

American Indians in the 20th Century: Issues and Debates

History

Eras

- 1870-1890 Final defeat, loss of land & control
- 1890-1920 Neglect, misery, despair
- 1920s-1940s Period of reform, constrained self-government. Cultural/religious recognition, pan-Indianism
- 1950s Counter-reform: termination, relocation, urbanization
- 1960s-1970s: Activism inspired by civil rights (Courts start supporting legal claims)
- 1980s-1990s: Growing resurgence of culture, growing emphasis on economic development & legal/political autonomy

1870-1890 Final Defeat

- US starts renegeing on treaties
- Loss of political self-control
- Much land earlier reserved to native peoples is lost to whites
- Many reservations become “checkerboarded” with whites owning land inside reservations
- Population reaches low point of 200,000 in 1890. (From 2 million – 30 million before Europeans.) Near genocide.

1890-1920

- Largely ignored by whites
- Starvation, despair, surviving on food rations only sometimes delivered
- Continued attacks on political, cultural autonomy
- Boarding schools: children taken from parents, forced cultural & linguistic & political assimilation

1920-1940

- Age of reform, concern
- Anthropologists & missionaries: respect culture, religion, language. First protection for religious, cultural freedom.
- Citizenship 1924.
 - Some were US citizens before by treaty.
 - Unilateral by US to deny special status of indigenous people, who did not generally want this
- Indian Reorganization Act 1934. Permits self-government, but under rules of US making. (Alaskans 1836)

1940s, 1950s

- 1946 Indian Claims Commission. Suppose to settle all land claims in 5 years. (Still going.)
- 1940s National Congress of American Indians (still exists). Pan-Indian, grounded in boarding schools.

- 1950s Counter-movement. Back to forced assimilation, forced relocation to cities.

- ½ become urban

- Boarding schools, forced adoptions continue

- Termination = cancel treaties, force people to be legally like everyone else.

Attacks on self-determination using the language of equality & liberation.

1960s-1970s

- Inspired by Civil Rights Movement, renewed activism

- Disruptive protests, occupations

- Militant exercise of treaty rights

- Fish-ins etc. Militant exercise of treaty rights as a protest.

- Occupation of Alcatraz Island 1969-1972

- Trail of broken treaties

- Development of Indian legal defense teams

- Assertions of nationhood, cultural autonomy

- Urban Indians & reservation Indians interact.

Trail of Broken Treaties 1972 demands

- Recognition of sovereignty

- New treaties and enforcement of old

- Increase land base of native people

- Funds for economic and educational development

Alcatraz Proclamation (1969) - excerpts

To the Great White Father and his People

We, the native Americans, reclaim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery.

We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty:

We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island 300 years ago. We know that \$24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than what was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of \$1.24 per acre is greater than the \$0.47 per acre the white men are now paying the California Indians for their lands.

We will give to the inhabitants of this island a portion of the land of their own to be held in trust . . . by the Bureau of Caucasian Affairs . . . in perpetuity -- for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down in the sea. We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our way of life -- ways in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with all white men.

Alcatraz Proclamation, more excerpts

We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards. By this, we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

- It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
- It has no fresh running water.
- It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
- There are no oil or mineral rights.
- There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.
- There are no health-care facilities.
- The soil is rocky and nonproductive, and the land does not support game.
- There are no educational facilities.
- The population has always exceeded the land base.
- The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

Alaskans

- Similar patterns in Alaska, but less White settlement, not forced into reservations
- Alaska oil pipeline: settlement creates corporations of native people who will own some of the rights.
- 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
- Alaskan people able to benefit from some of the lessons of those in the "lower 48"

Alaskan regional corporations

1980s –2000s

- Growing cultural revitalization – powwows, etc.
- Specific tribal culture & language
- Pan-Indian movements, cooperation
- Growing emphasis on economic development on the reservation so a separate life can be viable
- Continuing legal actions to defend treaty rights, press land claims & political sovereignty
- Emphasis on separateness, distinctiveness of indigenous people. "We are still here."

"We are still here"

- American Indian Movement
- Native American Rights Fund
- National Congress of American Indians
- Economic development organizations
- Pow-wows, spirituality

FAQs about AmerInds

Saved copy of HTML version of BIA FAQ file

Basic Issues/Conflicts

Pan-Indianism

- Emphasis on own tribe/culture