Indian Policy

Interpreting Primary Statistics

One [infantry] battalion...left Fort Lyon [Colorado] on the night of the 28th of November, 1864; about daybreak on the morning of the 29th of November we came in sight of the camp of friendly [Cheyenne and Arapaho] Indians...and were ordered by Colonel [J.M.] Chivington to attack the same, which was accordingly done....Going over the battle ground the next day I did not see a body of man, woman, or child but was scalped, and in many instances their bodies were mutilated in the most horrible manner--men, women, and children's privates cut out etc.; I heard one man say that he had cut out a woman's private parts and had them for exhibition on a stick; I heard another man say that he had cut fingers off an Indian to get the rings on the hand....

Sand Creek massacre, 1864

Whatever you wanted of me I have obeyed. The Great Father sent me word that whatever he had against me in the past had been forgiven and thrown aside, and I have accepted his promises and came in. And he told me not to step aside from the white man's path, and I am doing my best to travel in that path. I sit here and look around me now, and I see my people starving. We want cattle to butcher. That is the way you live, and we want to live the same way.

Sitting Bull, 1883

It was natural, at a time when the national territory seemed almost illimitable and contained many millions of acres far outside the bounds of civilized settlements, that a policy should have been initiated which more than aught else has been the fruitful source of our Indian complications. I refer, of course, to the policy of dealing with the various Indian tribes as separate nationalities, of relegating them by treaty stipulations to the occupancy of immense reservations in the West, and of encouraging them to live a savage life, undisturbed by any earnest and well directed efforts to bring them under the influences of civilization.

The unsatisfactory results which have sprung from this policy are becoming apparent to all. As the white settlements have crowded the borders of the reservations, the Indians, sometimes contentedly and sometimes against their will, have been transferred to other hunting grounds, from which they have again been dislodged whenever their new-found homes have been desired by the adventurous settlers. These removals and the frontier collisions by which they have often been preceded have led to frequent and disastrous conflicts between the races....

The government has of late been cautiously but steadily feeling its way to the adoption of a policy...to introduce among the Indians the customs and pursuits of civilized life and gradually to absorb them into the mass of our citizens, sharing their rights and holden to their responsibilities....

President Chester Arthur defending the Dawes Plan, 1881

The President of the United States be...authorized...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....

Sec. 6. That upon the completion of said allotments and the patenting of the lands to said  
allottees, each and every member of the respective band or tribes of Indians...shall...be  
subject to the laws, both civil and criminal, of the State or Territory in which they may  
reside.

Dawes Severalty Act of 1887

Questions To Think About

1. How would you explain the depth of hostility felt by many white Americans toward the  
Indians?

2. What is the goal of the Dawes plan? Do you approve or disapprove of the plan? Why?

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