

The Civil Rights Movement and MLK - Sidney Byrd - OSEU #6

If you left the reservation without permission, you could be shot as a hostile, yeah. So that's what happened to the Bighorn. They were trying to force the Indians to come back to the reservations and not wander around. Anybody else could go anywhere as they wanted to. Indians had to, you know. So we have, we're the last to become citizens of our own land. We're the only ethnic group that has a bureau. We're the only ethnic group that has to get permission to sell our land. Anything we do. So we're the most controlled ethnic group.

I marched with Martin Luther King. I was in Birmingham, Selma, Jackson, Montgomery. You know, I was introduced to Rosa Parks. The motel that we stayed in in Birmingham was bombed. I saw the worst in people. Saw the best in people. Saw people willing to lay down their lives for racial justice. It was so-called peace officers that released the attack dogs on little black children. Turned the water hoses on them. The motel that we stayed in, Gaston Motel in Birmingham, was bombed. But we didn't meet. We weren't there at the time.

We would break, go to a new location, go separate routes, meet another. We never stayed in one place. Too dangerous. I was the only Native American on the commission. Dr. Martin Luther King was going to be the speaker for Johnson C. Smith University, an all-Black college. So our commission sat on a platform as special guests. Next to me was an empty chair. I was looking out, and I saw security people checking cameras and handbags and everything. And all of a sudden, under heavy security, Martin Luther King was brought in. And I saw the people checking.

And I got to thinking, supposing someone shot and missed. I'm sitting next to him. And as if to read my thoughts, someone blew up this paper bag and, ow! It must have showed on my face because Martin Luther King reached over and touched my knee and said, Cool it, Sid. He knew he was going to die a martyr's death. And that's the way you get support for your cause. To die a martyr's death. He knew he was going to die a martyr's death. I've been to the mountaintops. So I've had some experiences.