

## **Historical Notes on Native Americans**

### **1. Christopher Columbus, Native American Slave Trader 1492**

Columbus shipped 10 Arawak men and women to Spain in the first Indian slavery dealings from North America. Spanish slave trading of Native Americans lasted many years. One ship, loaded with 1,100 Taino men and women, crossed the Atlantic to Spain with only 300 Native Americans surviving the journey.

The numbers of Native Americans decreased dramatically during the first century after Columbus “discovered” America. Native Americans were captured and transported to Spain as slaves. They were enslaved and forced to work in Spanish mines in the Americas, with the average worker dying by age 26. European diseases also took their toll and thousands were killed in countless massacres. A population of 80 million peoples decreased to only 10 million within a century. Mexico’s population of 25 million Indians dwindled to barely a million within the century following the arrival of Spaniards in 1519. (Ref. *Black Indians*, William Katz, 1986)

### **2. Protection of Indian Lands 1793**

In 1793 a law was passed which prohibited non-Indians from settling on Indian lands. This law also exempted Indians from complying with state trade regulations.

### **3. First Seminole War 1817**

The first war with the Seminole Indians was started by a United States attack.

### **4. Indian Removal Act of 1830 1830**

Indians were promised land in Oklahoma in exchange for their ancestral lands east of the Mississippi. “Escorted” by the U.S. Army, Indians were forced to march up to 2,000 miles. Many thousands died of cholera, measles and starvation en route. The Cherokee called the walk the “Trail of Tears.” The land promised Indians in Oklahoma was later taken away.

## **5. Bureau of Indian Affairs 1849**

Congress moved the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the War Department to the Department of the Interior. At that time a civilian corps of physicians was established to serve Native Americans. Many early treaties imposed time limits of 5 to 20 years on the provisions of health care.

## **6. Indians Ruled Wards of the State 1871**

A law passed in 1871 declared Indians wards of the state. This action tended to break down tribal unity and destroyed the power of the Chiefs. In denying their status as individual tribal nations, the government no longer needed tribal consent in their dealings with the tribes.

## **7. Congress Takes Land from Indians 8 February 1887**

The General Allotment Act, also called the Dawes Act, provided citizenship rights and 160 acres of land to each Native American. A tribal census was taken, land was parceled out to Indian families and the rest of the land was auctioned off by the Federal government. "Blood quantum" was used to determine whether an individual was a "full Blood Indian" or "mixed Blood Indian" which affected land allotments. A succession of massive land transfers was arranged through lotteries, sealed bids and frantic "runs."

In 1889 alone, whites—racing from starting gates in buckboards or riding horses and mules—staked claim to two million acres of formerly Indian landholdings. By 1890 the government had acquired 13 million acres of Indian lands through the allotment process, 23 million acres by 1891 and over 30 million acres by 1892. Great emphasis was placed on the need to "civilize" and to teach Christianity to Native Americans. To this end, young Native American children were sent to distant government- or church-run boarding schools, often thousands of miles from the "detrimental" influences of their home reservations.

## **8. Massacre at Wounded Knee 1890**

In the fall of 1890, Indian police killed Sitting Bull in an attempt to stop what they had feared to be an Indian uprising. Five hundred soldiers rounded up 200 Hunkpapa Sioux—mostly women and children—and culled out, lined up and disarmed the men. Someone is said to have discharged a weapon and the cavalry open fire with a Hotchkiss gun, killing most of the men within the first five minutes.

Within an hour some two hundred Indians were dead or dying. A few women got as far as three miles away before being caught and killed. The rest, about one hundred souls, fled and later froze to death in the hills.

The expropriation of Indian land through the bloodless process of treaty making and anti-Indian legislation left a more destructive legacy for the Indians in the future than the infamous massacre at Wounded Knee Creek.

## **9. Health Care for Native Americans 1921**

The Snyder Act authorized regular, continuing appropriations of funds for Indian health care and created a Health Division within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). In 1954 the BIA Health Division was renamed the Indian health Service and was moved to the Department of Health, Education & Welfare (now HHS).

## **10. Indian Citizenship 1924**

Congress declared all American Indians full citizens of the United States, but it wasn't until 1948 that they were allowed to vote in every state.

## **11. National Council of American Indians 1926**

Gertrude Bonnin, a teacher at the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and author of *Old Indian Legends and American Indian Stories*, joined the Society of American Indians in 1911. She founded the National Council of American Indians in 1928—a reform group.

## **12. The Indian Reorganization Act 1934**

The “Indian New Deal,” ushered in by the reform-minded Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, put an end to further allotment of lands under the Dawes Act of 1887. Native American tribes were encouraged to organize government under the terms of the Indian Reorganization Act and to adopt constitutions and by-laws, subject to the approval of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Indian Reorganization Act signaled the end of the “Allotment Era,” which started with the Dawes Act of 1887. The 1934 Act provided for the reacquisition of tribal lands and established preferential hiring of Native Americans within the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Native American tribes were authorized to set up business corporations for economic development, and a credit program was established to back tribal and individual enterprises.

## **13. World War II 7 December 1941**

War is declared on both Japan and Germany following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Indians are scattered throughout the military in integrated units. Navajo code talkers developed a specialized military dictionary which baffled the enemy.

## **14. Indian Claims Commission Act 1946**

Ostensibly designed to insure that indigenous nations which historically suffered illegal appropriation of lands would be reimbursed.

## **15. Benefits to Indians Terminated 1953**

The Termination Act established a Federal policy of dissolving unilaterally 109 Indian nations. A House resolution proposed termination of all Federal aid to and protection of Indians. Reservations were to be placed under state control and forced to pay their own way. The program was started, but proved a failure and was halted in the 1960s.

## **16. Indian Civil Rights Act 1960**

Repealed the worst features of the Termination Act of 1953.

## **17. Indian Bill of Rights 1968**

Referred to as the Indian Civil Rights Act, it guarantees to reservation residents many of the same civil rights and liberties in relation to tribal authorities that the Federal Constitution guarantees to all persons in relation to Federal and state authorities.

## **18. The Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement Act of 1971**

This Act resolved long unsettled claims of that state's Inuit and Aleut populations, with a cash settlement of \$962 million and 40 million acres of land. The act established 12 Native Regional Corporations and more than 200 Native Village Corporations to manage the land and the money. Many observers fear that this might eventually result in the loss of much land to non-natives, as did the Allotment Act of 1887. In 1988 The United States Congress passed amendments to correct flaws in the act, to diminish that risk. The amendments do not address native sovereignty or subsistence rights. Sections of the native community continue to be concerned as to whether the amendments adequately protect long-term control of the land.

## **19. Indian Preference in Hiring 1974**

In *Morton v. Mancari*, the Supreme Court upheld a statute giving Indians preference in Bureau of Indian Affairs hiring since Indians were singled out not as a racial group, but as members of quasi-sovereign tribal entities.

## **20. Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975** 1975

A provision of this Act enables Indian tribes and native Alaskan groups to receive payment in lieu of Indian Health Service facilities. They administer their own clinics, health centers, and village clinics.

## **21. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act 1976**

This Act authorized higher levels of spending on Indian health until statistics on the health of Indians match those of the overall U.S. population.

## **22. American Indian Religious Freedom Act 1978**

States that it is U.S. policy to protect and preserve the freedom to believe and exercise the traditional religions of Native Americans. The law does not assign enforcement power to any agency, however.