

## History of Native Americans in the United States

Midterm Examination      Ethnic Studies 112B / History of the US 108B

### “A” Example:

#3 The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was a dramatic shift in Native American policy for the US Government. Although the policy had accomplishments and failings, its legacy on American History endures.

The origin of the IRA comes from the debate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century about the perceived failures of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and their policy of assimilation. Also, the 1887 Dawes Act was dramatically shrinking reservation lands as they were sold to non-Indians. Among those who opposed BIA policy was John Collier who had extensive experience with the Pueblos of the southwest. When Collier became the new head of the BIA he used his experiences with the Pueblos to dramatically redirect Native American policy.

The purpose of the IRA was to remedy the failings of the policies of assimilation and allotment. The IRA ended allotment, which divided reservations into family homesteads. The problem with this was that the BIA leased the land of many Native American to non-Indians and “unallotted” land was sold to non-Indians by the Federal Government, thus shrinking reservations in a checker-board pattern. The IRA also stopped the sale of land to non-Indians. In addition, a fund was established by the government to buy back lands lost during allotment.

The IRA also aimed to improve policy regarding American Indians by involving more Indians in BIA policy-making. Provisions for tribal charters and the establishment of tribal councils were made so Indians could replace the BIA in some of its responsibilities (especially at the local level). The IRA established criteria for eligibility for voting on tribal charters based on “blood quantum”. This policy attempted to give voting authority solely to tribal members and limit outside interference.

John Collier appreciated the value of American Indian culture and under his leadership their IRA included provisions for their revival of Indian Arts, Crafts, and Religion. This was a great departure for the BIA policies of Collier’s predecessors. Their assimilationist policies made Native religions illegal and attempted to replace them with Christian Anglo beliefs.

The IRA can be credited with some accomplishments. It ended the dramatic land loss from the Dawes Act and allotment. Government funds even repurchased lands to restore parts of reservations. Funds for economic development were a new resource for Indians to develop an economy. The government bought thousands of sheep for the Navajo [prior to the IRA] to create an economy for the Navajo [which New Deal’s policy of stock reductions destroyed. This led to the Navajo voting against the IRA.] Also, the IRA involved many Native Americans in the policy making of the BIA. Art culture, and especially religious practices began to revive with legislation. The Sun Dance, for decades prohibited, emerged to become representative of the new religious freedom.

Although there were some successes, many criticize the IRA for perceived failings. Charters and tribal council encouraged political factions and disunity among tribes. An Anglo-style government merging corporate and municipal forms was imposed over traditional forms of government. This prompted many tribes to refuse to vote on or defeat IRA constitutions, such as the "5 Civilized Tribes" in Oklahoma. Rather than being a means of independence, charters became a mean of assimilation by making IRA governments work more like businesses or municipalities. Collier's experience with the Pueblos led him to assume this form of tribal government would work for all tribes. He disregarded tribal differences and introduced problems when his policies did not fit them.

The IRA attempted to restore the lost areas of reservations, yet without the proper congressional funding their program failed. Reports to the BIA stated that 1000s of acres were urgently needed to maintain the integrity of tribes. Only a fraction of this urgently needed land was purchased. Today the checkerboard reservation legacy if the Dawes Act to a large extent remains.

The IRA failed to withdraw the government from Indian affairs but led to greater involvement. With so many programs, imposed governmental forms, and general involvement in Indian affairs, the IRA is seen by many as a great policy of government control and assimilation.

The legacy of the IRA endures to the present. The tribes are mostly led by elected tribal councils. Many Native Americans are directly involved in the policy-making of the BIA. And the roots of cultural revival in the IRA has grown into a great resurgence of American Indian culture in the present.

### **"B" Example:**

#2 Native Americans, as were all Americans, were profoundly affected by the Depression. However, Native Americans had for many, many years before the Depression been subject to oppression and restrictive policies from the Federal government. They endured loss of land, forced assimilation and removal, and in some cases, genocide. Despite the countless obstacles and hardships, Native peoples remained and with the onset of the New Deal, and numerous of the policies implemented throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Native Americans demonstrated that they were still here and would persist for generations.

With the onset of the Depression , the Federal government forced the New Deal. With a 3-pronged attack of relief, recovery, and aid it began to attempt to balance pout the national economy. This was most evident in the west, which would undergo massive development. Throughout the west, infrastructural projects such as dams, highways, bridges, and roads employed many in the west. Despite persistent racial attitudes, in many projects Indian men were employed. Thus the New Deal shaped changes in the w3est and consequently shaped changes for Native Americans.

However, the most profound changes for Native Americans during the 1930s came from the BIA and its Commissioner John Collier. Under Collier the BIA headed n a new direction, however the process was difficult. Collier

promoted tribal identity and tradition, and thus promoted native art and religious freedom. He opposed assimilation and promoted the revival of Native languages. Native art was promoted through the 1935 Indian Arts and Crafts Act, and also through the New Deal's WPA which hired artists for murals and other artwork.

However, the most relevant policy under Collier was the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). This act ended allotments, instead it consolidated allotments into communal lands. The IRA, which went against the 1887 Dawes Act, also returned surplus land to tribes. The act also claimed that the leasing of lands needed the approval of tribal councils.

However, in order to receive these rights, a tribe had to accept all provisions and adopt IRA constitutions. Also, the IRA raised the question of who was as Indian by establishing a blood quantum. In order to vote on a tribal matter, a person must have 1/2 blood of the tribe.

Many tribes opposed the IRA. Out of nearly 252 tribes, only 90 actually passed IRA constitutions which covered approximately 103,000 Indians.

World War II also brought change to Native life. Over 25,000 actually fought and served and over 500 died. WWII caused an economic boom and thus attracted many people to migrate into cities, especially in the west. These included Native Americans. Many Indians opposed the war, however many return in Native American veterans seized the opportunity to bring tribal concerns to the public.

Immediately after WWII, the Indian Claims Commission (ICC) was established in 1946 to once and for all settle both new and old Indian land claims. However, many Native tribes opposed the ICC. They demanded the return of the lands, yet the ICC only awarded monetary compensation.

Another movement began to emerge after the war's end. In the 1950s the conservative government began the move toward the breaking of all bonds and trusts between the Federal government and Indians. This process called Termination would sever all relations between tribes and the Federal Government.

In 1953, House Concurrent Resolution 108 was passed and Termination began. Also in 1953, Public Law 280 gave the states a broad jurisdiction over tribal matters. In 1954, the Relocation Program promoted Indian migration into the cities with monetary aid. As a result of Termination, many tribal members moved into urban areas and life off the reservation began.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a revival of a pan-Indian identity emerged. The new generation who only knew of life off the reservation began to organize and started a youth movement. Tribal groups such as American Indian Movement (AIM) brought Native concerns to the national attention through such protests as the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz, the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties, and most notably during the occupation of Wounded Knee 1973. These protests also helped to revive Native religion through the Ghost Dance and Sun Dance. Movements and revivals such as these helped to reinforce the notion of a modern day pan-tribal identity.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Native American life has been shaped by policies both helpful and harsh. However, Indians remain, and in many ways

have made strides. Many policies have secured the survival of their culture such as the 1978 Religious Freedom Act, and also the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) 1990. In addition, the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act has secured a financial future for Native peoples.

The Native American experience during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was transformed many times over. However, Native American existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demonstrates that Native people will always be here.

### **"C" Example:**

#3 The Indian Reorganization Act was created by John Collier based on his work with the Pueblos. He saw that the Pueblos were trying to keep their traditions alive without fully assimilating and so he assumed that's how all of the tribes were. Therefore, Collier brought up the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) in order to let all tribes go back to living the way they used to before Assimilation.

With the IRA, Collier proposed to take all Reservation land out of allotments and back into one communally run piece of land. He assumed all tribes would benefit from this because it would allow them to revive their religious practices and continue farming and raising sheep. However, Collier's view was very one-sided because he did not realize that many tribes had already assimilated and did not live the same lifestyle as the Pueblos.

The first Bill of the IRA was proposed to Congress, but was modified in order to keep U.S. power over the Indians. Congress proposed that each tribe had to vote if they wanted the land to be communal again, which was discouraged by Congress because they did not want autonomous rule of the reservations. The first bill also did not include every Indian. Many tribes were left out of the bill from Oklahoma and all over because they were seen as either not wanting to be included or as being already assimilated. Also, Congress would not provide enough money for Collier to effectively carry out the IRA.

A second bill of the IRA was then proposed. It had been modified to include all of the tribes in Oklahoma. It was still required of each tribe to vote on the bill before the IRA would go into effect on a reservation. However, Congress still did not provide adequate funding for land or for the IRA to be successful unless the plan resembled Assimilation.

The IRA came under criticism and was seen as just another phase in assimilation. Had Collier taken into account the fact that most of the larger tribes (Sioux, Iroquois, ect...) were somewhat assimilated and used to living on allotted land, the IRA might have been constructed and received differently. Although it was criticized, there were some positive results. Indians were given religious freedoms and could once again practice the Sun Dance. The IRA increased Indian involvement in the Bureau of Indian Affairs by about 65%, and it opened the gates to self-determination.

The IRA was one of the first attempts to help the Indian restore their culture and way of life. John Collier had the Indians' best interests in mind, but he was ill-informed in terms of how the tribes, other than the Pueblos, actually were living. He assumed they would all want to revert back to the old way of

living and had not taken into account the effects of assimilation. It was a valiant effort the effect of assimilation. It was a valiant effort on Collier's part, but he didn't realize how powerful assimilation was and how badly the U.S. government wanted it to happen.