



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

Indian Claims Commission photographs from the Poor People's Campaign

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	Indian Claims Commission photographs from the Poor People's Campaign
Date:	1968 May-June
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.417
Creator:	United States. Indian Claims Commission
Extent:	57 Photographic prints 3 Contact sheets
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection includes photographic prints from May 1968 when a coalition of 60 Native American demonstrators surprised the Indian Claims Commission at the Bureau of Indian Affairs to demand better and more just compensation for land taken in the past century. The group was in Washington, DC as a part of the Poor People's Campaign.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Patricia Jollie, 2022.

Processing Information

Processed by Rachel Menyuk, Processing Archivist, 2023.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date; Indian Claims Commission photographs from the Poor People's Campaign, image #, NMAI.AC.417; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

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Poor People's Campaign/Poor People's March on Washington

Lasting through May and June of 1968, the Poor People's Campaign was a crusade for social justice first envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. By 1967, King had begun to argue publicly that civil rights alone would not bring about social justice. To realize the promises of American democracy, he argued, the nation would need to combat not only racial inequalities but class inequalities as well.

Native Americans played a significant role in shaping the objectives and message of the Poor People's Campaign from its earliest days. In the month prior to the mass demonstration in Washington, a group known as the Committee of 100 went to Washington to bring their demands to Congress. Consisting of representatives of King's coalition of the poor, the Committee of 100 served as the movement's vanguard and established the agenda for the campaign to come. Among the representatives sent to Washington were at least ten activists representing Native American interests. They included Tillie Walker (Mandan-Hidatsa), who was involved with the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute), a founder of the NIYC, and Henry Lyle "Hank" Adams (Assiniboine-Sioux), who had been instrumental in the struggle for Native American fishing rights in the Pacific Northwest. The participation of Native American leaders in the Committee of 100 challenged and expanded upon the very idea of civil rights as the foundation for social and economic justice in America.

More than 200 American Indian activists participated in the Poor People's Campaign. They traveled to Washington, D.C. in one of the many caravans of poor people that departed from cities across the nation in mid-May, 1968. Being in Washington, D.C. brought American Indian activists to the doorstep of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), an agency within the Department of the Interior. In the Poor People's Campaign, American Indians seized the opportunity to bring their issues directly to Department officials.

Excerpted from "Native Americans in the Poor People's Campaign" by the National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/native-activism-poor-peoples-campaign.htm>

Indian Claims Commission

The Indian Claims Commission was established as an independent federal agency on August 13, 1946. The Commission was charged with hearing and deciding claims made against the United States by "any tribe, band, or other identifiable group of American Indians residing within the territorial limits of the United States or Alaska" (60 Stat. 1049). Only claims filed within five years of the passage of the ICC's establishing act were eligible for consideration.

Between August 1946 and September 30, 1978, when the ICC was abolished, the Commission heard and issued rulings in hundreds of cases. Most related to land claims. The ICC was not empowered to grant or restore land to tribes, but it could award tribes money based on the market value of lands lost at the time of taking.

The ICC ultimately awarded over \$800 million to tribes. Cases that were not finalized when the ICC was abolished were transferred to the U.S. Court of Claims.

<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/indian-claims-commission>

Scope and Contents

This collection includes 57 black and white 8x10 photographic prints and 3 contact sheets of images from the 1968 Poor People's Campaign in Washington. The photographs were shot by Francis C. Ward inc, likely on behalf of the Indian Claims Commission (ICC). The photographs document the contingent of Native Activists who met with Indian Claims Commissioner John T. Vance at the Bureau of Indian Affairs sometime in late May or early June of 1968 while they were in Washington D.C. for the Poor People's Campaign. The photographs include images of Native

activists speaking to the ICC commission, such as Frank Allen (Stillaguamish Tribe) and Tillie Walker (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Nation), among others. There are also several photographs of John Vance, Henry Webb (ICC Chief Counsel), and other members of the Commission. There are a handful of duplicate photographs.

Arrangement

Arranged in 10 folders.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Names:

Allen, Frank E., 1931-2001
United States. Bureau of Indian Affairs
Vance, John Thomas, III, 1921-2008
Walker, Tillie

Places:

District of Columbia

Container Listing

Photo-folder 1	Commission Members, 1968 May-June 6 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 2	Commission Members: John T. Vance, 1968 May-June 7 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 3	Commission Members: Henry Webb (Chief Counsel of the ICC), 1968 May-June 4 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 4	Speakers: Frank Allen and John Vance, 1968 May-June 6 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 5	Speakers: Tillie Walker, 1968 May-June 3 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 6	Speakers: Various, 1968 May-June 7 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 7	Various Attendees, 1968 May-June 6 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 8	Various Attendees, 1968 May-June 6 Photographic prints
Photo-folder 9	ICC Group Portraits, circa 1968 2 Photographic prints Notes: Not taken during the Poor People's Campaign.
Photo-folder 10	Contact Sheets, 1968 May-June 3 Contact sheets