

Government Discrimination and Native American Resistance

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Colonization, Expansion, and Government Discrimination

America is basically part of the continent, which was first discovered by Europeans. In the years following 1492, the colonialism and settlement of the United States by people of European descent caused many social and political problems for the indigenous people of North America. The Americans realized they wanted the land they were living on, and they decided to pay them to move. Most of the Europeans who inhabited the United States came from Great Britain. Others came from the other parts of Europe due to its support of refugees from all over the world. When the British colonists settled, the country was already occupied by Indians, who later came to be named Native Americans. The native people of the United States were living peacefully in their land, and the land was their identity. They faced immense challenges when the American government started expanding the territory towards them. The Native Americans refused to give up their land, and the government took the step of forcing them to leave their land and shift to areas assigned by the government (Prucha, 1994).

Colonialism is the phenomenon where a person or a group of people decides to occupy a place that did not originally belong to them. The term became common during the period of European colonialism all over the world. Countries such as Spain, Great Britain, France, and Italy became involved in the concept as they conquered different parts of the world. Colonies belonging to different European countries were scattered all over Africa and Asia. Great Britain was the one that conquered the greatest part of America until they fought for independence and started calling themselves Americans.

The American Colonization Society was founded, and one of the founders and a member of the society was General Charles Fenton. He believed that all humans have equal rights under the law, but Native Americans were still denied their rights. He was a part of the society for fifteen years, but in the end, the society was used for the wrong purposes. The Native Americans were discriminated against because of their race and were forced to leave their land and shift to areas where they were given land. They were forced to leave their homes, and the government passed acts to remove them from their lands.

The Indian Removal Act and Forced Displacement

The [Indian Removal Act](#) was passed in 1830, and it allowed the president of the United States to force Native Americans from the southeast to move west of the Mississippi River. The law was passed under the presidency of Andrew Jackson. Many Native Americans refused to move and fought against the American government. However, many tribes were forced to move, and thousands died during the journey because of hunger, cold weather, disease, and exhaustion. This event became known as the Trail of Tears.

The government argued that removal would protect Native Americans from conflict with white settlers. However, the real purpose was to take their fertile land for farming, settlement, and economic development. The policy was therefore discriminatory because it treated Native Americans as obstacles to expansion rather than as people with legal and moral rights. The government negotiated treaties, but many of these agreements were unfair, pressured, or violated.

The Cherokee Nation challenged removal through legal action. In *Worcester v. Georgia*, the United States Supreme Court recognized that the Cherokee territory was a distinct political community and that the state of Georgia could not impose its laws there. Nevertheless, the decision was not effectively enforced, and the removal continued. This showed that legal recognition alone could not protect Native Americans when the political branches supported expansion.

Assimilation, Reservations, and Cultural Suppression

After removal, many Native American communities were confined to reservations. Reservation policies restricted movement, reduced economic independence, and placed tribal life under federal supervision. The government often controlled food supplies, land distribution, and political authority. These policies weakened traditional forms of governance and made many communities dependent on federal agents.

The government also promoted assimilation, which aimed to replace Native American cultures with European-American customs. Native children were taken to boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their languages, wear traditional clothing, or practise their religions. They were taught that their cultures were inferior. The purpose of these schools was not merely education but the destruction of indigenous identity.

The Dawes Act of 1887 divided communally held tribal land into individual allotments. Supporters claimed that private property would help Native Americans become farmers and assimilate into American society. In practice, the policy resulted in the loss of millions of acres of tribal land. Land that was not allotted to Native individuals was opened to non-Native settlement. The policy weakened

collective cultural and political structures (Deloria & Lytle, 1984).

Religious Discrimination and the Loss of Sovereignty

Native American religious practices were also restricted. Ceremonies, dances, and spiritual traditions were sometimes prohibited by government agents. Sacred lands were taken for settlement, mining, railways, dams, and other projects. Because indigenous religions are often closely connected to particular places, the loss of land also harmed spiritual life.

Government policies frequently ignored tribal sovereignty. Treaties recognized tribes as political entities, but federal and state authorities repeatedly interfered in their internal affairs. Native Americans were treated as dependent populations rather than nations with their own systems of law and government. This contradiction remains central to the history of federal Indian policy.

The granting of United States citizenship to Native Americans in 1924 did not immediately end discrimination. Some states continued to restrict their voting rights, and many communities lacked access to adequate education, healthcare, housing, and economic opportunities. Citizenship also created tension because Native people were citizens of the United States while retaining membership in sovereign tribal nations.

Native Resistance and Armed Conflict

Native American resistance took many forms. Some nations fought military campaigns to defend their land. Leaders such as Tecumseh attempted to build intertribal alliances against American expansion. The Seminoles resisted removal in Florida, and Plains nations fought to protect their hunting grounds from settlement, railways, and military occupation.

Armed resistance was often portrayed by the government and media as savagery, while American expansion was presented as progress. This language justified violence against indigenous communities. Massacres such as Sand Creek and Wounded Knee revealed the extreme consequences of dehumanization and military policy.

Although many military campaigns ended in defeat for Native nations, resistance preserved identity and demonstrated that government expansion was never accepted without opposition. Native leaders used diplomacy, treaty negotiations, migration, and strategic alliances as well as warfare.

Legal, Political, and Cultural Resistance

Native resistance did not end with the nineteenth-century wars. Tribal nations continued to use courts, political organization, education, and public protest. They challenged violations of treaties and demanded control over land, resources, schools, and governments. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 ended the allotment policy and encouraged tribal self-government, although it did not fully restore lost sovereignty.

During the twentieth century, organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians defended tribal rights. The Red Power movement and the American Indian Movement drew national attention to poverty, police violence, broken treaties, and cultural suppression. Events such as the occupation of Alcatraz and the protest at Wounded Knee became symbols of indigenous resistance.

Native communities also resisted through cultural survival. The preservation and revitalization of languages, ceremonies, oral traditions, and artistic practices challenged the assimilation policies designed to eliminate them. Cultural continuity is a form of political resistance because it protects collective identity and passes knowledge to future generations (Wilkinson, 2005).

Contemporary Struggles for Land, Resources, and Recognition

Contemporary Native American resistance includes legal and political campaigns over land, water, environmental protection, and treaty rights. Tribal nations have defended fishing and hunting rights guaranteed by treaties. They have also challenged mining, pipelines, dams, and other projects that threaten sacred lands or natural resources.

The protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline demonstrated the connection between sovereignty, environmental justice, and indigenous rights. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and supporters argued that the project threatened water supplies and sacred sites. The movement gained international attention and showed that historical conflicts over land remain relevant.

Many tribes have also developed their own institutions, businesses, schools, healthcare systems, and courts. These efforts represent self-determination rather than dependence. Tribal sovereignty allows communities to govern according to their own priorities while participating in the wider political and economic system.

Historical Consequences and Continuing Inequality

Government discrimination has produced long-term social and economic consequences. Land loss weakened traditional economies and separated communities from resources. Boarding schools

caused trauma that affected families across generations. Inadequate federal services contributed to health, housing, and educational disparities.

These problems should not be interpreted as failures of Native cultures. They resulted largely from conquest, forced removal, broken treaties, resource loss, and discriminatory policies. Understanding this history is necessary for evaluating present inequalities and government responsibilities.

The United States continues to have treaty and trust obligations toward tribal nations. These are legal commitments rather than charitable benefits. Addressing historical injustice requires respect for sovereignty, enforcement of treaties, protection of sacred places, and meaningful consultation on policies affecting Native communities (Fixico, 2012).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Native Americans experienced discrimination through removal, reservation policies, allotment, boarding schools, religious suppression, and the denial of sovereignty. Government policies treated indigenous land and culture as obstacles to national expansion. These actions caused death, displacement, cultural loss, and long-term inequality.

Native Americans consistently resisted through military defence, diplomacy, legal action, political organization, protest, and cultural survival. Their resistance prevented complete assimilation and preserved tribal identity and sovereignty. The history of Native American resistance demonstrates that the expansion of the United States was contested and that indigenous peoples remain active political communities. Justice requires recognition of this history and respect for the continuing rights of tribal nations.

References

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