

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIAL AMERICA**Issues Connector: American Indian Policy**

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

A New and Expanding Nation

In 1775, the Continental Congress created a Committee on Indian Affairs and appointed Benjamin Franklin to chair it. During the Revolutionary War, both the American 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. The Constitution ultimately gave the federal government the authority to regulate trade with Native Americans.

Native Americans and the Federal Government

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established in 1824 by then Secretary of War John C. Calhoun. Originally designed to help the federal government assimilate Native American groups, Calhoun appointed the former Superintendent of Indian Trade Thomas L. McKenney as the Bureau's first commissioner. The Bureau began as part of the War Department, an indication of the tense relations between the United States and Native Americans. The BIA was finally moved from the War Department to the Interior Department in 1949. The Bureau is under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Six of these commissioners have belonged to Native American groups, including four between 1966 and 1977. Today, the BIA manages million acres of land, develops forest land, leases assets, directs agricultural programs, protects water and land rights, develops and maintains infrastructure, and provides health services and economic development.

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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 was also known as the General Allotment Act, and it 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.

New Deal for Native Americans

In response to service by Native Americans in World War I, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, and ordered a survey of 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.

A Push for Self-Determination

The 1960s and 1970s saw a rebirth of pride in Native American culture, history, and heritage. 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 1973, the dispute led to conflict, with a group seizing hostages and beginning a 71-day standoff on a reservation in South Dakota. In response to activist concerns, the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act encouraged self-government and gave more autonomy to Native American groups. This act helped provide financial stability to services and programs run by Native American groups. The act was amended in 1994, expanding its original scope and content.

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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*

“Indians [should] be looked upon as human beings, having bodies and souls like ours, possessed of sensibilities and capacities as keen and large as ours, that their misery be inspected and held up to the view of our citizens, that their trophies of reform be pointed to. I say, it needs only this to enlist into their favor the whole civilized population of our country.”

—*Thomas L. McKenney, 1817*

“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*

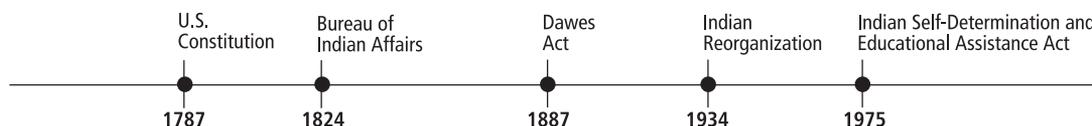
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“All we ask is full citizenship. Why not? We offered our services and our money in this war, and more in proportion to our number and means than any other race or class of the population.”

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

“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*



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

4. **Making Connections** What was Thomas McKenney’s goal? Looking at the quote from Dee Brown, what happened to McKenney’s vision?
