



J. Keppler, "Indian Policy - A House of Cards" 1881

U.S. Federal Indian Policies during the 19th-20th Century



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Model Curriculum

U.S. Federal Indian Policies during the 19th-20th Century

Author:

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Grade Level:

9-12

Subjects:

Ethnic Studies

Time Frame:

55 minutes


Lesson Slides:

 [Slides: U.S. Federal Indian Policies during the 19th-20th Century](#)


Lesson Script:

 [Slide Notes and Teacher's Script "U.S. Federal Indian Policies during the 19th-20th Century"](#)

Printables:

 [Federal Indian Policies Word Matching Handout \(1\).pdf](#)

Answer Key:

 [Example of completed word matching study activity \(1\).pdf](#)

Materials Needed:

- Computer and Projector or whole class media presenter

Curriculum Themes

- ☒ History
- ☐ Cultural Strengths
- ☒ Law/Government
- ☐ Relationship to Place
- ☐ Cross Curricular Integration



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Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces students to some of the most significant Federal Indian policies in the U.S. during the 19th and early 20th century. The lesson focuses on three eras of Federal Indian law; the removal and reservation era, the assimilation era, and the limited tribal self-rule era. This brief lesson spans 120+ years of Federal Indian law and is intended to introduce students to key concepts related to the complex legal relationship between Native American nations and the United States. The lesson consists of a lecture about the historical context of the law, a chronological timeline of the laws and policies presented, a video, and an in-class word matching activity designed to help students study the contents of the lesson.

The teacher must understand that the law is not a neutral entity for Native people nor anyone else and that the passage of time has not lessened the impact of these laws on Native peoples' lives. While many Native people study law in order to mitigate the harms of Federal Indian policies, the law has always been a tool of settler-colonialism when wielded by the U.S. The teacher must be prepared to actively engage students in a complex and difficult discussion about the legislative function of the U.S. settler state.

Essential Questions:

- Who is most detrimentally impacted by Federal Indian policies? What are some of these impacts?
- How can we understand Federal Indian policies differently and interpret the law as a function of U.S. settler-colonialism?
- What is at stake for Native American people in terms of Federal Indian policy?

Learning Goals

Students will:

- Analyze the complex and varied outcomes of Federal Indian policies through and during in-class discussion.
- Recall and summarize significant Federal Indian policies by engaging in an in-class word matching study activity.
- Collaborate with classmates and evaluate Federal Indian policies.
- Understand how the law is important to U.S. settler-colonialism.
- Work with a partner or individually to complete an in-class activity.
- Create a simple timeline that represents eras of Federal Indian law.

Background for Educators

For Native American peoples in the U.S. Federal Indian law has a long and violent history that has not yet abated. During the removal and reservation era, the U.S. committed horrific acts of genocide including the infamous Trail of Tears in order to secure control over stolen Native homelands. During the assimilation era Native peoples faced even more land loss under allotment, intense poverty, and the theft of their children. Finally, during the era of limited tribal self-rule there was an opportunity for tribes to assert more political agency but those gains were limited by U.S. oversight and failure to honor fiduciary obligations made via treaty with Native nations. Since its inception Federal Indian law has been dictated by settlers' desire to appropriate Native American homelands and transform them into raw material for capitalist expansion or individual private property which in turn expanded the territorial sovereignty of the U.S. As the lesson indicates, private property is not a neutral condition of ownership in a settler state like the U.S., it is a vehicle through which individual citizens claim ownership of dispossessed Native homelands. Each new era of Federal Indian law, even those that appear to grant some recognition of tribal nations' sovereignty, has in fact weakened tribal sovereignty by further entrenching U.S. occupation of Native homelands. The key vocabulary terms in the lesson, particularly assimilation and property, are critical to understanding the ideologies that animate Federal Indian Policy and understanding ongoing Indigenous dispossession.

Curriculum Standards

History and Social Science

- HSS.11.11: Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.
 - HSS.11.11.6: Analyze the persistence of poverty and how different analyses of this issue influence welfare reform, health insurance reform, and other social policies.

Theme for Ethnic Studies:

- Federal Indian Law and Policies; Native worldview and awareness of cultural perspectives.

Scaffolding

English language learners will benefit from the following strategies:

Emerging: Time to discuss the meanings of vocabulary words with a partner.

Expanding: Organizing the terms, visually, in a graphic organizer.

Bridging: Extended writing, to incorporate learnings of the lesson with any new research or connections they make.

Additional Resources for Teachers

To learn more, Teachers can explore:

Echo-Hawk, Walter R. In the Courts of the Conqueror: the 10 Worst Indian Law Cases Ever Decided. Fulcrum Press, 2010.

References

Croft, George A. "American Progress." , ca. 1873. Photograph. Library of Congress Website. <https://www.loc.gov/item/97507547/>.

Keppler, Joseph Ferdinand, Artist. Our Indian policy - a house of cards / J. Keppler. , 1881. N.Y.: Published by Keppler & Schwarzmann. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012647285/>.

"President Jackson and the Indian Removal Bill" from American Experiences Season 21 Episode 7. 4/26/2009. Arkansas PBS. Accessed Oct. 5, 2024.

<https://watch.myarkansaspbs.org/video/american-experience-president-jackson-and-indian-removal-bill/>.

"The Dawes Allotment Act." KSPS Documentaries. Arkansas PBS. Accessed Oct. 5, 2024. <https://watch.myarkansaspbs.org/video/dawes-allotment-act-4gxnnz/>.

"United States Office Of Indian Affairs, and T. J Morgan. Map showing Indian reservations within the limits of the United States." Washington, D.C.: Office of Indian Affairs, 1892. Map. Library of Congress Website. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2009579467/>.

Wilkins, David E., and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark. 2011. American Indian Politics and the American Political System. 3rd ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Unit Author

Stephanie Lumsden (she/her) is a member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe. She earned her PhD in Gender Studies at UCLA in 2023. Her research examines the relationship between Indigenous dispossession and the development of the carceral settler state in northwestern California. Stephanie is currently a University of California Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow in the History department at UC Santa Cruz. In fall 2025, Stephanie will be joining the Native American Studies department at UC Davis as an Assistant Professor.

California Native American Studies Model Curriculum


The California Native American Studies Model Curriculum (NASMC) will support the design and development of open-source lesson plans, primary source documents, planning resources, teaching strategies, and professional development activities to assist California K-12 educators in teaching about California Native American Studies. Per AB 167, the NASMC is defined as lesson plans, primary source documents, planning resources, teaching strategies, and professional development activities to assist educators in teaching about Native American Studies. The traditional cultural knowledge within lessons, including Native language, art, media and stories, are owned by the

respective Tribal nations, Native knowledge keepers, artists, producers and authors of the curriculum as indicated in each lesson.

Teacher Directions

Preparation for the lesson (Slide 1-8 in teacher script)

(30 minutes)

- In order to prepare the class for this topic, show slides 1-8 and follow the teacher script. Students will receive background information and context for the lesson.
 Slide Notes and Teacher's Script "U.S. Federal Indian Policies during the 19th-20th ..."

Activity: Word Matching Study (Slides 9-10 in teacher script)

(20 minutes)

- Work individually or in pairs to complete the handout.
- Match the laws and key terms listed on the handout to the corresponding era of Federal Indian law.
- Summarize the laws and define the key terms. (Check for understanding of key concepts in slide 10).

