

the safe limit for animals.” Opposed to the energy companies was the Black Hills Alliance (BHA), a coalition of Indian and white residents of the region. Among the leaders of the BHA were Winona Laduke (Ojibwa) and Madonna Gilbert (Sioux), first cousin of activist Russell Means. The Black Hills are “not just another mine site with a ‘potential’ for energy production,” Laduke explained. They are “a spiritual center” for the Indian people, “for as long as the old people can remember, there have been prayers and songs to ‘*Pahla Sapa*, our life blood.’”

Following an accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in March 1979, the market for uranium in the United States declined rapidly. By mid-1982 virtually all domestic uranium production was suspended. Many nuclear plants continued to operate, however, and the Council of Energy Resource Tribes and federal officials began to encourage tribes to open their reservations for use as sites for the storage of nuclear wastes. In 1984 the government began a vigorous campaign to place a major nuclear waste dump on the Yakama and Umatilla reservations in Washington state and on the Nez Perce reservation in northern Idaho. The campaign failed in the face of concerted intertribal opposition organized by Yakama leader Russell Jim. But other tribes welcomed the storage of nuclear wastes on their reservations as a boon to the tribal economy. In 1995 the tribal council of the Mescalero Apaches of southern New Mexico approved the formation of a joint venture for the construction of an above-ground storage facility capable of housing one-quarter of all the high-level spent fuels generated at nuclear power plants in the United States. Some residents of the reservation complained about the potential safety hazards, but tribal leaders emphasized that the storage facility would provide much-needed jobs and revenues. As Mescalero vice-chairman Fred Peso explained, the storage of nuclear waste “would diversify our tribal job base and place one more brick in the structure of economic self-sufficiency.”

Controversies over economic development also exacerbated such long-standing tribal rivalries as the Navajo-Hopi land dispute. In 1882 the federal government established a reservation for the Hopis in the middle of the huge Navajo reservation. At the time, fewer than 600 Navajos were living on the newly created Hopi reservation; by the early 1970s, however, the number of Navajos on Hopi land had grown to more than 10,000. Hopi leader Abbott Sekaquaptewa charged that the Navajos had taken both Hopi lands and tribal traditions. “Our

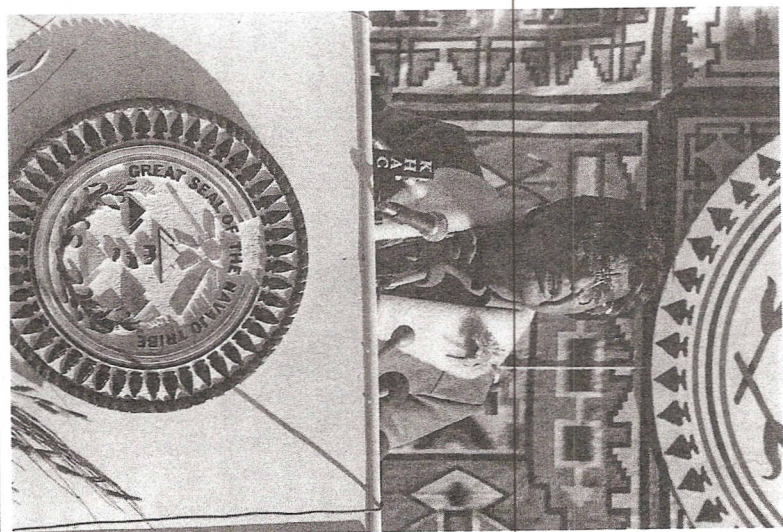
shrines have become their shrines,” he complained. The Hopi tribal council began legal proceedings to force the Navajos to leave. In 1974 Congress passed the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act to partition the disputed land, and subsequent court orders called for the removal of more than 5,000 Navajos from the Hopi reservation. Among those ordered to leave were the most traditional of Navajos, including many shepherding families living in isolated enclaves in the Big Mountain area of Black Mesa.

The Navajos who were threatened with removal charged that the real reason for their eviction was the desire of energy corporations and Hopi tribal leaders to develop the millions of tons of coal that lay beneath the surface of Big Mountain. For Navajo traditionalists, Big Mountain was sacred land. “It is the place we go to pray for our livestock,” explained one Navajo herder, “and our medicine men go there to get herbs. . . . We need the mountain to live.” Pauline Whitesinger, one of the Navajos ordered to leave, agreed. “In our traditional tongue there is no word for relocation,” she said. “To move away means to disappear and never be seen again.” In the summer of 1978, Whitesinger joined Indian activists Russell Means and Wallace “Mad Bear” Anderson in the Longest Walk, a demonstration that protested (among other things) the “genocidal” relocation of the Navajos.

The dispute moved toward resolution in the early 1980s when Congress created the Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation Commission and appropriated \$200 million to compensate those who had to be removed. New tribal chairmen were elected by the Hopis and the Navajos in 1982, and the new leaders pledged to cooperate in seeking a compromise solution. “We have to undo all of the hatred that the past leaders have created between the two tribes,” said the new Navajo Nation tribal chairman Peterson Zah. Both tribes suspended all lawsuits over the issue and formed a joint committee to negotiate future contracts and leases with energy corporations. Several hundred Navajos submitted voluntarily to relocation, but no final solution was reached. By the mid-1990s, at least 250 Navajo families ordered to leave the Hopi reservation remained on lands they had occupied for generations.

Peter MacDonald and other leaders of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes continued to believe that energy development was essential to Indian self-determination, but critics argued that CERT represented the final assault on the reservations by outside forces. Those who opposed the growing role of energy corporations in Indian

PETER MACDONALD SPEAKS AT WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA, CAPITAL OF THE NAVAJO NATION. FIRST ELECTED TRIBAL CHAIRMAN IN 1970, MACDONALD SERVED THREE TERMS BEFORE BEING CONVICTED IN 1990 IN TRIBAL COURT ON CHARGES OF BRIBERY AND ETHICS VIOLATIONS.



affairs charged that the wealth produced by energy development did not extend far beyond the tribal councils that negotiated the multimillion dollar deals with the corporations. The members of the Navajo tribal council, for instance, received salaries more than twenty times the average income of their fellow tribesmen. Chairman MacDonald, who traveled about in a Lear Jet and Lincoln Continental, was dubbed by his critics "Peter MacDollar."²² The close relationship between tribal leaders and the corporate elite was made manifest in a festive black-tie dinner in New York City in 1981, attended by several hundred CERT members and corporation executives. Four tribes resigned from CERT, complaining that MacDonald had "sold out to the corporate state."

Charges of corruption and mismanagement of tribal assets increased as millions of dollars flowed into the reservations. The administration of Peter MacDonald was racked by several scandals, including the indictment of the chairman himself for submitting false invoices to a utility company. In 1982 Peterson Zah was elected tribal chairman of the Navajo Nation, but four years later MacDonald returned to office. New charges of bribery, conspiracy, and ethics violations soon were leveled at MacDonald, and in 1989 he was accused of receiving kickbacks from corporations dealing with the tribe. "I knew that the businesses were spending their money to influence me, and I didn't care," MacDonald later acknowledged. "I was not being bribed. I was not selling out." In 1990 MacDonald was convicted in tribal court on more than forty counts and sentenced to nearly six years in prison. Two years later, the former chairman was found guilty in federal court of an additional sixteen charges. Through it all, MacDonald denied any wrongdoing and accused his opponents of engaging in a "concerted effort to undermine tribal sovereignty."

Despite the misfortunes of Peter MacDonald, the acceleration of energy resource development left an enduring legacy in Indian country. As historian Marjane Ambler, author of *Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development* (1990), concluded, the energy tribes of the far west faced the turn of the century "in a much better position than ever before." They were no longer the nation's energy colonies, but had taken an active role in the direction of their own economic affairs. Gaining control over their resources offered the best hope that Indians might yet "break the iron bonds linking them to dependency, paternalism, and exploitation."

THE VARIETIES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The development of energy resources was just one of the many ways that Native Americans pursued greater economic independence in the late twentieth century. As impressive as those resources were, they were concentrated on relatively few reservations. Only 14 percent of the nation's Indian people, in the mid-1980s, lived on reservations that received annual revenues from energy resources equal to \$500 or more per resident. Tribes without such resources turned to a wide variety of other economic enterprises.