

A Disgusting Exploitation

by Peter Tamulonis

If you have never seen a Seminole Indian reservation, consider yourself lucky. I have, and believe me, it was a truly unsavory experience. This is what happened.

Driving down the Tami-Ami Road, on the outskirts of the Florida Everglades, I approached a sign which read, "Seminole Reservation—Next Left." I had never seen a reservation of any sort. Since I thought that this might be a unique opportunity to learn a little more about my American heritage and about the unconquerable race with which Florida is still technically at war, I turned in. As I parked my car, I noticed that I was surrounded by a fleet of Cadillacs with unusual license plates. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that the Cadillacs were owned by these so-called poor, underprivileged Seminoles. The strange license plates merely indicated that the owners were Seminoles and were thus entitled to purchase anything they desired, including gasoline, food and clothing, completely free of any form of tax. These people are not even required to file income tax. Now, I really had to know how they lived. After paying the ridiculously high price of seventy-five cents, I prepared to enter the village.

As soon as I was within the enclosure, I detected the foul stench of rotting plants and mildewed clothing. As I approached the center of the compound, I surveyed the expressionless faces of the adult Seminoles as they lazily watched a band of grubby Indian children scurry around the dirt-ridden camp. The villagers seemed apathetic toward the dilapidated condition of the reservation and toward the wretched appearance of their unkempt children. Struck by inspiration, I decided to photograph this unique element of Americana. I soon learned that the inhabitants were eager to be photographed. A small group of villagers rapidly assembled for an impromptu picture. However, as I began to focus my camera, all the children in the portrait extended their arms, and while clenching and unclenching their fists, shouted, "Money! Money!" Even a tiny babe, still too young to walk, cried out while nestled in its mother's brawny arms, "Gimme! Gimme!" After paying the bribe, I finally snapped the picture. But why did I take the picture? Did I want as a keepsake this picture of unwashed Indian children, clothed in tattered

and dishevelled attire, posing before an unordered array of shabby huts?

The reservation was closing. All the tourists were asked to leave.

I got into my car. However, before I drove away, I watched with disbelief as the Indians, their day's work completed, filed out of their reservation, entered their respective Cadillacs, and drove home—to their comfortable, two-television homes.

I do not disapprove of anyone attempting to make a living, but to coldly exploit one's children, one's ancestry, and one's ethnic culture merely to "make a buck" is not only disillusioning, but also disgusting.

