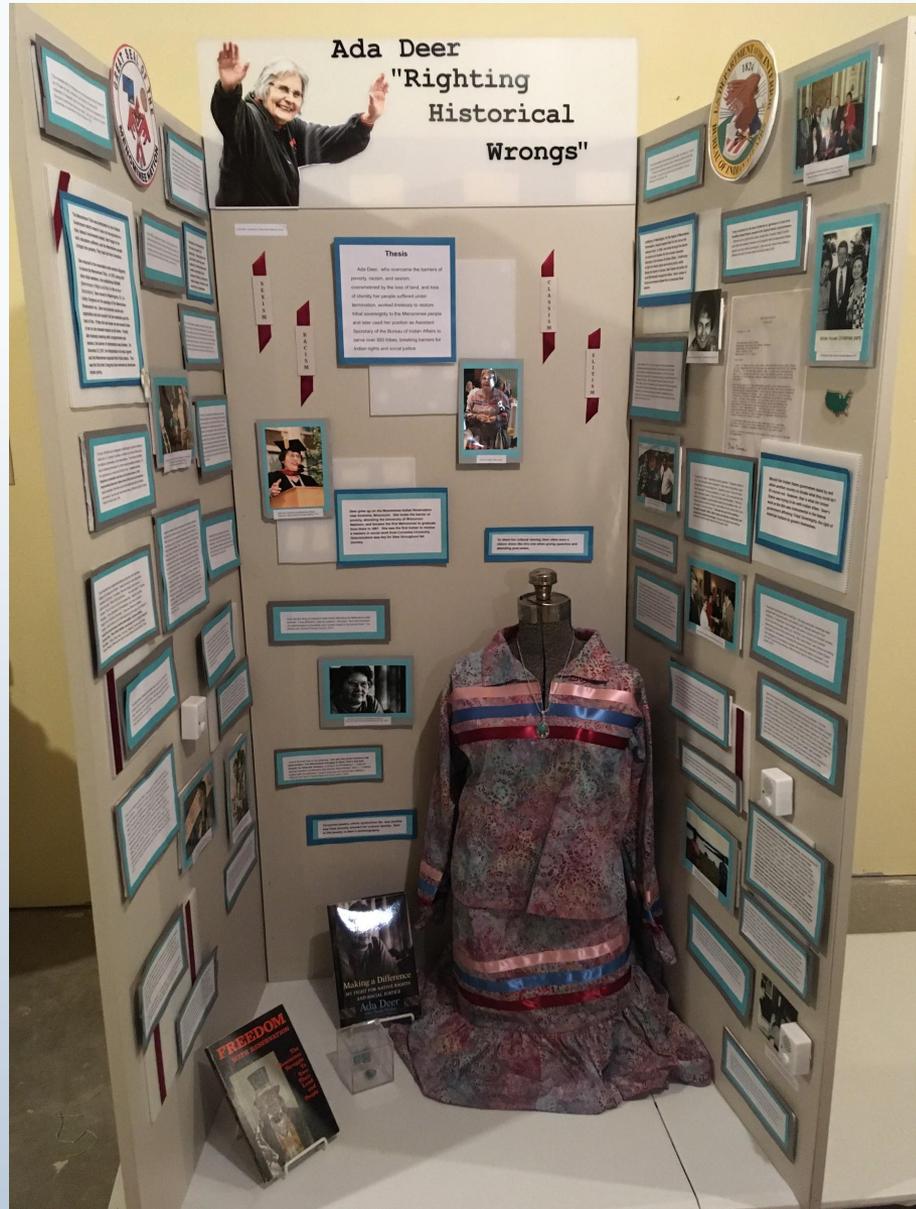


Ada Deer “Righting Historical Wrongs”

Theresa Murphy
Carolyn Sasse

Senior Division
Group Exhibit

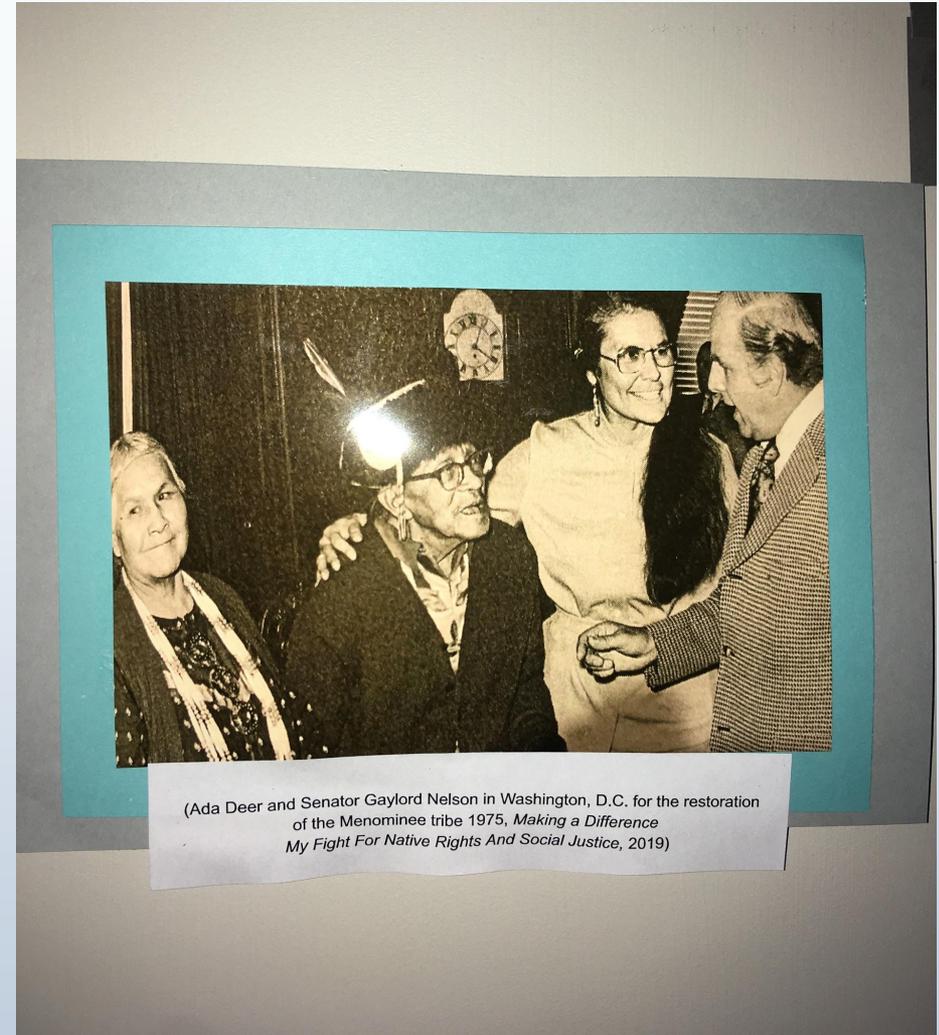
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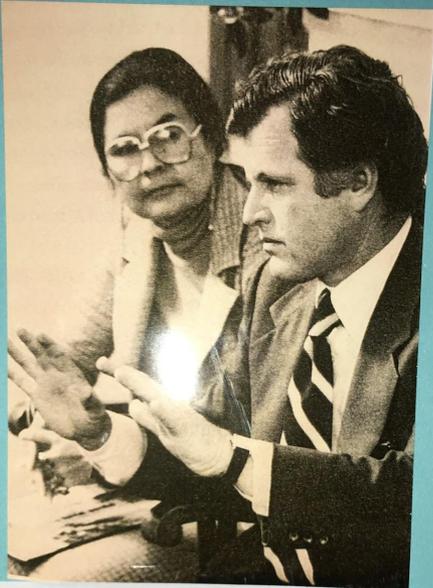


"Termination represented traditional Menominee way of life with a expected immediate Men and life styles. The truth changes imposed on us way of life imposed upon Indian Affairs to Repeal Termination Act"



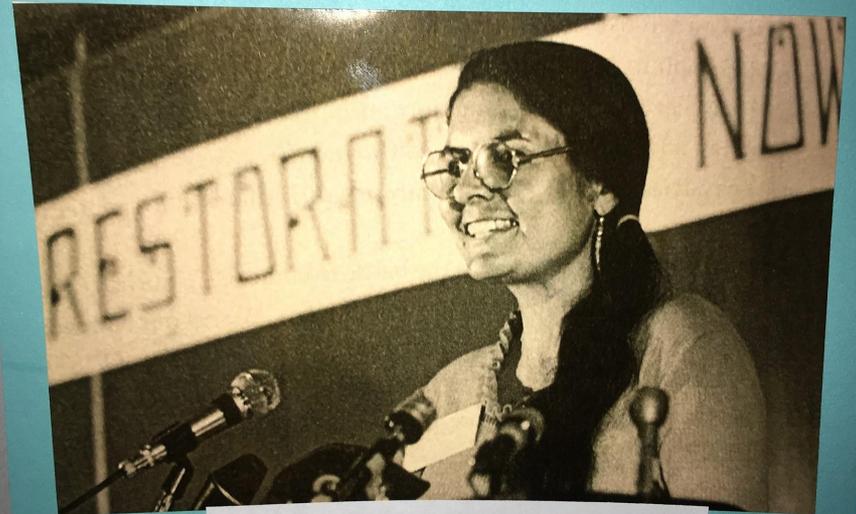
(Ada Deer and Senator Gaylord Nelson in Washington, D.C. for the restoration of the Menominee tribe 1975, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

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(Ada Deer with Senator Ted Kennedy, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"In the midst of all this, someone from Senator Edward Kennedy's office called and said the senator wanted to meet with us in Milwaukee.We made our case for restoration and told him that we were in the process of drafting a bill to restore our trust relationship with the federal government."
(Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)



(Ada Deer 1972, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"The immediate effect of Termination on our tribe was the loss of most of our 100 year old rights, protections, and services. No amount of explanation or imagination prior to termination could have prepared us for the shock of what those losses have meant." (Ada Deer, *Testimony to Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs to Repeal Termination*, 1973)

The Menominee Tribe was terminated by the Federal Government which means it was not recognized as a tribe, federal involvement ended, land began to be sold, education suffered, and the Menominee people plunged into poverty. They had lost their identities.

Deer returned to the reservation and worked diligently to restore the Menominee Tribe. In 1970, along with other tribal members, she established DRUMS (Determination of Rights and Unity for Menominee Stockholders). Deer moved to Washington, D.C. to lobby Congress for the passage of the Menominee Restoration Act. Deer encountered racism and opposition but she couldn't let her emotions get the best of her. If they did she knew no one would listen to her so she showed respect at all times. Finally after tirelessly meeting with congressmen and senators, the barrier of termination was broken. On December 22, 1973 the Restoration Act was signed and the Menominee regained their tribal status. This was the first time Congress had reversed an American Indian policy.

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"Termination represented a gigantic and revolutionary forced change in the traditional Menominee way of life. Congress expected us to replace our Indian way of life with a complicated corporate style of living. Congress expected immediate Menominee assimilation of non-Indian culture, values, and life styles. The truth is that we Menominee have never wanted such changes imposed on us, any more than white people would want an Indian way of life imposed upon them." (Ada Deer, *Testimony to Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs to Repeal Termination*, 1973)

"By the 1960's, my people were in despair. Poverty had sunk to new depths and we faced the loss of our land, tribal identity, and culture. My own personal choice was clear. I had to leave law school, return to the reservation, and create a coalition of tribal leaders to reverse termination." (Ada Deer, *Statement Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs*, 1993)

Termination of the Menominee Tribe was not meant to be detrimental. Freeing tribes from government control was seen positively. The Menominee were viewed economically strong because of owning a prosperous lumber company. Therefore, they were first to be terminated.

"From a cultural viewpoint: regardless of how much money is spent in Menominee County, the essential problem will remain. The government is asking us to make a success of the termination policy which we have bitterly opposed from the start. We are expected to give up our Indianness and adopt a way of life none of us want. Such an experiment like this can never work. It will only continue to impoverish our people." (Ada Deer, *Testimony to Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs to Repeal Termination*, 1973)

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Left Panel or Side 1

"I targeted committee members first because the bills dealing with Indians get referred to the House and Senate Committees on Interior and Insular Affairs and then to the respective Subcommittees on Indian Affairs, but I saw everyone I could. I made appointments, showed up and said the same thing to almost everybody; "Hello, I'm Ada Deer, member of the Menominee Indian Tribe, and I'm here to talk about Menominee termination and the Menominee restoration bill." I then summarized the bill. Most members of Congress didn't know what in the world I was talking about. Indians were not on anyone's radar screen. Their ignorance astonished and angered me. Indians were here before they were, but these people knew nothing about us except the stereotypes - the Indian on the nickel or Plains Indians in feathers on horseback. Menominees do not fit those stereotypes. They are a forest tribe that once lived in small groups and hunted, fished, and gathered wild rice. Now they work in their forest and mill or their homes, although they still hunt and fish. Most politicians also knew nothing about termination. Presumably they were more knowledgeable about other pending legislation. I was angry, and I didn't let anybody shunt me aside."

(Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

Additional Elements

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"In the early 70's she galvanized a successful movement to reverse the ill-fated policy of Menominee Federal Termination. This took extraordinary vision, tenacity, and grit. Ada presided over the drafting of a Constitution, the development of our Trust and Management Agreement and the reopening of our Tribal enrollment. In addition, we were faced with literally reconstructing a government and implementing the vast array of services associated with such. Implementing the mandates of the Menominee Restoration Act was awesome and ultimately required managing nearly 200 employees and a multi-million dollar budget. Ada achieved this with grace and dignity, while never being deterred by detractors and others less informed." (Shirley Daly, *Letter to Bruce Babbitt Vice Chairperson Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin*)

"Senator William Proxmire and Congressman David Obey, both of Wisconsin and seemingly sympathetic to Indians, sent a draft bill to DRUMS and MEI. ...The council decided that the bill was not specific enough and resolved that the Menominees would work with Judicare and NARF to draft their own bill." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

Additional Elements

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"I also met with the congressional liaison at the BIA, who had been talking to the lawyers in Interior. I asked him why he was discussing restoration with them. He replied, "We were talking about amend..." I almost shouted, "Whoa! Stop right there." ... "You said amend?" I almost shouted. "No, no, no, no, no! Let me explain this. English is my first language. I am a graduate of UW-Madison, and I have a master's degree from Columbia University. I know the difference between 'amend', which means you're tinkering around the edges, and 'repeal!" I **found his unconscious racism lamentably common among bureaucrats. They think Indians can barely put one foot in front of the other.** "Okay, Ada, okay," he said, "Repeal." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"I targeted committee members to get referred to the House of Representatives and then to the relevant subcommittee. I went to almost everybody in the Menominee Indian Tribe, and I'm here to talk about the Menominee restoration bill. Congress didn't know what was going on not on anyone's radar screen. Indians were here before me. Indians were here before the termination. Presumably they were in feathers on horseback, but they are a forest tribe that once gathered wild rice. Now they are still hunt and gather, although they still hunt and gather for termination. Presumably they were pending legislation. I was a member of the Menominee Indian Tribe." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"The Menominees already had decided that "amend" was not what they wanted, and he was not going to undermine their will so long as I was on duty. We weren't asking for the moon. We were asking for restoration of our land and tribe." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

I was on an airplane once when I recognized a Michigan congressman John Conyers, ... He was up in first class and I was in coach, but that didn't stop me! I left my briefcase in coach, and went striding up to first class. ... I said, "Excuse me Congressman Conyers. Could I have a minute of your time? I'm Ada Deer, member of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. I'm working on the repeal of termination. This is the Menominee Restoration Act and it is as important to Menominees and to Indians nationwide as *Brown v. Board of Education* was to you." "Come to my office," he said. I replied, "Thank you. And who should I see?" He answered, "Just come and see me." ... Most people would have been reluctant to disturb a congressman in first class. Not me." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"I thought I'm going to call Melvin Laird...now secretary of defense. I called up his office at the Pentagon and said, "I am from Wisconsin. I'm a member of the Menominee Tribe. Secretary Laird was our congressman, he is very familiar with our tribe, and he knows the issues confronting us. I need him to call the White House and get them to move on our restoration bill." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"At the White House - Smiling, they asked, "What did you do?" I confessed, "I called Mr. Laird." They were incredulous: "You called the secretary of defense?" By now I was enjoying myself: "Of course. This is an important bill. We've got to get moving on this." They were amazed, first, that I would have the chutzpah to call Secretary Laird and, second, that I could get the secretary of defense to call them." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

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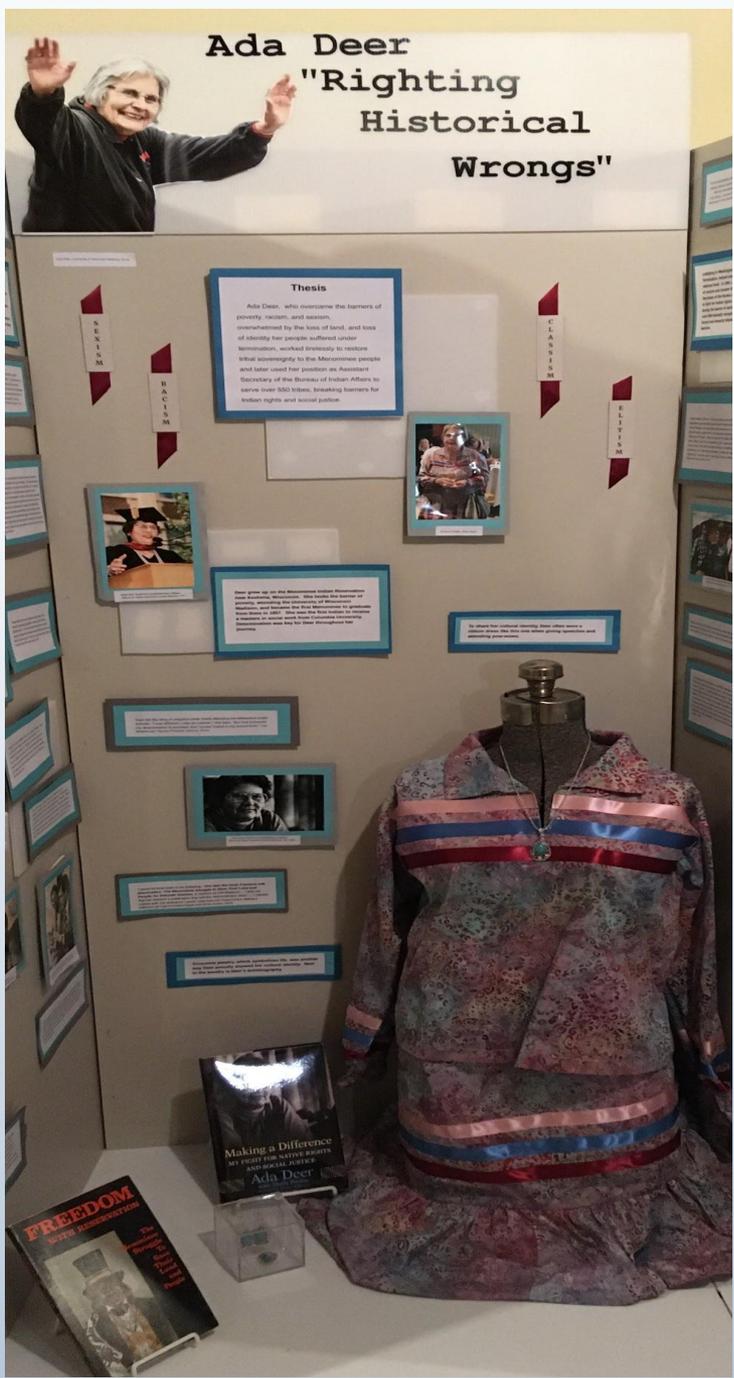
"The House of Representatives conducted a roll call vote on October 16th... and then finally it was over: 404 in favor and 3 against. On December 7th the Senate passed the bill, and on December 22nd President Nixon signed the Menominee Restoration Act into law." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"We could hardly believe it. A small tribe in Wisconsin had persuaded the United States to reverse its Indian policy." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"Against all odds, we invented a new policy - restoration. Finally, after grueling work by more people than I could ever possibly thank, our coalition pushed the Menominee Restoration Act through Congress. This legislation is a vivid reminder of how great a government can be when it is large enough to admit and rectify its mistakes. It is also indicative of my tribe's spirit, tenacity, and ability to hold other sovereign entities accountable." (Ada Deer, *Statement Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs*, 1993)

Center Panel or

Side 2



Graphics from Center Panel or Side 2



(Ada Deer Testimony to Muhlenberg College,
Wisconsin State Historical Society Madison, WI)



(Ada Deer Testimony to Muhlenberg College,
Wisconsin State Historical Society Madison, WI, 1995)

Additional Elements from Left Panel or Side 2

(Ada Deer, University of Wisconsin Madison, 2018)

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Thesis

Ada Deer, who overcame the barriers of poverty, racism, and sexism, overwhelmed by the loss of land, and loss of identity her people suffered under termination, worked tirelessly to restore tribal sovereignty to the Menominee people and later used her position as Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to serve over 550 tribes, breaking barriers for Indian rights and social justice.

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(Ada Deer Testimony to Marquette College, Wisconsin State Historical Society Madison, WI)



(Picture Credits, Betty Zepa)

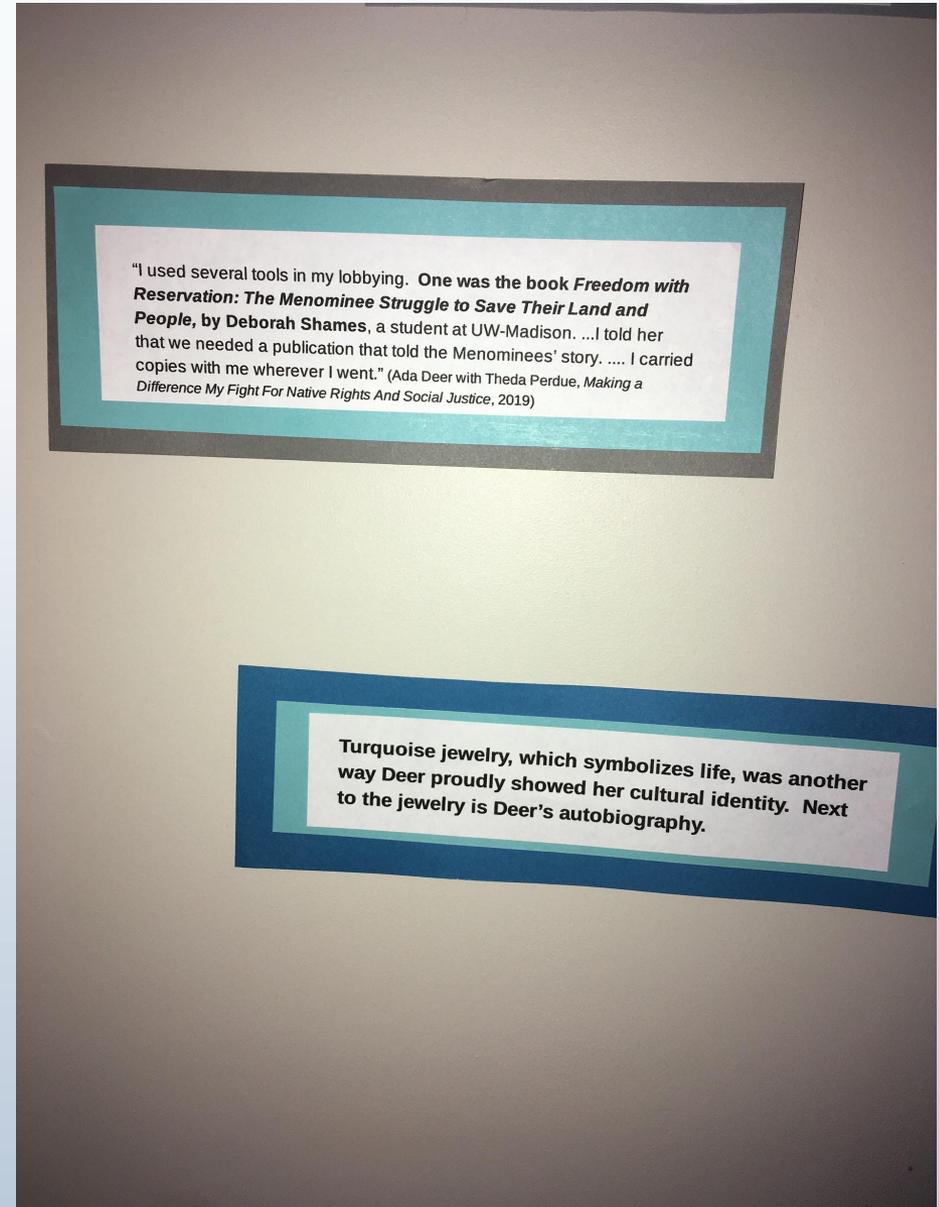
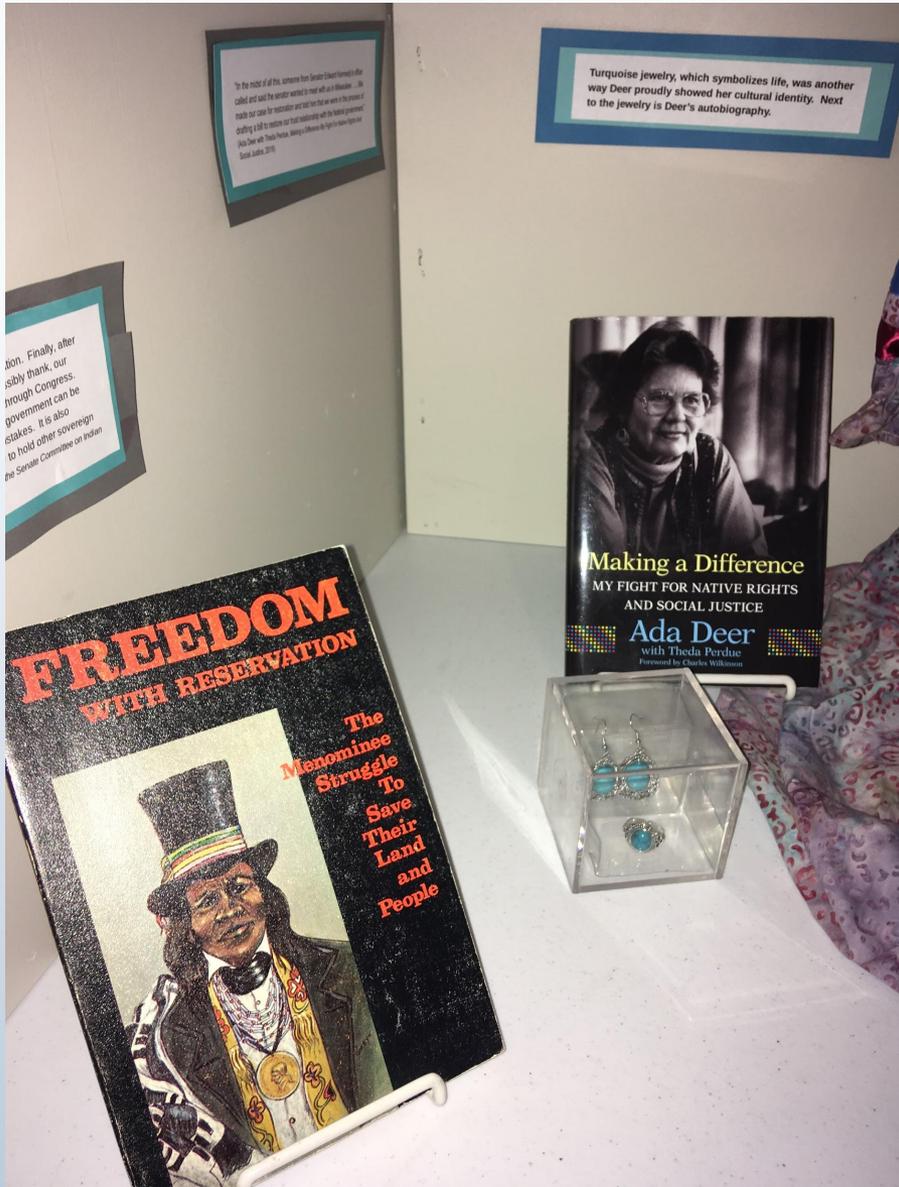
Deer grew up on the Menominee Indian Reservation near Keshena, Wisconsin. She broke the barriers of

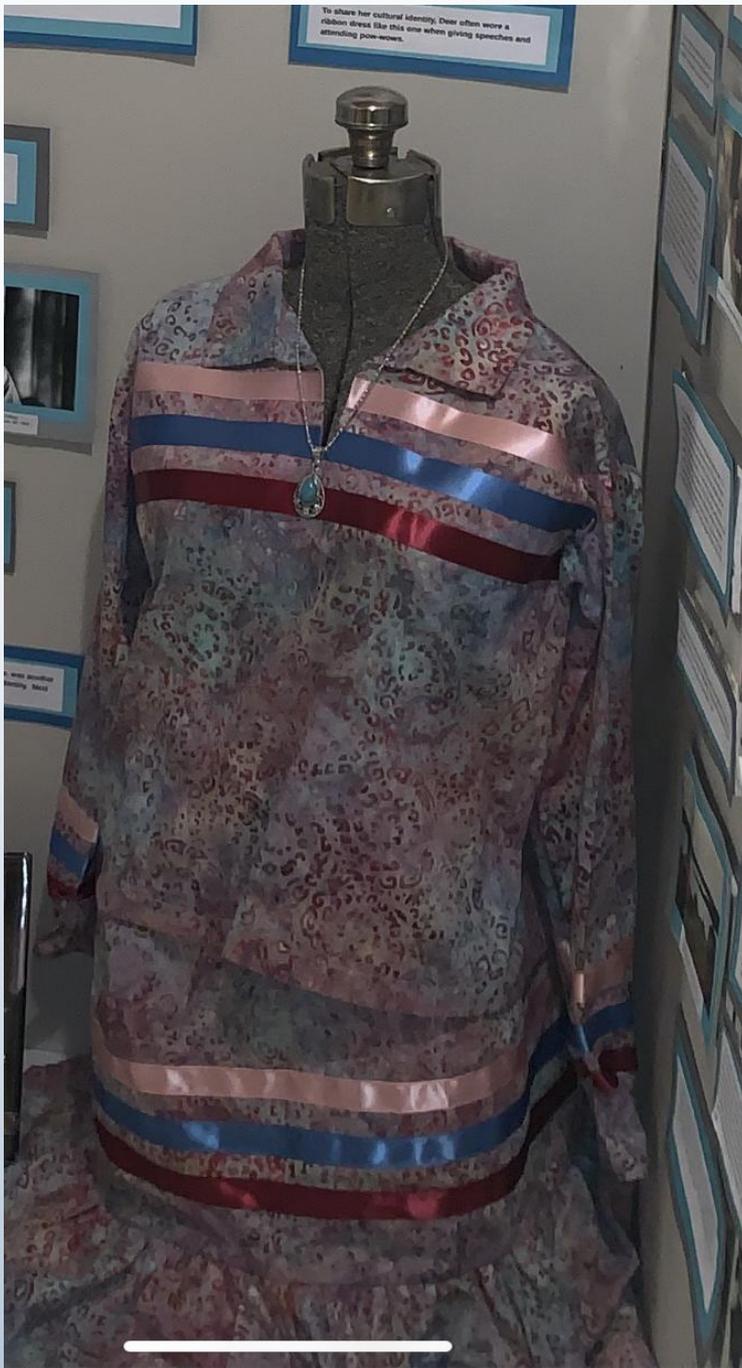
Additional Elements from Left Panel or Side 2

Deer grew up on the Menominee Indian Reservation near Keshena, Wisconsin. She broke the barrier of poverty, attending the University of Wisconsin Madison, and became the first Menominee to graduate from there in 1957. She was the first Indian to receive a masters in social work from Columbia University. Determination was key for Deer throughout her journey.

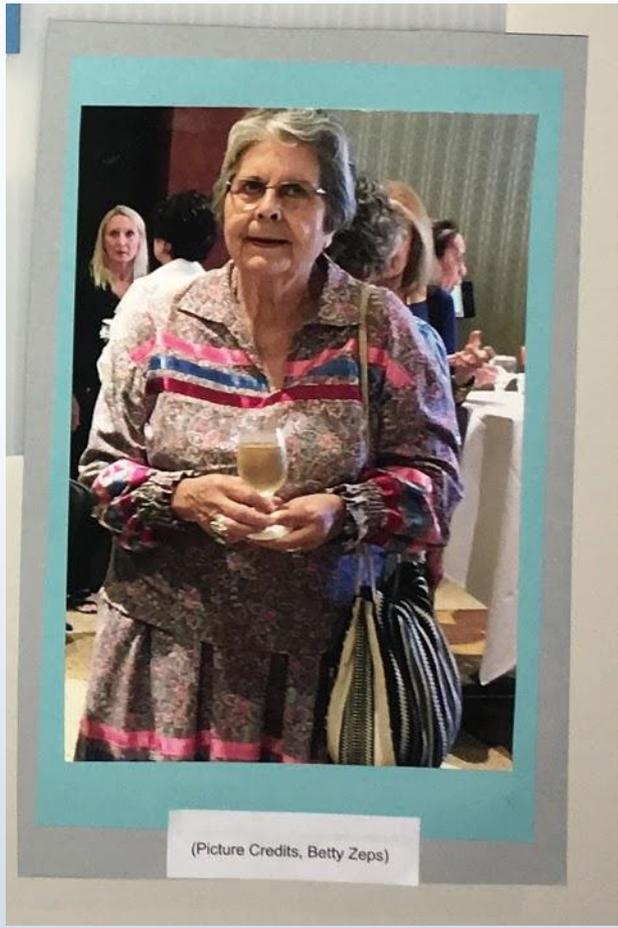
Deer felt the sting of prejudice while briefly attending the Milwaukee public schools, "I was different; I was an outsider," she says, "But that increased my determination to succeed, and I buried myself in my school work." (Tim Mickleburgh, *Paying it Forward*, Isthmus, 2015)

Additional Elements from Left Panel or Side 2





To share her cultural identity, Deer often wore a ribbon dress like this one when giving speeches and attending pow-wows.



(Picture Credits, Betty Zeps)

Additional Elements from Center Panel or Side 2

To share her cultural identity, Deer often wore a ribbon dress like this one when giving speeches and attending pow-wows.

Graphics from Right Panel or Side 3



(Ada Deer with Choctaw Indians on day of recognition,
Wisconsin State Historical Society Madison, WI)

Graphics from Right Panel or Side 3



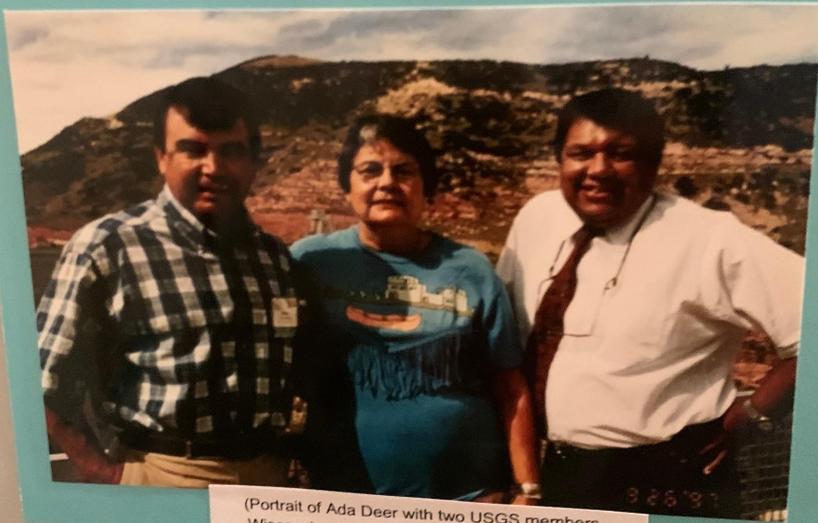
(Portrait of Ada Deer, Wisconsin Women Making History, 2015)



White House Christmas party

(Wisconsin State Historical Society Madison, WI)

Graphics from Right Panel or Side 3

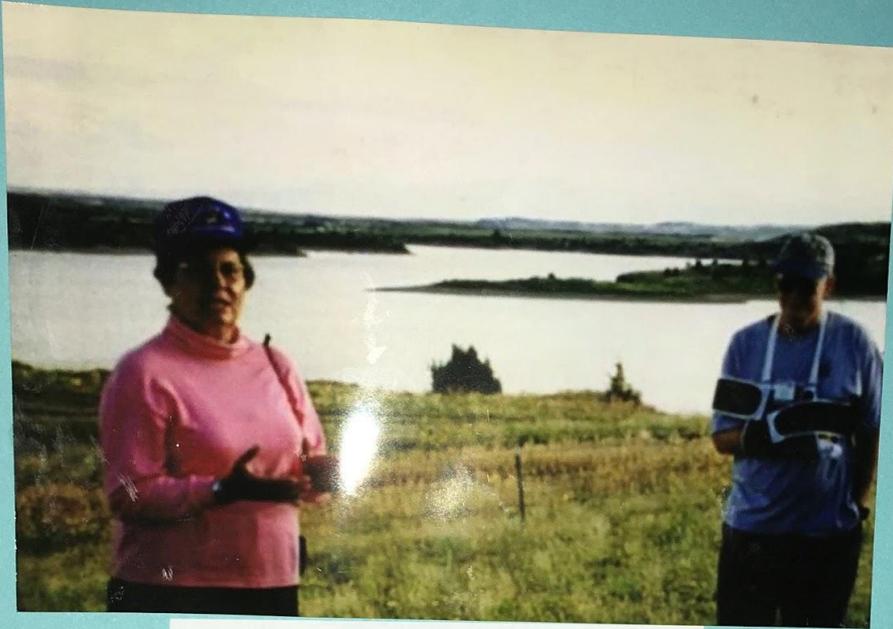


(Portrait of Ada Deer with two USGS members,
Wisconsin Historical Society Madison, WI, 1997)



(Ada Deer with President Reagan, National Archives, 1981)

Graphics from Right Panel or Side 3



(Portrait of Ada Deer on the USGS field trip,
Wisconsin Historical Society Madison, WI, 1997)



(Ada Deer Swearing in ceremony 1993,
Wisconsin Historical Society Madison, WI, 1997)



Additional Elements from Right

Panel or Side 3

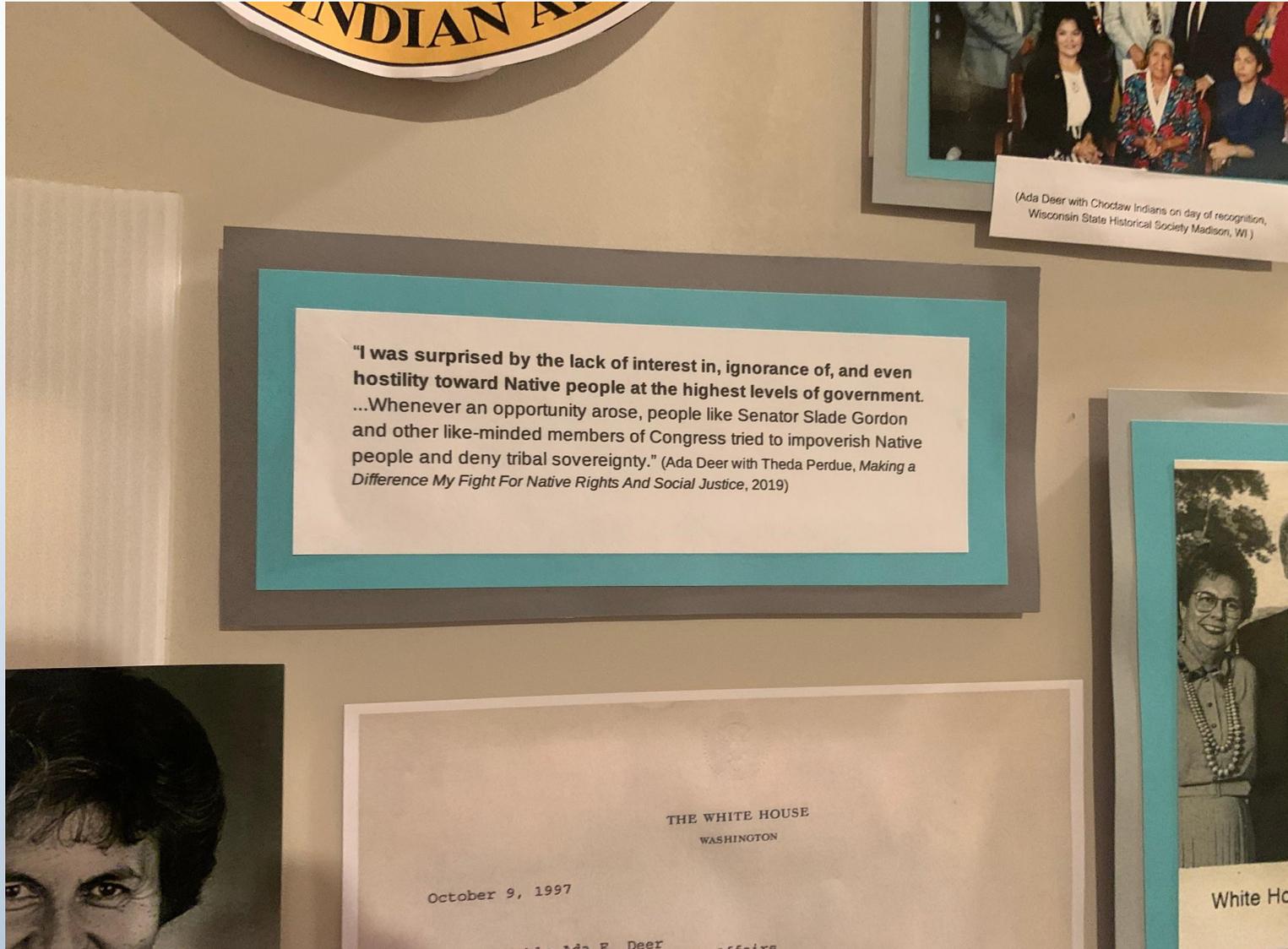
"In this administration, Indian tribes are at the table, not locked out. We are making progress toward consulting tribes on decisions affecting their lives. We must now rededicate ourselves to helping tribes prepare for the 21st Century. I am proud to say that I am part of that effort." (Ada Deer, Memorandum to Bruce Babbitt, 1994)

Lobbying in Washington, for the repeal of Menominee Termination, helped prepare Deer for her role at the national level. In 1993, she broke through the barrier of sexism and became the first woman Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Continuing to fight for Indian rights and social justice, while facing the barrier of racism, Deer helped set policy for over 550 federally recognized tribes. Deer's sense of humor and tenacity helped her to overcome those barriers.



Additional Elements from Right

Panel or Side 3



Additional Elements from Right

Panel or Side 3

"Some battles I did win. During my tenure, the Clinton administration established government-to-government relationships with 226 Alaska Native Villages, and expanded self-governance to 180 tribes through annual funding agreements, and approved gaming compacts between 130 tribes and 24 states. Fifty-Two percent of Indian Schools came under tribal, rather than BIA, management, and I approved the federal recognition of four tribes. My work had been exciting, rewarding, and sometimes frustrating, but I was looking forward to whatever challenges the future might bring." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)



(Portrait of Ada Deer, *Wisconsin Women Making History*, 2019)

Additional Elements from Right Panel or Side 3

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 9, 1997

The Honorable Ada E. Deer
Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ada:

I want to thank you for your many contributions during your tenure at the Department of the Interior as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. It is with deep regret that I accept your resignation, and I will always be grateful that you agreed to serve as Acting Chairman of the National Gaming Commission until a successor was confirmed.

You can be proud of your dedicated service to my Administration, your hard work on behalf of the Tribal Nations, and your success in addressing the complex issues involving the Indian gaming industry. Much work remains to be done, but, with the help of your strong leadership, we have already made significant progress in pursuing tribal economic development, religious and spiritual freedom, quality education for Native Americans, and strengthening the government-to-government relationship that is central to the Federal Trust responsibility. Building upon the cooperation, understanding, and respect we have developed during the past four years, we can all look forward to improved relations with Indian Country for years to come.

I'm confident that your skills and commitment will continue to serve you well in all your endeavors, and on behalf of all Americans, I extend my deepest thanks for a job well done.

Hillary joins me in extending best wishes for every future success and happiness.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton

Additional Elements from Right Panel or Side

3

Bill Clinton

"Excuse me" I said, "I would like to ask a question." Everyone stared at me. "Have the tribes been consulted?" There was a long silence, and I thought that no one had heard me. I raised my voice, "Have the tribes been consulted?" No one answered, so I said, "I can conclude from the silence that they haven't. This is the Clinton administration. There is a policy of consultation, and the tribes need to be consulted on this. All these decisions cannot be made in area offices or the central office here. We need to consult the tribes." **That was the end of the meeting. I thought to myself, "Well, I didn't make any friends in that room, but at least they heard the message."** (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

Additional Elements from Right Panel or Side 3

Would the United States government stand by and allow another country to dictate what they could do? Of course not. However, that is what the United States was trying to do with Indian tribes. Deer's work at the BIA was instrumental in the federal government affirming Tribal Sovereignty, the right of American Indians to govern themselves.

"Assistant secretary was a hard job. My days and often evenings were packed with appointments and events, and I always seemed to be traveling. Furthermore, the budget cuts were a source of constant anxiety. Every time the budget came up, I felt like I was singing just another depressing verse of the same song. But I also knew I was doing something important by constantly reminding the government that the United States had obligations to the Native people who land the nation occupied." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

Additional Elements from Right Panel or Side 3

"Today, more than 200 tribes are operating under self-governance agreements, an increase of 300% since I became Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs." (Ada Deer, *National Congress of American Indians*, 1996)

"Ada has been the catalyst for significant changes in the way the Department approaches Indian Affairs," said Secretary Babbitt. "Her priority has been on righting historical wrongs. She has worked to resolve long standing disputes and to settle problems without long, expensive court battles. Ada has overseen the transfer of greater authority to tribal governments, and, as a result, tribes are better equipped and more empowered than ever before. Her accomplishments over the last three and a half years are just the most recent chapter in a lifetime of outstanding public service and leadership." (Ada Deer, *Office of Secretary for Immediate Release*, 1997)

Additional Elements from Right Panel or Side 3

"We think most of all about the future of our young people. On this summer's night tens of thousands of girls and boys across Indian Country will go to sleep. Some in my Wisconsin homeland will hear the vibrant sounds I heard many years ago in the cabin where I grew up. Others will hear the wind in the Douglas fir trees at Warm Springs, the surging current of the great Missouri at Fort Peck, or the song of the canyon wren calling out from a redrock monument at Navajo. There is no reason why they cannot grow up to live in prosperity, in good health, with excellent education, in clean environments, and immersed in their rich traditions."
(Ada Deer, *Statement Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs*, 1993)

Additional Elements

from Right Panel or

Side 3

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(Ada Deer, Statement Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, 1993)



"Anti-Indian prejudice on Capitol Hill was obvious. At one hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Washington Senator Slade Gorton asked me how long these welfare payments to Indians were going to continue. I could not believe it. I was certain he knew better. "Excuse me Senator," I said. "These are not welfare payments. As you know, this country was built on Indian land with Indian resources, and treaties lay out the nation's obligations to Indians, and treaties are the supreme law of the land. These are permanent obligations and will continue." **I could hear the air being sucked out of the room, but I would not cave in to Slade Gorton. I realized that he was expressing the views of many people, that Indians are just welfare dependents who should be grateful for what they got and that the government was doing too much for them, but silence on my part might have been interpreted as acceptance. I was not having that!"**
(Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice, 2019)

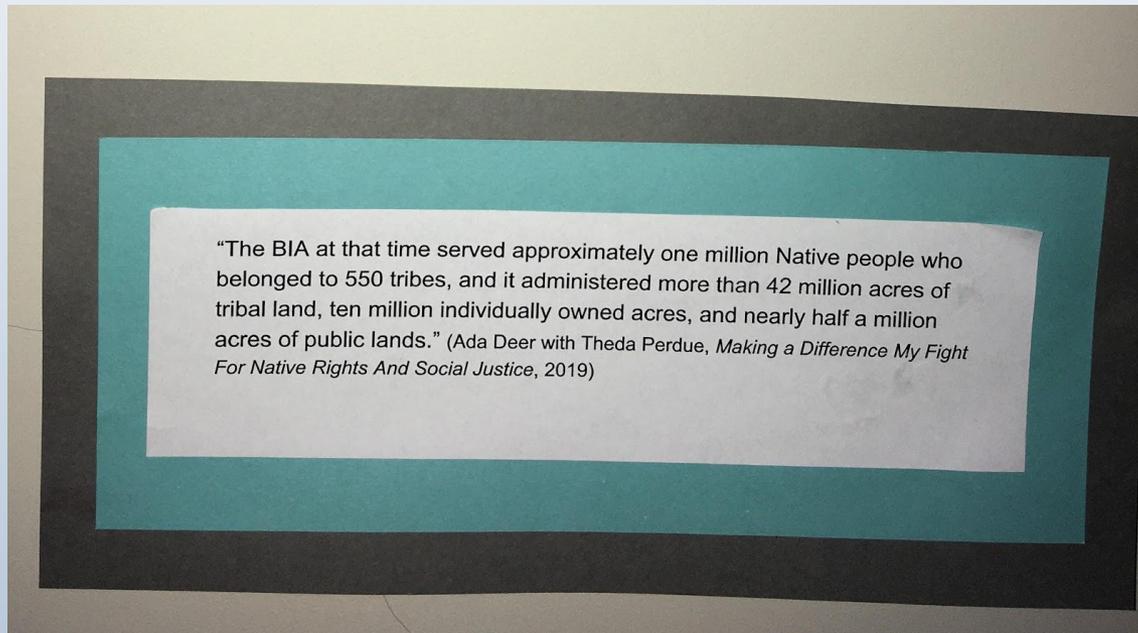
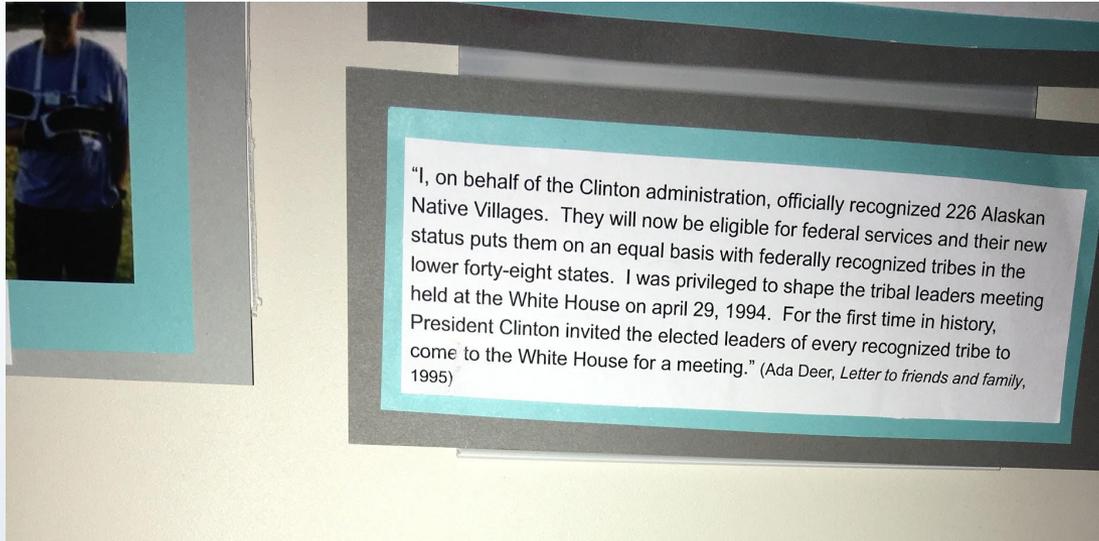
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"The challenges were enormous but the Deer was there to work. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 had empowered tribes to exercise their sovereignty and to enter into contracts with the federal government for services. In one sense, Indians now had the authority to shape their own destiny, but the loss of land and resources as well as decades of federal paternalism followed by efforts to terminate tribes had left serious problems in Indian Country." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

"The Listening Conference was an historic event; it changed the dynamic of the government-to-government relationship. We listened, we heard and we will act!" (Ada Deer, *Memorandum to Bruce Babbitt*, 1994)

Additional Media and/or Artifacts



Additional Media and/or Artifacts



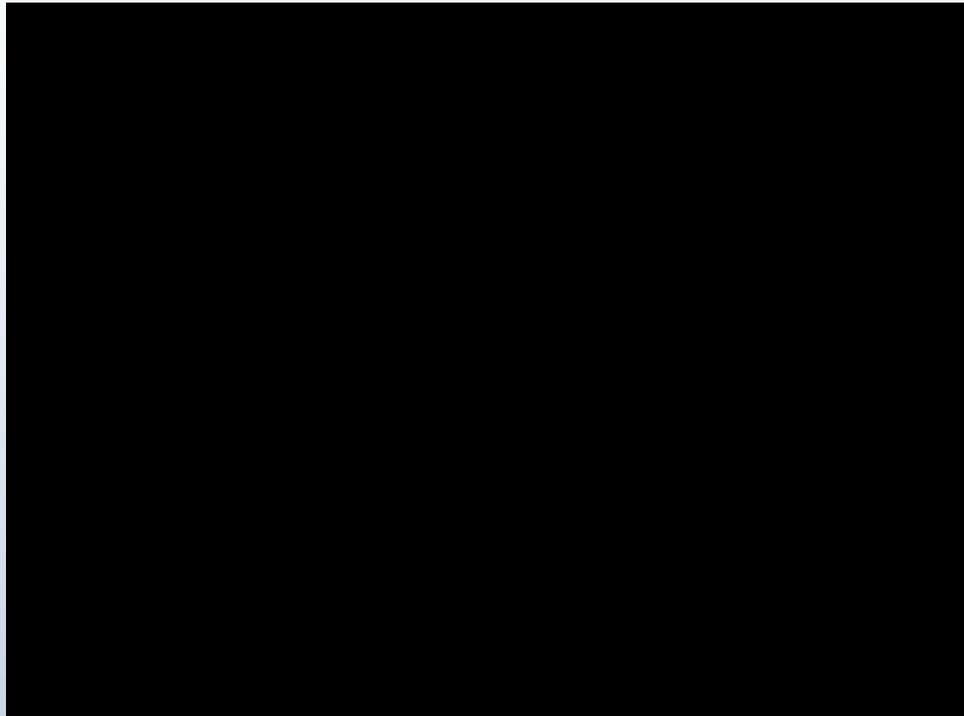
(Ada Deer Swearing in ceremony 1993,
Wisconsin Historical Society Madison, WI, 1997)

"The federal government also has a trust responsibility to protect tribes, but tribal sovereignty means that tribes have the right to manage their own affairs and to set citizenship criteria and determine who meets those criteria." (Ada Deer with Theda Perdue, *Making a Difference My Fight For Native Rights And Social Justice*, 2019)

Media Device Content

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Media from panel one.



From phone interview with
Ada Deer

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Media from panel three.



From phone interview with
Ada Deer



From phone interview with
Theda Perdue