

# Endangered Tribe



A Yanoama youngster from a tribe that lives near the Tototobi River peers through a tear in a screen. (AP)

## Civilization Thrusts Itself Into Yanoamas' Lifestyle

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TOTOTOBİ RİVER, Brazil (AP) — New pressures upon the Yanoama Indians of the Amazon Basin threaten to disrupt their uniquely primitive lifestyle.

Anthropologists fear that the nearly 5,000 Yanoamas in Brazil, in contact with civilization for only the past 15 years, are being inundated with missionaries trying to convert them to Christianity, with commercial interests wanting to exploit their tribal lands, and with representatives of a central government anxious to integrate the natives into the mass of the population.

"These people are living like some of the tribes encountered by the Lewis and Clark expedition in the U.S. Pacific Northwest early last century," one anthropologist along this remote tributary of the Amazon River told a visiting reporter. "But everything seems to be moving toward the destruction and deterioration of the social and economic conditions of the Indians."

The pressures were not immediately visible at the central Yanoama settlement on the Tototobi River close to Venezuela where about 80 people and a half dozen missionaries live near a small dirt airstrip. Ten years ago it took 29 days to travel by canoe to the nearest populated area at Boa Vista in Roraima province, but now planes fly the 425 miles from Manaus in a couple of hours.

Healthy-looking children were happily swinging on vines, or plunging into the swift-flowing river. They eagerly pulled on bows to shoot arrows accurately into the trees. Hens were being treated as pets, and neither they nor the eggs are eaten, the Yanoamas dining instead on the birds of the forest, and monkeys and lizards.

Some of the children had already been initiated into the ritual decorations of the tribe. Their lips, noses and cheeks had been pierced with sharpened twigs, and vegeta-

ble dye was smudged across their faces.

The missionaries said many children die because of infectious diseases and minor illnesses. Missionary Keith Wardlaw said some progress has been made in that "quite often now if the witch doctor fails to do his thing they will ask us for some medicine."

One repugnant tribal practice involves young mothers who become pregnant while nursing a child. Generally they are made to abort, but should the baby be born, then sometimes it is killed so that the older child will have sufficient milk and become stronger.

But Wardlaw said proudly that "we have the largest number of babies living in our maloca (communal house) than any other in Brazil."

Blood parasites, malaria and dysentery frequently kill many Yanoamas before they reach 50. The natives' animistic beliefs have greatly hindered their acceptance of hygienic measures.

Anthropologists fear that a far greater long-term threat is coming with civilization. Already a highway has been punched through the jungle to within 80 miles of the Tototobi River settlement, and there is concern that land frauds and other schemes to deprive the Indians of their rights may be coming.

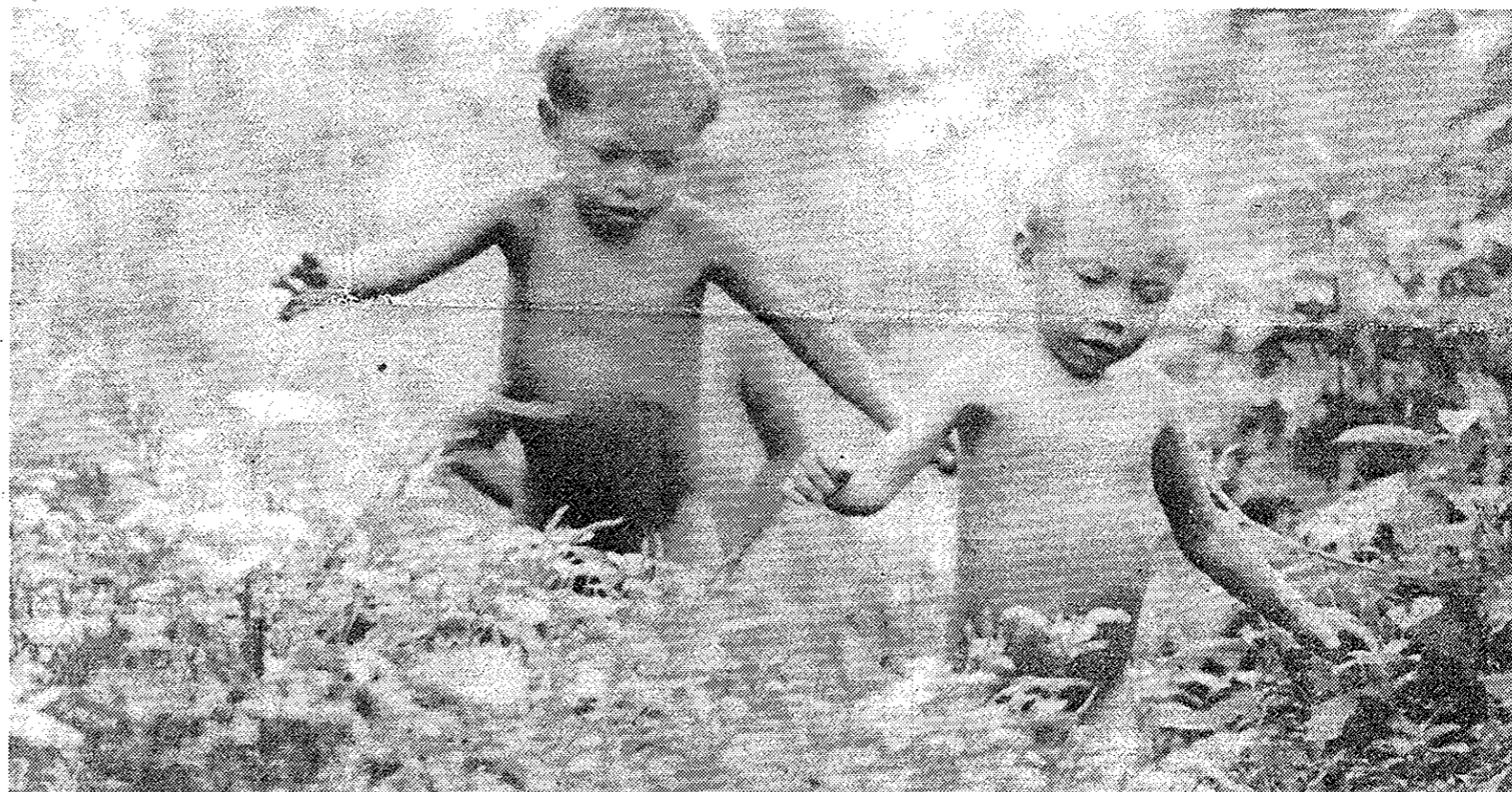
While praising the endurance of the missionaries, many anthropologists see their activities as seriously diluting the culture of the native peoples.

And most threatening, according to the anthropologists, is the policy of the Brazilian government to integrate the Indians into modern society as fast as possible, ignoring native languages and customs.

One anthropologist said, "The Yanoama still have an unpolluted environment, they've got water, they've got fish, they've got land to plant on. Their quality of life is infinitely better than all those poor people in the urban centers of Brazil's Northeast."



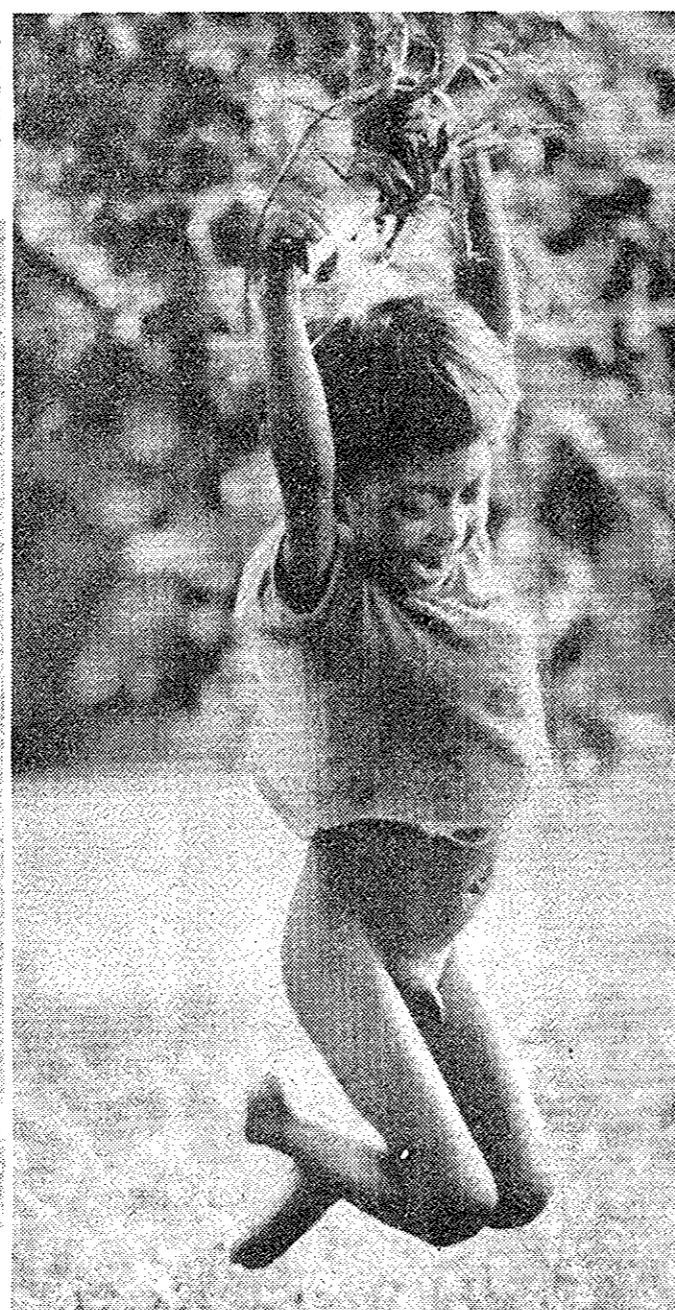
An older child gives a ride to a younger one. The bloated stomachs are caused by malnutrition and worms. (AP)



The healthy look of Yanoama Indian children playing in a small clearing is deceptive. The children rarely reach the age of 8 because of infectious diseases and minor illnesses. (AP)



Dressed up in ceremonial style, this Yanoama girl has decorated her face with a vegetable dye and has pierced her lips, nose and ears with sharpened twigs. (AP)



Swinging from vines is one of the Yanoama children's favorite pastimes. (AP)



Yanoama children play with bows and arrows along a jungle path. (AP)