

Case: Federal Indian Policy, Native Americans & the Allotment Era

Theme: Cultural Contact & Conflict

Time Period: Late Reconstruction / Gilded Age (1876-1900)

I. Overview of Case Topic:

During the Reconstruction Era the federal government underwrote an unprecedented extension of civil rights through the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and the nation engaged in a contentious debate over how to incorporate ex-slaves into American society. A parallel discourse concerning the assimilation of American Indians also emerged, and many former abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips and Lydia Maria Child reoriented their reformist endeavors toward the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Reservation System. Beginning in 1883, the self-described “Friends of the Indian” convened annually at the Lake Mohonk Resort in New York to craft a policy of “emancipation” for the Indian that mirrored the liberation of the freedpeople after the Civil War. By 1887 these reformers envisioned a social process of individualizing and de-tribalizing the Indian, which would dissolve their communal culture, identity, and property. A regular attendee of the conference, U.S. Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts translated this vision into federal policy with the General Allotment Act of 1887.

The “Dawes” act embodied the principles of the reformers and sought to transform tribal members into individual, land-owning family farmers in the Yeoman Ideal and Homestead Ethic. Reformers believed that indigenous communal cultures and the reservation system impeded the assimilation of individual Indians and perpetuated traditional associational ties. The act authorized the President to select reservations to be surveyed and classified into 160 acre allotments. As allottees, tribal members received twenty-five year trust patents to their land tracts, and could only receive fee-simple title once they had adopted commercialized, intensive agriculture or livestock raising. The Allotment Era of federal Indian policy (1887-1934) witnessed the transfer of over 84 million of acres of the Native landed estate and natural resources to non-Indian ownership and leasehold. The intents and results of the allotment policy also divided tribes over how to accommodate or resist the federal government. Locally, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs effectively culminated allotment on the Klamath Reservation of Southern Oregon by 1910—assigning 1180 allotments and issuing 951 trust patents.

II. Connection to Theme/Time Matrix:

During the Gilded Age (1870s-1900) the federal government and white Americans sought to construct a social order and race relations that regulated the position of Native Americans, Trans-Pacific and European immigrants, and African Americans. Major federal policies and court rulings included the Dawes Severalty Act (General Allotment Act) of 1887, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Ellis & Angel Islands (1892), and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). This case focuses on the social, ethnocultural, and legal history of federal Indian policy.

III. Historical Questions:

Who supported and who opposed the federal Indian policy of allotment?

Did Native Americans resist allotment, either collectively, tribally, or individually?

Was the policy and vision of genuine reformers and humanitarians undermined by land speculators and government bureaucrats?

How did allotment affect the daily lives of Native American families?

How did allotment change the relationship between the tribes and the federal government?

How did allotment affect local and regional economies? How did allotment affect Non-Indian extractive industries such as logging, lumbering, farming, and livestock raising?

Did Native Americans benefit from the policy of allotment?

Were Native Americans harmed by allotment?

Did Native Americans adopt farming and livestock raising as a result of this policy?

How did off-reservation boarding schools and on-reservation day schools complement the objectives of "Americanization," "Assimilation," and "De-Tribalization"?

How did the superintendents of the Klamath Reservation implement the Dawes Act?

How did the Dawes Act affect the Weeks family on the Klamath Reservation?

How do the descendants of Klamath tribal members who lived through allotment assess the impact of the Dawes Act on their parents and grandparents?

Looking ahead: How would Native peoples' experiences with allotment shape their responses to the federal Indian policy of Termination during the 1950s?

IV. Resources:

A. **Secondary**

Carlson, Leonard A. *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Fixico, Donald Lee. *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century: American Capitalism and Tribal Natural Resources*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1998.

Greenwald, Emily. *Reconfiguring the Reservation: The Nez Percés, Jicarilla Apaches, and the Dawes Act*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002.

Hoxie, Frederick E. *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

Laderman, Scott. "It is Cheaper and Better to Teach a Young Indian Than to Fight an Old One": Thaddeus Pound and the Logic of Assimilation." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 26:3 (2002): 85-111.

McLaughlin, Michael R. "The Dawes Act, or Indian General Allotment Act of 1887: The Continuing Burden of Allotment. A Selective Annotated Bibliography." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 20:2 (1996): 59-105.

McDonnell, Janet A. *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887-1934*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Otis, D.S. *The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973.

Prucha, Francis Paul. *Indian Policy in the United States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.

Stern, Theodore. *The Klamath Tribe: A People and Their Reservation*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965.

Senier, Siobhan. "Allotment Protest and Tribal Discourse: Reading Wynema's Successes and Shortcomings." *American Indian Quarterly* 24:3 (2002): 420-440.

_____. *Voices of American Indian Assimilation and Resistance: Helen Hunt Jackson, Sarah Winnemucca, and Victoria Howard*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

B. Primary: Edited Compilations

Jackson, Helen Hunt. *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson*. Edited by Valerie Sherer Mathes. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

Nabakov, Peter, ed. *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000*. New York: Penguin, 1999.

C. Primary: Archival (Available locally and through the TAH Website)

RG 75.19.51. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Records of the Klamath Indian Agency, OR. Allotment Case Files, 1908-1958. National Archives and Record Administration, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle.

–Box 237, Folders 1 & 3. "Jake Weeks; Allotment of Land" [Includes trust patents, lease agreements, appraisal reports, certificates of appraisal, sale applications, bidding invitations/awards, land status reports, bills of sale, and official correspondence and memoranda.]

U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Klamath Agency. Records of the Office of Indian Affairs. *Annual Narrative Reports of the Klamath Reservation*. 1910-1921. University of Oregon Library, Microform Collections.

U.S. Office of Indian Affairs. Klamath Agency. Records of the Office of Indian Affairs. *Annual Statistical Reports of the Klamath Reservation*. 1920-1935. University of Oregon Library, Microform Collections.

D. Primary: Websites

An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), Statutes at Large 24, 388-91, Native American Documents Project (NADP) Document A1887. California State University, San Marcos.

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Digital Classroom. Teaching With Documents. "Lesson Plan: Maps of Indian Territory, the Dawes Act, and Will Rogers' Enrollment Case File" URL: http://www.archives.gov/digital/classroom/lessons/federal_indian_policy/federal_indian_policy.html [Includes digital images of manuscript materials and maps from RG 75 Bureau of Indian Affairs: Maps of Indian Territory; Clement V. and William P. Rogers' Application for Enrollment in the Five Civilized Tribes; Testimony of Clement V. Rogers, 2 October 1900; and William P. Rogers' Application for Allotment and Homestead.]

Native American Documents Project (NADP) Document A1887. California State University, San Marcos. URL: <http://www.csusm.edu/nadp/index.html>. [Extensive on-line resources include bibliographies, documented narrative histories, statistical data, comparative tables enhanced with hypertextual links]