

America's Third World Society

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By

Jerry Hollingsworth

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This book is dedicated to my late father,
William Jasper Hollingsworth III,
who influenced me more than he ever knew.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last sixteen years, I have traveled the world as a sociologist, visiting many places such as Mexico, South America, South Korea, China, India, Europe, and West Africa, writing about social problems including poverty, racism, child labor, child soldiers, orphans, street children, and other social issues that occur in third world countries. For the last ten years, I have investigated social problems among Native Americans, an indigenous population marginalized since the early beginnings of history, and I quickly realized that living on a Native American reservation today was similar to living in one of those third world countries.

As I began to turn my attention to the field of Native American studies, I learned that most of academia has focused on general history, cultural studies, or anthropological and archaeological undertakings. While these topics are instrumental in understanding a culture, very few of them actually emphasize social conditions inside the heart of Native America today and there are very few sources on the present state of Native American reservations in the United States.

Over the years, as I have interacted with other academic professionals, I learned that there seems to be some misunderstanding when it comes to Native Americans and their situation today. This is especially true when it comes to the use of Native American mascots, symbols, and images for high school, college, and university athletic teams. It was then that I began to understand that there was still a serious lack of knowledge about Native Americans today and that there were some intense problems brewing that most people, including academic professionals, did not know about.

Native Americans today are experiencing more severe problems than racist images and mascots used by athletic teams. In Indian Country today, Native Americans living on reservations are suffering from intense poverty, massive unemployment, serious health disparities, educational failures, and poor living conditions that are reminiscent of some third world countries. After interacting with students, teachers, and non-academic individuals, I also realized that there are many different versions of how Native Americans are thought of today. While some individuals still think Native Americans live in teepees, other people believe that the Native Americans today are all wealthy and living off casino money and other government

endowments. Others tend to believe that Native Americans are all drunken vagrants living off welfare and governmental handouts.

One question comes up frequently: "If life is so hard on the reservations, why don't they just leave?" To try and answer this and other questions, I have spent the last ten years trekking across the country observing these Native American settings that we call reservations.

Sample Sizes and Analysis

One of the chief problems in studying a subject like American Indian reservations is the sample size. There are over 300 reservations in the United States. Therefore, it becomes paramount to choose a workable sample of reservations. I came by my sample selections mostly based on pure size and geographical location. Most of this project thus consists of ethnographic case studies involving thirteen of the largest American Indian reservations in the country.

Of the fifty largest American Indian reservations in the United States, thirty-seven are located in just two geographical areas: the American Southwest and the Great Plains region. Therefore, my concentration was on the states of South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana in the Great Plains region, along with Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico in the Southwest.

I chose the following tribes and reservations in the Southwest for this project: the Apache (Mescalero and San Carlos Reservations); the Pueblo (Acoma, Taos, and Zuni Reservations); the Hopi, the Navajo, and the Tohono O'odham and their cousins, the Pima. For the Great Plains region, I chose the Lakota Sioux (Pine Ridge, Standing Rock, and the Rosebud Reservations); and the Crow Agency and the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and the Arikara at Fort Berthold Reservation).

Methodology and Procedures

This is a project conducted with a methodology of qualitative analysis, using observation techniques on several key American Indian reservations. I also conducted interviews with American Indians who live on those reservations. I gathered information through secondary analysis, as well as statistics from formal census data, crime data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice (BJS), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) reports, economic reports, medical reports, historical records, educational statistics from the Department of Education, and individual tribal government statistics.

In this project, the goal was to understand the social problems that exist on the reservations in the United States. I also became concerned with the

number of social problems caused by living in remote areas, geographically separated from urban areas. Reservations seem to have fallen into a degraded state of being, with high poverty rates, high unemployment, health problems, rising crime rates, and other social problems. How did it get this way? As I looked further into the problem, I began to see some definite possible explanations, such as poorly formed governmental policies, maltreatment, racism, and forced assimilation, all of which have affected the American Indians in negative ways.

I reviewed the concept of "State Harm," first proposed by Kauzlarich,¹ as a model, both perpetrated by the U.S. Government in establishing our American Indian policies, and by the Spanish, through intentional conquests of indigenous populations they encountered in their early explorations of North America.

In adapting the approach of state harm, it is my intention to show that the U.S. Government, as well as European colonists (especially Spanish conquistadors) caused direct harm to Native Americans over the course of time as they became involved in Native American policy and treatment.

Others have also studied this concept in the form of "Historical Trauma" (HTR). Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart used the concept of HTR to explain many of the problems of the Lakota, such as alcoholism, suicide, poverty, substance abuse, and many other psychological issues.²

HTR manifests itself in a variety of ways, most prominently through substance abuse as a vehicle for attempting to numb pain. This model seeks to use this to explain other self-destructive behavior, such as suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, violence, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions. Many historians and scholars believe the manifestations of violence and abuse in certain communities are directly associated to the unresolved grief that accompanies continued trauma.

Events such as those at Wounded Knee at Pine Ridge in the 1890s could have caused transgenerational trauma. In the same manner, events such as the Navajo "Long Walk" may have had the same effect on Navajo of the present generation. The "Trail of Tears" during the Indian Removal Act of 1830 could also cause such harm. Many of the case studies included in this project will reflect similar outcomes of trauma, mistrust, poverty, health

¹ Kauzlarich, D., Matthews, R., and Miller, W. (2001). Toward a Victimology of State Crime. *Critical Criminology*, 10(3), 173–194.

² "Incorporating Historical Trauma Informed Interventions With Evidence Based Practice," Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD. Native American Disparities Research Center for Rural and Community Mental Health.

problems, and other social problems among American Indians who live on some of our largest reservations.

The boarding school era caused more harm than good in its attempt at forcibly assimilating American Indians. The boarding school era may also have caused long-lasting problems in educational attainment for Native Americans in the twenty-first century. The educational system that serves our Native American reservations is a shambles, falling well short of the shining glory that education should represent in the United States.

Research Focus

In order to gain the knowledge necessary for the completion of this project, I have traveled approximately 10,000 miles observing throughout Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. I have spent numerous hours poring over census data, historical records, archives, population and demographic reports, economic and educational information, and numerous other sources. I have also conducted interviews with Native Americans.

The research in this study for the sample reservations focused on the following areas: (1) poverty; (2) unemployment; (3) educational attainment; (4) crime on the reservation; (5) general living conditions; and (6) health disparities.

Government policy originally aimed to assimilate American Indians into the white world. It did this largely via the method of reservations. However, in doing so, it may have succeeded in doing the exact opposite. In some cases, as this study will demonstrate, the reservations themselves may have produced a situation of everlasting poverty, social isolation, and a myriad of other social conditions that are still present today.

Ethical Issues

One of my main concerns when I first began to write about Native America was that of the ethical situation. Should white scholars write about Native Americans? The Native American writer, Vine Deloria, once stated: "Even with tribal peoples now entering academic fields, there is bias, and most academics deeply believe that an Indian, or any other non-Western person, cannot be an accurate observer of his or her own traditions because that individual is personally involved."

It follows, to listen to the apologists for many university departments, that an urban, educated white person, who admittedly has a deep personal interest

in a non-Western community but who does not speak the language, had never lived in the community, and visits the people only occasionally during the summer, has a better understanding of the culture, economics, and politics of the group than do the people themselves.³

I admit that, in many ways, I have somewhat fallen into the category proposed by Mr. Deloria, although this study was conducted during a four-year period, with thousands of miles covered and many one-on-one conversations, interviews, and observations conducted, it should still be listed as the chief weakness of the study. In my own defense, I listened to many Native American voices during this project, and I have attempted to complete an objective analysis.

Mr. Deloria was also convinced that scientists, including Anthropologists and Archaeologists simply cast aside any input from the legends and stories of Native Americans in favor of a white interpretation of Native American life, including religion, history, culture, and traditions. In many instances, Native Americans have disagreed with the anthropological information forwarded about their history, lives, and stories written by white social scientists.

Other more important figures in American Ethnographic scholarship have erred somewhat in their work, including the great Robert Lowie. Lowie was a major contributor to the field of Native American studies and was a student of Franz Boaz, a principal founder of the field of anthropology in the United States.

Lowie, in this famous book on the Crow Indians incorrectly labeled the Crow as "Sun Worshipers." He made several other errors in his original work, including many miscalculations about Crow religion. Today, most Crow Indians, such as Phenocia Baurle,⁴ frown on his work. However, they do acknowledge the detail in his work, despite the lack of accuracy.

In some cases, Native American groups have scoffed at the archaeological record, especially the theory of the "peopling of North America" across the Bering Strait, in favor of the statement: "We have always been here." This was a common Native American philosophy in almost all of my dealings with Native Americans. For example, the Hopi discredit the theory of the Bering Strait crossing. As stated in their own writings, and many other statements of belief, they came to America on rafts.⁵

³ Deloria, Jr. Vine (1997). *Red Earth White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Fulcrum Publishing. Golden, Colorado.

⁴ Lowie, Robert H. (1935). *The Crow Indians*. "Introduction by Phenocia Bauerle." University of Nebraska Press. Lincoln.

⁵ Waters, Frank (1977). *Book of the Hopi*. Penguin Books.

Other Native Americans (most notably the Mandan) have been appreciative of the work done by historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists in helping them restore some of the knowledge lost due to the smallpox epidemic, and the poor treatment during the boarding school era when their language was largely forbidden by the white teachers. I have, therefore, attempted to expound greatly on Native American objectivity with the American Indian voice, as well as documenting the historical record when needed.

I also struggled with the notion that even though Native American people are generally impoverished, especially on the reservations, this does not necessarily mean that they are living in a state of unhappiness. As David Treuer stated in his book, *Rez Life*: “We love our reservations.”⁶ This caused me to wonder whether all Native Americans felt the same way. After all, there are some, like the Hopi and the Pueblo, who have done everything they can to maintain the old ways, and although they may live in poverty, they are happy on their reservations. They are living in peace and, in some cases, maintaining a lifestyle without modern conveniences such as electricity or running water. Are we measuring their social conditions with an ethnocentric view?

In retrospect, most of the early ethnographers were also writing their scholarly works with the idea in mind that the Native American populations were rapidly disappearing and that they should, therefore, record everything they could before they all vanished. It was obvious that Lowie believed that the Crow would soon be extinct.

In fact, most Native American groups have proven resilient in the face of much tragedy, and their culture survives even after suspected acts of cultural genocide, cultural appropriation, and many other acts of state harm. Today, many American Indians lie between two worlds: that of the reservation where they face the possibility of a life of poverty, or the white world where they may experience a different set of problems such as discrimination and exclusion. The factor of “state harm” will largely explain my description of Native American reservations as “third world.”

Some Native Americans are living off the reservation in urban environments and may be better educated, sufficiently employed, and living an assimilated life that is hardly noticeable to the American public. This was especially true of the studies I did in Oklahoma among the Five Civilized Tribes.⁷ While they still were among the lowest statistics in such things as

⁶ Treuer, David (2012). *Rez Life: An Indian's Journey through Reservation Life*. Atlantic Monthly Press. New York.

⁷ Hollingsworth, Jerry W. (2018). *Native America in the 21st Century*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle upon Tyne. UK.

unemployment and health problems, they were much better off economically than living on reservations, where many third world conditions thrive.

Therefore, after traveling extensively and conducting field studies on reservations in the American Southwest, as well as out on the Great Plains, I observed that many of the largest Native American reservations were in a particularly vulnerable position. Marked by being in remote and isolated locations, they had problems with unemployment and inadequate education which led to massive poverty, poor health, and a number of other issues.

I will also provide a brief history of each tribe, as well as how the reservations developed. It is not my intention to provide a complete history of each group. There are plenty of historical accounts of each of these major groups already written. The historical account I provide in this study will illuminate how and under what circumstances their reservations were established. I am also not pursuing a study of indigenous cultural knowledge. Nor will I be adding to the fountain of knowledge of any spiritual, religious, or ceremonial beliefs of these Native American groups, but will be presenting an objective analysis of social problems experienced by some of our largest Native American reservations located in the Southwest and the Great Plains regions of the United States.

The Pandemic Strikes

As I was finalizing my research for this project, the Coronavirus pandemic struck. It was obvious that, as COVID-19 made its presence felt, the American Indian reservations would be among the areas most affected. The Epilogue at the end of this book addresses the COVID-19 situation on the reservations specifically.

PART I

THE CREATION OF AMERICA'S THIRD WORLD SOCIETIES

CHAPTER ONE

THE RESERVATION STORY

There are 326 American Indian reservations in the United States today. According to the BIA, approximately 56.2 million acres are held in trust by the United States for various Indian tribes. The largest is the 16 million-acre Navajo Nation Reservation located in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. The smallest is a 1.32-acre parcel in California where the Pit River Tribe's cemetery is located. Many of the smaller reservations are less than 1,000 acres.⁸

Some reservations are located in remote locations. Others are relatively small, and sometimes very wealthy. However, some of the largest reservations are stuck in a mire of poverty, unemployment, and a variety of other social problems.

A Third World Comparison

While American Indians in general live in poverty more often than the national average, approximately 41 percent of those on the largest reservations live well below the poverty level. Overall, unemployment among males aged between 20 and 64 is about 60 percent on the largest reservations. Life expectancy in some tribes is as low as 45, a rate equal to the poorest third world countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Other problems include alcoholism, suicide, obesity, diabetes, and cancer, all at higher rates than the national average. Educational attainment among reservation Indians is at an all-time low and crime seems to be increasing as well.

Third world countries are the least developed nations in Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as some European countries. Some nations on these continents are now called developing nations, but "third world" still usually refers to countries with the least amount of economic progress. Since many of these nations were predominately poorer than the former Soviet Union and the United States, the term "third world" also became synonymous with poverty. The United States and other western nations were referred to as first world nations, while the Soviet Union and its allies were fashioned as

⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs. U.S. Dept. of Interior

second world countries during the Cold War era. However, most Native American reservations today have much more in common with third world countries.

The study of reservation life for American Indians reflects a number of issues mentioned above, as well as crime, various health problems, unemployment, poverty, and discrimination. These issues remain front and center among those American Indians on some reservations. Many Native Americans still report a particular sense of isolation in the United States in the twenty-first century.

Those living on some of the largest and most remote reservations further exemplify that isolation. As I traveled extensively across those expansive land areas, what stood out most were the pervasive rural environments, small communities, villages, small farms, and ranches sometimes hundreds of miles away from populated areas with their employment opportunities and educational resources. In many cases, in order to pursue a higher level of education, American Indians must leave the reservation.

American Indians in the United States The Demographics

In the year 2000, there were 2.5 million Native Americans living in the United States. In addition, another 1.6 million people reported that they were American Indian or Alaskan natives. Although there are over 500 tribes ranging in size from under one hundred to more than 300,000 members, Native Americans still make up less than one percent of the total U.S. population. There is also a movement to identify native Hawaiians in the same category.

According to the 2010 Census, 5.2 million citizens in the United States identified themselves as Native American or as an Alaskan native living alone or with someone of another race. Out of this total, 2.9 million identified as just Native American or as an Alaskan native. Another 2.3 million identified as being Native American and living with someone from another race.

According to the 2010 Census, the Native American/Alaskan population had increased by 39 percent since 2000. The U.S. population for 2010 was 308.7 million, which still puts the Native American population at less than one percent, officially at 0.9 percent. In addition, the U.S. population only grew by approximately nine percent.⁹

⁹ United States Census Bureau. The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010. January 2012.

The 2020 census reveals a higher number. Those identifying as Native Americans or Alaskan natives is at 6.9 million, and now represents 2.9 percent of the American population.

In sheer population numbers, the largest Native American group is the Navajo, with 308,013 members, followed closely by the Cherokee with 285,476. The Sioux have 131,048, and the Chippewa are fourth with 115,859. The numbers drop drastically after that, as the Choctaw claim 88,913, while the Apache have 64,869. The seventh largest group are the Pueblo with 59,337. In eighth place are the Iroquois with 48,365, while the Creek are at 44,085, and the tenth largest Native American group are the Blackfoot with 23,583 members.¹⁰

Currently, 15 states have Native American populations of over 100,000. Alaska has the highest percentage of Native Americans with 20 percent of the population, and 145,000 Native residents. However, California has the highest actual number of Native Americans, with over 757,628, followed by Oklahoma, with 523,360.¹¹

Native Americans on Reservations

Today, about one-quarter of all Native Americans live on reservations, which cover 52.4 million acres in thirty-three different states. There are at least twelve reservations in the United States that are larger than the state of Rhode Island. Nine other reservations are larger than the state of Delaware. The Navajo Reservation is the largest and is about the size of the state of West Virginia. The smallest reservation is the Likely Rancheria in Modoc County, California at only 1.5 acres.

By comparison with the Navajo Reservation, others are quite small. For example, the Oil Springs Reservation is an Indian reservation of the Seneca tribe located in New York. The 2010 Census records just one resident. Although the Seneca tribe controls it, as of 2005 no tribal members actually live there. The reservation is northwest of the village of Cuba and includes a couple of Native owned gas stations.

The Poospatuck Reservation is an Indian reservation in the community of Mastic, Suffolk County, New York, and is one of the smallest in the country. The population was 271 at the 2000 Census.

Some reservations are extremely poor, such as the Pine Ridge Reservation of the Lakota Sioux in South Dakota. This reservation is in Shannon County, which is the poorest county in the United States. Although there is a casino

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau. 2010.

¹¹ United States Census Bureau. 2020.

on the reservation, it nets little or nothing in revenue for the residents of the tribe.

Other reservations are exceedingly rich. For example, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Tribe is the richest tribe in the country, due to its small size and successful casino operations. Located just southwest of Minneapolis–St. Paul, the tribe only has 460 members, yet each person receives more than \$1 million a year. The payouts come in the form of \$84,000 a month to each adult.¹²

The Establishment of Reservations

One of the first acts by the American government in their attempts to assimilate the American Indians was the establishment of reservations across North America. Establishing reservations was seen as a way of containing the “Indian problem.” On August 29, 1758, European colonists established the first Indian reservation in what would be the United States, in Shamong Township, New Jersey. The Brotherton Reservation was a 3,000-acre tract of land.

Creating Reservations

Creating reservations was done in one of three ways: by treaty; by Executive Order of the President of the United States; or by an Act of Congress. From the very beginning, treaties were signed for three reasons: to negotiate peace and friendship; to secure land and independence for American Indians; and to assimilate them into American society.

Reservations actually became the obvious choice for assimilating American Indians into the American way of life. The decision to use reservations as the method of choice in mainstreaming Indians into white society occurred when the federal government made the decision to move Native American relations from the War Department into the Interior Department.

According to Iverson, the reservation system would have been regarded as the ideal model for teaching English to the Native American groups, converting them to Christianity, and otherwise molding them into compliant and docile groups.¹³

¹² Daily Mail News. 12 August 2012.

¹³ Iverson, Peter (2002). *Diné: A History of the Navajos*. University of New Mexico Press. Albuquerque.

Today, over 740,000 American Indians live on reservations, and find their lives influenced and controlled by aspects of the federal government. Government agencies such as the BIA and the Public Health Service continue to influence such things as the infrastructure (roads and highways), education, and other vital services. Many of these reservations are located in the most remote areas of the United States. Today, some reservations are located in areas where there are few opportunities for employment, education, medical care, or other vital resources.

The Concept of State Harm

The reservation method, initially, was a method of social control. The boarding school system that followed the establishment of those reservations was a formal method of obtaining almost complete destruction of Native American culture.

Ward Churchill in *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, writes that cultural genocide occurs “when all policies [are] aimed at destroying the specific characteristics by which a target group is defined, or defines itself, thereby forcing them to become something else.”¹⁴ In the United States, the boarding school policy was one of the chief methods used to destroy indigenous cultures.

The formation of reservations was also a means to obtain land for settlement for white Americans. The concept of state harm constitutes a framework that may suggest a reasonable explanation for the poor social conditions in these “third world societies” that make up the reservation system in the United States, and have persisted into the twenty-first century.

Other similar theoretical applications are available to understand and explain some the issues at hand in Native America. One particular idea advanced by social workers, psychologists, and other professionals is the “Historical Trauma Model.” First used by social worker and mental health expert Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in the 1980s, historical trauma is another way to understand how the psychological and emotional traumas of colonization, relocation, assimilation, and American Indian boarding schools have manifested within generations of the Lakota population.¹⁵

The issue of State Crime is a concept originally advanced to examine how corporations and governments intersect to produce social harm. The

¹⁴ Churchill, Ward (2004). *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*. City Lights. San Francisco.

¹⁵ Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart “The historical trauma response among natives and its relationship to substance abuse: A Lakota illustration.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 35(1)

definition of State Crime is “harmful behaviors committed by states upon its citizens, citizens of another state, or upon another state.”¹⁶

Another examination by Kauzlarich et al, argues that “regardless of whether state crimes are defined as ‘illegal, socially injurious, or unjust acts,’ they cause harm and produce victims.” Under these circumstances, Native Americans would become victims of State Crime.

Leading psychiatrists and scientists have also introduced the concept of transgenerational trauma. For example, soon after descriptions of *concentration camp syndrome* (also known as survivor syndrome) appeared, clinicians observed in 1966 that large numbers of children of Holocaust survivors were seeking treatment in clinics in Canada. The grandchildren of Holocaust survivors were overrepresented by 300 percent among the referrals to a child psychiatry clinic.¹⁷

In this project, I am utilizing “state harm,” introduced by Kauzlarich et al, as a concept referring to the inhumane treatment applied to the indigenous populations by the Spanish and American policies that led to the destruction of their language, religion, culture, and property. The subsequent confinement to reservations also ultimately changed and harmed them and continues to have consequences on the reservations today. Transgenerational trauma occurs when dealing with some of the more serious components of reservation life, such as suicide, alcoholism, drug use, and crime. As this theme develops, we begin to see state harm at a very early stage in American history.

American Indian Policy and the Jeffersonian Era

American Indian policy actually began early on in the history of the United States. Thomas Jefferson made a deal with Napoleon in 1803 for the Louisiana Purchase. The acquisition brought into the United States about 828 million square miles of territory from France, thereby doubling the size of the young Republic.

The new territory stretched from the Mississippi River in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west, and from the Gulf of Mexico in the south to the Canadian border in the north. This new land deal was also crucial in the beginning of relations with American Indians west of the Mississippi River.

¹⁶ Kauzlarich, D., Mullins, C., and Matthews, Rick, “A Complicity Continuum of State Crime.” *Contemporary justice Review*, 2003 Vol. 6 (3), Pp. 241-254.

¹⁷ Fossion, P., Rejas, M., Servais, L., Pelc, I. & Hirsch, S. (2003). “Family approach with grandchildren of Holocaust survivors,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 57(4), 519–527.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the first American presidents to formulate a plan to deal with the Native Americans in the west.

One of Jefferson's first moves was to appoint Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to form an expedition to cross the western portion of the United States to reach the Pacific Ocean. One of the chief objectives of the expedition was to observe and record the whereabouts, lives, activities, and cultures of the various American Indian tribes that inhabited the newly acquired territory, along with other geographical and horticultural information.

The expedition encountered many different tribes along the way, many of whom offered assistance, providing the expedition with their knowledge of the wilderness and helping them to acquire food. The indigenous populations Lewis and Clark encountered received various gifts of medals, ribbons, needles, mirrors, and other articles, introduced to ease any tensions when negotiating with the various tribes. The Mandan provided them with food and other essentials as the expedition wintered there in 1804. Today, a replica of Fort Mandan exists near the Missouri River where the expedition headquartered.

The *Corps of Discovery* reached the Pacific and made a legal claim for the land. They established diplomatic relations and trade with at least two dozen Indian tribes.

Jefferson's Indian Policy

President Jefferson had a significant impact on the Indian nations of North America. He pursued an Indian policy that had two main ends. First, Jefferson wanted to guarantee the security of the United States and so sought to bind Indian nations to the United States through treaties. The aim of these treaties was to acquire land and facilitate trade. However, it was more important to keep the Indians allied with the United States rather than European powers, namely England in Canada and Spain in the regions of Florida, the Gulf Coast, and lands west of the Mississippi River.

Secondly, Jefferson used the networks created by the treaties to further the program of gradual civilization of the so-called "savages." His idea was to get Native Americans to adopt European agricultural pursuits, shift into a sedentary way of life, and free up hunting grounds for further white settlement. His mainstream thinking was to encourage the various Indian nations to purchase goods on credit so they would likely fall into debt, which they could relieve through the sale of land to the government. "If only they

would take up agriculture, become civilized and be absorbed into American society,” Jefferson told Congress in 1803.¹⁸

These policies may have later laid the groundwork for the idea of such policies as the Indian Removal Act that would occur under the auspices of President Andrew Jackson in 1830. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 became one of the first and most serious forms of state harm to the American Indians east of the Mississippi River.

Indian Removal Act of 1830

The U.S. government adopted the Indian Removal Act in 1830. The Act authorized the President of the United States to negotiate treaties and to remove the remaining eastern Indians to lands west of the Mississippi River. This intentional act allowed Americans to steal land from indigenous populations.

Under Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, federal agents used threats, bribes, and liquor to secure Indian consent to one-sided treaties. These policies affected a number of Native Americans, specifically the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creeks, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminoles). The federal government removed thousands of Indians, some in chains, on a journey marked by hunger, disease, and death. The “Trail of Tears” thus began one of the most harmful acts committed by the U.S. government.

Senator Benton, James K. Polk, and Manifest Destiny

Thomas Hart Benton was a U.S. Senator from Missouri and was one of the first advocates of American westward expansion. His cause was “manifest destiny,” a movement and widely held belief that Americans should expand across North America. Early on, he had called for the annexation of the Republic of Texas and authorized the Homestead Act.

One chief problem standing in the way of America’s march to the Pacific was Mexico, and, shortly after becoming president, James K. Polk found a solution to this problem. President Polk was also an expansionist and he started a war with Mexico soon after coming into power. Victory in the war left the United States free to expand as far west as possible.

Soon, the Santa Fe Trail would clear the way into New Mexico and the Oregon Trail opened along with other famous roads to California and the

¹⁸ National Museum of the American Indian, summer 2009, pages 54–58. Smithsonian Museum.

gold fields. The problem with the freedom of movement across to the west was that it crossed the path of many of the Native American hunting grounds. This would produce a number of conflicts, both major and minor.

For many Native Americans, the buffalo was their main source of subsistence, and incursions by settlers into the native hunting grounds caused the buffalo to change their migratory paths. It was inevitable that conflicts would arise as more and more strangers invaded native lands. In time, the practice of American buffalo hunters killing the animals for their hides and leaving their carcasses to rot in vast piles across the west, would spell doom for the life of the American Indian.

Reservations as a Means of Social Control and Confinement

The buzzword for many years regarding American Indians was that they were “savages” who needed to be “civilized.” Thomas Jefferson wanted nothing more than to turn them all into farmers, thereby teaching them the civilized ways of American society. This philosophy would be the main reason for reservations becoming the mode of operation in dealing with American Indians. Most American Indians at the time knew nothing of farming, and this sudden change of lifestyles was devastating and restricting.

One of the main methods adopted in this assimilation process was to place Indians on reservations and start the process of turning them into English-speaking “civilized” beings by way of education. This gave birth to the famous boarding school philosophy.

