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AN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

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NEW DEAL TO TERMINATION

Some relief for Indigenous nations came with the 1930s New Deal. The Roosevelt administration's programs to combat economic collapse included an acknowledgment of Indigenous self-determination. Roosevelt appointed anthropologist and self-identified socialist John Collier as US commissioner of Indian affairs in 1933.[18] As a young activist scholar in 1922, Collier had been hired by the General Federation of Women's Clubs to assist the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico in their land-claims struggle, a project that culminated in success when Congress passed the 1924 Pueblo Lands Act. Having lived at Taos Pueblo, whose residents practiced traditional lifeways, Collier had developed respect for the communal social relations he observed in Indigenous communities and had confidence that these peoples could govern themselves successfully and even influence a move toward socialism in the United States. He understood and agreed with Indigenous opposition to assimilation as individuals into the general society—what the ongoing allotment in severalty of Native collective estates and the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 sought to institutionalize.

As commissioner for Indian affairs, in consultation with Native communities, Collier drafted and successfully lobbied for passage of the Wheeler-Howard bill, which became the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. One of its provisions was to end further allotment of Indigenous territories, which was immediately implemented, although already allotted land was not restored. Another provision committed the federal government to purchase available land contiguous to reservations in order to restore lands to relevant Native nations. The IRA's main provision was more controversial with Indigenous peoples, calling for the formation of "tribal governments." In a gesture toward self-determination, the IRA did not require any Indigenous nation to accept the law's terms, and several, including the Navajo Nation, declined. The IRA was limited in that it did not apply to the relocated Native nations in Oklahoma; separate legislation was later drawn up for their unique circumstances.[19]

The Navajo Nation, with the largest land base and population among Indigenous peoples in the United States, soundly rejected signing off on the IRA. The Great Depression of the 1930s was, in the words of postwar Navajo chairman Sam Ankeah, "the most devastating experience in [Navajo] history since the imprisonment at Fort Sumner from 1864–1868."[20] When Collier became commissioner in 1933, he pushed for reduction of Navajo sheep and goats

as part of a larger New Deal conservation scheme to stem stock overgrazing. He badgered the twelve Navajo Council members into accepting the reduction, promising unlikely new jobs under the Civilian Conservation Corps to replace lost income. Collier suggested, without basis, that soil erosion in the Navajo Reservation was responsible for the silting up of the Boulder Dam site. His action likely was influenced by agribusinesses that wanted to get rid of all small producers in order to create an advantage to Anglo settler ranchers in New Mexico and Arizona.[21] The process is still bitterly remembered by Navajos. With traumatized Navajos watching, government agents shot sheep and goats and left them to rot or cremated them after dousing them with gasoline. At one site alone, thirty-five goats were shot and left to rot. One hundred fifty thousand goats and fifty thousand sheep were killed in this manner. Oral history interviews tell of the pressure tactics on the Navajos, including arrests of those who resisted, and express bitterness over the destruction of their livestock. As Navajo Council member Howard Gorman said:

> All of these incidents broke a lot of hearts of the Navajo people and left them mourning for years. They didn't like it that the sheep were killed; it was a total waste. That is what the people said. To many of them livestock was a necessity and meant survival. Some people consider livestock as sacred because it is life's necessity. They think of livestock as their mother. The cruel way our stock was handled is something that should never have happened.[22]

In addition to the trauma experienced by the Navajos, the effect of the reductions was to impoverish the owners of small herds.

For those Native nations, the majority, that did accept the Indian Reorganization Act, a negative consequence was that English-speaking Native elites, often aligned with Christian denominations, signed on to the law and formed authoritarian governments that enriched a few families and undermined communal traditions and traditional forms of governance, a problem that persists. However, the IRA did end allotment and set a precedent for acknowledging Indigenous self-determination and recognizing collective and

cultural rights, a legal reality that made it difficult for those who sought to undo the incipient empowerment of Indigenous peoples in the 1950s.

The Truman administration pushed out John Collier, among many other progressive Roosevelt appointees. Following the end of World War II, attitudes among the ruling class and Congress regarding Indigenous nations turned from supporting autonomy to their elimination as peoples with a new regimen of individual assimilation. In 1946 Congress established the Indian Claims Commission and the Indian Claims Court to legitimize the prior illegal federal taking of Indigenous treaty lands. Between 1946 and 1952—the cutoff date for filing claims—370 petitions representing 850 claims were filed on behalf of Indigenous nations. Although the government's stated purpose was to clear title for lands illegally taken, the claims mechanism barred restitution of lands taken illegally or acquiring new ones to replace the loss. Settlement was limited to monetary compensation based on the property's value at the time of the taking, and without interest. Adding insult to injury, any expenditure made by the federal government on behalf of the Indigenous nations making claims was subtracted from the overall award, thereby penalizing the Indigenous people for services they had not requested. The average interval between filing a claim and receiving an award was fifteen years.

In creating the Indian Claims Commission, Congress was acknowledging the fact that the federal government had illegally seized Indigenous lands guaranteed by treaties. That validation became useful in Indigenous strategies for strengthening sovereignty and pursuing restitution of the land rather than monetary compensation. On the other hand, the process became a stepping-stone to ending federal acknowledgment of Indigenous nations altogether. The Eisenhower administration lost no time in collaborating with Congress to weaken federal trust responsibility, transferring Indian education to the states and moving Indian health care from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of Health.

This policy trend toward assimilation culminated in the Termination Act (House Concurrent Resolution 108) in 1953, which provided—in Orwellian language—that Congress should, "as

quickly as possible, move to free those tribes listed from Federal supervision and control and from all disabilities and limitations specially applicable to Indians." Under termination, the federal trust protection and transfer payments guaranteed by treaties and agreements would end. Dillon S. Myer, who had headed the War Relocation Authority that administered the concentration camps for US citizens of Japanese descent, was, significantly, the Eisenhower administration's commissioner of Indian affairs to implement termination.[23] Commissioner Myer noted that Indigenous consent was immaterial, saying, "We must proceed even though Indian cooperation may be lacking in certain cases."[24] In the same year, Congress imposed Public Law 280 that transferred police power on reservations from the federal government to the states.

Despite the piecemeal eating away of Indigenous landholdings and sovereignty and federal trust responsibility based on treaties, the US government had no constitutional or other legal authority to deprive federally recognized Native nations of their inherent sovereignty or territorial boundaries. It could only make it nearly impossible for them to exercise that sovereignty, or, alternatively, eliminate Indigenous identity entirely through assimilation, a form of genocide. The latter was the goal of the 1956 Indian Relocation Act (Public Law 949). With BIA funding, any Indigenous individual or family could relocate to designated urban industrial areas—the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Dallas, Denver, Cleveland—where BIA offices were established to make housing and job training and placement available. This project gave rise to large Native urban populations scattered among already poor and struggling minority working-class communities, holding low-skilled jobs or dealing with long-term unemployment. Yet many of these mostly young migrants were influenced by the civil rights movement emerging in cities in the 1950s and 1960s and began their own distinct intertribal movements organized around the urban American Indian centers they established. In one of the largest of the relocation destinations, the San Francisco Bay Area, this would culminate in the eighteen-month occupation of Alcatraz in the late 1960s.

CIVIL RIGHTS ERA BEGINS

The founding of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in 1944 had marked a surge of Indigenous resistance. An extraordinary group of Native leaders emerged in the 1950s, including D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead), Edward Dozier (Santa Clara Pueblo), Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Lakota), and dozens of others from diverse nations. Without their efforts, the termination period would have been more damaging than it was, possibly ending Indigenous status altogether. As a result of their organizing, the government ceased enforcing termination in 1961, though the legislation remained on the books until its repeal in 1988.[25] However, by 1960, more than a hundred Indigenous nations had been terminated. A few were later able to regain federal trusteeship through protracted court battles and demonstrations, which took decades and financial hardship. Indigenous leaders such as Ada Deer and James White of the terminated Menominee Nation played key roles in the struggle to have Indigenous cases heard by Congress and by the Supreme Court in suits and appeals. The restitution movement attracted publicity through community organizing and direct action.[26] Postwar Indigenous resistance operated in relation to a United States far wealthier and more powerful than before, but also within the era of decolonization and human rights inaugurated with establishment of the United Nations and adoption of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. Native leaders paid attention and were inspired.

Native organizing, like the organization of the African American desegregation and voting rights movement, developed within the context of a nationalistic anticommunist ideology that intensified with the Cold War and nuclear arms race in the 1950s. This second great Red Scare (the first had been in the wake of World War I) targeted the labor movement under the guise of combating the "communist threat" from the Soviet Union.[27] It also attacked the civil rights and self-determination movements of the period, and racism broadened and flourished. The wars against Japan and then Korea,

along with the successful Chinese communist revolution, revived the early-twentieth-century racist fear of a "yellow peril." Mexican migrant workers largely replaced the Asian agricultural workers displaced by the Japanese American internment, but in 1953 "Operation Wetback," as the federal program was called, forced the deportation of more than a million Mexican workers, in the process subjecting millions of US citizens of Mexican heritage to illegal search and arrest. Native Americans continued to experience brutality, including rape and detention in the border towns on the edges of reservation lands, at the hands of citizens as well as law enforcement officials. The situation of African Americans was one of continued legalized segregation in the South, and extralegal but open discrimination elsewhere. Then, thanks to the long and hard work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1954, the US Supreme Court ordered desegregation of public schools. Years of persistent and little-publicized civil rights organizing, particularly in the South, burst into public view with the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, the following year. The white response was murderous: a well-funded campaign by White Citizens' Councils that formed all over the country, accusing civil rights activists of communist influence and infiltration. When white vigilantes bombed and burned Black churches, it was said that "the communists" were doing it to gain sympathy for integration.

As national liberation movements surged in European colonies in Africa and Asia, the United States responded with counterinsurgency. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was formed in 1947 and expanded in size and global reach during the Eisenhower administration under director Allen Dulles, brother of Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles. The CIA instrumentalized the overthrow of the democratically elected governments of Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954.[28] Guatemala had been the leading light in developing the Inter-American Indian Institute, a 1940 treaty-based initiative that Dave Warren and D'Arcy McNickle were involved with. Following the coup, the institute headquarters relocated from Guatemala City to Mexico City, but there it no longer had the same clout. Covert action came to be the primary means of counterinsurgency, while military invasion remained an option as in Vietnam following a decade of covert counterinsurgency there. In the buildup to the US war in Vietnam, the CIA set the stage with its "secret war" in Laos, organizing the indigenous Hmong as a CIA-sponsored army. After Iran and Guatemala, the CIA engineered coups in Indonesia, the Congo, Greece, and Chile, while attempting assassinations or coups that failed in Cuba, Iraq, Laos, and other countries.

Two years before John F. Kennedy took office as president of the United States, the Cuban people, after decades of struggle and years of urban and rural organizing and guerrilla war, deposed the corrupt and despised dictator Batista, who had been financed and supported by the United States to the bitter end. The CIA spent the next several years trying to assassinate revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and made many attempts to invade, the most infamous of which was the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco. Many Cubans who left Cuba for the United States after the revolution were recruited as CIA operatives. The revolution in Cuba, just ninety miles off the Florida coast, would be a touchstone for increasingly radicalized young people in the United States, but even more so for the Indigenous peoples of Latin America, which resonated with Native American activists seeking self-determination to their north.