

THE INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

Washington, D. C.

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To this end, it seeks by the thoroughgoing study and examination of the best administrative practice, public and private, American and foreign, to formulate those principles which lie at the basis of all sound administration, and to determine their proper adaptation to the specific needs of our public administration.

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INSTITUTE FOR GOVERNMENT RESEARCH

STUDIES IN ADMINISTRATION

THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN ADMINISTRATION

Report of a Survey made at the request
of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary
of the Interior, and submitted to him,
February 21, 1928

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith the report of the survey of the economic and social condition of the American Indians, made by the Institute for Government Research in accordance with your request of June 12, 1926.

This survey has been made under the immediate direction of Mr. Lewis Meriam of the regular staff of the Institute in cooperation with nine specialists selected for this particular project by the Institute for Government Research. The essential facts regarding the training and experience of these specialists that led to their selection are given, in what I trust will prove sufficient detail, in the foreword to the main report. This foreword describes the origin of the survey, its staff, its scope, and the methods pursued.

To repeat in this letter of transmittal what is set forth in the foreword seems unnecessary, but I should perhaps say that Mr. Meriam has worked continuously on this project from the receipt of your letter of June 12, 1926, to date. The special staff began assembling early in October, 1926. On November 12, 1926, five of them left for the field and were later joined by the others. Field work continued almost without interruption for seven months. One or more members of the special staff visited ninety-five different jurisdictions, either reservations, agencies, hospitals, or schools, and also many communities to which Indians have migrated. Practically all Western states with any considerable Indian population were included in the field work.

The time since June 12, 1927, has been spent in the preparation of the report. Because of the diversity and complexity of Indian affairs this report is necessarily voluminous. The main detailed report contains the following sections: (1) A General Policy for Indian Affairs, (2) Health, (3) Education, (4) General Economic Conditions, (5) Family and Community Life and the Activities of Women, (6) The Migrated Indians, (7) The Legal Aspects of the Indian Problem, and (8) The Missionary Activities among the Indians.

Appreciating the fact that many persons deeply interested in the broader aspects of the Indian problem cannot give the time required for a consideration of the details, we have prepared a summary which will immediately follow this letter of transmittal.

You will appreciate that in the preparation of a report of this character a choice has to be made as to the criterion to be used in measuring progress. One alternative is to compare conditions existing to-day with conditions existing when the various activities undertaken in behalf of the Indians were first begun. The other is to compare the activities as at present conducted with the work of other agencies, both public and private, engaged in comparable activities for the general population or for other special groups. This second method, in other words, may be described as comparing present conditions with the practicable ideal.

Had the Institute for Government Research considered its primary function to be to pass upon the competency and efficiency of the officers and employees of the Indian Service, it would properly have adopted as its criterion the progress made in the several activities; it would have taken the conditions at the beginning as the base line and would have given due consideration to the limitations imposed by appropriations. Such a measure is the only fair one to apply in attempting the difficult task of evaluating the services of individual employees of an organization.

The Institute, however, did not regard this approach to the subject as sufficiently fundamental and constructive. The object of the Institute was not to say whether the Indian Service has done well with the funds at its disposal but rather to look to the future and insofar as possible to indicate what remains to be done to adjust the Indians to the prevailing civilization so that they may maintain themselves in the presence of that civilization according to at least to a minimum standard of health and decency.

This use of the practicable ideal as the standard for discussion frequently makes it necessary to criticize adversely the present activities of the Indian Service. Fair-minded readers will appreciate that such criticism is not necessarily a reflection on the officers and employees of the Indian Service. Limited appropriations have often necessitated the employment of persons not possessed of the qualifications requisite for the efficient performance of the duties

of their positions, but the employees generally are as good as could be expected for the salaries paid. Frequently the number of positions is too small for the work to be done. The survey staff estimates roughly that it would take almost twice the present appropriations for the Indian Service if each of its major activities were brought abreast of the better if not the best practice of other organizations doing like work for the general population. In many, if not most cases, the survey is not revealing to responsible officers and employees conditions they do not already know. Their administrative task is to do the best they can with such funds as they are able to secure. The function of the Institute was conceived to be to compare their achievements with the practicable ideal.

In the report the effort has been made to explain the difficulties under which the Indian Service has labored. These explanations are given not in an attempt to evaluate the personnel but to show what changes must be made if the Service is to be raised to the plane of efficiency necessary to accelerate the progress of the Indians.

The members of the survey staff wish me to say clearly in this letter that in almost every activity of the Indian Service they found wide variation between the best and the worst. The best at times approaches the ideal; frequently the survey staff has been able to take as their standard for comparison the attainments of the Indian Service itself. The worst often falls far below the normal.

Inevitably where the variations between the best and the worst are wide, illustrative examples cannot be interpreted as applicable to the Service as a whole. Illustrations have been given both from the better and the poorer jurisdictions, and the effort has generally been made to give some indication as to which the example refers. It follows, therefore, that no fair-minded person will select the best in an effort to commend the Indian Service or the poorest in an effort to condemn it. The object of the survey has been not to take sides for or against the Indian Office, but to endeavor through constructive criticism to aid insofar as possible in pointing the way toward marked improvement in this important activity of the national government. That was our understanding of your request. We hope that our work may be of service to you in the difficult

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

administrative task which confronts you and your associates who are responsible for the welfare of the Indian wards of the United States.

In accordance with the practice of the Institute for Government Research the report, in preliminary form, was submitted to administrative officers of the Service to afford them an opportunity to call to our attention matters which they believed should be given consideration in the final revision.

In concluding I wish to express our appreciation of the spirit shown by the officers and employees of your Department. They have recognized that the survey should be independent and impartial, and they have not sought to influence our decision regarding the staff, the methods and the scope of the survey, or our findings and recommendations. They have, moreover, extended to us every possible courtesy and have supplied us with all the available information for which we have asked.

Very respectfully,

W. F. WILLOUGHBY,

Director, Institute for Government Research

HON. HUBERT WORK,
Secretary of the Interior

February 21, 1928

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