

Vision Statement for The Buffalo Trust

The Buffalo Trust was a non-profit foundation for the preservation and return of their cultural heritage to Native Americans, especially children, founded on the conviction that the loss of cultural identity—and the theft of the sacred—is the most insidious and dangerous threat to the survival of Native American culture in our time.

Vision Statement

by N. Scott Momaday

*"The buffalo is more than an animal. It is the sun's shadow.
Our lives are bound to it. If it lives, we live.
If it dies, we die. It is our life and our living shield.*

These words were spoken to me several years ago by an old Kiowa man at Medicine Park, Oklahoma. I hear them often in my mind. In the near distance were buffalo, mostly cows and calves. The newborn calves were lying here and there in the tall grass of the rolling plains. They were orange and umber colored, and they were beautiful. The sky was clear and blue. The Wichita Mountains were lofty and sharply defined. It was a day out of Genesis, the first of all days. This is where, according to Kiowa oral tradition, the buffalo emerged from the underground, and it is where, when the Plains culture came to an end, they returned to the earth. The Kiowa believe that they will emerge again, and the people and their animal representation of the sun will flourish once more.

The buffalo is an appropriate sign for the sacred in the American Indian world. It stands for the many elements of sacred aspect which have been lost to Indian peoples. I believe that the greatest threat to the survival of American Indians -- more than the wars, the disease, the poverty, the discrimination, and the European occupation -- is the removal of the spiritual matrix of traditional life, the theft of the sacred. From the beginning, American Indians have centered their world views upon profound belief in the spiritual. That belief has become tentative in our time. Fewer and fewer Indian young people are acquiring those aspects of sacred being which have always defined them. I am deeply concerned to expose this theft of the sacred, and to see that American Indians, young people especially, are allowed to define themselves in terms of the spiritual values that inform their ancient heritage.

The Buffalo Trust will be a place, on sacred ground, where Indian people can come immediately into the presence of sacred matter -- objects, stories, music, dances, feasts, ceremonies of all kinds. I envision the Buffalo Trust as a physical, geographic place, and eventually places, study centers; but the Buffalo Trust will also carry the experience of the sacred to Indian people wherever they are located, in outreach activities directed both to Indian audiences and broader audiences. The Buffalo

Trust will afford opportunities for elders and medicine people to share their wisdom with others, for scholars to exchange ideas in an atmosphere of learning and participation, for Indian and non-Indian people to congregate freely in a spirit of celebration, good will, community, and reverence for the sacred and human being. Above all, the Buffalo Trust will provide experience of sacred space where American Indian young people can and will regain that sense of the sacred that distinguishes them as the inheritors of a rich and venerable culture, that will throughout their lives enable them to know who they are in the spirit of their unique inheritance.

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