

THE SOUTH AND WEST TRANSFORMED**Issues Connector: American Indian Policy**

Over the course of American history, the federal government has fluctuated between assimilating Native Americans into white American culture and maintaining and protecting Native American land and heritage. That issue is still being debated today, both by the U.S. Government and by Native Americans themselves.

Northwest Ordinance

In 1775, the Continental Congress created a Committee on Indian Affairs and appointed Benjamin Franklin to chair it. During the Revolutionary War, both the Americans and the British sought the allegiance of various Native American tribes. On the whole, Native Americans tended to side with the British, possibly hoping to stop the new nation from expanding still farther into their territory. After the war, an attempt was made to treat the Native Americans who had sided with the British as a defeated enemy who could be forced to forfeit land. However, this tactic was abandoned as impractical, and the new U.S. government sought to purchase tribal lands through treaties and passed the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, establishing a government for the settlers in the Northwest Territory.

Chief Joseph and the Struggle for Land

Many Native Americans, including Chief Joseph, expressed dissatisfaction with the government's Native American reservation system. In February of 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, named for its author, Senator Henry Dawes. This legislation gave the President the ability to break up Native American reservations into small parcels. These parcels were then given out to individuals who registered on a tribal roll, with single people receiving 30 to 60 acres and the head of a family receiving 120 acres. In 1893, President Cleveland set up negotiations with the Five Civilized Tribes—the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and the Seminoles. The negotiations led to these groups receiving shares of common property in exchange for abolishing their ethnic governments. The Dawes Act was established to protect Native American property rights, and more specifically to protect Native Americans from losing their land to settlers moving westward. However, many allotments were plots of land completely unsuitable for farming, and some Native Americans could not afford the necessary supplies to start their own farms.

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Issues Connector: American Indian Policy**New Deal for Native Americans**

Prior to World War I, most Native Americans did not have citizenship in the United States. More than 10,000 Native Americans served in the military during the war, prompting many to press for full citizenship. Several years after the war, in 1924, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, granting citizenship to all Native Americans born in the United States. That same year, Congress also initiated the Meriam Survey to research and report on life on reservations. The appalling conditions left in the wake of the Dawes Act surprised Congress, and many of the recommendations from this survey were included in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, whose purpose was to decrease federal control and increase self-government within the Native American groups. The act slowed the future allotment of land and returned surplus lands to Native American groups. The act also encouraged these groups to take control of their own affairs. Money was also freed to allow a credit program for land purchases, educational assistance, and help for Native American organizations. Many Native American groups were able to purchase land, and millions of acres were added to reservations. The number of Native American children in school increased, and services improved.

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee

The 1960s and 1970s saw a rebirth of pride in Native American culture, history, and heritage. One of the most powerful publications at the time was *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown, which looked at American history from an American Indian point of view. This era also produced strong political activism on the part of many Native Americans. Some groups were demanding that the federal and state governments honor the terms of the treaties that the groups had signed generations before. These included provisions regarding hunting and fishing rights, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. Other activist groups seized government buildings in protest of treaty violations. In more recent years, Native American groups have sued the federal and state governments, seeking a restoration of traditional lands or, more often, a settlement from the government for lands that were taken in violation of those original treaties.

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"The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them."

—*Northwest Ordinance, 1787*

Sec. 16. Any Indian tribe, or tribes, residing on the same reservation, shall have the right to organize for its common welfare, and may adopt an appropriate constitution and bylaws, which shall become effective when ratified by a majority vote of the adult members of the tribe, or of the adult Indians residing on such reservation, as the case may be, at a special election authorized by the Secretary of the Interior under such rules and regulations as he may prescribe.

—*Indian Reorganization Act, 1934*

"If you tie a horse to a stake, do you expect he will grow fat? If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth, and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented, nor will he grow and prosper. I have asked some of the great white chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. He can not tell me."

—*Chief Joseph, 1879*

"The Indians knew that life was equated with the earth and its resources, that America was a paradise, and they could not comprehend why the intruders from the East were determined to destroy all that was Indian as well as America itself."

—*Dee Brown, Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, 1970*

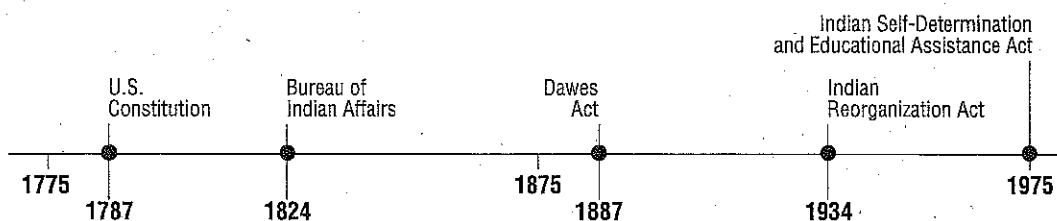
American Indian Policy

"All we ask is full citizenship. Why not? We offered our services and our money in this war, and more in proportion to our number and means than any other race or class of the population."

—*Charles A. Eastman, Santee Sioux, discussing the service of Native Americans during World War I*

"It seems a recurrent theme these days that America is returning to its worst practices when it comes to Indian relations. The fundamental justice once envisioned on the New York state Indian land claims now clouds over in America's recurring amnesia about its legislative debts to Native peoples, whose real property was stolen."

—*Indian Country Today, editorial, 2005*



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Directions: Read the quotes regarding policy and attitudes toward American Indians. Then answer the questions below.

1. In what ways was the Northwest Ordinance ignored?

2. To what is Chief Joseph referring in his quote? To what does he compare Native Americans, and why?

3. **Draw Conclusions** In what way does Eastman's statement show pride? Why does Eastman stress the details about Native American volunteers?

4. **Synthesize Information** Do you think Chief Joseph would have approved of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934? Explain your answer.

5. **Make Connections** What point are both Eastman and the editorial for *Indian Country Today* making? Do you agree with it? Explain your answer.
