

At the end of the American Civil War, the United States was poised for more growth and development. As U.S. citizens and European and Asian immigrants built cities and settled farms and ranches in the West, they encroached, or advanced, on the lands of Native Americans who already lived there. To create more space and opportunities for the settlers, the U.S. government passed new legislation and established policies that effectively created smaller reservations for Native Americans in less desirable locations and attempted to assimilate, or blend, these Native American nations into mainstream American culture.

In modern times, there has been heavy criticism of these government actions. Given what we now know about the disastrous consequences of expansion for Native Americans, would there have been a better solution than breaking Native American lands into smaller parcels and forcing assimilation? It is your job to study the issue and write a proposal for an alternative to the Dawes Severalty Act and other Native American policies of the time. How could the demands of westward expansion been balanced better with the rights of Native Americans?

## I. Introduction

1. Study the text below:

From the *Dawes Severalty Act of 1887*

*An Act to provide for the allotment of lands in severalty to Indians on the various reservations, and to extend the protection of the laws of the United States and the Territories over the Indians, and for other purposes.*

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That in all cases where any tribe or band of Indians has been, or shall hereafter be, located upon any reservation created for their use, either by treaty stipulation or by virtue of an act of Congress or executive order setting apart the same for their use, the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, authorized, whenever in his opinion any reservation or any part thereof of such Indians is advantageous for agricultural and grazing purposes, to cause said reservation, or any part thereof, to be surveyed, or resurveyed if necessary, and to allot the lands in said reservation in severalty to any Indian located thereon in quantities as follows:

To each head of a family, one-quarter of a section;

To each single person over eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section;

To each orphan child under eighteen years of age, one-eighth of a section; and

To each other single person under eighteen years now living, or who may be born prior to the date of the order of the President directing an allotment of the lands embraced in any reservation, one-sixteenth of a section:

[A]ll lands adapted to agriculture, with or without irrigation so sold or released to the United States by any Indian tribe shall be held by the United States for the sale purpose of securing homes to actual settlers and shall be disposed of by the United States to actual and bona fide settlers only tracts not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres to any one person, on such terms as Congress shall prescribe, subject to grants which Congress may make in aid of education: And provided further, That no patents shall issue therefore except to the person so taking the same as and homestead, or his heirs, and after the expiration of five years occupancy thereof as such homestead; and any conveyance of said lands taken as a homestead, or any contract touching the same, or lieu thereon, created prior to the date of such patent, shall be null and void.

2. What does the text tell you about the attitude of the U.S. government toward Native Americans? How does this act attempt to control the Native American nations? Spend three minutes to stop-and-jot a few quick ideas about the U.S. government and the Native Americans in the West. As you think about the text, ask yourself how this law might have affected Native Americans.
3. Work together with a partner and discuss some of your ideas. Then, use the information you have gathered from studying the text to talk about these questions:
  - How does the Dawes Act work to weaken Native American land claims? Use evidence from the document.
  - What relationship between the United States and the Native Americans is established in this legislation?
  - How do you think this policy affected the lives of Native Americans?
  - In what ways does this policy favor westward expansion over Native American rights?

## II. Research the Policies Toward Native Americans

1. Review the text, images, and video segments below that describe some of the actions of the U.S. government during westward expansion as well as Native American responses. In the space below, take notes on the content of the text, images, and video segments. Use the questions to guide your note taking.
  - What policies and actions did the government promote in regard to Native Americans?
  - What did the government intend to accomplish through those policies and actions?
  - How did these policies and actions affect Native Americans in the West? How did Native Americans respond?

Notes

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Students in Blacksmith Shop at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, c. 1900

*The Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Indian School was established to train Pawnee, Kiowa, and Cheyenne youth from the Great Plains to farm and adopt mainstream business practices. The school was founded in 1878 and forbade its students to have long hair, wear Native American clothing, or practice the religious and cultural traditions of their nations.*



*Students in Blacksmith Shop at Carlisle, IRC.2005. Discovery Education. Web.*

An excerpt from *Federal Indian Policies, from the Colonial Period Through the Early 1970s*

The Indian Allotment Act . . . was passed in 1887. Its intent was to assimilate the Indian by giving him individual ownership of land, as opposed to the collective land use and possession practiced by most Indian groups. . . .

The result of nearly 50 years of the allotment policy was to reduce the Indian land holdings from over 140 million acres in 1886 to under 50 million acres in 1935. Thousands of Indians receiving these allotments sold them to non-Indians who had the financial means and business abilities to develop the lands.

The sale or rental of land tended to increase the Indian's dependence upon Government support. In many cases rental income was too small or sale funds soon exhausted and the Indian was forced to turn back to the Government for assistance. In addition, the demands of this newly imposed civilization were often contrary to Indian culture and created psychological conflicts that still persist.

*Federal Indian Policies, from the Colonial Period Through the Early 1970s.* Washington, DC: The Bureau of Indian Affairs 1974.  
Web

"The General Allotment Act and Relocation Program" from *Native Americans: Native Americans Today*

This video segment discusses the Dawes Severalty Act that allotted plots of land to Native Americans and the government sale of Native American lands to white homesteaders.

"The Dawes General Allotment Act" from *Just the Facts: Documents of Destiny: Transformation and Industrialization*

This video segment contains information about the text of the Dawes Severalty Act and the reasons behind it.

Sioux Camp Near Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota, 1891

*About 6,000 peoples of the Sioux nation lived near the Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota in the late 1800s, after the Dawes Act was passed and the bison had been hunted to near extinction. Without the bison and their lands to hunt on, the Native Americans depended on government agents for beef and other food stuffs. Agents were known to shortchange the Native Americans of food rations and any cash payments they should have received from the sale of land.*



*Sioux Camp Near Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota. IRC, 2005. Discovery Education. Web.*

## Biographies: Native American Leaders

This reading passage presents biographical information on three important Native American leaders of tribes in the West.

### Excerpt from *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography*

Right now the Cheyenne and Sioux are fighting white men on the Platte; this very day the soldiers are marching from the south into our hunting grounds on the Powder. Sully [U.S. Gen. Alfred Sully] simply wants to get us all together at Rice, and then rub us out. "Wait! Don't be in a hurry. Take your time." As for signing away lands, "No!" As for allowing white men to make roads and forts in Sioux country, "No!" . . . Let us alone. The Black Hills belong to me.

Vestal, Stanley. *Sitting Bull, Champion of the Sioux: A Biography*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin 1932. Web

### Quote from American Horse, 1890

*American Horse was an Oglala Lakota chief who took part in the "Indian Wars" against the U.S. government.*

We were made many promises, but have never heard from them since. The Great Father says if we do what he directs it will be to our benefit; but instead of this they are every year cutting down our rations, and we do not get enough to keep us from suffering.

Mooney, James. *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office 1896. Web

## Video segments from *Native Americans: Contact and Conflict*

### "The Black Hills and the Battle of Little Big Horn"

This video segment describes the conflict between the Native Americans and settlers in the American West when gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

### "Wounded Knee Massacre"

This video segment describes the final chapter in a 400-year-long conflict between European Americans and Native Americans.

2. As you review the research on the Native American policies and actions, fill out a chart identifying particular information from each source.

Source	What policies and actions did the U.S. government promote?	What did the government hope to accomplish through those actions and policies?	How did these actions and policies affect the Native Americans? How did they respond?



### III. Write an Alternative Policy Proposal

Now, think about the information you have in your notes and chart. Write an essay proposal presenting an alternative solution to the government policies and actions that takes into consideration the Native Americans' rights while still aiding westward expansion. Consider these questions as you write your essay:

- What actions and policies did the government promote?
- What did the government hope to accomplish through those actions and policies?
- How did these actions and policies affect the Native Americans? How did they respond?
- What would be a better solution? How could you maintain Native American rights and still help westward expansion?

Remember to support your opinion with knowledge about the effect of the Dawes Act and other policies during this period.