

American Indian Historical Timeline

In *The Rights of Indians and Tribes* by Stephen L. Pevar, it is suggested that Federal Indian policy can best be understood when placed in historical perspective. The brief summary below attempts to highlight changes in the way that the federal government has dealt with American Indians and Alaska Natives and some of the resulting trauma.

1492-1787: Tribal Independence

- Peaceful relations when it suited the interests of Europeans
- Violence between Indians and settlers increased over time
- Disease, introduced by Europeans, decimated Indian population
- European population increased at a great rate
- There began a pattern of invading Indian territory and taking possession
- After Revolutionary War, Americans began the quest for land

1787-1828: Agreements Between Equals

- Indian tribes were viewed as separate nations and negotiations were done by treaty
- Indian tribes were strong militarily and still a threat
- Law were passed to protect against the taking of Indian land
- Few of the laws were actively enforced and expansion was encouraged

1828-1887: Relocation of the Indians

- “Removal of the eastern Indian tribes to the West” became dominant policy
- US is stronger and does not need to avoid hostility with Indian tribes
- Indian Removal Act of 1830 led to treaties that forced most eastern Indian tribes to the west
- Discovery of gold led to further expansion and slaughter of food source- bison
- By 1887, 200 boarding schools were established with 14,000 Indian forcibly enrolled
- Federal courts were authorized to prosecute Indians who committed certain crimes on the reservation
- 1871 Congress passed law that stopped additional treaties with Indian tribes
- Indian tribes no longer seen as independent nations

1887-1934: Allotment and Assimilation

- Assimilation into white society became the new federal policy
- 1887 General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) sought to extinguish tribal sovereignty, erase reservation boundaries, and force assimilation
- Surplus lands sold to non-Indians
- Tribal culture was completely disrupted: communal life destroyed, land taken away again, and outsiders allowed to live on Indian reservations
- Congress allowed Indian land to be leased to non-Indians, controlled funds that resulted from the leases, and determined when to distribute the funds

This summary was compiled from *The Rights of Indians & Tribes* by Stephen L. Pevar, Fourth Edition (2012), Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

- In 1924, Congress passed law that conferred US citizenship on all Indians

1934-1953: Indian Reorganization

- 1935 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA)- Federal Indian policy changed as this law was enacted to protect the remaining Indian land base, encourage Indian tribes to adopt constitutions, and engage in self-government
- The IRA has been criticized as paternalistic, ethnocentric, and insufficient

1953-1968: Termination

- The IRA goals were abandoned and federal policy changed again
- Termination of the federal government's trust relationship with Indian tribes became the new policy with the goal of assimilation (again)
- Federal benefits and support services were eliminated.
- 1953 Public Law 280 gave six states criminal jurisdiction over Indian reservations
- 1956 Relocation program offered job training and housing assistance to Indians who would leave the reservation for urban areas
- Many tribal governments were disbanded and reservations abolished.

1968-Present: Tribal Self-Determination

- Federal Indian policy changed to one which promotes tribal sovereignty and self-determination.
- Since 1968, the legislative and executive branches have attempted to provide measures which improve would improve the social and economic life of tribes and their people
- However, since the 1970s, Indian interests have lost more than 80% of the cases decided by the Supreme Court