

## Povos Indígenas no Brasil

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## Death by Emancipation

The much mistrcated and oft-massacred Indians of Brazil are an endangered human species. Almost their only guarantee of survival is the lands reserved for them by law, largely in the Amazon region, where many of these primitive tribesmen pursue a Stone Age way of life. Under the guise of "emancipating" the Indians, the Brazilian government has begun to remove their historic tribal lands from federal protection: last week a decree was sent to President Ernesto Geisel that ends official protection and gives the Indians title to their land. The rationale was that it would put the Indians on the same footing as other Brazilians. When the Indians are no longer wards of the state, insists Interior Minister Rangel Reis, they can become "politicians, generals and even Presidents of the Republic."

In fact, concerned anthropologists and churchmen in Brazil believe that emancipation will mean bondage and even death for the Indians. The real motive behind the government's move, they charge, is to gradually open up the Indians land to private developers. Said Anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro: "The decree will mean the extinction of the Indians as tribal peoples, as their land is gobbled up by greedy farmers, ranchers, mining companies and speculators who have long been awaiting this moment."

Roman Catholic prelates have been outspokenly opposed to the emancipation decree, which has not yet been signed by Geisel. They point out that after 1911, when Brazil's first Indian protection agency was established, at least 1 million Indians died, many of them massacred with that agency's connivance. Whites who coveted Indian lands dynamited villages, gave the Indians food laced with arsenic and inoculated entire tribes with smallpox virus. If the Indians lose their land, "there will be no Indians left in 30 years." said Bishop Tomas Balduino, the head of the Roman Catholic Church's mission to the Indians. "The emancipation of Brazil's Indians is a means of committing genocide, this time without dirtying anyone's hands with gons or poison.

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