



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
San Diego Public Library

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“STANDING SILENT NATION” DOCUMENTS THE CLASH OF NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY

San Diego, CA... What does a family have to endure to create a future for itself? “Standing Silent Nation” is an eye-opening account of Native American reservation life that belies popular images of casino mini-states. It is the story of one Lakota family’s struggle to retain tribal identity and sovereignty against the odds of history and current government policy. The FREE screening of the documentary will be held on Wednesday, July 11, at 6:30 p.m., in the third floor auditorium of the Central Library, located at 820 E St., in downtown San Diego.

In April 2000, Alex White Plume and his Lakota family planted industrial hemp on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota after other crops had failed. They put their hopes for a sustainable economy in hemp's hardiness and a booming worldwide demand for its many products, from clothing to food. Although growing hemp, a relative of marijuana, was banned in the U.S., Alex believed that tribal sovereignty, along with hemp's non-psychoactive properties, would protect him. But when federal agents raided the White Plumes' fields, the Lakota Nation was swept into a Byzantine struggle over tribal sovereignty, economic rights and common sense.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe passed an ordinance in 1998 allowing the cultivation of low-THC hemp on the reservation, which they distinguished from higher-THC marijuana. “Standing Silent Nation” recounts the White Plumes’ tragic-comic adventures in hemp growing; the world is in the midst of a boom market for hemp products. The demand is no less in the United States, with

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this anomaly — hemp products can be sold in this country, but hemp growing is a felony. Alex wasn't out to challenge the logic of the federal government's drug war, but figured that tribal sovereignty allowed him to plant hemp as surely as it allowed casinos elsewhere. He was wrong.

The “silent nation” is the Lakota name for the plants and grasses of the plains that sustained the buffalo herds, and later the horses, which in turn sustained the people called “Sioux” (a term coined by would-be French colonizers). But the buffalo herds — and Indian access to the grasslands of the West — all but disappeared as the tribes were corralled into ever-smaller and more-arid reservations, where government-issued corn could not thrive and grazing lands were too poor to support herds. This is the history behind Pine Ridge, whose name is also synonymous with Native American resistance to American dominance, from the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre to 1971's “Wounded Knee” standoff between the FBI and the American Indian Movement (AIM) to the 1975 Pine Ridge Shootout — and with Lakota persistence in preserving tribal life.

This documentary, which was shot over the course of four years, raises a number of questions: Why did the government wait for the first crop to reach maturity before acting? Why did FBI and DEA agents raid the fields at daybreak with an array of armor and guns? Why have they continued to raid the White Plumes' land, even when the hemp grew back of its own accord, and to bring charges that could put Alex in prison for as long as 10 years? What lies behind the government's persistent objection to hemp?

Should the growing of hemp fall into the same class of crimes as murder, which allows the federal government to override tribal sovereignty? This is the question that matters most to the Lakota of Pine Ridge, for whom sovereignty is the last, if much transgressed, defense for Native American rights. Unfortunately, no one from the Drug Enforcement Administration was permitted to explain to the filmmakers the reasoning behind the government's actions.

“Standing Silent Nation” is a production of Prairie Dust Films in association with Native American Public Telecommunications (NAPT).

Since 1988, PBS' Point of View "POV" series has brought the best of independent point-of-view documentaries to a national audience, featuring the work of America's most innovative documentary filmmakers to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. "Standing Silent Nation" is scheduled to debut on national public television July 03, 2007 at 10 PM (60 minutes). Check local listings.

For more information about the film showing, call the Central Library at 619-236-5800 or visit the Library on the City's Web site at www.sandiegolibrary.org

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