it. Our peaceful brother is saying "No" to encroaching forces. Hindus may learn from the quiet but courageous, cultural self-determinism of the Hopi.