

Court Case Study for 3-4 - Day 2

Northern Cheyenne Tribe vs. Hollowbreast was a big court fight about land and coal on the Northern Cheyenne Homelands in Montana. The tribe wanted to keep the coal underground for all tribe members, not just a few tribal people.

What Happened Long Ago

Long ago, in 1926, the U.S. government gave small pieces of land to tribe members for growing food or keeping animals. But a special law said the coal and rocks under the ground stayed with the whole tribe until 1976. Land owners could use the top part, but not the coal below.

Why They Fought

In the 1960s, people in the United States wanted more coal for power and lights. It was worth a lot of money. The tribe was afraid that in 1976, some people would sell the coal fast and hurt the land or the tribe. So in 1968, Congress made a new rule to keep the coal for the tribe forever, if courts agreed.

What the Courts Said

One court said yes, the tribe keeps the coal. Another court said no. But in 1976, the biggest court, the U.S. Supreme Court, said the tribe wins. The coal stays with the whole tribe forever.