

# The Inconvenient Indian



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THOMAS KING

Thomas King is a Canadian author and activist. He was born in Roseville, California, and is of German and Greek descent on his mother's side and Cherokee descent on his father's side. King grew up in California and earned his undergraduate and master's degrees from Chico State University in California and his doctorate in English from the University of Utah. His doctoral dissertation analyzed Native American oral storytelling tradition as literature. King emigrated to Canada in 1980 and later taught in the Native Studies department at the University of Lethbridge. He published his first novel, *Medicine River* (1990), shortly after moving to Canada. The novel received considerable praise and was runner up for the 1991 Commonwealth Writer's Prize. As an author, King has published works of fiction, detective novels, and children's literature, much of which depicts the lives and histories of Native people. His novel *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) was nominated for a Governor General's Award for fiction. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012) won the 2014 RBC Taylor Prize. The conversational style King employs in *The Inconvenient Indian*, characteristic of much of his writing, illustrates his project of injecting elements of the oral tradition that is so important to indigenous culture into conventionally Western narrative structures. Outside of literature, King worked as story editor for *Four Directions*, a CBC television series about First Nations people, from 1993 to 1994. He is also involved in politics and activism. In 2007, he was announced as the New Democratic Party candidate for Guelph, Ontario, though he lost the election. In 2004, he became a Member of the Order of Canada. King is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Guelph in the School of English and Theatre Studies Department.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In Chapter 6 of *The Inconvenient Indian*, King discusses the American Indian Movement and other organizations' role in directing the public's attention toward the issues of contemporary Native people. Together, these organizations comprised the Red Power movement (a term attributed to Vine Deloria, Jr.), a social movement organized by Native American youths to reclaim tribal sovereignty. The Red Power movement demanded the right for Native Americans to regain control of their land and create their own policies and social programs. The movement was known for engaging in civil disobedience in its quest for change. King describes several significant events

the movement organized, such as the Occupation of Alcatraz and the Occupation of Wounded Knee. King's discussion of the movement ends with the culmination of the Occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 and doesn't go into great detail about the federal policy changes it helped initiate. Some changes for which the Red Power movement was responsible include the passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which officially ended termination and returned federal recognition to tribes. The budget of the Indian Health Service doubled between 1970 and 1975; the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 banned the outlawing of religious practices such as sun dance and sweat lodges; and the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978 authorized tribes to establish community colleges on reservations. By 1980, more than 100,000 Indian Studies programs had been created throughout the country. Some might think that such changes are too symbolic or too little too late. However, the changes have showed that organizing and protesting can elicit actual results. The movement also instilled a new sense of visibility and pan-Indian pride in the younger generations. The ethos and strategies of the Red Power movement may be seen in new movements today, such as the Standing Rock protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline and the demand for Indigenous water rights.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

King is primarily known for his fiction, which also centers around the experiences of Native Americans. His first novel, *Medicine River* (1990), depicts the lives of contemporary First Nations people in Western Canada. *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) takes place in the present day in a Blackfoot community in Alberta, Canada. The novel blends oral tradition with written narrative forms, much like King does in *The Inconvenient Indian*. Other notable works of nonfiction about the experiences and histories of Native Americans include Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969). In *Custer*, Deloria explores the plight of contemporary Native people and the failures of the government and other organizations to provide adequate aid. The book was highly influential in bringing visibility to contemporary Native issues. It remains one of the most important works of nonfiction written by a Native American author. A more recent work of indigenous history is *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (2017) by David Grann. Grann, an American journalist, explores a series of murders of wealthy Osage people in Osage County, Oklahoma, in the 1920s, after the Osage were awarded profits from oil discovered beneath their land allotments. Lastly, in *The Inconvenient Indian*, King recommends two books about the Battle of Little Bighorn: Evan Connell's

*Son of the Morning Star* (1984), and Brian Dippie's *Custer's Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (1976), which delves into the creation and perpetuation of the romanticized Custer myth.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*
- **When Written:** The book was written in the 2010s, but King states in the prologue that he derived its core narrative from conversations and arguments he has been having since his university days.
- **Where Written:** Ontario, Canada
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** History, Nonfiction, Native American Studies
- **Setting:** North America
- **Antagonist:** The U.S. and Canadian governments
- **Point of View:** First Person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Film Cred.** *The Inconvenient Indian* was made into a documentary film, *Inconvenient Indian*, which premiered at the 2020 Toronto International Film Festival and won numerous awards, including the award for Best Canadian Film.

**Progress.** King concludes *The Inconvenient Indian* on the hopeful note that Indians and Whites can continue to make progress on the issue of land ownership in North America. Since the book's publication in 2012, the U.S. has appointed its first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary. In 2021, the U.S. Senate confirmed Deb Haaland, an enrolled member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, to serve as the Secretary of the Interior, putting her in charge of the executive department responsible for the management of federal lands and the administration of federal programs for Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the Prologue to *The Inconvenient Indian*, Thomas King explains his use of fiction and nonfiction to tell the history of relations between Native Americans and white settlers in North America. He also says that throughout the book he will be using "Indians" for Native Americans and "Whites" for white settlers.

Chapter 1 explores the concept of constructing a history and the impossibility of presenting a completely neutral account of the past. King laments the difficulty of beginning a history of

Indian-White relations in North America without talking about Christopher Columbus. He portrays history not as an objective set of facts but as a culmination of the "stories we tell about the past." He asks the reader to "forget Columbus" and begins his account elsewhere, with the description of a plaque in a small town in Idaho that purports to commemorate an Indian massacre of White pioneers that never actually took place. King uses this story as a launch point to explore other popular but likely fictitious myths about early Indian-White relations, such as Pocahontas saving John Smith and George Custer going down in history as a hero.

Chapter 2 focuses on the origins of White-Indian relations in North America. King explores the construction of race and how negative stereotypes that depicted Indians as uncivilized, godless savages influenced the U.S. and Canada's interactions with Native peoples. These stereotypes also influence the policies that were legalized to justify removing Native peoples from their land. King explores how North American culture—films, literature, and visual art—reinforced these negative stereotypes.

Chapter 3 is a more in-depth investigation of Indians' role in North American culture, past and present. King describes three "types" of Indians—**Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians**—to distinguish between the way North Americans see Indians, the reality of life for contemporary Indians in the U.S., and the way policy shapes who can legally define themselves as Indian. This chapter aims to distinguish between how Indians exist in reality versus how stereotypes of them exist in the collective imagination of North America.

King argues that North America's notion of Indians is rooted in the past: it associates Native culture with the feathers, loincloths, and drums of Western movies and believes that the culture has died out. Contemporary Native peoples don't fulfill these dated, inaccurate stereotypes. They are "inconvenient" to contemporary America because they are a reminder of the wrongs of the past, with which America remains unwilling to reckon. King argues that real Indians have to appear like Dead Indians to be seen by contemporary America, as evidenced by the trend of using Dead Indian imagery to market products and lifestyles to Whites. Finally, King discusses Legal Indians, a term he employs to designate individuals who are legally recognized as Indians and afforded certain rights according to the U.S. and Canadian governments.

Chapter 4 explores the history of policies that the U.S. and Canadian governments have employed to negotiate land settlements and, broadly speaking, "deal" with the continent's "Indian Problem." Relocation became official policy when President Andrew Jackson signed the Removal Act into law in 1830, authorizing the U.S. government to negotiate treaties with tribes to relocate them to newly purchased land west of the Mississippi in order to make room for the development of settler towns in the East. These negotiations were coercive,

and many tribes were effectively forced off their ancestral land. King cites the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the Cherokee, as a particularly horrific example of this policy's brutality.

Chapter 5 explores the two "impulses" that define Indian-White relations in North America: extermination and assimilation. Assimilation was a departure from the earlier policy of "extermination," which employed racist logic derived from social Darwinism to claim that the death of Indians as a race was ethical because the "survival of the fittest" dictates that the superior race will survive over the inferior. In contrast, proponents of assimilation, such as Richard Pratt, argued that Indians could be taught to adapt to Western culture if they were removed from their traditional environments. Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, a residential school where Indian children were taken from their families and cultures and forced to conform to Western ideals and speak English. Pratt's school served as a model for the many boarding schools that would emerge across North America over the next several decades. Children faced harsh conditions at these schools, and abuse, sickness, and malnutrition were common. While both the U.S. and Canada conducted investigations that revealed the sordid conditions of these institutions, neither government acted on this knowledge.

Chapter 6 further investigates policies the U.S. and Canadian governments employed to force Natives off their land and coerce them to assimilate into Western society. King begins with an analysis of the 1887 General Allotment Act, which divided Indian land into parcels assigned to individuals to coerce Natives into the Western ideal of owning private property. The government would then steal back the Indian land that remained after distributing former reservation land into allotments. Allotment continued until Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934. This was a step in the right direction for Native people, but the onset of World War II took away the time and resources needed to implement the act. By the end of the war, the U.S. rolled back many of the liberties promised to Indians in the IRA, and "termination" became the new policy regarding Indian relations. In 1953, the passage of House Concurrent Resolution 108 repealed existing treaties with tribes and ended federal management. By the time termination ended in 1969, it had abolished over 100 tribes. King closes Chapter 6 with a discussion of the revolutionary movements established in the late 1960s to resist and draw attention to the poor treatment Indians suffered from the government. In particular, he focuses on the American Indian Movement, exploring several notable occupations it was involved in in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 or the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973.

Chapter 7 explores how to reconcile the past with the present. King wryly evokes the complaints of Whites who claim that

racism is a thing of the past and that historically oppressed people ought to forget about it and move on with their lives. In this chapter, he explores policies that have affected Indians since 1985 to see if racism is a thing of the past or if it continues into contemporary life. To do this, King explores several Canadian laws that have impacted Natives. For instance, Bill C-31, an amendment that seems to help Indians on the surface, worked toward minimizing the number of individuals who qualify as Status Natives, thus eliminating Canada's overall Native population and the amount of federal spending allocated to them.

King also explores the emergence of Indian gaming in the U.S. in the 1970s. Operating gaming operations on reservations offered the opportunity for economic advancement and prosperity for Natives living on the reservation. However, the federal government quickly stepped in to interfere, passing the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act to monitor and manage gaming operations on reservations, prohibiting tribes from gaining true economic independence and political agency.

Chapter 8 focuses on the future of Native people in the U.S. and Canada. King identifies the complicated and controversial concept of sovereignty—or self-governance—as something that is incredibly important to the future of Indian-White relations in North America. King explores the economic and social impact of sovereignty and the various policies the government has employed to deny tribes the right to operate as sovereign nations, despite being authorized to operate as such in both the U.S. and Canadian constitutions.

Chapter 9 focuses on the central role land has played in Indian-White conflicts since the beginning of European settlement in America. King explores the ways U.S. and Canadian governments have broken treaties and used legal loopholes to steal Indian land and complicate their ability to purchase more. King believes that Whites won't stop coveting land until they control the entire continent. To King, the desire for land is the one constant that has remained at the center of Indian-White conflict: controlling land is more important to Whites than assimilation or Indian removal.

Chapter 10 explores the future of Indian-White relations. King focuses on two land-claims settlements that he sees as indicative of a positive shift in Indian-White relations: the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), passed in 1971, and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, passed in 1993. King closes his "account" with an ambiguous but hopeful look at the future of Indian life in North America and the prosperity that might await Indians in the ages to come.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Thomas King** – Thomas King is the author of *The Inconvenient*

*Indian*. King conveys the history of Indian-White relations in North America in a conversational, personable tone that blends elements of fiction and nonfiction. This technique reinforces the book's exploration of the relationship between history and storytelling, but it also imbues the book's conventionally Western narrative approach with elements of oral tradition that are important to indigenous culture. King identifies as Cherokee on his father's side, and he interweaves his personal experiences as an indigenous person with his investigation of history to create a personal yet broad "account" of Native people in North America. King's presentation of history is unconventional and creative. Rather than running through history linearly, from Christopher Columbus's arrival to the present, King jumps back and forth in time, interjects with personal anecdotes and commentary, and employs other rhetorical strategies that encourage the reader to engage critically with the facts. King's narrative challenges stereotypical accounts of Indian-White relations in North America, bringing visibility to the Native perspective that centuries of oppression have hidden from sight.

**General George Armstrong Custer** – General George Armstrong Custer led U.S. troops into the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn against the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne for control of the Black Hills. The U.S. government had already promised the Black Hills to the Lakota with the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868. However, after Custer led an army expedition into the Hills in 1874 and found gold there, non-Natives began to arrive in droves to mine, and the U.S. government did little to stop them. The U.S. lost to the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne, and Custer died in battle. Over time, history has "framed [Custer's death] as a romantic tragedy," and his fateful final battle is known as "Custer's Last Stand." In *The Inconvenient Indian*, King reframes this narrative, arguing that Custer's death was a consequence of his hubris, tactical miscalculations, and the ultimately flawed decision to take on the Lakota, who were much stronger than the U.S. Army.

**Louis Riel** – Louis Riel was a Métis who fought to protect Métis homeland after the Canadian government illegally purchased it from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1869. Riel formed a provisional government for the purchased territory, a territory called Rupert's Land, which consisted of 3.9 million square kilometers of land encompassing Manitoba and parts of Saskatchewan, Alberta, Quebec, Ontario, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. A coup was organized to overthrow the provisional government in 1870. Riel executed Thomas Scott, one of the organizers, and was forced to flee Canada after the execution inspired a wave of anti-Métis, anti-Catholic, and anti-French sentiments. Riel returned to Canada in 1885 to lead the North-West Rebellion, a battle between the Métis and the Canadian government. Canada defeated the Métis, and Prime Minister John A. Macdonald executed Riel for treason. Riel has since become a legendary figure in Canada.

**James Earle Fraser** – James Earle Fraser was the American artist who created **The End of the Trail**, a 1915 sculpture that King describes as "the twentieth century's most famous Indian image." Fraser's sculpture was itself inspired by centuries of depictions of Native people in art, literature, and, more recently, the Wild West performances of the 19th century. The sculpture depicts a "dejected Indian" atop an equally dejected horse. King interprets the sculpture as symbolizing "that both rider and horse have run out of time and space and are poised on the edge of oblivion." The sculpture is a visual representation of the destruction and cultural erasure Native Americans faced over centuries of colonization and forced assimilation. According to King, variations on the bleak image portrayed in Fraser's sculpture may be seen all across the U.S. today, on the sides of motels and on billboards, for example. King sees this recurrent imagery as another example of America's tendency to see "**Dead Indians**" but ignore "Live Indians."

**Richard Pratt** – Richard Pratt was an army captain whose Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which first opened in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, served as a model for the boarding schools that would open across the country over the 19th and 20th centuries and become compulsory for Native children. Pratt believed that education could be used to could teach Indian children to "assimilate" into Western society, an idea distilled in his infamous quotation, "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man." Pratt believed that Indians' "savage" ways weren't the result of "race or some defect in the blood," but of "environmental determinism." It was this belief that motivated Pratt to push for displacing Native children from their tribal communities, educating them at boarding schools where they would be isolated from their traditions and fully immersed in Western culture. At schools like Carlisle, Native children had to wear Western clothing and speak English. They were punished for speaking their native languages, and abuse, disease, and malnourishment were extremely common amongst the students.

**Jay Silverheels** – Jay Silverheels was a Canadian Mohawk actor known for playing Tonto, the Lone Ranger's Indian sidekick on the television series *The Lone Ranger*, which first aired in 1949. Silverheels is one of two Indian actors to have a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. King describes how the character of Tonto reflected North America's idealized vision of the "trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly" Indian—a far cry from the violent "savages" of many Western films of the time.

**Buffalo Bill Cody** – Buffalo Bill Cody established his Wild West Show in 1883. The show featured White actors in redface playing Indians, but Cody later employed Indian actors, including Sitting Bull, to fill these roles. King credits Wild West shows like Cody's with helping create the stereotypical "**Dead Indian**" that dominates North America's collectively imagined image of Native people.

**Will Rogers** – Will Rogers was a Cherokee actor and social commentator who got his start performing in vaudeville shows across the country, including Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show. He was one of the highest-paid actors by the 1930s. Although Rogers is one of two Indian actors to have stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, he was never cast in Indian roles because he was thought not to “look Indian enough” to play one onscreen.

**Theodore Roosevelt** – Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th president of the United States and was in office from 1901 to 1909. He founded the Carson National Forest in New Mexico in 1906, despite the fact that its land was located on Taos Pueblo Indian territory. Ba Whyea, or Blue Lake, and its surrounding area, in particular, was sacred to the Taos Pueblo and an important part of their ceremonies.

**Andrew Jackson** – Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States. He signed into law the Removal Act of 1830, which authorized the removal of Indian tribes living in the eastern United States from their land to make room for the development of towns in the eastern U.S. One of the most infamous events associated with Jackson and the Removal Act was the relocation of the Cherokee from Georgia to Oklahoma, which is known as the Trail of Tears. Around 4,000 Cherokee died on the journey.

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt** – Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the 32nd president of the United States and was in office from 1933 to 1945. He appointed John Collier as the Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and approved the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, which was created to help return to Indians land that was seized from them during the allotment era.

**Zig Jackson** – Zig Jackson is a Mandan photographer from the Fort Berthold reservation in South Dakota. King references Jackson’s photographic series “Entering Zig’s Indian Reservation,” which features photos of Jackson walking around San Francisco in a feathered headdress, and the amused looks his appearance receives from White onlookers. King uses the photographic series to illustrate how Whites only see “**Dead Indians**” (Indians who resemble the stereotypes depicted in Western films, for example, that evoke a time long since passed) while “Live Indians” (real Indians) remain largely invisible to them.

**John Collier** – John Collier was the Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs during Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidency. Unlike many U.S. politicians, Collier rejected the forced assimilation of Indians. He helped pass the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, which King cites as “a positive shift in government thinking” regarding its Native population. The act ended allotment as national policy.

**Lewis Meriam** – Lewis Meriam was the lawyer who led the 1926 investigation into the condition of Indians living in the United States. Meriam’s final report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, was published in 1928 and revealed the “grossly inadequate” conditions of Indian children living in government-funded boarding schools. Despite these published findings, the government did little to atone for its transgressions. King wryly notes that the U.S. Government hasn’t commissioned a similar study since.

**Duncan Campbell Scott** – Duncan Campbell Scott was head of Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932. He advocated for the elimination of legally recognized Indians in Canada, and for their assimilation into the larger Canadian population. King cites Scott’s view as representative of the national sentiment toward Indians in the 20th century.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Vine Deloria, Jr.** – Vine Deloria, Jr. was a Lakota author, historian, and activist known for his book *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), which brought national attention to contemporary Native American issues in North America.

**Sitting Bull** – Sitting Bull was a Hunkpapa Lakota leader who was killed by police at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota in 1890. He led the Lakota in battle against Custer and the U.S. Army in the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn.

**Chief Delbert Guerin** – Chief Delbert Guerin was a Musqueam chief in 1970, when the Musqueam people were involved in a land dispute with the Canadian government after a luxury golf course and other developments were built on Musqueam land.

## TERMS

**Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)** – The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was a piece of legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1971. Under ANCSA, Alaska Natives received 44 million acres of land and around \$963 million. King presents this settlement in the final chapter of the book as an example of a recent positive development in Indian-White relations.

**American Indian Movement (AIM)** – The American Indian Movement is a Native American grassroots organization founded in 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as a response to police brutality against Native people. Over time, the organization developed into a national movement. The 1960s and 1970s saw the development of several notable advocacy groups, but AIM generated the most media attention. A fair number of AIM events—such as the 1971 looting of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in Washington, D.C.—escalated into violence; yet King contends that in many of these

situations, “governmental antipathy and blinkered law enforcement” was as much to blame for the violence as AIM was. Notable confrontations and occupations in which AIM was involved include the 1969 Alcatraz occupation and the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, which escalated into a standoff between AIM protestors and federal officers that lasted 71 days.

**Bill C-31** – Bill C-31 is an amendment to the Indian Act that the Canadian government passed in 1985. The bill allows Native women who lost their Legal Indian Status through marriage to regain their Status. Prior to the passage of Bill C-31, the government was authorized to take Legal Indian Status away from women who married a non-status or non-Native spouse. The amendment also contains a loophole known as the “two-generation cut-off clause,” which maintains that if a family marries out of Status for two generations, the children of that second marriage become non-Status Natives. **King** is critical of the bill because he sees it as the Canadian government’s effort to reduce the population of Status Natives.

**Blood Quantum** – The U.S. uses “blood quantum” laws to determine legal Native American Status, judging an individual’s Status as a legally recognized Native American by the fraction of Native American ancestry in their bloodline. Most tribes in the U.S. base membership eligibility on blood quantum, but requirements vary from tribe to tribe. Once a person is enrolled in a tribe, they become what **King** refers to as a “**Legal Indian**,” a person that is federally recognized as Native.

**Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** – The Bureau of Indian Affairs is the U.S. federal agency in charge of creating policies for and administering services to the country’s American Indian population.

**Cherokee Freedmen** – The Cherokee Freedmen is a term that refers to people who were formerly enslaved by the Cherokee people and their descendants. They were of African and mixed African and Cherokee ancestry. Under a treaty the Cherokee signed with the U.S. government after the Civil War, people formerly enslaved by the Cherokee were given the same rights as other Cherokee, including Cherokee citizenship and voting rights. A substantial number of Cherokee have not been happy to have Freedmen included in the Cherokee Nation and have brought a number of cases to the Cherokee Supreme Court to challenge the regulation.

**General Allotment Act** – The U.S. Congress passed the General Allotment Act (also known as the Dawes Act) in 1887. Allotment replaced removal and relocation as the official government policy on assimilating the country’s Indian population. Under the General Allotment Act, the federal government divided reservations into parcels of land and distributed them to individuals. The government held these allotments in trust for 25 years, after which time each allottee received U.S. citizenship. The government believed that coercing Indians to forgo their traditional practice of sharing

communal land for owning private property would assimilate Indians into Western society through their integration into the U.S.’s capitalist economy.

**House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 108** – House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 108 was a law passed in 1953 that made “termination” the official U.S. policy on Indian relations. **King** refers to termination as the “midcentury version of colonialism.” Under termination, the U.S. government ended treaties and ceased federal supervision over tribes. A separate law, Public Law 280, authorized certain states to take back land previously allotted to Indian reservations. Between 1953 and 1966, when termination as a policy officially ended, 109 tribes lost federal recognition, and the government took back a million acres of Indian land.

**Indian Act of 1876** – The Indian Act of 1876 is a law passed by the Canadian Government that defines which individuals are legally recognized as Native people and authorized to receive government resources. The act also outlines policies and regulations to control the lives of “Status” Natives, or individuals that the Canadian government legally recognizes as Native. The Indian Act still determines which Natives qualify for government resources, though various amendments have passed over the years that change the requirements an individual needs to qualify for Status.

**Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA)** – The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) is legislation that the U.S. Congress passed in 1988. The act officially recognized American Indians’ right to operate gaming establishments on tribal land. The act also established regulations that required tribes to forfeit a percentage of their earnings to the state, and that limited the class of games that could be played without prior government approval.

**Indian Reorganization Act (IRA)** – President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** signed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) into law in 1934. The IRA ended allotment as the government’s official policy and returned to tribes the surplus land they lost during the allotment years. The act also afforded more protections for Indian land, since it extended trust protection indefinitely and established a fund to be put toward the purchase of Indian land that had been lost during allotment. **King** sees the IRA as a positive shift in national policy regarding the country’s Native population; however, because of the onset of World War II not many years after the act became law, the government lacked the attention and resources necessary to put the act into practice adequately, and Native peoples were unable to benefit from many of the protective measures the law was supposed to afford them.

**Métis** – The Métis are one of Canada’s three recognized Aboriginal groups—the other two are Indians (First Nations) and the Inuit. The Métis are of mixed Indian, English, and French descent. They are not recognized as Status Indians under Canada’s Indian Act, though they have protected land in

Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

**Nunavut Land Claims Agreement** – The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was a 1993 settlement between the Canadian Government and the Inuit that gave the Inuit of the central and eastern Northwest Territories a new territory, Nunavut, in the eastern region of the Northwest Territories. In addition to the over 350,000 square kilometers of land the Inuit obtained through the agreement, they also obtained over one billion dollars. **King** explores the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in the final chapter of *The Inconvenient Indian*, tentatively framing them as evidence that Indian-White relations are moving in a positive direction.

**Removal Act** – Signed into law by President **Andrew Jackson** in 1830, the Removal Act made removal and relocation the U.S.'s official policy on managing the Indian population. The Removal Act authorized the government to seize Indian lands within existing state borders and relocate tribes west of the Mississippi River.

**Termination** – Termination was the official policy the U.S. and Canada adopted in the 1950s and 1960s to minimize government spending on subsidies for tribal citizens living on reservations. The passage of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 108 in 1953 made termination the official U.S. policy on Indian relations and authorized Congress to terminate federal relations with tribes. The subsequent passage of the Relocation Act in 1956 incentivized Native people to move from reservations to urban areas by covering their moving expenses and subsidizing vocational training.

**Trail of Tears** – The Trail of Tears refers to the forced removal of the Cherokee from their land in Georgia. This took place after the Removal Act authorized the U.S. government to seize Indian land and relocate tribes to newly purchased territory west of the Mississippi. Around 4,000 Cherokee died on the journey. The Cherokee called their removal *nunna daul isunyi*, or “the trail where they cried.”

book’s opening chapter. While conventional wisdom might suggest that history is rigid, immutable, and synonymous with fact, King quickly dismisses this assumption, asserting that there is no such thing as objective history. States King, “Most of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past.” This means that there is no such thing as a “neutral” depiction of historical events. Every account of the past, even well-intentioned ones, is the product of choices the storyteller has made. “By and large, the stories are about famous men and celebrated events,” states King, implicitly drawing attention to the conventional narrative of Indian-White relations that has dominated North American history, which celebrates the victorious settlers who conquered the North American continent and vastly diminishes the sufferings endured by the Native peoples whose perspectives have remained at the periphery of history.

King’s account of North American history subverts this conventional narrative, making the conscious choice to emphasize “stories” that shed light on the Indian perspective of European settlement in the U.S. and Canada. He demonstrates how stories White settlers had told themselves about Indians—misguided, often racist stereotypes about Natives’ cultural inferiority, godlessness, and lacking economic sense—influenced their daily interactions and the legislation their governments created to impose structure onto those interactions. To further persuade the reader of history’s inherent subjectivity, King chooses not to present his book as a conventional work of scholarship, opting instead to insert colloquial language and personal anecdotes throughout his account of North American history, emphasizing his authorial voice to underscore the conscious decisions involved in shaping history and presenting it to the world. *The Inconvenient Indian* emphasizes the inherent bias of history, the tenuousness of fact, and how these biases prevent North America from possessing a more informed, ethically responsible sense of its past. The tendency to mythologize a culture’s celebrated figures and dismiss its failings warps one’s sense of the past, but recognizing these biases allows for the opportunity to have a more comprehensive, humbled sense of one’s past and paves the way for a more ethical future.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY

King begins *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* with the disclosure that, as its full title suggests, the book will be an “account” rather than a history of Indian-White relations. King immediately establishes the distinctions and connections between fact and fiction, history, and story in the



### RACISM AND SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION

One of the most persistent messages King reinforces in his account of Indian-White relations in North America is how Whites employed racist ideas and stereotypes to infantilize and dehumanize Indians. Racist ideology validated Whites’ unethical treatment of Native peoples and justified their systematic extermination of Native lives and cultural practices, as well as the legislation that legally sanctioned these unethical practices. The notion that it was acceptable to exterminate Native peoples by virtue of “natural selection” (Darwin’s survival-of-the-fittest theory popularized

in the 19th century) applied not only to the literal “extermination” of Native peoples, but also to the destruction of their cultures. White settlers believed that assimilation, which became the official policy for managing North America’s Indian “problem” in the 1800s, was justified on the grounds that it was acceptable and even noble to bring the culturally inferior, savage Natives “salvation and improvement” through forcing them to adopt western ideals of Christianity and capitalism. Such was the logic employed by the American army captain Richard Pratt, for instance, who argued that assimilation would “kill the Indian in him, and save the man.” Pratt advocated for the compulsory re-education of Native children, and his Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which opened in 1879, served as the model for the many residential schools that operated throughout Canada and the U.S. in the 19th and 20th centuries. These schools strove to “save” indigenous children from their cultural and familial safety nets so that they could be assimilated into western culture and become more productive members of White society. In short, *The Inconvenient Indian* argues that racism toward Native peoples in North America justified White settlers’ unethical extermination of Native life and culture. Furthermore, Whites embedded these racist ideologies into the policies and treaties they adopted to facilitate the management of North America’s “Indian problem,” thereby subjecting Native peoples to systemic oppression that persists to this day.



## LAND

King begins Chapter 9, “As Long as the Grass is Green,” by posing the question, “What do Whites want?” In other words, what do Whites want from

Indians that has fueled centuries of conflict, justified their disrespect for Native peoples and their culture, and motivated their perpetual severing of treaties? While racism, Christianity, and capitalism have all contributed ideologically to the conflicts that have plagued Indian-White relations in North America since the colonists’ arrival, King believes that one may reduce Indian-White conflict to an even more elemental degree, identifying land as the central motive for centuries of fraught, violent, oppressive Indian-White relations. States King, “[The issue] will always be land, until there isn’t a square foot of land left in North America that is controlled by Native people.” To King, Whites’ desire to assume control of Native lands has motivated such pieces of legislation as the Removal Act that Andrew Jackson signed into law in 1830, which sanctioned the removal of tribes from their ancestral lands to make room for the westward migration of White settlers, as well as the General Allotment Act that Congress passed in 1887, which divided land settlements into individual parcels to encourage in displaced Indians the Western ideal of individual ownership over Native communal living.

These underlying cultural differences in Indian and White

attitudes toward land and land ownership have exacerbated conflict and misunderstanding between Whites and Native peoples. One common justification for the removal of tribes off their traditional lands was the belief that Indians were incapable of using land appropriately and most efficiently. White settlers looked down on Native hunting and gathering practices, viewing them as ineffective compared to traditional European farming practices. Underlying these opposite views was the notion that Whites viewed land as a commodity: as something “that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it,” while Indians did not. Whereas Whites primarily saw land as a means to an economically improved end, Native peoples’ lives were interconnected with the land emotionally, spiritually, and physically. In, King proposes that land conflicts always have been and continue to be the central driving force in the Indian-White conflict in North America.



## SOVEREIGNTY

In Chapter 8, “What Indians Want,” King states, “If Native people are to have a future that is of our own making, such a future will be predicated, in large part, on sovereignty.” The definition of sovereignty is “supreme and unrestricted authority,” though King contends that sovereignty, in practice, is rarely unrestricted or absolute. In the context of North American Indian-White relations, sovereignty refers to tribes’ or bands’ ability to conduct their affairs without the economic or political interference of their respective federal governments. Although numerous treaties (not to mention both Canada’s and the U.S.’s constitutions, as well as the United Nation’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) recognize Aboriginal peoples’ legal right to self-governance, in practice, Canada and the U.S. have historically (and continue to) attack this right through treaties and legal loopholes that leave tribes with what is, at most, “partial sovereignty.” For instance, after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that tribes had the right to develop gaming operations on tribal land, the U.S. Congress responded by passing the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), which required tribes to negotiate with states over which gaming was allowed on reservations.

Furthermore, the IGRA forced tribes to sign over to the state substantial percentages of the profits they earned from gaming operations, despite the fact that they were the “sole owners and primary beneficiaries” of these operations. In effect, the IGRA encroached on tribes’ ability to take full economic advantage of their sovereign status. King goes further, arguing that non-Native North Americans’ support for sovereignty extends only so far as it benefits them financially: for instance, waste management companies became fervent supports of tribal sovereignty when it offered them the possibility of surpassing U.S. environmental regulations by leasing out sections of tribal reservations to use as landfills. The



controversial subject of tribal sovereignty and the federal government's repeated attempts to undermine tribes' right to self-governance underscores the connection between economic development and Native cultural longevity.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### DEAD INDIANS, LIVE INDIANS, AND LEGAL INDIANS

King defines three categories of Indians that exist in real life: Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians. These categories symbolize what King sees as a sharp disconnect between how North American culture perceives Native Americans and the reality of Native American oppression—a reality that goes unnoticed by the majority of the country.

King's term "Dead Indians" evokes the stereotypes and clichéd images of Indians that exist in old Western films. King suggests that when most of America thinks about Indians, they think of an extinct relic of a bygone era: "all those feathers, all that face paint, the breast plates, the bone chokers, the skimpy loincloths." "Live Indians," on the other hand, refers to Indians as they actually exist. These Live Indians are "invisible" to most of America because they do not conform to the stereotypical images of the Dead Indian, with the "noble" costuming and exotic, antiquated culture. King suggests that Live Indians are invisible because they are "unruly" and "disappointing," and many Americans feel uncomfortable acknowledging their own culture's complicity in the problems Live Indians now face. Lastly, "Legal Indians" refers to Indians as they exist according to government policy—that is, simply by virtue of their Indian Status and tribal affiliation.

King establishes these three categories of Indians to symbolize how years of systemic racism, exploitative federal policy, and cultural ignorance have oversimplified the North American perception of what it means to be a Native person. By calling attention to these somewhat reductive categories, King effectively highlights the ways in which uninformed narratives can skew the way people view each other, ultimately creating a disconnect between common perception and reality.



### THE END OF THE TRAIL

*The End of the Trail* is a 1915 sculpture by the American artist James Earle Fraser. The sculpture itself symbolizes the gradual destruction of Native culture and the incompatibility of the old way of life with modernity. King's evocation of the sculpture reinforces this symbolism but also gestures toward the possibility of an improved, culturally rich

future.

Fraser's sculpture depicts a "dejected Indian" sitting atop his dejected horse. King explains that "both rider and horse have run out of time and space and are poised on the edge of oblivion." In other words, Whites have pushed Native people and their traditional ways of life out of their native lands and to the brink of extinction.

On the one hand, King acknowledges that the sculpture embodies the incompatibility of the Native people's previous way of life in a modern, westernized world. On the other hand, though, King entertains the notion that the horse refuses to fall off the end of the trail: "its front legs are braced and its back legs are dug in. American expansion be damned." In this interpretation, the sculpture reflects the strength and tenacity of a people who have persisted in the face of centuries of violence and cultural erasure. King's dual interpretation of the sculpture symbolizes his overall attitude toward the story of Native people in North America. He maintains a bleak cynicism about the violence and suffering Native people have endured, and he recognizes how government policy keeps Native people disempowered and vulnerable. At the same time, though, he also notes that Native people have persisted despite centuries of systemic oppression, pointing out that their vibrant—and undoubtedly *alive*—culture has sustained them. King thus entertains a hope for the future of Indian-White relations and the possibility of a sovereign, prosperous Native people.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the University of Minnesota Press edition of *The Inconvenient Indian* published in 2018.

### Prologue: Warm Toast and Porcupines Quotes

●● Fictions are less unruly than histories. The beginnings are more engaging, the characters more cooperative, the endings more in line with expectations of morality and justice.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** xi-xii

#### Explanation and Analysis

King uses the Prologue to explain the compositional decisions in writing *The Inconvenient Indian* and the difficulties of writing about history. This passage alludes to his decision to write his account of Indian-White relations in North America as a conversation and selection of stories

rather than a straightforward history. He notes that “fictions are less unruly than histories,” explaining how writing in this style provides a smoother, more understandable story of Indian-White relations.

This passage also foregrounds the topics he will address in the chapters that follow, namely how the history of Indian-White relations has been wrought with injustice and unethical behavior. This history does not fit neatly into reductive conceptions of good and evil. When King claims that “the beginnings [of fictions] are more engaging, the characters more cooperative, the endings more in line with expectations of morality and justice,” he insinuates that the nonfiction account of Indian-White relations in North America is the opposite: they are rife with uncooperative characters, and they evade simple understandings of “morality and justice.” In short, this passage is essential in establishing King’s style of composition and the core themes of his investigation of Indian-White relations.



This is the central premise of King’s book: that North American history has favored the White perspective on the past while ignoring the Native American perspective. King spends the rest of his book unpacking this premise and offering a different “series of stories” about the past that sheds light on the atrocities committed against Native people in North America over the centuries—details that, King argues, have been left out of conventional White stories about the past.

☛ Three hundred people in the wagon train. Two hundred and ninety-five killed. Only five survivors. It’s a great story. The only problem is, it never happened. You might assume that something must have happened in Almo, maybe a smaller massacre or a fatal altercation of some sort that was exaggerated and blown out of proportion. Nope. The story is simply a tale someone made up and told to someone else, and, before you knew it, the Almo massacre was historical fact.

## Chapter 1. Forget Columbus Quotes

☛ Most of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past. That’s all it is. Stories. Such a definition might make the enterprise of history seem neutral. Benign. Which, of course, it isn’t. History may well be a series of stories we tell about the past, but the stories are not just any stories. They’re not chosen by chance.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 2-3

### Explanation and Analysis

In the opening chapter of his account of Indian-White relations in North America, King explains the subjective nature of history and the relationship between history and the past. In this passage, King challenges the conventional understanding of history as a neutral account of the past.

“Most of us think that history is the past. It’s not,” states King. Instead, he defines history as “the stories we tell about the past.” Furthermore, such stories are not “benign” or “neutral” or “chosen by chance.” This means that the “stories” of which history is made are selected with intention and purpose. The details historians include in these stories are not objective but chosen to reaffirm a particular narrative—a narrative that the historians want their audience to believe about the past.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

King begins his account of Indian-White relations by telling a story about a plaque on display in the small town of Almo, Idaho. While the plaque purports to memorialize the White lives lost in an Indian massacre, King reveals the shocking detail that this massacre “never happened.”

King begins his account of Indian-White relations with this account to show how mythologizing the past obscures the truth and perpetuates racially charged stereotypes about Native Americans. States King, “the story is simply a tale someone made up and told to someone else, and, before you knew it, the Almo massacre was historical fact.” King’s language is important in this passage. “The Almo massacre was historical fact,” he writes—not “the Almo massacre was believed to be historical fact.” In expressing how the memorialization of this false story transformed fiction into “historical fact,” King underscores the central theme that history is defined and created by stories.

For years, such stories have been used to reaffirm racist ideas, such as the savagery and inferiority of Native peoples. King’s implicit message in this passage is that we should be wary of the fallibility of history to tell the whole truth about the past. As the plaque in Almo demonstrates, unexamined

fictional accounts of history are capable of transforming racially charged falsehoods into supposedly reputable facts.

☛ Almost immediately after word reached the world that Custer had got his ass kicked in Montana, America's artistic class went to work. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, Frederick Whittaker, and the like lifted Custer out of the Montana dirt, hoisted him high on their metered shoulders, and rhymed him around the country in free verse and heroic couplets. At the same time, artists began recreating and reimagining the story with paint and canvas.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker), General George Armstrong Custer

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 13

### Explanation and Analysis

King breaks down the famous event from American history of the defeat of General George Custer and the American Army at the Battle of Little Bighorn. The U.S. has mythologized the event as “Custer’s Last Stand,” a romanticized retelling that portrays the defeated Custer as a doomed but “heroic” leader.

In reality, Custer’s decision to wage war against the Lakota and their allies was ill-advised and in conflict with the 1867 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which gave unrestricted use of the Black Hills to the Lakota. The Battle of Little Bighorn began after White troops flooded the Hills after finding gold there. Not only was the war a rejection of this treaty, but it was also ill-advised, as the Lakota and their allies had superior forces and resources to the Americans. King insinuates that it was unthinkable to remember an American historical figure as falling victim to his own poor martial strategy, so artists resolved to change history, conveying Custer through a more “heroic” lens.

King argues that artists and writers played a significant role in the transformation of Custer from a foolish general to a fallen hero and American legend. “Almost immediately after word reached the world that Custer had got his ass kicked in Montana, America’s artistic class went to work,” explains King, suggesting that the “artistic class” consciously reworked Custer’s pathetic, swift defeat as something more respectable, noting that they “hoisted him high on their metered shoulders” with their words and visual renditions of the battle, “recreating and reimagining the story with paint and canvas.”

King thus shows how art and culture contribute to fictitious and often biased renderings of the past to reaffirm a particular narrative—in this case, the supposed heroism of the White men who became martyrs in their quest to conquer the West.

## Chapter 2. The End of the Trail Quotes

☛ Eugenics, a natural byproduct of the discussion of race, was a very popular idea in the early part of the twentieth century, until Hitler and the Nazi regime went and wrecked it for everyone.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 28

### Explanation and Analysis


King describes the role eugenics played in the prominent perception of Native peoples in North America in the early days of colonization and settlement. He states that eugenics was “a natural byproduct of the discussion of race” and a “very popular idea in the early part of the twentieth century,” highlighting how widespread and commonly accepted the concept was. Eugenics is the process of breeding out heritable traits seen as inferior, all with the goal of strengthening and improving future generations. The idea was created by British scientist Francis Galton, who borrowed (and, to a certain extent, distorted) ideas drawn from Charles Darwin’s concept of natural selection (survival of the fittest). Later, North American governments used logic derived from Darwin’s concept of natural selection to justify the forced assimilation of Native Americans into Western culture throughout the 19th- and 20th-centuries.

King’s analysis suggests that modern understandings of history make out Hitler’s application of eugenics to be a fluke—a radical, unimaginably horrible worldview that did not reflect the relative tolerance of the mainstream culture. In reality, though, such views were broadly accepted enough to be used in the Canadian and U.S. government’s large-scale attempt to snuff out North America’s indigenous cultures.

But if you look at the sculpture a second time, you can easily reason that the horse is resisting. Its front legs are braced and its back legs are dug in. American expansion be damned. This pony is not about to go gentle into that good night. Such a reading might be expanded to reimagine our doleful Indian as a tired Indian, who, at any moment, will wake up refreshed, lift up his spear, and ride off into the twenty-first century and beyond.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker), James Earle Fraser

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 32-33

### Explanation and Analysis

King describes James Earle Fraser's 1915 *The End of the Trail*, a sculpture that King cites as the most memorable image of Native Americans in the 20th century. The sculpture depicts a forlorn Native American man in traditional dress atop his equally defeated-looking horse. The sculpture depicts the “end of the trail,” so to speak, for Native American culture. In other words, western expansion had pushed Native peoples and their culture to the edge of the continent, and there was no way to reverse the damage that had been done and regain all that they had lost.


Here, King offers an alternative interpretation of the sculpture, suggesting that one can also see the horse as “resisting” being pushed from its Native land. “Its front legs are braced and its back legs are dug in. American expansion be damned,” states King. “This pony is not about to go gentle into that good night.” King’s alternate reading suggests that Indian culture isn’t as extinct as it might seem. In fact, it has remained alive, emboldened by the people who have managed to maintain their Native traditions and ways of life.

King’s alternate interpretation of the sculpture reflects the underlying hope beneath his otherwise cynical account of Native Americans in North America. He believes that the continent’s “Inconvenient Indians” can regain their cultural identity and customs if America rights the wrongs it has committed over the centuries. For instance, it crafts legislation that grants tribal sovereignty and returns stolen land.

Indians were made for film. Indians were exotic and erotic. All those feathers, all that face paint, the breast plates, the bone chokers, the skimpy loincloths, not to mention the bows and arrows and spears, the war cries, the galloping horses, the stern stares, and the threatening grunts. We hunted buffalo, fought the cavalry, circled wagon trains, fought the cavalry, captured White women, fought the cavalry, scalped homesteaders, fought the cavalry. And don’t forget the drums and the wild dances where we got all sweaty and lathered up, before we rode off to fight the cavalry.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis



King describes Native Americans as the U.S.’s film industry has historically portrayed them: “Indians were made for film. Indians were exotic and erotic. All those feathers, all that face paint, the breast plates, the bone chokers, the skimpy loincloths, not to mention the bows and arrows and spears, the war cries, the galloping horses, the stern stares, and the threatening grunts.” King’s description evokes Indians as they existed in Western films. By focusing on specific details of their visual appearance, King shows how the film industry robbed Indians of their humanity, reducing them to “exotic and erotic” characters to capture White America’s fixation on a romanticized American west.


King provides this example to suggest that Hollywood perpetuated—and helped create—America’s stereotypical belief that Native culture was wild and uncivilized. King also makes the broader claim that American society only recognizes “Dead Indians,” or the Indians of Western films, who ultimately depict Native culture that belongs to a bygone era. Indians as they *actually* exist—their authentic cultures, their various tribes, their values—remain invisible to Americans, who have historically seen them as a roadblock standing in the way of Western expansion.

In short, this passage is crucial in building the distinction between Dead Indians (these historically inaccurate stereotypes of Indians found in Hollywood) and Live Indians—Indians as they actually existed and continue to exist.

Film dispensed with any errant subtleties and colorings, and crafted three basic Indian types. There was the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, and the dying savage.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis

King continues to describe the stereotypical images of Indians prevalent in the film industry in the first half of the 20th century. Here, he establishes the primary three Indian characters that existed in film: “the bloodthirsty savage, the noble savage, and the dying savage.” These distinctions are important because they point to the belief in the inferiority of Native culture that foregrounded all of White America’s attitudes toward Indians: that they were all “savage.”

White Americans seemed to view Native people as “savages” if they weren’t willing to assimilate into Western culture. According to this perspective, the “bloodthirsty savage” violently rejected and fought against Western culture. The “noble savage,” on the other hand, remained open to being as educated as their uncivilized brain allowed them. And the “dying savage” passively stood by while their “savage” culture was replaced by the superior Western culture.

These three stereotypes demonstrate King’s thesis that Live Indians are invisible to White America. Despite the U.S.’s best efforts, they failed to drive Indians and their culture from the land entirely. Indian tribes and cultures were struggling and on the verge of extinction, but they persisted and continue to do so. These stereotypes deny that cultural persistence, justifying the destruction of their supposedly inferior culture as both inevitable and imminent.

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage distinguishes between two types of American stereotypes about Indians: the stereotypes of popular culture and the stereotypes of real life. King argues that popular culture stereotypes are “savage, noble, and dying Indians,” referring back to his analysis of Indians in film in Chapter 2.

While these Indians reflect and reaffirm some of American society’s bigoted views, they differ from the Indians that exist in real life, which are “Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians.” These labels show how White America interacts with modern-day Indians because of its inaccurate, misinformed stereotypes. Dead Indians are the stereotypical renderings of Indians found in films. King argues that these are the only types of Indians that exist in the collective American consciousness, since America associates Indians with a “dead” culture. In contrast, Live Indians are the actual Indians that existed in history, and those that continue to exist today. These Indians are invisible to Americans, King argues, because they do not conform to America’s romanticized, stereotypical views. Lastly, Legal Indians refer to individuals who are legally considered Indians according to federal and tribal legislation. The label of Legal Indian has nothing to do with culture: it has to do with how the law determines a person’s identity.



These three categories are essential to understanding the basis of King’s argument about White and Indian relations in the U.S. They establish the groundwork for how the history of Indian-White relations has been forged through stereotypes, cultural erasure, and discriminatory legal maneuverings.


☞ Whites have always been comfortable with Dead Indians.

## Chapter 3. Too Heavy to Lift Quotes

☞ Indians come in all sorts of social and historical configurations. North American popular culture is littered with savage, noble, and dying Indians, while in real life we have Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)


**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 53

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 3, King identifies three types of Indians that exist in real life: Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians. These categories are King’s invention and illustrate the distinction between Indians as they actually exist and


Indians as they exist in the collective North American White imagination.

According to King's logic, "Dead Indians" are the Indians of the past: the stereotypical "savages" of Western films, the Indian princesses, the names of overnight camps non-Native children attend during the summer. Dead Indians are sports mascots and advertising campaigns; they inspire New Age yuppies who want to get more in touch with themselves and the natural world. To non-Natives, Dead Indians evoke a nostalgic, romanticized past that no longer exists. This is why, King argues, "Whites have always been comfortable with Dead Indians." After all, Dead Indians pose no threat to White people, since—unlike living, breathing Native people—they want no government assistance, no tribal sovereignty, and, certainly, no return of illegally stolen lands.

☛☛ Dead Indians are dignified, noble, silent, suitably garbed. And dead. Live Indians are invisible, unruly, disappointing. And breathing. One is a romantic reminder of a heroic but fictional past. The other is simply an unpleasant, contemporary surprise.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 66

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage expands on King's concept of Dead, Live, and Legal Indians. Here, King emphasizes how "Dead Indians" are the Indians with whom White people are actually comfortable, whereas "Live Indians" are the ones they fail to respect or even acknowledge.

White America's preference for Dead Indians reflects America's willingness to respect Native culture so long as Native culture does not disturb the present. "Dead Indians are dignified, noble, silent, suitably garbed," notes King. These Indians conform to the stereotypes of Western films that evoke the romanticized old West, flattering White America's conception of history without presenting any real-world problems. They are a piece of nostalgia from an older America, a relic of the past to admire from a distance.

In contrast, Live Indians are "an unpleasant, contemporary surprise." King suggests that Indian-White relations in America are predicated on America's refusal to see Indians

and Indian culture as part of the contemporary world. The poverty, loss of land, and inadequate access to health facilities that Live Indians endure is not as fun to imagine as the Dead Indian, which is "a romantic reminder of a heroic but fictional past." The tension that exists at the core of Indian-White relations rests in Whites' unwillingness to see Indians as fellow *people*. They support legislation that harms Indians because they do not see them as a legitimate part of the contemporary culture, instead viewing them as characters from a past that no longer has any bearing on the present.

## Chapter 4. One Name to Rule Them All Quotes

☛☛ This idea, that Native people were waiting for Europeans to lead us to civilization, is just a variation on the old savagism versus civilization dichotomy, but it is a dichotomy that North America trusts without question. It is so powerful a toxin that it contaminates all of our major institutions. Under its influence, democracy becomes not simply a form of representative government, but an organizing principle that bundles individual freedoms, Christianity, and capitalism into a marketable product carrying with it the unexamined promise of wealth and prosperity. It suggests that anything else is, by default, savage and bankrupt.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 79

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, King describes the "savagism versus civilization dichotomy" that European settlers in North America used to justify the forced assimilation of North America's Native population. According to this racist ideology, Native people were underdeveloped and uncivilized compared to Europeans, who viewed Western culture as superior. Although Native peoples had complex social systems and cultural traditions that can be classified as nothing other than "civilization," Europeans, emboldened by the idea that their culture was objectively superior, felt it their duty to *save* Natives from a life of "savage" meaninglessness and "lead [them] to civilization." It was this type of thinking that justified centuries of coerced assimilation.

But King proposes that this thinking isn't a thing of the past: "it is a dichotomy that North America trusts without question. It is so powerful a toxin that it contaminates all our major institutions," he argues. King believes that North

America's sustained belief in the objective superiority of "individual freedoms, Christianity, and capitalism" bleeds into and corrupts its "major institutions," rendering the government incapable of treating its subjects who do not embrace such values with objective fairness. King's implicit message in this passage is that North America's bias toward Western values render it incapable of being a truly "representative government" for its disparate population.

## Chapter 5. We Are Sorry Quotes

Throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America, there have always been two impulses afoot. Extermination and assimilation.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 101

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage outlines the core concerns of Chapter Five: the "extermination and assimilation" that King believes have always guided Whites' interactions with Natives and the legislation the governments of the U.S. and Canada have passed into law as the official policies for how to deal with their nations' Indian populations.

Both impulses—extermination and assimilation—center around eliminating Indian culture, which Whites have historically perceived as inferior. Extermination refers to the literal extermination of Indians, whether through battle or the transmission of infectious, deadly diseases. Assimilation is a more figurative sort of extermination, one more focused on cultural extermination. When it was clear that Whites could not literally kill off all of the continent's Indian culture, they resolved at least to free the place of Indian culture.

North America undertook the project of assimilation in a number of ways, through the implementation of the residential school system, where Indian children were taken from their tribes and families and forcibly assimilated into Western culture at supposed schools, where they were forced to speak only English, made to wear Western clothes, and horrifically abused. Another way of encouraging assimilation was through coercing Indians into giving up communal land in favor of privately-owned land parcels (allotments) in the General Allotment Act of 1887, and later, in the termination era, by seizing control of

reservations and ending federal recognition of tribes through House Concurrent Resolution 108, which was passed in 1953.

Pratt's plan was a simple one. North America would have to kill the Indian in order to save the man. "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" was the exact quotation, and while it sounds harsh, it was an improvement on Philadelphia lawyer Henry Pancoast's 1882 suggestion that "We must either butcher them [Indians] or civilize them, and what we do we must do quickly."

**Related Characters:** Thomas King, Richard Pratt (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 107-108

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 5, King explores the history of North America's methods of assimilating Native peoples into Western culture. One such approach was the residential school system, where Native parents were coerced (or outright forced) to send their children to boarding/residential schools, many of which were intentionally located far away from reservations. The thought behind this choice was that children would be more likely to undertake the process of assimilation if they were isolated from the elders, language, and cultural practices of their homes.

Pratt was a U.S. Army captain who founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The school served as the model for many similar boarding schools that would emerge throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Pratt's approach to assimilation—and the U.S. and Canadian governments' broader justification for assimilation—was that it was necessary to kill "the Indian in him" if one wanted to "save the man."

Pratt's remark suggests that European or American culture was the civilized, superior culture of "man" and, by extension, that Indian culture was the culture of uncivilized "savages." To "kill the Indian" to "save the man" meant to replace children's knowledge of Indian culture with superior Western culture in order to "save" them from a life of meaninglessness, sin, and depravity.

King suggests that Pratt and—more broadly—the American populace regarded this approach as humane and generous, since it implied that Indians were capable of reformation and civilization, which was not always a given among accepted ideologies of the day. At the very least, King

remarks wryly, Pratt's stance improved on Henry Pancoast's suggestion that the U.S. "must either butcher [Indians] or civilize them."

## Chapter 6. Like Cowboys and Indians Quotes

☛ At the end of the twenty-five-year trust period, each allottee would own their own allotment free and clear, and Indians, who had been communal members of a tribe, would now be individual, private land owners. Reservations would disappear. Indians would disappear. The "Indian Problem" would disappear. Private ownership of land would free Indians from the tyranny of the tribe and traditional Native culture, and civilize the savage.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 130-131

### Explanation and Analysis

King explains the terms of allotment outlined in the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act. Allotment was the U.S. government's new attempt to assimilate Indians into Western culture after the former policies of removal and relocation failed to generate the results the government had hoped they would.

Under allotment, the U.S. government assigned Native peoples parcels of land, or allotments, held in trust for 25 years, after which allottees would own the land outright and be granted U.S. citizenship (in exchange for their tribal membership). The goal of allotment was to absorb Native people into the U.S. economy, enticing them to adopt Western culture outright with the allure of private land ownership.

In reality, allotment benefited the federal government far more than allottees, since it relegated surplus, former reservation land that had not been divided into allotments back to the federal government. In the long term, the government hoped, allotment would disincentivize Native peoples from engaging in their supposedly "uncivilized" practices of sharing communal land and "from the tyranny of the tribe and traditional Native culture." Like the government's previous Indian policies, allotment was intended to "civilize the savage" who posed a threat to the Western way of life.

## Chapter 7. Forget about It Quotes

☛ Ignore the past. Play in the present.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 166

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 7, King employs a rhetorical strategy of entertaining the logic of people who believe that North America has moved beyond the days of systemic racism and colonial violence. He makes the ironic decision to completely disregard the past in order to highlight the irrationality of believing that racism against Native peoples no longer exists and that centuries of displacement, cultural erasure, and genocide have not had a lasting impact on North America's indigenous population.

The bulk of the chapter explores land disputes that have taken place since 1985 (such as the occupation of the Douglas Creek Estates), but whose central conflicts began decades and even centuries before. In both the Oka Crisis and the occupation of the Douglas Creek Estates, the land in question was illegally stolen, sold, or leased from Native nations well before the protests took place. King shows how ignoring the root causes of these protests is disingenuous and illogical. He ultimately concludes that it is impossible to consider the present state of Indian-White relations without considering the past, which is still very much alive in the long-lasting consequences of systemic racism and broken treaties.

☛ What happens next is complicated, illegal, and sleazy. But, given the history of Indian affairs, not unexpected. The states, along with the federal government and private interests, made it quite clear that while tribes might have the legal right to run gaming enterprises on their reservations, that right could be tied up in the courts until hell froze over. What we need, tribes were told by the powers that be, is a compromise. Compromise is a fine word. So much more generous than blackmail.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 177-178



**Explanation and Analysis**


King describes several U.S. Supreme Court cases that ruled in favor of Native tribes having the authority to conduct gaming operations on reservations, regardless of local or state law. While these decisions seemed initially to be a positive step toward tribes being able to realize their right to self-determination (sovereignty), no sooner had the court issued these rulings than the U.S. federal government stepped in to pass what King deems to be “complicated, illegal, and sleazy” policy to regulate tribal gaming operations. Passed in 1988, for example, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) limited which games casinos could operate and mandated that tribes relinquish a portion of their revenue to the state.

Throughout the book, King identifies countless instances in which the government passes laws that seem superficially to act in the best interest of tribes but end up harming them long-term. For example, IGRA granted tribes the right to be the sole owners and primary beneficiaries of gaming operations; however, it also required tribes to sign compacts that relinquished hefty portions of revenue generated from certain games at tribal casinos.

To King, the U.S. and Canadian governments reliably deny Native peoples their rights through coercion and “blackmail” framed as “compromise.” For example, while having sole ownership in exchange for paying a portion of casino revenue to the government initially may seem like a compromise, the reality was that tribes would be remiss in challenging the government’s authority to make these demands, since the federal government had the power to keep Natives’ right to operate casinos “in the courts until hell froze over.” King sees IGRA as one example of the federal government’s strategy to weaponize policy and bureaucracy to attack Native rights.

●● Racism is endemic in North America. And it’s also systemic. While it affects the general population at large, it’s also buried in the institutions that are supposed to protect us from such abuses.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 188

**Explanation and Analysis**

In Chapter 7, King challenges those (presumably White or non-Native people) who claim that Native Americans who

complain about racism or lack of opportunity ought to forget the past and live in the present. He explores a myriad of acts of violence and injustice endured by North America’s Indian population since 1985 to show how illogical and factually inaccurate it is to suggest that racism, oppression, and the lingering aftereffects of colonial violence no longer influence Native life. One particular manner in which the demons of North America’s colonial past continue to haunt Native peoples is in the abuse they incur at the hands of “the institutions that are supposed to protect [them] from such abuses.”

For example, King cites several instances in which police departments either failed to properly investigate or press charges for the murder and assault of Native peoples. One particularly egregious act involves a conspiracy within the Saskatoon police department. Beginning in 1976, police officers made a habit of driving young indigenous men to the outskirts of town and leaving them there to freeze to death. Locally, these drives are known as “Starlight Tours,” which have occurred as recently as 2000. While some policemen involved in the deaths of these men were fired, nobody was formally accused or convicted of murder.

**Chapter 8. What Indians Want Quotes**

●● If Native people are to have a future that is of our own making, such a future will be predicated, in large part, on sovereignty.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 193

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the last few chapters of *The Inconvenient Indian*, King shifts his attention toward the future, speculating that the future of Native people in North America “will be predicated, in large part, on sovereignty.”

Sovereignty is a controversial issue in contemporary society. Opponents of tribal sovereignty argue that such a method is a thing of the past and is impractical to implement in the modern world. Furthermore, opponents suggest that the idea that Native people are different than other U.S. citizens and not required to answer to the same laws and regulations is racist, discriminatory, and not in the best interest of tribes or non-Native U.S. citizens.

To that end, while the Canadian and U.S. constitutions both

give Native peoples the right to self-govern, the government regularly enacts new policies to limit tribes' practical ability to exist as fully sovereign nations because giving tribes full sovereignty would severely limit the government's ability to collect tax revenue from Native land and operations. For example, after a U.S. Supreme Court case ruled that tribes could operate casinos on tribal land regardless of local or state laws, the federal government passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) to limit which types of games casinos could offer and authorize the federal government to collect tax revenue from casino operations.

☝ But instead of pursuing the American dream of accumulating land as personal wealth, the tribes have taken their purchases to the Secretary of the Interior and requested that the land they acquired be added to their respective reservations and given trust status. This is not merely a return to a communal past. It is a shrewd move to preserve and expand an indigenous land base for the benefit of future generations.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 211

### Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 8, King explores the controversial issue of sovereignty, which he views as essential to the future of tribes and Native culture. A large part of why tribes have had trouble with self-governance is their dependence on the federal government for food and other essential resources. They do not technically own reservation land, which belongs to the government. One promising avenue by which tribes can achieve economic independence and political independence is through revenue generated from gaming operations in tribal casinos and resource mining.

King offers the Oneida as an example, explaining how the tribe used revenue generated from its Turning Stone Casino and Resort to purchase and add 17,000 acres of land to its existing reservation. While King has understandable concerns about the environmental consequences of resource mining and the possibility that gambling operations will invite criminal enterprises into reservations, he sees both industries as feasible methods by which tribes can establish the economic independence needed to operate as a truly sovereign nation.

This passage also highlights what King believes to be a critical difference between Indian and White culture. Whereas White people tend to accumulate wealth to “pursu[e] the American dream of accumulating land as personal wealth,” tribes use wealth to reclaim the “communal past” they enjoyed prior to European colonization. Interestingly, Whites were so invested and eager for Indians to participate in their capitalist economy because they believed the accumulation of personal wealth would catalyze Native absorption into Western culture. In reality, Natives have used Western capitalism to reclaim elements of their culture, such as communal living and a sacred appreciation for the land—the very elements Whites thought would be lost.

## Chapter 9. As Long as the Grass is Green Quotes

☝ The issue has always been land. It will always be land, until there isn't a square foot of land left in North America that is controlled by Native people.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 217

### Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 9 focuses on King's conviction that Whites' desire to seize, control, and develop Indian land is at the center of all Indian-White conflicts. Furthermore, King predicts that the U.S. and Canadian governments will continue to attack Indian sovereignty and rights to land “until there isn't a square foot of land left in North America that is controlled by Native people.”



To King, controlling Indian land is even more important to Whites than forcing Native cultures into extinction through assimilation. He argues that while North America has wavered on many of its past Indian policies, the one issue that has remained firmly at the core of all Indian-White relations is land. Specifically, differing attitudes about how land ought to be used have informed all Indian-White conflicts.

Whereas Native cultures have a spiritual relationship to land, Whites view land in terms of its ability to be developed and generate profit. These fundamentally different attitudes toward land have informed practically all official government policy. For example, the Removal Act of 1830 was created to push tribes west of the Mississippi to clear

space for new White settlements. Likewise, the General Allotment Act of 1887 was created to coerce Native peoples into adopting the Western practice of owning private property. In short, Whites' desire to develop land for personal gain, and their conviction that this land was wasted on Indian cultures that prioritize communal living over individual enterprise, has been the common denominator in centuries of policy, intolerance, and oppression—and will continue to be, so long as Indians continue to hang on to what little land they have left.

☞ For non-Natives, land is primarily a commodity, something that has value for what you can take from it or what you can get for it.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 218

### Explanation and Analysis

Chapter 9 focuses on what drives Indian-White conflict. King concludes that what Whites want most is land. He spends the bulk of the chapter describing a series of significant conflicts throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America to prove that the root cause of all Indian-White conflicts is Whites' desire to control Indian land.

King prefaces these case studies by identifying what he sees as the main difference between Indian and White relationships to land. "For non-Natives, land is primarily a commodity," King states, positing that it is the "value" of the land—not the land itself—that is so attractive to them. In King's view, non-Natives value land for "what you can take from it or what you can get from it." Non-natives view land as a means to an end: as an asset to be exploited for economic gain.

The non-Native tendency to view land as a commodity is strikingly different from a Native perspective on land. In contrast, land is sacred to Native peoples and holds priceless relevance to their longstanding spiritual and cultural traditions. These differing attitudes toward land help explain the perpetuity of Indian-White conflict in North America. King believes that Whites will never stop pursuing Native land; at the same time, Natives will never agree to place a monetary value on something integral to their spiritual lives—something that is essentially priceless.

☞ And as they had done in 1875, the Lakota refused the settlement. Money was never the issue. They wanted the Hills back. As for the money, it stays in an interest-bearing account to this day.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 222

### Explanation and Analysis

King focuses on the central role land has played in Indian-White conflicts throughout history, claiming that Whites' desire for Indian land has been the root cause of all such conflicts and will continue to be until there is no remaining Indian land for them to take. One of the reasons King identifies as a primary incentive for Whites to acquire land is that they view land as a commodity or asset. He contrasts Whites' economic attitude toward land with Indians' reverence, citing the Lakota Nation's repeated refusal to accept financial compensation for the Black Hills, a sacred place the government illegally stole from them when it broke the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Despite the government's repeated offers to the Lakota of cash buyouts to relinquish their rights to the Hills, the Lakota refuse to accept payment in exchange for their sacred land. The government first offered the Lakota compensation in 1875, offering the tribe \$25,000 to cede their land and move to Indian Territory, but the Lakota refused to sign a new treaty. Since then, the federal government has regularly presented the Lakota with new offers, and the original awarded amount "stays in an interest-bearing account to this day." Over 100 years later, in 1980, the Supreme Court ordered the U.S. government to pay the Lakota \$105 million in exchange for their land. Again, the Lakota refused, arguing that the land was never for sale, and they would not cede their rights to it. The Lakota Nation's unwavering decision not to accept compensation is evidence to King that "money was never the issue" for the Lakota, nor for the many other North American tribes for whom money was no substitute for the return of sacred land.

## Chapter 10. Happy Ever After Quotes

☞ Ignorance has never been the problem. The problem was and continues to be unexamined confidence in western civilization and the unwarranted certainty of Christianity. And arrogance. Perhaps it is unfair to judge the past by the present, but it is also necessary.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 265

### Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of *The Inconvenient Indian*, King provides some closing remarks on the nature of Indian-White conflict and what can be done to secure a positive future for Native peoples. While certain land settlements give King a degree of optimism that Native conditions are improving, they do not counteract what King identifies as the underlying “problem” that encourages Indian-White conflict: Whites’ belief in the superiority of their culture, ideals, and visions.

King underscores that the U.S.’s centuries-long crusade against Native culture, land, and livelihood was not born of “ignorance” but of “unexamined confidence in western civilization and the unwarranted certainty of Christianity.” If the desire for land was what Whites most wanted from Native people, then this “unexamined confidence” is what motivated them to stoop to such ethically dubious, brutal means to secure it. Until the non-Native populations of the U.S. and Canada gain some perspective and see outside the comforting narratives they have created to absolve themselves of their complicity in colonial violence and cultural erasure, no single land settlement will be enough to ensure the prosperity and healing of North America’s Native people.

●● So long as we possess one element of sovereignty, so long as we possess one parcel of land, North America will come for us, and the question we have to face is how badly we wish to continue to pursue the concepts of sovereignty and self-determination.

**Related Characters:** Thomas King (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 265

### Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of *The Inconvenient Indian*, King articulates his predictions about the future of Native peoples in North America. While he is mildly encouraged by such land settlements as the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) or the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, his underlying sentiment is one of weariness. “So long as we possess one element of sovereignty, so long as we possess one parcel of land, North America will come for us,” King cautions.

King’s underlying point is that, as history has shown, Native people may take no government treaty or policy as reassurance that their land and culture are secure. Instead, King believes that North America’s quest to control the entirety of the continent renders Native land claims and sovereignty perpetually under attack. Ultimately, Natives cannot rely on policy and the federal government to protect them and must take it upon themselves to “pursue the concepts of sovereignty and self-determination.” He underscores the necessity for Native people to question “how badly [they] wish to continue” these pursuits, warning that securing their fundamental rights will always be an uphill battle against an often paternalistic government that will do everything in its power to push Native culture toward extinction.

While King’s parting sentiments in Chapter 10 are cynical, his underlying message also reflects a confidence in the perseverance of Native people, who have struggled against systemic oppression and colonial violence for centuries and managed to survive.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PROLOGUE: WARM TOAST AND PORCUPINES

King begins by explaining the origins of the book's name. Fifteen years ago, he and some Aboriginal friends were trying to choose a name for their drum group. King wanted to use the tongue-in-cheek name "The Pesky Red Skins," and he remembered the name years later as he was searching for a title for this book. While King initially wanted to call the book a "history," his partner, Helen, and his son, both historians, thought the project was too casual to be considered history. King ultimately agreed with them.

King speaks about the differences between fiction and nonfiction, explaining that he generally prefers writing fiction, which is often neater, and with clearer "expectations of morality and justice." He compares writing fiction to "buttering warm toast, while writing a history is herding porcupines with your elbows." In writing *The Inconvenient Indian*, therefore, he has combined elements of fact and fiction, combining history with personal anecdote and conversation.

King explains some of the terminology he employs in his account, explaining that he will use the term "Indian" to refer to North America's indigenous population, even though it's a highly generalized term. To compensate for this generalization, King will also use the term "Whites" to refer to all Caucasian peoples in North America. He uses the term "reservations" to talk about Native territory in the U.S. and "reserves" to talk about territory in Canada.

*King establishes two of the book's central themes: the problematic idea that Indians are "Pesky" or inconvenient to North America (an idea that King criticizes and challenges), and that history is a complex, subjective concept that goes beyond mere reflections on the past.*



*King's remark that fiction has clearer "expectations of morality and justice" implies that morality and justice rarely exist as clearly in real life as they do in stories. His comparison of writing fiction to "buttering warm toast, while writing history is herding porcupines with your elbows" references the Prologue's title and reinforces the notion that history is messy and complicated and rarely conforms to humanity's notions about good and evil, morality and immortality.*



*By going out of his way to explain the language he uses when discussing various groups of people, King invites readers to recognize that generalizations rarely do a good job of fully capturing an entire population. As a Native American himself, King ends up using the term "Indian," even though the term itself is a misnomer. By adopting this inaccurate term, though, King subtly urges readers to think carefully about the words society uses to label people.*



## CHAPTER 1. FORGET COLUMBUS

King laments the difficulty of deciding where to begin a book about Indians in North America, eventually settling on Columbus's arrival in 1492, though his wife begged him to avoid this cliché. Columbus was credited with discovering the North American landmass, since Europeans were unfamiliar with it prior to his arrival. Of course, if history hadn't awarded Columbus the title of *discoverer*, it would've gone to somebody else—the Norse, perhaps.

*The notion that one must consciously decide when and with whom to begin a history reinforces King's stated goal in the introduction: to blend fact with fiction. In mulling over where to begin his account, King reinforces the element of choice and narrativizing at play in the construction of history. In other words, history is less objective than one might think: it is the product of decision and narrative framing.*



Because history is “the stories we tell about the past,” it is inherently biased toward favorable depictions of celebrated men. King decides to tell a different story—one without Columbus—and begins his account in Almo, Idaho, a small town of 200 in southern Idaho whose only claim to fame is an Indian massacre that occurred in 1861. There’s a plaque in town dedicated to the 300 westbound immigrants who lost their lives. Generally speaking, King explains, Indians didn’t kill that many Whites at one time, though there are exceptions, such as the 1813 Fort Mims massacre.

King continues, “giv[ing] credit” to the massacres committed against Indians by Whites by listing off the much larger death tolls for which they are responsible, such as a 1598 massacre in present-day New Mexico, in which Juan de Onate and his troops killed over 800 Indians and cut off the left foot of every Native man older than 25; or the infamous Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, where over 200 Lakota were killed. In short, the Whites have been far more successful at massacres than Indians. This is why, in contrast, the 1861 Almo massacre seems so horrific.

King backtracks, revealing that the Almo massacre never actually happened. Its first mention was a 1926 book called *Reminiscences of Early Days: A Series of Historical Sketches and Happenings in the Early Days of Snake River Valley*, which presents the gruesome supposed massacre as “a right proper Western,” says King, complete with brave, persevering White women and “bloodthirsty Indians.” Though this piece of “history” has since been discredited, the town of Almo wishes not to remove the plaque, so the non-massacre remains “part of the culture and history of the area.”

King shifts his focus to the infamous myth of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith. Smith claimed he was captured by the Powhatan in 1607 and saved by the head man’s daughter, Pocahontas. However, Smith had been telling variations of this compelling story well before 1607. In reality, Smith’s first mention of Pocahontas occurred in 1616, when she arrived in England as a famed “American Indian princess.” Furthermore, because Smith would have been 27 to Pocahontas’s 10 when he arrived in present-day Virginia in 1607, it’s unlikely they even knew each other. Nevertheless, the story’s “exoticism” and “White hero” figure ensure that it persists.

*King reinforces the subjectivity of history by defending it as “the stories we tell about the past.” By this logic, most histories of Indian-White relations in North America begin with Columbus to place the accomplishments of White men front and center. King’s remarks about 300 being an unusually high number of White casualties challenges the idea that Native Americans inflicted more violence upon settlers than settlers inflicted upon Native Americans.*



*King’s comment about “giv[ing] credit” alludes to his earlier remark about history being written to “giv[e] credit” to a particular individual or nation. King implicitly takes issue with the fact that Whites typically only credit themselves with actions that paint them in a favorable light. Here, he widens the historical perspective to “credit” Whites with the massacres they committed against Indians.*



*The plaque in Almo purports to memorialize a historical event, yet, in reality, the commemorated massacre never happened. King is careful in his use of language here, describing how the massacre remains “part of the culture and history of the area” to show how history and truth aren’t necessarily the same thing. History is what a group of people with similar incentives or values choose to believe. He implies that because the plaque upholds a version of the past that depicts Indians as “bloodthirsty” and settlers as martyrs, the town chooses to keep it as part of its “history,” even after the commemorated massacre has been discredited.*



*The myth of Pocahontas saving John Smith is an example of history being skewed to reinforce a narrative of “exoticism” and the resilience of the “White hero.” Despite its fictitiousness, it remains a popular myth in American popular culture, so much so that it was adapted as a Disney movie in 1995, for example. The stereotype of the “American Indian princess” cliché is itself a further example of America’s history of Native Americans centering around Western ideals, since the concept originates from Europeans falsely believing that Native peoples shared the European system of royalty, where the daughters of chiefs were akin to the daughters of kings.*



Next, King recalls the Battle of Little Bighorn, often mythologized as “Custer’s Last Stand,” and which U.S. historians often frame as an archetypal “heroic but ill-advised and failed endeavor[.]” These accounts typically portray General Custer as a hero who fought to the end, a myth popularized through word of mouth and countless works of visual and literary art depicting the battle, though, of course, none can be accurate, since there was nobody there to photograph it.

*George Armstrong Custer led the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry Regiment into battle against the Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes in the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn. The tribes swiftly defeated the U.S. Army. History’s decision to mythologize Custer and his men as fallen heroes ignores the egregious strategic errors Custer made that brought about their downfall, such as the decision to break down his forces into smaller battalions and rejecting the offer of an additional Cavalry to assist his men, believing they could swiftly defeat the enemy tribes.*



Next, King describes the Métis leader Louis Riel’s role in the Rebellion of 1885, which receives considerably less attention than the Battle of Little Bighorn. Riel’s story begins in 1869, with the Red River Rebellion, which ensued after Canada bought Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company—a purchase of nearly 4 million square kilometers. The problem with this purchase was that Hudson’s Bay Company didn’t own this land. After the purchase, Ottawa appointed as governor William McDougall, who despised the French. When McDougall sent surveyors into the newly purchased territory to divide it into parcels, they were met with Métis resistance and forced to retreat.

*The Hudson’s Bay Company’s decision to sell land that wasn’t theirs to sell introduces one of the book’s major themes, which is the central role that control of land has played in Indian-White interactions throughout history. The Hudson’s Bay Company still exists today as a retail business group, but for much of its existence (it was founded in 1670 in London) it was a fur trading business. Finally, in suggesting that Louis Riel’s role in the Rebellion of 1885 receives less attention than Custer’s Land Stand, King insinuates, perhaps, that this is because Custer was White and Riel was Metis, one of Canada’s three recognized indigenous groups.*



Louis Riel led the fight between the French and English for Métis land. He was involved in the creation of a provisional government for the territory and in numerous negotiations. Everything progressed smoothly until February 1870, when Charles Boulton, John Schultz, Charles Mair, and Thomas Scott attempted to overthrow the provisional government. Riel pardoned Boulton but executed Scott, which resulted in much anti-Métis, anti-Catholic, and anti-French sentiments directed toward Riel, who was forced to flee Canada.

*Riel’s decision to execute Scott stemmed from his desire for the Canadian government to take the Métis seriously. Today, historians regard this decision as Riel’s biggest political mistake, mainly for the anti-Métis, anti-Catholic, and anti-French sentiment it inspired among Canada’s Protestant population. In fact, Scott’s execution was integral in the formation of the Canada First movement, a nationalist movement that persisted into the mid-1870s.*



By 1885, it was apparent that the Dominion of Canada (Canada was not yet a country at this time) had no intentions to negotiate with the Métis, many of whom had since moved from Manitoba to Saskatchewan, where they formed a settlement at Batoche, along the South Saskatchewan River. That year, Riel returned to Canada to lead the North-West Rebellion, during which the Métis fought against the Canadian government to defend their stolen land. Riel eventually surrendered after his troops ran out of ammunition. While Dumont and many other of Riel’s troops managed to escape to Montana, Riel remained behind, was charged with treason, and hanged.

*Riel lived in exile in the U.S. after the Red River Rebellion. He spent most his time in the Montana territory and became involved in religion and politics, campaigning on behalf of the Republican party. He became a naturalized citizen in 1883. The defeat of Riel and the Métis and First Nations people he fought with is remembered as an infamous failure for Canada’s indigenous people. Today, Riel is one of the most famous people in Canadian history. But history has portrayed him differently over time. Initially, his defeat was seen as a triumph of Protestant civilization over the supposed “savagery” of the mixed-race Métis. Later accounts of Riel were less racially charged, emphasizing how Riel’s defeat ultimately exacerbated the treatment of Canada’s indigenous population.*



King considers Louis Riel, George Custer, and the others who died throughout the history of Indian-White relations in North America. He recalls Crazy Horse, who was murdered by soldiers at Camp Robinson, or Sitting Bull, who police shot at the Standing Rock Agency in North Dakota. However, because these men didn't die "with their boots on" alongside Custer, history doesn't remember their names quite as well as his. King ironically denies that race has anything to do with who is and isn't remembered in American history.

*King's remark about not remembering the fallen Native leaders because they didn't die "with their boots on" like Custer suggests that these men aren't remembered as well because they aren't White—the use of the "boots" imagery evokes clothing associated with Western culture. King's denial that race has anything to do with which parts of history are remembered is sarcastic. This is typical of the conversational style King uses in the book.*



King criticizes popular history's tendency to highlight the inconveniences Native people posed to westward expansion while minimizing the invaluable assistance they provided to European explorers, surveyors, and traders who were woefully unfamiliar with the land. Ultimately, King concludes, much of Indian history in North America has been lost to time. He compares Native history to a fossil hunt, which requires the researcher to piece together the larger picture from scattered artifacts and clues left behind.

*King's closing remarks shed some light on the book's title, speaking of the inconvenience Natives posed to White settlers wishing to expand their euro-centric settlements westward. Of course, it's ironic for Whites to have thought this, since the sentiment implies that Indians were in Whites' way when, in reality, Whites were the once imposing on Native land.*



## CHAPTER 2. THE END OF THE TRAIL

King begins an anecdote about playing "cowboys and Indians" with his brother and some neighborhood friends when he was a young boy. He remembers how nobody—himself included—wanted to be an Indian. King compares his childhood self to Straight Arrow, a character from a popular radio show of the same name that ran from 1942 to 1952. Straight Arrow was a Comanche man who was adopted by a White family and acted as a White man named Steve Adams. When danger arose, Straight Arrow would don "traditional" Comanche clothing, a golden bow and arrow, and ride a Palomino stallion named Fury to fight evil. Like Straight Arrow, King donned a cowboy outfit to "hide [his] secret identity."

*King recalls this anecdote to show how the broader culture of North America teaches Native people to reject and feel ashamed of their indigenous roots. Even Straight Arrow, a heroic indigenous character in popular culture, was compelled to only display his indigenous identity on rare, special occasions. King thus learned from a young age the unfortunate and damaging lesson that, in North America, having indigenous heritage is often framed as undesirable.*



King commences a broad overview of White-Indian interactions in North America over the past few centuries. Since the establishment of colonies in Plymouth, Jamestown, and Quebec, among other places, Indians became a significant part of life for European settlers and appeared throughout their art, literature, and pop culture. During this period, while disease had greatly diminished Indian populations, survivors were not yet relegated to reservations. For this reason, they were "more difficult to ignore," states King.

*King's remark that Indians were "more difficult to ignore" before they were moved to reservations speaks to the idea he proposed in the previous passage: that mainstream American culture thinks that indigenous people are best hidden from public view. The idea here is that Indians are a problem that needs to be pushed to the side if they cannot be gotten rid of entirely.*





While explorers who were simply passing through and relied on Indians to navigate untraversed lands had mostly positive interactions with Indians, settlers who lived in close proximity to Indians had more negative perceptions of them and resented having to share land they had mistakenly believed would be entirely free for their taking. Additionally, settlers' Christian worldview equipped them with logic that persuaded them to form a dual image of the world, differentiating only between "light or dark, good or evil, civilized or savage." King sees the "cowboys and Indians" games of his youth as a distilled version of this duality.

King frames the years between the early 17th century and the late 19th as a period of "continuous[] 'not sharing'" between colonists and Indians. This "not sharing" led to a series of wars over land disputes, including the 1622–1644 war between the Powhatan Confederacy and the Virginia Colonists, and the 1637 Pequot War fought in Connecticut and Rhode Island, for example. The years in which battles weren't actively ongoing weren't peaceful, either, and saw the U.S. government repeatedly make and break treaties and peace agreements with its Indian neighbors.

Five years after the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee, the *New York Times* published an article (which was first published in England's *Westminster Review*) that claimed that Canada had never engaged in an Indian War. King argues that this logic is misleading, citing a number of conflicts, such as Duck Lake and Cut Knife, that, perhaps, aren't considered "proper 'Indian' conflicts," since they involved the Métis. Though the *Westminster Review's* claim isn't technically false, King argues that it purposefully disguises Canadian aggression against its Aboriginal people.

*Whites who needed Indians—explorers for whom Indians were convenient guides—got along well with Indians. Settlers who wished to develop Western homesteads and towns without the supposedly "savage" influence of the neighboring Natives, in contrast, had more strained relationships with their Native neighbors. The settlers' worldview that crated a dual image between "light and dark, good or evil, civilized or savage" helps contextualize the racist ideology that settlers used to justify their view of Indians as an impediment on their new settlements.*



*King's assessment that the years between the 17th and 19th centuries may be defined as a period of "continuous[] 'not sharing'" suggests that, at its core, Indian-White tensions may be seen as the consequence of their desire to claim and covet land.*



*King's criticism of Canada seemingly not characterizing wars waged against the Métis as "proper 'Indian' conflicts" (since the Métis are of mixed race, having indigenous blood as well as French blood) suggests that Canada adjusts its definition of who is and isn't indigenous to suit its preferred narrative. Only a few decades before the publication of the Westminster Review article, Canada's Protestant population was engaged in war against the Métis, but here, they seem to claim that the Métis aren't Indian to falsely suggest that Canada treats its Native population less violently than the U.S.*



King segues into a discussion of race. The concept of race has been in existence at least as far back as the Egyptians, who established racial categories for “Egyptians,” “Asiatics,” “Libyans,” and “Nubians.” In 1775, German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach put forth five categories of race: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Ethiopian, American, Indian, and Malayan. In the late 19th century, Charles Darwin argued for the superiority of Europeans over other races. In James Fenimore Cooper’s 1841 novel *The Deerslayer*, he argues that Indians and White men both had “gifts” from God: the White man, Christianity, and the Indian, “wilderness.” While Cooper’s ideas sound almost “progressive,” they imply that Indians lacked the pre-frontal cortex necessary to understand God, and White men, with their Christianity, were intellectually superior.

Cooper’s logic establishes a clear boundary between the Indians and Whites, explained and justified by “divine sanction.” Adding to this boundary were commonly held beliefs about certain attributes that Indians possessed as a racial group. For example, some early North American literature characterized Indians as “pagans” and savages. Other works, such as Lydia Marie Child’s *Hobomek* (1824) reimagined Indians as romantic, tragic figures: as “noble, honest, and trustworthy,” but only at the level of the individual, which did little to negate the racism directed toward Indians in North America.

King describes the painting of George Catlin, Charles Bird King, and Paul Kane, who traveled west and painted the Indians they encountered along the way. Such paintings were the basis of later cinematographic renderings of Indians in the Western films of John Ford, D.W. Griffiths, and Kevin Costner, among others. King also cites the Wild West shows of the 19th century as influencing the popular culture view of Indians. Shows such as Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show performed across the country and abroad. Initially “Indians” were played by White men in redface, but later, actual Indians, such as Jack Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, and Red Shirt joined them often. Although these shows were often commercialized and crass, showrunners treated Indian performers well and paid them for their work.

Darwin published his theory of evolution in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). In this book, Darwin introduced the theory that populations evolve through natural selection, which dictates that organisms better adapted to their environment are the ones that will survive and reproduce. Darwin’s theory employs the phrase “survival of the fittest” to describe the process by which supposed superior organisms are selected to procreate. Darwin’s evolutionary theories were later adopted by the philosopher Herbert Spencer to create Social Darwinism, an inherently racist ideology claiming that Europeans were a superior race. Social Darwinism attempted to justify imperialism on the grounds that it eradicated the world of inferior races and cultures. This type of ideology informed and justified settlers’ treatment of North America’s indigenous population.



Cooper’s racism applies Darwin’s theory of evolution to Christianity, claiming that European superiority is justified by “divine sanction,” something evidenced by Europeans’ willingness to let God into their lives and Natives’ rejection of Christianity. Even comparatively sympathetic attitudes toward Natives—such as Lydia Marie Child’s—weren’t all that much better, implying that outlying Natives were “noble, honest, and trustworthy,” adjectives that might better be used to describe an obedient dog than an actual human.



King establishes how popular culture and the arts further embellished on North America’s already racially charged, biased perception of Native Americans. In this way, he suggests that Indians have been objectified and dehumanized in America’s collective imagination, relegated to caricatures from movies or performers in vaudeville shows like Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West Show.



Wild West shows culminated in James Earle Fraser's 1915 sculpture **The End of the Trail**, the most well-known Indian image of the 20th century. The sculpture depicts a dejected Indian man atop his resisting horse. Today, variations on the original work exist all across the U.S., pasted on the sides of motels, restaurants, and rest stations.

Next, King delves into an overview of Indian representation in Hollywood. Between 1894 and 1930, Hollywood made over 100 films depicting “real” Indian people and their “authentic” culture. After 1930, it produced an additional 300 films. “Indians were made for film,” King contends wryly, noting the “exotic and erotic” visual features of Indians favored by filmmakers, such as the feathers, face paint, and loincloths.

King establishes three categories of Indians in film: the “bloodthirsty savage,” who was most common, the “noble savage,” who assisted Whites in their struggles against the savage Indians; and the “dying Indian,” who was a product of a bygone era that existed before White settlers' arrival. Regardless of which type of Indian a film featured, the inevitable moral put forth was a yielding of the Native people to “Christianity and Commerce.” Early directors like D.W. Griffiths and Jay Hunt cast White actors in Indian roles. However, early films featured a number of Indian actors, too, such as William Eagle Shirt, a Lakota. James Young Deer and his wife Lillian St. Cyr, Nebraska Ho-Chunks who worked with Griffith, even had their own film company, though they've largely fallen into obscurity over the years.

Chauncey Yellow Robe, a Lakota who played Indian roles in various films, including 1930's *Silent Enemy*, spoke at the conference of the Society of American Indians in 1913 about the film industry's inhumane representation of Indians as savages, which Yellow Robe saw as representative of the country's broader view of Indians.

*King sees The End of The Trail as the natural end of the Indian portrayed in these stereotypical, racially charged elements of popular culture from the previous century. The sculpture suggests that the Indians of those works is dead and has no place in contemporary America. This sheds more light onto King's repeated claims that North America views Indians as inconveniences that are best moved out of sight.*



*King further demonstrates how American popular culture objectifies Indians. His wry remark that “Indians were made for film” implies that stereotypically “exotic and erotic” images of Indians are made for White consumption—for entertainment. This passage also further asserts the idea that Whites can only see stereotypes of Indians—not their true culture.*



*King suggests that White people not only see Indians as inferior, but also have trouble conceiving of them outside the context of White culture. The image of Native people in North America has therefore been refracted through the problematic lens of White culture, which breaks the Indian population down into three reductive categories. The “bloodthirsty savage” is thus a violent enemy who threatens to disrupt the White, Christian world; the “noble savage” stereotype accepts and acquiesces to the racist idea that Indian culture is inferior; and the “dying Indian” represents the Indians from a time that no longer exists.*



*Chauncey Yellow Robe's theory that the film industry's treatment of Native people reflects the nation's broader view of them mirrors King's own view: North America sees its Native population as relics of the past that no longer matter.*



King continues his analysis of historical stereotypes of Indian peoples, describing the illustration of an Indian on horseback seen on paper currency in circulation in the U.S. from 1899 to 1914. King notes how the headdress that Running Antelope, the Lakota who served as the model for the illustration, was wearing might not have been an authentic Lakota headdress but a Pawnee headdress instead (the Lakota and Pawnee were enemies during this time.) There have been a number of other commemorative Indian images put forth by the U.S. and Canada over the century, including various stamps depicting Indians.

*Again, the reproduction of an Indian image onto paper currency shows how White culture has historically objectified and dehumanized Indians, viewing them as commodities and objects rather than people with meaningful lives and cultures. That the illustration of Running Antelope might feature the man wearing a Pawnee headdress further shows how little respect Whites had for Natives—they see them as images for their consumption, which is why no care was taken to ensure that Running Antelope was depicted wearing an authentic headdress. King thus highlights the unfortunate fact that cultural authenticity seems to not matter very much when the consumer is ignorant and uninterested in that culture.*



King reveals which famous Indian he'd like to see depicted on currency: Will Rogers. Rogers was a Cherokee who performed as a vaudeville player and appeared in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. He made his first film appearance in *Laughing Bill Hyde* in 1918 and went on to act in 50 films, becoming one of the highest paid actors in Hollywood by the 1930s. Rogers was also a renowned social commentator and humorist who wrote over 4,000 newspaper columns, and he was even nominated as the Anti Bunk Party candidate for president.

*Will Rogers is an outlier, compared to the other prominent historical Native figures. After all, he did well in White America, both socially and financially.*



Rogers was never cast as an Indian, since he “didn’t look Indian enough” to Hollywood. Still, he’s one of two Indian actors to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The other Indian actor with a star is Jay Silverheels, a Canadian Mohawk, who apparently did look “Indian enough” and played Indians. His most famous role was Tonto in the *Lone Ranger* TV series. King describes Tonto as “North America’s Indian.” He was “trustworthy, loyal, [and] helpful” to his White counterparts. Tonto was proof that Natives *had* learned the civilized behavior settlers had “shared” with them. While Silverheels has been criticized for playing a “Stepin Fetchit role,” it was a job, and one of the first that depicted an Indian as *nearly* equal to his White sidekick.

*King’s remark that Rogers “didn’t look Indian enough” might help explain his success in the Hollywood industry and the broader American culture. He didn’t look like an Indian—an inconvenience North Americans would rather clear away and ignore—so he was embraced and allowed to succeed. “Stepin Fetchit” refers to a famous Black vaudeville performer. He acted under the stage persona “Stepin Fetchit,” which many have suggested played up negative stereotypes of Black Americans as lazy and scheming. So, when people call Tonto a “Stepin Fetchit role,” they mean that Tonto was harmful to the image of Native Americans since he reinforced existing negative stereotypes of Native Americans that existed in White North America’s collective imagination. In this instance, that Tonto is “trustworthy, loyal [and] helpful” reaffirms the negative stereotype of the “novel savage” that existed in earlier films.*



King wonders whether Indian representation in film and television really has an impact on North America’s perception of the Indian. He considers the controversy of non-Indian actors being cast in Indian roles before coming to the conclusion that, regardless of whether Indian roles are played by Indians or non-Indians, the “truth” Hollywood depicts about Indians is rarely truthful.

*The concept of representation is a relevant issue today, as well. King tends to think that Native people have more vital, pressing concerns to deal with than their representation in Hollywood—or, at least, that restoring the broader narrative surrounding Native culture is the most important thing to address.*



King breaks down typical Indian film roles into two categories: historical Indians and contemporary Indians. Most Indian actors play historical Indians, though directors seem to have no problem filling these roles with racially ambiguous Italians, Mexicans, and Greeks. However, directors are more likely to cast real Indians in contemporary Indian roles. In the past 20 years, such films as *Powwow Highway* (1989) and *Smoke Signals* (1998) have offered less stereotypical visions of contemporary Indian life. Additionally, Native filmmakers, such as Phil Lucas and Alanis Obomsawin, are changing the way Indians are depicted on-screen with documentaries depicting contemporary Native life. Unfortunately, not many people watch documentaries, nor are documentaries an accurate depiction of reality, merely “an approximation.”

*That these two categories of Indian—historical and contemporary—exist today suggests a shift in a positive direction of Native representation in film, since King has just established that older Western films tended only to show romanticized, exoticized visions of Indians of the old West, which fail to correctly depict Indian culture.*



### CHAPTER 3. TOO HEAVY TO LIFT

King establishes three types of Indian present in the North American cultural imagination: **Dead Indians, Live Indians, and Legal Indians**. Dead Indian doesn't only refer to Indians who are “deceased.” The Dead Indian is a composite image of America's “collective imaginings and fears.” They're comparable to the Indians portrayed in old Western films and are a common image in American culture. King references Sacheen Littlefeather, who refused the Best Actor Award on behalf of Marlon Brando at the 1973 Academy Awards, as an example of a Dead Indian. King describes Dead Indians as America's “only antiquity,” and he compares them to Europe's Ancient Greeks or Russia's Cossacks.

*King departs from an analysis of Indians that exist in film and shows how America overgeneralizes Indians that exist in real life, as well. These distinctions are important in building King's case that Indian-White relations are so fraught because Whites fail to truly see Indians, instead focusing too much on a romanticized version of Indian culture. Sacheen Littlefeather appeared at the Academy Awards in 1973 on behalf of the actor Marlon Brando, who had sent her in his place to refuse the Best Actor award—a statement he wanted to make about the unfair treatment of Native Americans in the film industry. King's point is that Sacheen Littlefeather appeared in authentic dress because Americans don't pay attention to Indians unless they fit into the stereotypical and outdated North American vision of Indian culture.*



Most importantly, the **Dead Indian** is a nonthreatening image for Whites. King quotes General Phil Sheridan, who supposedly stated, “The only good Indian I ever saw was a dead one.” In a speech he gave in 1886, years before his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt admitted that while not all Indians are better dead, nine out of ten are.

*The Dead Indian isn't a threat to Whites because he doesn't have the ability to try to threaten their Euro-centric, Christian culture with his own. Americans love the romanticized Indians of film because they evoke a danger that the Western world fought and defeated. They pose no real threats to contemporary life, and this is why they're entertaining to consume.*



Next, King lists a number of geographic features across the U.S., “**Dead Indian** Meadows,” and “Dead Indian Peak” and “Dead Warrior Lake.” He also cites a number of products bearing Dead Indian imagery, such as Calumet Baking Powder, Crazy Horse Malt Liquor, and Land O’ Lakes butter. King sees the use of Indian imagery in advertising as an extension of the medicine shows that toured the West in the 18th and 19th Centuries, which would purport to sell “Dead Indian elixirs” to treat an array of maladies. Today, the Dead Indian is present in alternate health practices, such as cleansing psychotherapy sessions in sweat lodges. New Age enthusiasts meld Buddhism, Taoism, and plain fiction together to craft a “Dead Indian” narrative of spirituality.

The target audience for **Dead Indian** advertising is never Indians, though. King explains how Whites created the Dead Indian as a more comfortable alternative to the Live Indian, which persisted into the 20th century, despite years of conflict, disease, and supposed “divine” sanction diminishing their population. The mainstream U.S. culture believed that the shrinking Indian population was evidence of “natural law” favoring the strong over the weak. American art and literature support this premise. Longfellow’s poem *Song of Hiawatha*, for example, romantically espouses the notion that Indians had “underst[ood] their noble but inferior nature” and “willingly gifted” the U.S. to the Whites.

However, **Live Indians** didn’t die out entirely. This was a problem for U.S. culture, which had already erected Dead Indian imagery to replace them. So, the U.S. government relegated Live Indians to reservations and reserves “in the rural backwaters” of the U.S. and Canada. “Out of sight, out of mind,” muses King. In his seminal 1969 work *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Lakota scholar Vine Deloria describes Live Indians as “transparent,” referring to how visibly apparent it is what Indians want and what help they need. King sees this as evidence of Indians’ “invisib[ility],” positing that North Americans “don’t see contemporary Native people [...] as Indians.”

King provides several examples that depict the **Live Indian**’s characteristic invisibility. He describes a photographic series by Mandan photographer Zig Jackson called “Entering Zig’s Indian Reservation,” in which Jackson photographed himself around San Francisco wearing a feathered headdress, capturing the shocked expressions of non-Natives as they encountered a “Dead Indian come to life.”

*King’s list of geographic features sarcastically criticizes the surplus of natural features named after deceased Indians or Indian-adjacent cultural ideas. For example: the surplus of products that use Indian imagery to sell their goods further builds on America’s racist treatment of Indians, their objectification, and the belief that they are not humans but objects to be used as Americans see fit.*



*Dead Indians are comfortable to Whites because they rid Whites of responsibility for past atrocities the country as a whole committed against Native peoples. They are a nostalgic nod to the past, not the disadvantaged population that exists today, despite being ravaged by centuries of conflict, disease, and land theft. The idea of “natural law” also enables Whites to eschew responsibility for their role in disenfranchising Native peoples, since it suggests that Whites were merely following divine orders rather than acting out of personal agency.*



*King suggests that Whites tend to keep Dead Indian imagery around because it comforts or benefits them. On the other hand, North Americans exile Live Indians to reservations. Whereas Whites don’t need anything from Live Indians, King suggests, Live Indians do need things from Whites: the return of their land, government assistance, and sovereignty. But these are all things that the broader American culture isn’t willing to reckon with. To that end, Deloria insinuates that Whites see Indians but remain ignorant to their needs as actual people.*



*Jackson’s photo series is so disconcerting because it breathes life into an image America has come to associate with a past that no longer exists.*



For **Live Indians**, claims King, being “inauthentic” is even worse than being invisible. Yet, North America seems to have decided that, in order to perpetuate the myth of the Dead Indian, Live Indians “cannot be genuine Indians.” He connects this logic to the Christian idea of original sin, comparing Dead Indians to “garden of Eden-variety Indians” who are innocent of sin and authentic. Live Indians, in contrast, are “fallen Indians” by virtue of their assimilation into modern society. Many Native people try to prove authenticity by claiming to belong to a particular tribe—Blackfoot or Navajo, for example. Yet, North America will not accept this, choosing instead to group all tribes together under blanket terms like “Indian,” or “Aboriginal,” or “First Nations.” For North Americans, Dead Indians reaffirm a glorified myth, but Live Indians are merely “unruly” and “disappointing.”

King references a scene from a Tony Hillerman Novel, *Sacred Clowns*, in which tourists look on as a Navajo community undertake a Tano ceremony. He muses how, for White tourists, traditional ceremonies like the Tano ceremony represent “**Dead Indians** com[ing] to life.” But when Live Indians dance at powwows, they aren’t doing it for North America’s entertainment. Rather, these events bring Live Indians together and remind them of their familial and cultural traditions, and their “relationship with the Earth.” King expands on this latter point, framing Indians’ connection to the Earth as another cultural belief that has been coopted by White North American culture.

King moves on to address the third category of Indians: **Legal Indians**, or “Status Indians” in Canada, who are registered as Indians under the terms outlined in the Indian Act. According to the 2006 census, there are 565,000 Status Indians living in Canada, though the total number of Native peoples was closer to 1.2 million. In the U.S., “Status” is granted to tribes rather than individuals. In 2009, the federal government recognized 564 tribes with members eligible to receive federal assistance. There are around 950,000 individuals who fall into this category, though the total number of Indians living in the U.S. is closer to 2.4 million.

*Live Indians don't conform to the nostalgic Wild West imagery Whites typically associate with Indians. It's ironic that America demonizes Live Indians for having assimilated into Western culture, as that's what centuries of colonization have coerced them to do. King's remarks about America grouping disparate Native tribes together under one broader identity of "Indian" or "Aboriginal" further underscores Whites' disregard for Native life and culture. They are only concerned with indigenous people insofar as indigenous people affect their own lives and ability to develop land or practice Christianity and other euro-centric practices.*



*This scene from Hillerman's novel is similar to the previously mentioned photographic series by Zig Jackson. Both evoke a "com[ing] to life" of Dead Indians. Again, King suggests that a large contributing factor to the tensions that plague Indian-White relations is Whites' misguided belief that Indians exist for them: that their powwows are on display for entertainment, that their traditions may be repurposed for white usage through cultural appropriation.*



*The sharp distinction between the number of legally recognized Indians and the number of Native peoples who actually exist shows how federal policy actively tries to eliminate or severely diminish the Native population. The passage of laws that create stricter requirements for legal recognition as an authentic Indian means the government has to pay out less federal assistance. King implies that policy is the modern way of kicking Native people off their land and forcing assimilation: by robbing them of a legal claim to their identity.*



King considers the **Legal Indian** to be a lapse in judgment on North America's part, and an error it has tried to correct for nearly two centuries. The Legal Indian came about as a consequence of the treaties the U.S. and Canada signed with Native nations. The treaties entitled Legal Indians to certain rights. While many people in North America view treaty rights as an act of generosity on the federal government's part, in reality, King argues, Native people have more than paid for these rights.

*King suggests that conventional history frames the rights afforded to registered tribes as an overly generous gift the government has bestowed upon Natives. Rhetoric like this underlies contemporary arguments against supplying more aid to reservations or halting energy operations (fracking) that pollute water on tribal lands. In reality, King suggests, the federal aid Native people receive is the bare minimum, considering the violation of agency and cultural freedom Natives have endured over the years. In other words, the history of Indian-White relations has been skewed toward a more favorable view of White generosity and away from the role Whites played in disenfranchising Indians in the first place.*



In Canada, a **Legal Indian** is defined in the Indian Act of 1876. Beyond defining the designation, the act also outlines how to control the lives of Legal Indians. For example, an 1881 amendment to the act prohibited Legal Indians in prairie provinces from selling agriculture in order to keep them from becoming competitors to White farmers. A subsequent 1914 amendment required Legal Indians to gain permission to appear in traditional costume in advance of shows, dances, or exhibitions. Until 1968, the Canadian government could "enfranchise" Legal Indians: take away their Legal Indian status and replace it with Canadian citizenship.

*Barring Legal Indians from selling agriculture is another attempt of the government to assimilate Native people into Western culture for Whites' benefit while leaving Indians with no benefits of their own. Once more, Indians are treated not like a group of people with cultural significance and legitimate needs, but like an inconvenience White American society must deal with. The framing of "enfranchise[ing]" Legal Indians but giving them Canadian citizenship as a generous gesture on the part of the Canadian government is another instance of history being spun to present Whites in a positive light while obscuring their oppressive actions.*



In the U.S., **Legal Indians** are enrolled in federally recognized tribes. Eligibility is controlled by tribes and varies, though most determine eligibility by "blood quantum," that is, by the percentage of Native blood in one's ancestry. In 1950, the U.S. began "enfranchising" whole tribes, removing them from the federal registry and taking away millions of acres of Legal Indian land from tribes and selling them to non-Natives. In this way, the government reduces Legal Indians to Live Indians.

*The U.S.'s legal strategy of "enfranchising" entire tribes mirrors Canada's strategy. Both nations purport to be helping Natives integrate into Western society when in reality they are robbing tribes of sovereignty (the right to self-governance) and weaponizing enfranchisement to encourage cultural erasure.*



The desire to get rid of **Legal Indians** has been around for years and is motivated by the government's desire to absorb Live Indians into the predominant, non-Native culture. In 1953, the U.S. Congress passed the Termination Act and the Relocation Act. Termination gave the federal government the right to terminate federal relationship with tribes, and Relocation incentivized Indians to leave reservations and relocate to more urban areas. The Canadian government attempted to pass a similar law in 1969. Then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau argued that Indians weren't entitled to land or Native rights and that it would be in Natives' best interest to assimilate into Canadian society. Nearly every Indian organization opposed the plan.

*Adopting termination and relocation as national policy was the U.S.'s way of eradicating Native culture through absorption into mainstream society. The thought was that in robbing tribes of sovereignty and taking back rights to reservation land, tribal communities would disperse, live in less culturally homogenous areas, and be absorbed into white Western culture. Prior to termination, legally recognized Indians and tribes weren't subject to federal or state taxes and laws. Termination changed this, attempting to force Native people to abandon cultural practices and, for their own good, assimilate into the modern, more civilized ways of modern society*





King argues that the “**Dead Indian**” is the only Indian North America is interested in, evidenced by the vast array of “Indian” clubs and social organizations that exist across the continent. It was Canadian Ernest Thompson Seton who created the modern experience of “summer camp” and founded the Boy Scouts. Seton was interested in Native culture and founded the League of Woodcraft Indians in 1902, an organization that offered outdoor activities and “Indian culture” to non-Indian children. King views such organizations as opportunities for non-Native people to “transform” temporarily into Dead Indians: to participate in sweats and pipe ceremonies and assume names like “Howling Wolf.” King cynically suggests that it would be beneficial to these clubs if Live and Legal Indians ceased to exist, since having the “original” around infringes on their ability “to sell the counterfeit.”

*King identifies the hypocrisy of America appropriating and engaging in the same indigenous cultural practices that the government has prohibited actual indigenous people from practicing. America loves “Indian culture” for non-Indians but abhors it in authentic Indians. America’s fixation with Indian culture also reaffirms the cultural preference for the “Dead Indian” over the “Live Indian.” Americans participate in Indian culture to relish in what they see as a past way of life while ignoring the fact that these practices belong to a culture that is still alive, despite America’s best efforts to eradicate the people to whom those cultural practices initially belonged.*



## CHAPTER 4. ONE NAME TO RULE THEM ALL

King suggests that the bigoted, anti-Indian slurs he’s heard at protests and marches are indicative of North America’s broader hatred of **Live Indians**. He isolates one example of this hatred, the question “Why didn’t we kill you off when we had the chance?” as a launch point for a deeper exploration of North American Indian policy during the early colonial years.

*The rhetorical question King poses establishes the central concerns of Chapter 4: the methods America has used to atone for its mistake of not completely eradicating Indians and Indian culture while it had the chance. King argues that the ensuing years of North American Indian policy was the U.S. and Canada’s attempt to finish the task it wished it had completed outright.*



King begins by addressing the North American misconception that Native people and their culture “are trapped in a state of stasis,” unable to progress alongside the rest of civilization. He compares this presumed stasis to Vladimir and Estragon of Beckett’s play [Waiting for Godot](#), suggesting that White Americans see Native people as “waiting for Europeans to lead [them] to civilization” and considers it an extension of the “savagism versus civilization dichotomy” that has defined North America’s attitude toward Native people for centuries. Such a dichotomy regards anything that contradicts Christianity and capitalism as immoral savagery.

*The idea that Native people and their culture “are trapped in a state of stasis” reflects King’s earlier notion of the Dead Indian: Americans tend to believe that Native people and their culture are a thing of the past and no longer relevant or beneficial to modern society. The Beckett play [Waiting for Godot](#) features two characters who wait for the titular character, who never arrives. For King to evoke this play to describe Whites’ perception of Indians “waiting for Europeans to lead [them] to civilization” imbues Native people with a powerlessness to change their circumstances. It suggests that Americans think Native people are doomed to remain static and unimproved.*



After America fought and won the Seven Years’ War, the American Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812, William Bradford claimed that “a hideous and desolate wilderness” had been transformed into two nation states, Canada, and the U.S.

*Bradford’s description—in which he calls America’s newly won land “a hideous and desolate wilderness”—reinforces Whites’ dichotomy between civilized European culture and uncivilized, savage Native culture.*



Indian-White relations were initially centered around commerce, such as the fur trade, and military alliances. Indians saw themselves as independent nations separate from the U.S. and Canada, and, initially, federal governments treated them as such. However, this attitude shifted as European militaries grew more powerful than Indian forces. The Articles of Confederation gave the U.S. federal government the right to supervise all Indian affairs. This right was expanded in the 1790 Trade and Intercourse Act, which gave the federal government the power to buy and sell Indian *land*.

*Initially, the federal government treated Indian tribes as sovereign nations. This meant that Indian nations were not held to the same legal responsibilities as U.S. Citizens. King insinuates that the government allowed this not out of a desire to honor tribes' rights to self-governance but out of self-preservation: it was in the federal government's best interest not to interfere in Indian issues because Indian military forces were stronger than European forces. However, when the balance of power shifted hands, it was no longer necessary to "respect" Indian rights to sovereignty. The 1790 Trade and Intercourse Act was the first law passed to control trade between Native Americans and settlers. It came from the impulse toward assimilation present in American culture and politics of the time. It also laid the groundwork for later acts that pushed for moving tribes off their land and onto reservations.*



King cites three Supreme Court decisions in the 19th century as instrumental in shaping Indian-White relations in North America by redefining tribes as dependent rather than sovereign nations. In 1823's *Johnson v. McIntosh*, the court ruled that private citizens couldn't buy land from Indians directly—if Indians wanted to sell, they had to go through the federal government, since the land belonged to the government "by right of discovery." In 1831's *Cherokee v. Georgia*, the court ruled against the Cherokee nation, maintaining that the Cherokee nation was not sovereign and, therefore, still subject to the laws of the state of Georgia. Finally, 1832's *Worcester v. Georgia* held that it was the federal government's responsibility to uphold and regulate relations with the Cherokee nation. Canada would fashion laws of their own in 1876 with the Indian Act.

*"By right of discovery" is legal jargon that originated in the Doctrine of Discovery, legislation used by European monarchies beginning in the 15th century to justify the colonization of foreign lands. The Doctrine was issued in 1403, shortly after Columbus arrived in America. The purpose of the Doctrine was to claim territories inhabited by non-Christians. What's more, because indigenous people were not practicing Christians, they were considered non-human by the Doctrine's guidelines. The Doctrine reinforces the Western narrative of history that frames Europeans as discovering America, disregarding the people and civilizations that already existed there. The Doctrine's underlying ideology was critical in the rulings of these three Supreme Court cases.*



King describes how these rulings transformed Indians into North America's "property," proposing that Indians became "furniture" under such laws, which were designed to control and "organize" them, grouping together disparate tribes, cultures, and languages under the general term "Indian." This generalization transformed the way North America regarded Indians, grouping them together in a "one size fits all" mindset." From there, explains King, North America began to form its official "Indian Policy."

*King's analysis that these rulings transformed Indians into "property" is in keeping with the guidelines set in place by the Doctrine of Discovery, which held that indigenous people were not considered human due to the fact that they weren't Christian. The dehumanization of Native people informed the federal government's decision to categorize and restructure formerly sovereign tribes as it saw fit. King is suggesting here that Europeans' resounding belief that Native Americans were not people was a major influence on the official "Indian Policy" that would develop over the following centuries.*



Before the 1800s, explains King, military action had been synonymous with Indian policy in North America. However, by the 19th century, military action was supplemented with “treaties, removals, and relocations,” the combined efforts of which King refers to as “Plan A.” According to King, the point of Plan A was to steer Indians away from White settlement and economic growth. Plan A also outlined a plan of attack for whenever a conflict between Whites and Indians arose. Under Plan A, the military would intervene, and the government would follow up by devising a new treaty that forced Native people to give up either a portion or the totality of their land.

Throughout the colonial period, the U.S. and Canada signed over 500 such treaties. The first was signed with the Delaware in 1778, and the last, with the Nez Perces, in 1868. Treaty-making ended in the U.S. in 1871, which was, coincidentally, the same year treaty-making began in Canada, with 11 Numbered Treaties negotiated with multiple First Nations bands across Canada. While treaties might have ended Indian-White conflicts, North American governments repeatedly failed to honor the stipulations outlined in these treaties.

King agrees with numerous scholars who have claimed that these treaties were intended to be mere “experiences of the moment” rather than “long-standing agreements.” When these treaties were signed, North America believed it was only a matter of time before Indians died out entirely, therefore agreements outlined in the treaties wouldn’t need to be upheld permanently. The “inconvenien[ce]” of surviving Indian populations prompted their removal and relocation. The federal government’s official justification for such moves was “Indian welfare,” claiming that segregating Indian and White populations would minimize racism and allow Indians to maintain their culture.

The U.S.’s first legal sanctions to force Indians from their land happened in 1802, when the federal government asked Georgia to give its western lands to the federal government. In 1803, Thomas Jefferson drafted an amendment that gave Congress the right to trade land west of the Mississippi River (that was bought from France via the Louisiana Purchase). Although the amendment was never ratified, Congress passed legislation in 1804 that provided an avenue for Jefferson to pursue similar policies.

*Prior to the 1800s, King suggests, Indian-White relations had been limited to military pursuits. The federal government’s newfound control over land and trade enabled them to exercise power over Native tribes more politically, supplementing military dealings with “treaties, removals, and relocations” in an effort to ensure that Whites maintained the upper hand.*



*King construes these treaties as a means for the federal government to have its cake and eat it too: the federal government presented treaties as legally binding promises extended to Native tribes in place of war, but the federal government’s comparatively stronger military forces meant there was no foolproof way for Native tribes to ensure the federal governments followed the guidelines of the treaties.*



*King and other scholars suggest that these treaties were the federal governments’ efforts at buying time. They were quick ways to avoid war while avoiding having to make good on any promises. The governments entered into these treaties with the assurance that they could expel or assimilate the remaining Indian populations and ultimately avoid having to honor the guidelines outlined in the treaties. Finally, King shows how the government recast Indian removal and relocation as in the best interest of “Indian welfare” to minimize their complicity in unethical and removal of Native people from their lands and cast themselves as moral saviors of their uncivilized, helpless indigenous neighbors.*



*King is referring to the Compact of 1802, which authorized the federal government to terminate the Indian land title and remove the Cherokee from Georgia in exchange for Georgia relinquishing its claim to western land. Purchasing western land through the Louisiana Purchase afforded the U.S. new land onto which to relocate eastern tribes.*



A series of relocation treaties between the U.S. government and tribes followed. In 1804, Henry Harrison, the governor of Indiana, enacted a treaty between the state and Sauk chiefs in response to a Sauk warrior being accused of killing three settlers. Harrison offered the warrior's release in exchange for compensation for the murdered settlers and the cessation of the tribe's land in Illinois and Wisconsin. Moreover, some rumors claim that Harrison got the Sauk chiefs drunk before signing the treaty. Harrison's trickery was commonplace in treaty "negotiations." If a tribe refused to sign a removal treaty, for instance, the U.S. government would simply find a few outlying members of the tribe willing to sign the document, even if these members weren't authorized to speak on behalf of their tribe. When Native peoples threatened to combat these tactics with military action, the U.S. withheld annuity payments to disincentivize military action.

Removal became national policy when Andrew Jackson signed the Removal Act into law in 1830, symbolically framing removal as a triumph of civilization over savagery. From there, relocation happened quickly. The Choctaw were removed from their land in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana in 1831. By 1840, most tribes east of the Mississippi River were relocated west. The Cherokee use the phrase *nunna daul isunyi* or "the trail where they cried" to refer to their forced removal, which saw the deaths of 4,000 of the 17,000 forced to flee their native land. King sees the Trail of Tears as "the largest massacre of Native people in North American history." Although no records exist to attest to the exact number of Native peoples removed from their land in the 19th century, the number of displaced Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole peoples alone is between 75,000 and 100,000.

While Canada didn't have an official removal policy on par with the U.S.'s, it, too, enforced "relocations" for Native peoples. According to a 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, the Canadian government saw Aboriginal people as "unsophisticated, poor, [and] outside modern society" and used Natives' supposed incompetence to justify relocation, arguing that it would help impoverished Native peoples move to locations with more hunting opportunities and better access to healthcare and educational resources.

*The Treaty of St. Louis (1804) refers to a series of treaties between the U.S. and Native American tribes between 1804 and 1824. Harrison negotiated the Treaty of St. Louis of 1804 with the Sauk and Meskwaki tribes. The treaty held that in exchange for an annual delivery of \$1,000 worth of goods, the tribes would relinquish their land rights. That the treaty was signed by Quashquame, a Sauk chief, on behalf of the affected tribes was highly controversial. Black Hawk, another Sauk chief, argued that Quashquame was unauthorized to sign treaties. The treaty created a rift between the Sauk and the U.S. and ultimately contributed to the Sauks' decision to side with the British during the War of 1812.*



*Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law on May 28, 1830, and the first issue arose when the Cherokee, along with four other tribes known as the Five Civilized Tribes (Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Cherokee, and Creek) refused to abandon their cultivated land for land unknown in the western "Indian Territory." While the Cherokee were forced from their land and undertook the Trail of Tears, Florida tribes remained behind and fought resettlement in what became known as the Seminole Wars (1835-1842). The Trail of Tears consisted of over 5,000 miles across nine states. Those who perished on the Trail of Tears died of starvation, illness, and exposure to extreme weather.*



*Canada's official policies on Indian removal might have differed from the U.S., but their motive for undertaking the task of removal stemmed from the same racist ideology that Native people were "unsophisticated, poor, [and] outside modern society" to the extent that they could not coexist with Europeans in new settlements. As King has shown time and again, the Canadian government tried to recast the unethical forced move, suggesting that removal was actually beneficial for tribes since it afforded them better hunting opportunities and access to resources.*



Most of Canada's official relocations happened in the 1940s. However, unofficial relocations began as early as 1836, when the Governor General of Canada, Francis Bond Head, suggested that Native peoples needed to be shielded from "White vices," such as alcohol. To do so, Head proposed relocating Native peoples away from White settlements. In 1836, Head forced the Newash and Saugeen bands of the Ojibway to give up 600,000 hectares of their land south of Owen Sound, Ontario. The bands were then relocated to present-day Bruce Peninsula. Just 20 years later, the Newash band had to relinquish 4,000 hectares of their reserve to make room for additional White expansion. Subsequent relocation measures followed, with the Ojibway being allotted smaller land parcels with each restructuring.

In 1935, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act, which gave the Canadian government the power to turn farmland into pasture to prevent erosion, allowed for the forced relocation of the Métis of Ste. Madeline in Manitoba. The Act guaranteed displaced White farmers compensation for their removal, but the same protections weren't extended to the Métis, nor were they given new land to replace the land from which they were removed.

In 1942, the Mi'kmaq were relocated from disparate locations throughout Nova Scotia to Eskasoni and Shubenacadie, the two largest existing Mi'kmaq settlements. Because the Mi'kmaq were Catholic, the Canadian government used the Church to advocate for relocation. Ultimately, the relocation went through, despite the protests of the Mi'kmaq already living in the settlements as well as the relocated Mi'kmaq. Relocation of the Mi'kmaq began in 1942, though by 1944, only 10 new houses had been built at the settlements. Two years later, relocated families were still living in tents. By 1948, unemployment at the Eskasoni and Shubenacadie settlements reached record-breaking heights, and the entire population was on welfare. Ottawa refused to acknowledge that its relocation program had been a failure, and the Canadian government continued with its relocation efforts into the 1950s and 1960s, displacing the Inuit, Nutak, and numerous Yukon bands.

*Head's argument that Native people be relocated to protect them from "White vices" like alcohol is another example of the government recasting their oppressive policies as in the best interest of the oppressed. The 1836 forced removal King references here is Treaty 45, or the Manitoulin Island Treaty, which was negotiated between Odawa and Ojibwe leaders and Head, acting as a representative of the British Crown. The treaty was less of a negotiation than it was Head forcing the band leaders to sign the document. To suggest that the treaty was a negotiation implies that the Native groups had agency or choice in the matter. In reality, these treaties were signed using coercion and manipulation.*



*Yet again, a negotiated treaty disproportionately harmed Native peoples while affording protections for Whites. The government undertook the actual process of removal unethically, as well. Between 1938 and 1940, the government forcibly removed Métis farmers from their community homestead, shooting dogs, burning down homes, and demolishing the community school and church in the process.*



*That the Canadian government pushed for the Catholic Church to advocate for Mi'kmaq relocation is another instance in which the government forced assimilation onto Native peoples and then weaponized it against them. The relocation of the Mi'kmaq wasn't officially forced. Instead, the Canadian government incentivized Mi'kmaq families to move with the promise of finished housing and improved access to healthcare, education, and employment—opportunities that were lacking on their existing settlements. However, the government failed to follow through with these promises or to incorporate this egregious injustice into the larger historical narrative. As of 2020, Mikmaq impacted by the coerced relocation are still demanding an apology from the Canadian government.*



After World War II, North America's Indians were relocated en masse once more, this time to make room for industrial activity, namely hydroelectric projects. Dams were built across the continent, many on Indian land. These projects depleted hunting resources, destroyed sacred sites, and necessitated yet more forced relocation. King cites as an example the Flood Control Act of 1944, which allowed for the passage of the Pick-Sloan Plan, which, in turn, authorized the creation of dams and reservoirs along the Missouri River. Despite the fact that many of these dams would be built on tribal lands, the Army Corps of Engineers failed to consult with affected tribes. While the Pick-Sloan Plan flooded thousands of acres of Indian land and displaced 1,000 Indian families, curiously, it had no such negative impact on non-Indian towns in the same area.

Ultimately, though, relocating Indians wasn't enough for North America's Whites. Indians continued to practice their culture, rendering them "in the way" even after they were relocated and strategically assimilated into Western society. According to King, it was now time for North America to begin "Plan B."

## CHAPTER 5. WE ARE SORRY

King identifies two "impulses" of Indian-White relations in North America: extermination and assimilation. North America didn't view extermination as "genocide." Instead, it saw the mass deaths of Indians as a natural consequence of "manifest destiny," a concept derived from Aristotle's notion of "natural law" that the U.S. used to justify war with Mexico. Typically, extermination occurred in battle or via the spreading of diseases.

Assimilation, the second impulse, and that which King gives the nickname "Plan B," involved "salvation and improvement." King connects the question of assimilation back to the assertion the 16th-century Spanish cleric Bartolomé de las Casas made that Indians had souls and should be treated as equals to the Europeans. De las Casas's position contradicted Juan de Sepúlveda, who claimed that Indians were soulless and, therefore, "natural slaves." English and French settlers took a different approach, reasoning that Indians were human, albeit less evolved and civilized than their European counterparts. Therefore, they believed that Indians could be saved and civilized through assimilation

*The Flood Control Act of 1944 and the Pick-Sloan Plan caused the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota tribes to lose over 200,000 acres of land. The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (also known as the Three Affiliated Tribes) lost 155,000 acres of land on the Fort Berthold Reservation. Once more, King makes a direct comparison between the way treaties dealt with White versus Indian inhabitants of land. King suggests that the plans outlined in the Pick-Sloan Plan took care to preserve land inhabited by White settlers while affording Indian nations no such protections.*



*King implies that one may regard the history of Indian-White relations as a timeline of Whites taking progressively drastic measures to ensure that Indians were not "in the way" of the development of White culture and towns.*



*Manifest destiny was a cultural belief—popular in the 1800s—that American settlers were destined to expand their settlements westward across the continent, spreading their virtues, beliefs, and agrarian practices. One may also consider how framing westward expansion as "destiny" relieved settlers of personal moral responsibility for the unjust displacement of Native peoples—settlers could claim that they had no say in whether or not they took over Native land but were simply following their fate.*



*English and French settlers' perspective on how to deal with Native people is technically more humane than Juan de Sepúlveda's view, but that's not saying much. Both schools of thought operated under the premise that Native peoples were inferior to Europeans. Whereas de Sepúlveda felt this inferiority justified enslavement, English and French settlers thought it their ethical and evangelical duty to reform and improve the lives of these inferior people. Once more, King shows how settlers' recast their unethical treatment of Native peoples as generosity and Christian duty.*



If extermination was the impulse that dominated early Indian-White interactions and assimilation marked the later interactions, these two impulses converged in the 19th century, when settlers used “force of arms, deception, and coercion” to conduct forced assimilation of Native peoples into White culture. It was often missionaries (Jesuits, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Quakers, for instance) who undertook the task of assimilation. King describes this type of missionary work as “war.”

North America’s desire to assimilate Indians into White culture was grounded in the belief that Indians could be productive citizens of White North America if adequately educated in the customs of their superior, Eurocentric, Christian culture. King notes that such assimilation offered no room for compromise and required the complete relinquishment of Native culture for White culture.

King turns to 17th-century Quebec and 17th-century New England to begin his in-depth analysis of assimilation in North America. Sometime around 1637, Jesuit priest Father Le Jeune built a Catholic Indian village near Saguenay for Indians who wished to convert to Catholicism, abandon their “nomadic” lifestyle, and take up farming. The village was named Sillery after its primary benefactor, a Knight of Malta named Noël Brûlart de Sillery. Although Sillery never attracted as many converts as the Jesuits hoped, they continued to construct similar villages, which Indians used for temporary shelter and protection against enemy tribes.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., John Eliot, the “Indian Apostle,” came to Boston in 1631 and constructed “praying towns” on the outskirts of Puritan settlements. These “praying towns” were “halfway houses” for Indians who wished to convert to Christianity. However, because praying towns were located on the outskirts of town, they were targeted by enemy tribes wishing to destabilize colonists and colonists who couldn’t differentiate between the “friendly Indians” who lived there and their enemies. As a result, praying towns were attacked by colonists and Indians alike during the 1675 King Philip War.

*King describes missionaries’ contribution to assimilation as “war” to remind the reader that assimilation was an act of violence committed against Native peoples, even if assimilation wasn’t as physically coercive as the previously favored relocation efforts.*



*King has previously suggested that settlers were compelled to save and civilize Native Americans to fulfill their “manifest destiny.” He dispels the illusion that settlers undertook the task of assimilation for selfless, Christian reasons here when he describes how North America’s drive to assimilate Native Americans came from a problematic desire to transform Indians into members of Western society.*



*Father Le Jeune de Brébeuf worked mostly with the Huron/Wyandot people. As far as missionaries went, he was one of the better ones, known for his commitment to learning the Huron/Wyandot language and oratory style. He was also reasonably accepting of the reality that his converts were likely unwilling to abandon all their beliefs. Brébeuf died in 1649 when the Iroquois destroyed the Huron mission village and took missionaries and native converts as prisoners before torturing and killing them.*



*Other missionaries founded “praying towns” modeled after Eliot’s, including Samson Occom, a Mohegan who converted and became a Presbyterian cleric. These towns pushed for assimilation into Western culture and conversion to Christianity; however, the communities were able to self-govern, electing their own rulers. Indians who lived there were also permitted to use their own language. The partial sovereignty afforded to citizens of these towns was mostly taken away by the 18th and 19th centuries, however, following North America’s more aggressive policy of removal, relocation, and assimilation.*



Even though neither the Jesuit villages of Quebec nor the praying towns of New England were particularly successful, they nonetheless provided effective models for future assimilation. Although the “Indian Problem” had been mainly solved in North America by the late 19th century, with tribes hidden away on reservations and reserves, and large numbers dying from disease and starvation, Indian culture persisted.

King describes the 1892 address by Richard Pratt, a U.S. Army captain, to the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction. Pratt used his address to advocate for education as a “more humane and effective” method of assimilation. Pratt’s plan was to “Kill the Indian [...] and save the man.” Pratt believed that the biggest obstacle that stood in the way of Indian assimilation into Western society was their environment. To counteract this obstacle, in 1879, Pratt opened the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, one of the first Indian boarding schools, in Pennsylvania.

The first Indian schools were day schools located on reserves and reservations, which enabled children to keep in touch with their families and cultures. However, these schools were deemed ineffective and gradually replaced by a second group of schools, mostly day and residential schools located off but near reservations. The church believed that limited access to “old, unimproved people” increased Indian children’s ability to assimilate and created this second group of schools to drive a wedge between children, their families, and their cultures.

This paved the way for Pratt’s Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which opened in 1879. The Carlisle model required schools to be located far away from reservations and limited (or eliminated) students’ contact with family. In addition, children weren’t allowed to speak their language or engage in cultural practices. Instead, they had to learn English and undertake traditional European customs such as farming, baking, and housekeeping. By 1909, there were over 20 schools operating according to the Carlisle model, along with hundreds of on-reservation boarding schools and day schools.

*Future models of assimilation would adapt the model of these planned communities to a more rigorous process of assimilation which took additional, radical steps to ensure the extinguishment of native culture.*



*Again, King shows how Whites recast racism and oppressive policy as humanitarian, Christian efforts. Pratt advocates for Indian boarding schools as a “more humane and effective” method of assimilation because they “kill the Indian [...] and save the man.” He frames the ethically dubious act of coerced assimilation and cultural erasure as a selfless act of salvation.*



*The first Indian schools likely suffered from the same problematic ideas as the “praying towns” and Jesuit missionaries: namely, that allowing Indians to maintain a close connection to their language and culture stood in the way of their ability to assimilate into Western society.*



*The Carlisle Indian School isolated Indian children from their parents and communities in order to coerce them to assimilate more forcefully. Between the years of 1879 and 1918, over 10,000 Indian children attended Carlisle and were largely barred from maintaining contact with their relatives back home. While attendance at Carlisle and other residential schools wasn’t legally required, in practice, children were often forcibly removed from reservations. The justification of this forced removal was that Indian parenting styles were inferior to Western methods of childrearing. U.S. officials also claimed that Indians didn’t understand the value of education.*





King recalls his own experience at a Catholic boarding school run by the Christian Brothers in Sacramento, California, where his mother sent him after a series of misbehaviors. There were many rules to follow at the school, and King was beaten for minor infractions. What King remembers most about his two years there was an overwhelming sense of loneliness and “abandonment,” though he knew his mother had meant well in sending him there, believing he would receive a good education. He also knows that his experiences paled in comparison to the experiences he researched to write this book.

Canada saw similar schools appear over the second half of the 19th century, and by 1932, it had over 80 schools in operation. The Catholic Church operated most of these schools, and various Protestant denominations operated the remainder. In 1850, enrollment at these schools became mandatory for children between six and 15. Parents who refused to enroll their children faced prison sentences. In the Canadian and U.S. schools, overcrowding led to the spread of disease, and abuse was common.

By the early 1900s, the mortality rate for Native students was 50 percent in Alberta. Still, Duncan Campbell Scott, the Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, saw no reason to change the federal policy on the schools and maintained that they were vital to achieving the “final solution” to the nation’s “Indian Problem.” King sarcastically notes that it “would be tactless and unseemly” to suggest that Hitler was quoting Scott in his later remarks about the “Jewish problem.” Besides, King wryly notes, “Scott was advocating assimilation, not extermination.”

In 1919, Scott eliminated the position of Medical Inspector for Indian Agencies. In 1926, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, ordered a report on the condition of Indian life in the U.S. Lewis Meriam, an accomplished lawyer, headed the investigation. Meriam’s findings showed that Indian children in boarding schools received “grossly inadequate” treatment, and that horrific diseases such as tuberculosis were commonplace. Besides this, children received wholly lacking educations at these supposed schools. The Meriam Report was highly critical of the federal government’s handling of Native children and failure to protect Native rights. King sarcastically quips that this negative feedback might be why the U.S. has yet to conduct another survey of this kind.

*King recalls his own time at a religious boarding school to suggest the universality of the experience of being alienated from one’s culture, values, and loved ones as a Native person. He also includes this story to suggest that Indian-White relations haven’t improved nearly as much as they should have over the past few centuries, though, of course, King’s schooling was the choice of his mother and not forced by the government.*



*Unlike the U.S., Canada passed legislation that made schooling mandatory for Native children. What both countries’ schools have in common is their failure to provide the education they promised, as well as their inadequate living conditions and the prevalence of abuse.*



*King notes the similar language Scott and Hitler use to describe their relative ethnic “problem” populations, ultimately highlighting the brutality and unethical regard for Native people that existed in North America into the 20th century. King seems to gesture toward the idea that America tends to downplay the horrors of its treatment of Native Americans compared to other more infamous recent genocides, such as the Holocaust.*



*Meriam’s findings couldn’t be clearer about the “grossly inadequate” facilities provided to Native children who were forced to attend the country’s many boarding schools. King wryly implies that Meriam’s findings were such an inconvenient and undesirable truth for the U.S. that its immediate response was not to improve the conditions of these children but to ensure that another review like Meriam’s would never be conducted again. The U.S. would rather appear blameless than accept accountability for their egregious assault on Native children over the centuries.*



Canada's equivalent to the Meriam Report was the Hawthorn Report, which was published in 1966 and 1967. Like the Meriam Report, the Hawthorn Report also presented findings that claimed the Canadian government failed to provide Native children with adequate treatment and resources. The researchers also conveyed their firm belief that Indians should not be required to assimilate into Canadian society to receive assistance from the government. To King's mind, though, the Hawthorn Report is just another instance of empty rhetoric, since the Canadian government's actions were repeatedly geared toward coercing Indians into assimilation.

King shifts his focus to the Hawthorn Report's emphasis on "the economics of being Indian." In 1960, for example, the per capita income for Indians was \$300, less than a quarter of the per capita income for non-Indians. The report also claimed that while the Sarcee and the Blood in Alberta, for example, had access to many natural resources and an urban center nearby, they failed to take advantage of these opportunities for economic advancement. In addition, the report stated that Indians weren't suited to the discipline required of a day job. The report used White values and standards to assess the Indian population. It offered a corresponding set of recommendations for improving Indians' ability to succeed at the level of Whites. The most critical element of this report, though, was that it revealed Canada's policy toward Indian-White relations as a failure, particularly from an economic perspective.

King suggests that the Hawthorn Report also inadvertently revealed a logical fallacy in North America's treatment of the Indians: "that all people yearn for the individual freedom to pursue economic goals." King's father-in-law, Bernard Hoy, was an inspector for the Catholic Separate School Board in the 1950s and 1960s. What Hoy remembered most about the schools was Indian students in classrooms gazing out the window at the world outdoors. "They didn't belong there," Hoy explained

*King draws an implicit connection between the Meriam and Hawthorn reports and the numerous treaties the U.S. negotiated with tribes: all of these documents made bold statements that seemed to promise change or compensation when in reality, these words were empty rhetoric, and neither the Canadian nor U.S. government had any intentions of following through with the promises guaranteed in the treaties or the suggestions proposed in the Meriam and Hawthorn reports.*



*The notion that the Sarcee and Blood people of Alberta failed to take advantage of natural resources is developed from a White, Eurocentric perspective. Whites felt the Indians weren't making the best use of their land, but they were judging them on the agrarian standards of European society rather than the nomadic customs to which tribes were accustomed. Lastly, King highlights how the Hawthorn report portrayed Canada's policy toward Indian-White relations as an economic failure to suggest that Canada's interests were in self-preservation and economic prosperity rather than in the welfare of Native peoples.*



*The Hawthorn Report's logic is flawed because it assumes "that all people yearn for the individual freedom to pursue economic goals" when, in fact, such goals are not universal but largely European. Native culture doesn't place the same value on individual freedom and economic advancement. Bernard Hoy's anecdote about seeing the sad, disinterested children at the Catholic schools underscores this sentiment. "They didn't belong here," he states, referring both to the school and to the broader Eurocentric culture.*



While people typically espouse the merits of education, one ought to view North America's Native education program as a series of abuses rather than benefits. The first abuse was to position White values as superior to Native values. The second was the inability or unwillingness of the U.S. and Canadian governments to monitor their schools adequately. The third abuse was their failure to act after knowing how overcrowding and disease ravaged their schools. In the end, up to 50 percent of Native children who enrolled in these schools lost their lives there. King compares this to the 1918 Spanish flu, which had a mortality rate of 10-20 percent. King speculates that the government might have taken more actions to improve these schools' conditions had the enrolled children been White.

*Interestingly, U.S. authorities' justification for the schools was that Indian culture didn't understand the value of an education. In reality, the schools the U.S. founded to instill in Indian children a respect for education did little to educate them. King insinuates that it was more likely a student would fall ill and die than emerge from a boarding school educated and reformed. The inadequate living and learning conditions of these schools reveals their true purpose beneath the empty rhetoric of education and betterment that they espoused: assimilation and cultural erasure.*



In subsequent years, North America has tried to repent for its boarding schools. In 1986, the United Church of Canada issued an official apology to the Native people for the poor treatment of Native children. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI conveyed remorse for the horrific conditions students faced at Catholic-operated schools. King notes, however, that the Pope's statement was neither an apology nor an admission of guilt. In 2008, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper addressed the House of Commons to officially admit that "assimilation was wrong" and has "caused great harm." On behalf of Canada, he said, "We are sorry." In 2009, the U.S. Congress passed an apology resolution that President Obama signed into law; however, not much has come of it in subsequent years.

*King describes the various formal apologies issued on behalf of the Canadian and U.S. governments immediately after describing the egregious conditions of Indian boarding schools to suggest, perhaps, that these apologies are woefully inadequate compensation for the corresponding crimes. In a way, they are just another example of empty rhetoric that isn't attached to policy change.*



The U.S.'s apology, issued in an amendment in the 2010 Defense Appropriation Act, addresses years of "ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the United States Government regarding Indian tribes." However, King notes, the apology ends with a disclaimer stating that "nothing in this Joint Resolution authorizes any claim against the [U.S.] or serves as a settlement of any claim against the [U.S.]," effectively rendering the U.S. "guilty but not liable," according to King. King muses how neither Canada's nor the U.S.'s public apology was all that "sincere," however, and he criticizes the trend in the political world for apologies to coexist with denials of wrongdoing.

*King observes how the U.S.'s "apology" manages to absolve the country of guilt. In doing so, King draws a connection between this apology and many of the other legal doctrines the country has enacted to engage with its Native population over the years. Such legislation is full of empty rhetoric and crafty linguistic or legal loopholes that ensure the U.S. won't be made accountable for the wrongs it has committed. King sees the public apology trend as a way for dominant powers to create a narrative that frames them as repentant and just while doing little to actually correct the wrongs they've committed against oppressed people.*



## CHAPTER 6. LIKE COWBOYS AND INDIANS

In 1887, the U.S. passed the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act. King frames the Dawes Act as “Washington’s new and improved effort at assimilating Indians” after removal and relocation failed to produce the results the government had in mind. According to King, the intent of the Dawes Act was to teach Indians the value of the control of land and private ownership. By 1887, reservations were seen as incompatible with America’s capitalist and Christian values, and government officials feared that allowing Indians to live on reservations enabled them to continue their pagan cultural practices.

The General Allotment Act broke reservations into individual parcels of land, and each head of household received an allotment of 160 acres. The federal government held the allotments in a trust for 25 years, during which time the land couldn’t be sold. Everyone who received an allotment gave up their treaty status but received U.S. citizenship in exchange. After 25 years, each allottee would own their land, and reservations and America’s “Indian Problem” would be solved, once and for all.

While the General Allotment Act was framed as beneficial to Indians, what it mostly did was free up land where reservations used to exist for White settlers to use in their own business ventures. It also meant that acreage tribes received through previous land treaties was halved.

Allotment continued in the U.S. until 1934, when Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act. When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933, his administration created programs designed to revive the economy during the Great Depression. Roosevelt appointed John Collier as Commissioner for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Collier rejected the notion of forced assimilation, embracing instead a “cultural pluralism” that allowed Indians to embrace their cultures. He also believed that in order for this to happen, Indians had to keep their land.

*The implicit intent of the General Allotment Act was to assimilate Indians into Western society. As King has previously stated, the U.S.’s thoughts on how land ought to be valued and controlled were rooted in Eurocentric ideas that differed from Native peoples’ relationships to land. Teaching Indians the value of private land ownership was another attempt to absorb Indians into the U.S. culture and economy.*



*The General Allotment Act transformed formerly communal tribal land into personal property (albeit personal property that was still held in trust to the federal government). This is a variation on the methods employed in the residential school system: to force assimilation by separating communities and immersing individuals in European customs and values.*



*Once more, the U.S. government frames a policy created to eradicate Indian culture as something that’s ultimately beneficial for Indians. Such a narrative portrays the U.S. as blameless and well-intentioned as opposed to complicit in cultural destruction and colonial violence.*



*John Collier is one of the rare U.S. government officials King has mentioned that appears to respect the culture and land rights of Indians. He also explicitly identifies the direct positive relationship between the perpetuation of Indian culture and the ability of Indians to maintain their communal land.*



Collier instituted the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, in 1934. The act signified a positive shift in the government's treatment of Indians, ending allotment and allowing for the land lost in the allotment process to be returned to tribes. While the Act seemed good on paper, its stipulations weren't strictly practiced in the 19 years it was in effect. World War II, which began in 1939, redirected the federal government's (in the U.S. and Canada) attention away from Indians. By the end of the war, the U.S. rolled back many of the liberties the IRA afforded Indians, and colonialism again became the norm.

This new form of colonialism was called "termination." The practice became official government policy in 1953 after the passage of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 108, which repealed all existing treaties with tribes and ended federal supervision over tribes. Additionally, Public Law 280 enabled some states to control reservations. These practices continued for 13 years until the termination policy ended in 1966; however, by this time, 109 tribes were abolished and a million acres of land taken from Indians. Canada attempted to pass similar legislation in 1969, when Pierre Trudeau and the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, published the 1969 White Paper, a proposed law that would have rescinded treaties and abolished Indian status, ultimately resulting in loss of Indian land.

King sees these new developments in Indian policies as an extension of the type of treatment Indians received in the 18th and 19th centuries. This time, however, Indians began to revolt. King sets this revolt against the backdrop of other revolutions and discord taking place in the late 1960s, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, or the police clashing with demonstrators at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. 1968 was a significant year for Indian revolution. In 1968, N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa-Cherokee author, was the first Aboriginal author to win the Pulitzer Prize. Meanwhile, the American Indian Movement (AIM) was gaining traction in Minneapolis.

*Circumstance prohibited the U.S. from seeing the impact the Indian Reorganization Act might have made if World War II hadn't taken hold of the country's economic and political resources. There's something rather tragic in the notion that the U.S. returned from fighting a genocidal authoritarian regime (Nazi Germany) only to resume the process of eliminating their own country's minority population.*



*HCR 108 and Public Law 280 effectively ended tribal sovereignty. This meant that Indians were subject to the same laws and regulations as other U.S. citizens. Canada's proposed 1969 White Paper purported to advance equality in Canada by getting rid of the Status designation (Legal Indians, in King's terms) and rendering all individuals—Indian or otherwise—equal under Canadian law. Again, then, the government frames a law to position itself as well-intentioned when, in reality, the law harms the people it purports to protect. When negotiations began to amend the Indian Act in response to Hawthorn's report (mentioned in Chapter 5), First Nations leaders repeatedly expressed concern over the breach of rights to land and self-determination that the proposed amendments would bring about for Canada's Native peoples.*



*King places the Indian revolt against termination policies alongside other critical moments of the Civil Rights movement to provide historical context, and to raise awareness about a cause that is often forgotten amidst the anti-war movement and fight for Black American rights that dominate historical narratives about this era in U.S. history. The American Indian Movement (AIM) was one of the most important Native advocacy groups to emerge out of the era. It was founded by a group of Native American men who had been separated from their communities and traditions following the passage of U.S. Public Law 959 Indian Relocation Act of 1956, which incentivized the relocation of Indians from reservations to urban areas.*



King enrolled at Chico State University in California in 1968 and got involved in Native activism. He describes the late 1960s and early 1970s as a period in North American history when “everyone wanted to be an Indian. Even the Indians.” At this time, many Indians living in urban environments were largely unaware of life in rural areas and on reservations. However, this changed on November 20, 1969, when 89 Indians from multiple tribes sailed from Sausalito to occupy Alcatraz, a defunct federal prison. Some protestors claimed that the Indians occupied Alcatraz because of its many similarities with reservations. For instance, it was isolated from modern facilities, had no running water, and lacked employment opportunities and access to healthcare.

The occupation of Alcatraz lasted nearly 19 months and attracted national attention. Celebrities such as Jane Fonda and Marlon Brando visited the island to show their support. Still, the conditions on Alcatraz were harsh, and, in many ways, it was more of a media success than a practical success. However, the occupation did succeed in transforming Alcatraz into a symbol of Native resistance. King quotes Vine Deloria Jr., who stated, “Alcatraz was a big enough symbol that for the first time this century Indians were taken seriously.” Indeed, the U.S. government took notice of the occupation, and protestors saw what was possible if they organized well and committed to their cause.

The Alcatraz occupation ended on June 10, 1971, when authorities removed the 15 people who remained. While King agrees with Deloria’s claim that the occupation was mostly “symbolic,” he maintains that it was critical in popularizing the American Indian Movement (AIM). AIM was established in 1968 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to oppose police brutality against Indians in the Twin Cities. It was headed by activists such as George Mitchell, Dennis Banks, and Clyde Bellecourt, who organized patrol squads to monitor police conduct. AIM also helped establish alternate schooling options for Indian children in the Twin Cities area who had a hard time adjusting to public schools due to recent relocation.

The main goal of AIM’s occupations and protests was to call media attention to injustice. While AIM events received criticism for becoming violent, U.S. government intervention was frequently as responsible for the violence as the AIM protestors. In February 1972, AIM staged a protest in Gordon, Nebraska, to protest the death of Raymond Yellow Thunder, a Native man who was kidnapped by a mob of White men and presumably beaten to death. His body was found in the cab of a pickup truck. The Sheridan County Attorney framed the incident as “a cruel practical joke.” AIM demanded a murder investigation, but the perpetrators received only a year in prison.

*The organizers of the Occupation of Alcatraz claimed that the Treaty of Fort Laramie (signed between the U.S. and the Lakota) authorized Indians to use abandoned federal land. Alcatraz qualified as this type of land, since the federal penitentiary had been closed since 1963 and the island on which it was located named surplus federal property in 1964. Four hundred protestors occupied the island at the height of the protest. The occupation of federal land had special symbolic meaning to the movement because it emphasized the central role land ownership and control has played in the history of Indian-White conflict.*



*Even if the occupation of Alcatraz wasn’t directly responsible for any changes to U.S. Indian policy, the protest’s visibility made it more difficult to construct a narrative of Indian-White history in which Indians were a dying people with an extinct culture. It jettisoned Native issues into public discourse and helped Indians become active, vocal authors of their history.*



*While Alcatraz might have been mostly symbolic, the attention it brought to AIM was indispensable to the cause for Native rights. AIM developed the Twenty Points, a list of issues AIM had with federal policy toward Indians. Twelve of these points described treaty responsibilities AIM felt the government had not honored, such as recognizing the right of Indians to review and interpret treaties, the passage of new treaties, and the repeal of Public Law 280.*



*For the Sheridan County Attorney to downplay Yellow Thunder’s brutal murder as “a cruel practical joke” reaffirms the common thread of King’s book: the repeated dehumanization of Native life and culture, and the way this dehumanization bled into centuries of biased and racially charged U.S. policy.*



Later that year, AIM and some other advocacy organizations organized the Trail of Broken Treaties, a car caravan that travelled to Washington, D.C. to lobby for Native sovereignty and raise awareness of the poverty and inadequate living conditions Natives experienced on reservations. The caravan reached D.C. in November to find that their housing arrangements had fallen through. Frustrated and tired, protestors took over the Bureau of Indian Affairs building, where they remained for a week, damaging BIA files in the process. King recalls hearing about the vandalism while a student in Salt Lake City. He and other advocates condemned the destruction, which ultimately had the potential to create negative consequences for tribes.

Another important AIM occupation occurred in Custer, South Dakota, to protest the murder of Wesley Bad Heart Bill, who was beaten to death by a White man named Schmitz in a bar brawl. Schmitz received a second-degree manslaughter charge and a minimal sentence for his role in the crime. AIM leaders arrived in Custer on February 6 and demanded to meet with County Attorney Hobart Gates, who refused to amend the charges brought against Schmitz. The confrontation turned violent, and police interfered, armed with nightsticks and tear gas. A riot ensued that lasted through the afternoon and resulted in the arrest of nearly 30 Indians. Sarah Bad Heart Bull, the murdered man's mother, was charged with "riot with arson" and spent five months in prison. Schmitz, in contrast, spent just one day in jail.

Just 21 days after the riot in Custer, AIM protestors occupied Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. At this point, Pine Ridge was involved in something of a civil war, with traditional Lakota fighting the tribal chairman, Dick Wilson, and his GOONs (Guardians of the Oglala Nation), his personal security force. An AIM caravan of over 50 cars arrived to help the traditional Lakota in their fight against Wilson. They were drastically under armed against the federal government agencies who arrived to defend the town. The Wounded Knee occupation didn't receive the same universal media coverage as Alcatraz, but grassroots efforts around the country organized to send supplies into the village, which the federal government had attempted to cut off from the outside world.

*AIM left the Interior building on November 8 with the White House (then under Richard Nixon) agreeing to negotiate AIM's 20 points. Nixon's stance on tribal sovereignty was strikingly different from official policy and dominant sentiment of the 1950s. He believed that tribes would be better managed if they could govern their own affairs rather than reporting back to a separate government agency. Such thinking is in line with modern conservatism's call for decentralized government and states' rights.*



*Schmitz's second-degree manslaughter charge and single day in jail is yet another example of a White U.S. citizen receiving an extremely lenient sentence for committing a crime against a Native person. U.S. and Canadian policy that advocated for an end to the reservation system and tribal sovereignty in exchange for the enfranchisement of Indians claimed such laws would uplift Indians and render all U.S. citizens equal under the law, yet time and time again such laws aren't doled out equally.*



*GOONs were a paramilitary group established in 1972 and authorized by the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council. AIM protestors occupied Wounded Knee to protest the election of tribal chairman Dick Wilson. AIM argued that Wilson and his (aptly named) GOONs intimidated and inflicted violence upon political enemies and misappropriated tribal funds.*



King recalls being in Salt Lake City during the protest. During one support rally, an old woman stood up and asked, “Where are the warriors?” King sees this question as one that was asked repeatedly during this revolutionary period of Indian history. In response to her question, King and some others drove east to Wounded Knee. When they were stopped by police at the border passing into Wyoming, King recalls acting not like a warrior but like a frightened kid. The police harassed and pointed guns at King and his companions. Their van was towed, and they didn’t make it to Wounded Knee.

The occupation of Wounded Knee lasted for 71 days. In the end, one U.S. Marshall, Lloyd Grimm, was paralyzed, and two Indians, Frank Clearwater, and Lawrence Lamont, were shot and killed by the government. Today, explains King, many people regard AIM as “the first truly militant Native organization,” and one primarily interested in “initiating confrontations and occupations at a national level.” King sees these conceptions as simultaneously true and false. Natives like Tecumseh and Pontiac had resisted colonialism long before AIM’s formation. The Society of American Indians, a separate pan-Indian organization, was founded in 1911 and was the primary Indian lobby in the U.S. for decades. The National Congress of American Indians was formed in 1944 and was also successful in lobbying efforts that opposed states’ rights to criminal and civil jurisdiction over tribes.

The League of Indians of Canada was formed in 1919 by F. O. Loft, a Mohawk, after seeing the right to vote awarded to Black people and women in America in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Loft felt that Native people, too, ought to enjoy the protections and liberties of having their own political entities. However, the League of Indians in Canada was struck down by the Canadian government which, in 1927, created legislation banning Native people from forming political organizations. Another Canadian organization was the North American Indian Brotherhood, formed in 1945. The organization was short-lived because of its associations with the Catholic Church. This was followed by the 1961 formation of the National Indian Council, which included Status and non-Status Indians, as well as the Métis.

*King’s recollection of his attempt to join the Wounded Knee occupation emphasizes the book’s central theme of history, storytelling, and mythology. He notes how the old woman’s call, “Where are the warriors?” was a common refrain of this revolutionary moment in Indian history. The call for warriors is a call to regain the collective, communal power Indian tribes had had before centuries of U.S. policy robbed them of culture and unity. That the armed police could so easily destroy King’s warrior ethos and render him a child shows how effectively the oppressive forces of the federal government dismantles tribal unity and disheartens proponents of indigenous culture.*



*AIM’s infamous reputation as a “truly militant Native organization” and as instigators of “confrontations and occupations at a national level” may be interpreted as the broader culture’s attempt to discredit the oppressed, writing history in such a way that renders the oppressors blameless while finding fault with the oppressed. In reality, though, the opposite is true. AIM’s violent protests were a comparatively short-lived instances of violence relative to the centuries of systemic oppression, colonial violence, and trauma North American Indian policy thrust upon the continent’s indigenous population.*



*Among the many grievances the League of Indians of Canada identified as common to Canada’s indigenous population included the loss of reserve lands, the government’s failure to honor indigenous land rights, and the government’s restriction of hunting and trapping rights. This reaffirms King’s central claim that land ownership and control is at the core of Indian-White relations.*





AIM lasted longer than the aforementioned Canadian organizations; however, by 1990, central leadership figures were either imprisoned or “had their lives destroyed by government sanctions, legal and illegal,” and it, too, was dissolved. Today, many people look down on AIM, pointing to the looting of the BIA building or the riot in Gordon, Nebraska. One recurring sentiment is that AIM and similar organizations ought to have more faith in the government to right wrongs. Knowing the history of Indian treatment in the hands of the federal government, though, King sarcastically dismisses this sentiment.

*King’s sarcastic dismissal of the notion that AIM and other Indians should have more faith in the government is rooted in centuries of broken treaties and illegal seizure of Indian land. Condemning AIM’s violence without taking into account the centuries of violence the U.S. government committed against Indian tribes offers an incomplete and therefore biased account of history.*



## CHAPTER 7. FORGET ABOUT IT

King lists some of the many atrocities and injustices Native people have faced from the government, such as the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890 and the Trail of Tears, to challenge the notion that the historically oppressed ought to leave the past in the past and shift their attention to the future. He shifts his focus to a pamphlet published by the Interstate Congress for Equal Rights and Responsibilities entitled *Are We Giving America Back to the Indians?*, which portrays Indians as “a bunch of welfare bums.”

*King mentions the Interstate Congress for Equal Rights and Responsibilities pamphlet, which portrayed Indians as “a bunch of welfare bums.” He uses this to illustrate a belief he thinks is unfortunately prevalent in mainstream American culture: namely, that Natives (and all oppressed people) ought to leave the past in the past and move on with their lives. Such a view renders the demand for retribution or reparations for past wrongs an exercise in whining and refusal to take personal accountability rather than an exercise in justice. It assigns blame to Natives by erasing the past wrongs the government committed against them.*



King makes a rhetorical choice to be objective, though, addressing “Native failings,” such as the racist treatment of the Cherokee Freedmen. Since the 1800s, Cherokee have been involved in a debate about who is Cherokee enough to receive tribal assets and vote in elections. Prior to the abolition of slavery, Cherokee participated in the slave trade and enslaved over 1,000 African people. After the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in 1866, former Cherokee slaves, some of whom were born of African-Cherokee heritage, were allowed the same rights as native Cherokees. These people were called the Cherokee Freedmen.

*King includes this aside about the Cherokee Freedmen as a rhetorical strategy. He shows that he can portray Native history in an objective light, revealing unsavory moments of tribes’ pasts, such as the enslavement of Black people, in addition to portraying tribes as the victims of colonial oppression. He also shows how, within tribes, the notion of who counts as a “Legal Indian” is a contentious subject. Cherokee resistance to offering tribal membership to Freeman is similar to the federal government’s restrictions on tribal membership or, in Canada, Status. At the same time, it must be noted that the issue of tribal membership and Native identity has been complicated by U.S. policy toward the treatment of Native Americans. Years of having rights taken away and treaties broken has given tribes extra incentive to safeguard membership.*



A lot of Cherokee disagreed with the ruling that Cherokee Freedmen had access to the same rights as other Cherokee. In the 1970s, Ross Swimmer, Principal Chief of the Cherokee, required all Cherokee citizens to have a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) to claim assets. There are three categories of Cherokee: Cherokee by blood, Freedman, and intermarried Whites. This ruling was challenged in 2004, when Lucy Allen, a descendent of a Freedman, brought the issue to the Cherokee Supreme Court, which ruled that Freedmen had the same right to assets as blood Cherokee. This ruling was challenged and reversed in 2006 by Chad Smith, who changed the constitution to allow for additional restrictions on tribal membership. While the 2006 ruling demonstrated the Cherokee nation's just right to sovereignty, it also illuminated the problematic reality that many Cherokee opposed sharing tribal assets with Black people.

King returns to his opening, rhetorical call to “ignore the past,” choosing to begin “the present” in 1985, the year his second child was born. He references the book *Helpless! Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy and How the Law Failed All of Us* by Christie Blatchford, a journalist at *Globe and Mail*, as an example of this present-oriented style of Native history. In the introduction to her book, Blatchford stresses that her book will not address land claims, or the abuse, trauma, and injustices Native peoples have suffered for generations. Rather, it focuses on the negative consequences the occupation of the Douglas Creek Estates has had on non-Native Caledonia residents, and the failure of law enforcement to protect their property. The irony behind Blatchford's claim, of course, is that the occupation would not have happened were it not for Canada's failure to fulfill land claims established centuries earlier.

Since the publication of King's book, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia ruled in favor of the Freedmen descendants, stating that descendants had the full rights of citizenship in the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Nation's Supreme Court has also voted to remove the words “by blood” from its constitution, which is deemed exclusionary toward descendants of Freedmen.



King's move to “ignore the past” is a rhetorical choice aimed at discrediting the viewpoint that Indians ought to forgive the U.S. the sins of its past. Blatchford proposes such a view in her book about the occupation of the Douglas Creek Estates, which focuses on the negative consequences the protest had on White homeowners and business owners of the area while ignoring the land claims issues that inspired the protest in the first place. King insinuates that Blatchford's logic is faulty because ignoring the past automatically renders the protesters in the wrong, because without a past there is no justification for protest. The occupation in question is the Caledonia land dispute/Grand River land dispute, an ongoing (as of 2022) conflict between the Six Nations of the Grand River and Canada. The Six Nations are demanding compensation for leased lands and the return of stolen lands. The dispute gained widespread attention in 2006 when a group of protestors occupied Caledonia, a community within the disputed land. Shortly after, they took control of Douglas Creek Estates, the site of a future development. Protestors blocked roads and rail lines and damaged a power station, resulting in a power outage and \$1 million of repairs. Violence ensued on both sides of the protest. The area's residents sued the Government of Ontario for its failure to intervene in the occupation.



Nevertheless, King resolves to forget history, shifting his attention to his proposed 1985 start date to address Canada's Bill C-31, which passed in 1985 and was created to address the inequality between Status Native men and Status Native women. Before C-31, when Status Native men married non-Status women, the women and their children would gain Status. However, when Status women married non-Status men, they would lose their Status. The passage of Bill C-31 into law returned Status to women who had lost theirs through marriage. However, Bill C-31 failed to guarantee Status for offspring of marriages between Status and non-Status Natives. For instance, the child of a Status woman who married a non-Status man would not have Status. This loophole is called the "two generation cut-off clause."

King sees this denial of status as part of a larger measure by which the Canadian government sought to eliminate Status Indians. While there will still be full-blood and mixed-blood Indians in Canada, there will be fewer and fewer Status Indians. Over generations, Canada's reserves will become "ghost towns. Or museums." As a result, the Canadian government will no longer need to allocate as many resources as possible toward Status Indians.

Continuing in his survey of post-1985 history, King describes the Meech Lake Accord, a series of amendments to the Canadian Constitution that deemed Quebec a "distinct society" with new, increased powers in the areas of government appointments, immigration, and national institutions. Notably, the Accord enabled Quebec to exit any government programs it deemed unnecessary. However, the Accord dismissed Aboriginal needs, denying Aboriginal societies the designation of "distinct societies" awarded to Quebec. In fact, Native people weren't mentioned in the Accord. To pass, Canada's 10 provinces had to approve the Accord before June 23, 1990. However, Manitoba and Newfoundland failed to approve it.

*The "two generation cut-off clause" of Bill C-31 reflects an ongoing pattern in laws passed that purport to help Native people but harm the longevity of their culture in the long run. The intent behind the clause is virtually identical to many of the other policies King has presented throughout the book: to eradicate legal claims to Indian identity and relieve the federal government of the burden to support its indigenous people.*



*King's description of the disappearance of Status Indians rendering Canada's reserves "ghost towns" or "museums" evokes language of death and the past. In this way, he insinuates that Canadian policy toward Indians is aimed at transforming the country's Legal Indians into Dead Indians: into individuals of a bygone era that pose no legal or sociological threat to the government or mainstream Canadian culture.*



*The Meech Lake Accord's failure to consider Aboriginal nations "distinct societies" is further evidence of federal policy legally denying Aboriginal people the right to self-governance. The accord was initially popular across Canada's provinces; however, opponents took issue with the "distinct society" clause, arguing that it would unbalance the federal government and give Quebec the power to surpass protections afforded to minority groups (among them, Aboriginals) in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to prioritize the province's French culture.*



Elijah Harper, a Cree, was the first Treaty Indian elected to office in Manitoba. He voted against forgoing public hearings to pass the Accord, effectively killing the Meech Lake Accord. Two years later, a second Accord of amendments, the Charlottetown Accord, was presented. Unlike the Meech Lake Accord, the Charlottetown Accord involved the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, and the Métis National Council. It also included amendments calling for the right of Canada's Native population to practice their culture, language, and traditions, and for the Aboriginal governments to "constitute one of the three orders of government in Canada." Lastly, it called for the treaty rights of Native peoples to be upheld, and for the Native right to self-government, as well as guaranteed seats allotted to Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian Senate.

While these stipulations sound good in theory, King reveals that they were accompanied by clauses that essentially negated whatever power they seemed to promise. For example, the proposed "right to self-government" was undercut by a provision that prohibited the passage of aboriginal laws if those laws conflicted with federal law. The Charlottetown Accord was voted on by public referendum and defeated, lacking popular support of Aboriginal peoples. King speculates that this might have been due to Aboriginal people's unwillingness to trust the federal government. Furthermore, it wasn't only Aboriginal voters who voted against the Accord: voters from six provinces also rejected the Accord. Indeed, King recalls people complaining about "more money being wasted on Indians" in this Accord. The failure of these two Accords, King muses, sends Native peoples "right back to 1985."

King returns to the 2006 Mohawk occupation of land in Caledonia, Ontario. The occupation led to the Ontario government agreeing to a \$20 million settlement, awarded to the homeowners and businesses of non-Natives who suffered negative consequences as a result of the occupation. Mohawk land disputes, in contrast, were ignored.

*The Charlottetown Accord was supported by the Progressive Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic Party of Canada, as well as First Nations groups. The Accord was particularly unpopular in Canada's Western provinces, which shared a concern that the Accord reflected the elites' ideas about how Canada ought to be. In the years following the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Canada was in the midst of a recession, and many citizens had turned on what they viewed as an elite leadership too concerned with politics to be concerned for the country's economy.*



*Even the Charlottetown Accord, which seems to be a piece of legislation King feels is most in line with the interests of indigenous people, contains legal loopholes that undercuts indigenous peoples' right to self-govern. King suggests that the failure of both Accords to pass ultimately brought Native people "right back to 1985," implying that even in this rhetorical experiment—where King willfully forgets the past and resolves to solve Indian issues that exist in the present—laws are passed and rejected to the detriment of indigenous people. No matter how recent the past, the government still acts against the interest of its indigenous communities.*



*King describes the \$20 million settlement to point out how quickly and easily the government hands out compensation for stolen land to its White population while failing to afford its indigenous population the same privilege. Of course, the only world in which this double standard is justified is the hypothetical world King inhabits in this chapter, where history begins in 1985.*



King shifts focus to the rise of Native gaming, which had economic costs and benefits for Native peoples. King dates the beginnings of legislation that opened the door for gaming to 1972, when a Chippewa couple living on the Greater Leech Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota challenged a property tax bill the county sent them. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled that state governments did not have the right to tax Indians living on federal reservations, nor could they monitor Indian activities that took place on reservations. The ruling, voiced by Justice William Brennan Jr., along with two other major cases, 1981's *Seminole v. Butterworth* and 1987's *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*, paved the way for the development of gambling enterprises on tribal land.

*Seminole v. Butterworth* was a U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit case where the court ruled that the State of Florida could not enforce the Florida Bingo Statute to prevent the Seminole tribe from operating a bingo parlor on tribal property. The ruling went against Public Law 280, which held that Native Nations were held to the same laws as U.S. Citizens. It was highly influential in the develop of the Indian gaming industry. The final case King references, *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians*, was a U.S. Supreme Court case involving California's attempt to shut down small bingo parlor operations operated on Cabazon and Morongo reservation lands. The court ruled in favor of the tribes, which overturned existing laws limiting gaming on reservations and set a new standard for tribal sovereignty.



These rulings upset state governments, who were now unable to claim tax revenue amassed from gambling. Federal agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Congress, banded together to oppose Brennan's ruling. In 1988, Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), which recognized tribes' rights to operate gambling establishments on tribal land—with the caveat that tribes had to consult with the states on which games would be allowed to be played there.

IGRA was the first federal gaming structure to pass into law. It established the National Indian Gaming Commission and authorized the political entity to regulate gaming operation. Since the Act's passage in 1988, it has been the subject of much controversy, particularly with regard to whether the National Indian Gaming Commission and the Department of the Interior can legally regulate tribal Indian gaming regulations.



The IGRA established three classes of gambling, I, II, and III. Class I comprised "social gaming with minimal prizes" and was not regulated by the IGRA. Class II covered bingo and bingo-adjacent games and was regulated by tribal governments overseen by the National Indian Gaming Commission. Class III encompassed all gaming not covered in Classes I and II. This gaming was regulated by the state and federal governments, though it differed little from the type of games featured in Atlantic City or Las Vegas.

While IGRA authorizes states to regulate some elements of Indian gambling operations, many opponents of the Act come from the states themselves. One common objection has to do with how casinos are funded. The Bureau of Indian Affairs allots tax-payer money to tribes (who do not pay taxes) for economic development. Some states and U.S. citizens object to the use of taxpayer money to fund tax-exempt tribal casinos that generate income that is not funneled back into the state economy.



As of the writing of this book, there are 15 Native-run casinos in Canada and over 300 in the U.S. The growing industry generates over \$25 billion annually, and approximately one-third of North America's tribes are involved in gaming. King notes how he once heard someone call Indian Gaming "the new buffalo."

King's remark that Indian Gaming is "the new buffalo" alludes to how Indians have had to find new ways to advance themselves since their previous source of sustenance, the buffalo, was rendered virtually extinct through excessive hunting practices of settlers. The comparison frames gaming as a primary means of economic development for tribes and a path toward economic independence and sovereignty.



Indian Gaming generates substantial income for states as well. Arizona tribes have given Arizona over \$400 million since 2003, for example. In 2003, California asked its tribes to “donate \$1.5 billion” toward helping the state escape its deficit. King wryly notes that California, centuries before, had sanctioned the murdering and scalping of Indians, regardless of age or gender. But, of course, “the past is the past.”

*King offers these examples of Indian Gaming revenue being cycled back into state economies to challenge the notion he cited at the beginning of the chapter—namely, that Indians are lazy and reliant on handouts. He continues his rhetorical strategy of willing away the past in this passage as well. King points out the hypocrisy of states demanding money from a group of people they have scalped and murdered in the past. He then undercuts such an idea by suggesting that “the past is the past.” King’s dark humor points to how omitting certain contexts—particularly how the past impacts the present—skews one’s sense of history.*



Of course, the present sees its fair share of atrocities committed against Native peoples as well. King points to the formation of advocacy groups such as Stop Treaty Abuse, formed in 1988, geared toward stopping the government’s supposed “preferential treatment” of Indians. Meanwhile, the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA) argues that Federal Indian Policy is racist and unconstitutional. Bigotry against Native peoples exists on a smaller scale, too. King describes a flier distributed across South Dakota and Nebraska in 1999 that purported to be from the South Dakota Fish and Game Department and announced a special hunting season geared toward hunting the state’s “Worthless Red Bastards, Gut Eaters, Prairie Niggers.”

*King provides these examples of bigotry to show how racism impacts Native peoples on a personal level as well as systematically. The Southern Poverty Law Center has called CERA “arguably the most important anti-Indian group in the nation.” The group seeks to end tribal governments, eradicate treaties, and overturn policies that establish legal rights for Native peoples.*



Such bigotry extends to Canada as well. King recalls moving into a house in Lethbridge, Ontario, in a newer, suburban subdivision situated on the edge of the Blackfoot reserve. Shortly after moving in, they received a flyer from a realtor warning the subdivision that a “Treaty Seven” family had moved into the neighborhood, referring to the treaty the Canadian government negotiated with the Blackfoot in 1877. The flyer’s coded message was that an Indian family moved into the neighborhood, which would diminish everyone’s property value. When King and some others complained about the Treaty Seven flier, a city official ordered them to “calm down” and forget the past. The realtor wasn’t punished for the flier, either.

*King’s personal encounter with bigotry further shows how racism impacts North America’s indigenous population at the broader, legal level and at the personal level. His story also illustrates another instance in which the larger society fails to defend attacks against indigenous people that occur in the present as well as the past. That the realtor wasn’t punished for the coded message on the flyer shows that the common refrain to leave the past in the past and focus on the present is empty rhetoric the culture uses to avoid accountability.*



King reflects on another example of bigotry, recalling a sign taped to a Tim Horton’s drive-through window that read “No Drunk Natives.” He notes that while he’s seen far more drunk Whites emerging from bars on the weekend, “in North America, White drunks tend to be invisible, whereas people of color who drink to excess are not.”

*This additional example of racism shows that North America applies a double standard not only to policymaking but also to behavior. North America largely ignores its “White drunks” while simultaneously weaponizing indigenous struggles with addiction, thus presenting Indians as a group of “Drunk Natives.” This thinking implies that Whites are allowed their vices at the individual level while Indians are forced to act on behalf of their entire culture.*



King categorizes North America's racism as "endemic" and "systemic," noting that racism runs rampant in institutions that are supposed to safeguard minorities against it. For instance, in Manitoba in 1971, a Cree Woman named Helen Betty Osborne was walking home alone when four White men beat, raped, and brutally murdered her. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) didn't begin a serious investigation into the murder, however, until 1983. Though four men were identified as complicit in the crime, only one, Dwayne Johnston, was convicted of murder. Furthermore, it wasn't until 1999 that the Manitoba Aboriginal Justice Inquiry confirmed that the crime was racially motivated.

King next focuses on three suspicious, seemingly connected deaths of Native men in Saskatoon. Each of the men was found frozen to death in the same area outside of town. Eventually, it came to light that, at least since 1976, Saskatoon police officers had a practice of driving Native men to the outskirts of town and leaving them for dead. In local urban folklore, the practice was known as "Starlight Tours." After a public inquiry, police involved in the crimes had "their reputations impugned," but the most severe sentence served was a mere eight months in prison.

King ends his survey of racially motivated legal sanctions and crimes committed against Indians in North America with the conclusion that it's impossible to forget the past, since the aftermath of these atrocities is irrevocably intertwined with the present.

*King uses the murder of Osborne to show how racism influences how the law is enforced when, in theory, the opposite should be true—the law should keep racism and racist attacks in check. The failure of Canadian authorities to convict more than one man of the crime, too, resembles other instances King has provided to demonstrate the government's failure to protect its indigenous population. Schmitz, for example, beat Wesley Bad Heart Bill to death in Custer, South Dakota and spent only a single day in jail (as outlined in Chapter 6).*



*As of 2021, no Saskatoon police officer has been convicted in the freezing deaths of the indigenous men who died in the "Starlight Tours." Furthermore, between 2012 and 2016, the "Starlight tours" section of the Wikipedia entry for the Saskatoon Police Service was deleted multiple times. An investigation revealed that the edits came from a computer associated with the police service. This scandal illustrates the police service's quite literal effort to rewrite history to obscure their complicity in violence committed against the indigenous population.*



*The rhetorical exercise of forgetting the past that King employs in this chapter proves futile. By extension, King suggests that simply moving on from such a horrific and difficult past is illogical, counterproductive, and even impossible.*



## CHAPTER 8. WHAT INDIANS WANT

King attests that "What Indians Want" is "a future." However, whatever future Indians can have "will be predicated, in large part, on sovereignty." The definition of sovereignty is "supreme and unrestricted authority." In practice, sovereignty is more complex, and rarely "absolute." Aboriginal sovereignty is legally recognized in treaties, in both the Canadian and American constitutions, and in the Indian Act. In practice, however, it remains a controversial subject.

In a *Globe and Mail* article from August 2009, Canadian columnist Jeffrey Simpson takes issue with the practicality of a sovereign nation that consists of only a few hundred people being wholly sovereign. King challenges Simpson's take by citing the Navajo nation in the Southwest, or the Blackfoot of Alberta, who have been sovereign nations for many years and control on-reserve services in the areas of health, education, and housing.

*King has referenced the controversial subject of tribal sovereignty throughout the book, but he finally addresses it directly in Chapter 8. Chapter 8 marks a shift in focus, since it concerns the future of Indian-White relations as opposed to the past, which has been the primary focus of the book thus far.*



*King implicitly evokes the concept of the Live Indian's invisibility in this passage, revealing how Simpson's argument against sovereignty blatantly ignores the successful sovereign Native Nations that exist in present day. In this way, King insinuates that opposition to sovereignty is rooted in its failures in the past rather than its possibility of providing Native tribes with a prosperous future.*



However, complications persist, and Ottawa and Washington, D.C. manage budgets for sovereign indigenous nations while simultaneously remaining uninvolved in other liabilities. For example, in 2010, the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team was unable to enter England to compete in the International Lacrosse Championships because their Iroquois passports were deemed invalid.

American historian David Wilkins argues that the U.S. federal government and indigenous tribes are engaged in “an ongoing contest over sovereignty.” Regardless of who is winning that contest, King adds, history has made it clear that neither the Canadian nor U.S. governments have much interest in granting tribes the sovereignty to which either country’s constitution supposedly entitles them. In fact, the federal governments seem expressly interested in *minimizing* the power of agency tribes have to self-govern.

King takes issue with the contemporary mainstream belief that North America’s Native population needs to be “rescued from reserves and reservations,” and from pieces of legislation, such as the Indian Act, that give tribes authority. The logic goes that tribes are “obsolete” and broken systems, and that Native peoples need to be free to participate in western capitalism. It follows that treaties actually inhibit “Native-non-Native *rapprochement*.” Washington State politician Slade Gorton supported this position and made a career out of attacking tribal sovereignty. He sponsored a 1998 Senate bill called “The American Indian Equal Justice Act” which attacked tribal sovereignty on the grounds that it encouraged “social tensions” and was antithetical to “social peace.”

Gorton’s position is far from unpopular. In 1983, for example, Washington State Senator Jack Metcalf called on Congress to terminate existing treaties with tribes. A major voice in Canada’s neo-termination movement is Thomas Flanagan, a political science professor at the University of Calgary strongly in favor of assimilation. The main points underlying Flanagan’s position are that Aboriginal peoples are not entitled to sovereignty and should not receive federal funding or tax exemptions. Furthermore, closing the Department of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Affairs would save billions of tax dollars annually. Finally, the dissolution of tribal sovereignty would return treaty-protected lands to the market.

*Technicalities like the Iroquois lacrosse team’s inability to cross the border exist because the U.S. and Canada’s policies on sovereignty are murky and unclear. For instance, while the U.S. Constitution currently recognizes tribal sovereignty, most Native land is held in trust by the United States, which means the land—and the tribal governments and economic systems in operation on it—is still subject to federal law and regulation.*



*Another example of the way the federal government uses policy to limit tribal sovereignty is the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court Case *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, which ruled that tribes do not have the inherent authority to arrest, try, and convict non-Native people who have committed crimes on tribal land.*



*The belief that Native peoples need to be “rescued from reserves and reservations” is a continuation of the sentiment that has existed since the early days of colonialism: that Natives are helpless to govern themselves and live meaningful, culturally rich lives and thus need the influence of Western culture to save them from themselves. The views Gorton espoused in the American Indian Equal Justice Act are reminiscent of the ideas put forth by CERF in Chapter 7. Both ideas insinuate that granting a historically and currently oppressed peoples special privileges is an exercise in inequality and is ultimately unconstitutional. Such views espouse equality over equity and reinforce what King sees as a sentiment that is damaging and antithetical to Native economic and cultural empowerment.*



*Despite the progress achieved during the revolutionary years of AIM protests and occupations, termination is still a topic in contemporary politics. This underscores the premise King introduced in the chapter’s opening remarks: that the future of Indian-White relations will be focused on the issue of tribal sovereignty. The contentious nature of sovereignty also suggests that the past isn’t as distant and buried as certain narratives of North American history would like to think they are.*





King shifts his focus away from the theoretical and toward the practical application of sovereignty, specifically the issues of tribal membership and resource development, which he believes are the most important challenges facing contemporary Native peoples. Currently, tribal membership in an Aboriginal Nation is determined by federal law, blood quantum, and tribal regulations. In Canada, the Indian Act and other treaties set the terms required for band membership. In the U.S., membership depends on federal tribal recognition.

The legality of tribe membership poses challenging questions about Native identity in North America. Presently, most tribes or bands control membership. Specific rules vary among tribes and bands, but the basic requirement is a blood relationship between a registered Indian or ancestor and the Indian requesting membership. Some tribes have additional blood quantum requirement. For example, the Comanche in Oklahoma require a minimum blood quantum of one-quarter. The Cherokee require that a person's ancestors' names appear on the 1924 Baker rolls or the 1898-1914 Dawes-Gaion-Miller rolls. Presently, tribes across North America are trying to limit membership due to limited land and other resources. As Native populations grow, there is a call to restrict access of tribal assets to "authentic" Indians. King sees the difficult question of authenticity as simultaneously "self-serving and self-defeating."

Sovereignty is important because it enables bands and tribes to have more control over tribal membership, whether that means raising or lowering requirements. In Canada, authenticity is defined by the Indian Act, and there is no alternate way to create new Status Indians outside of birth. While bands may award membership to non-Status Indians or non-Indians, granting them the opportunity to vote in band elections, they would not be eligible to receive benefits allotted to Status Indians in the Indian Act.

*King revisits the concept of Legal Indians he introduced in Chapter 3, as well as the U.S. and Canadian federal governments' efforts to limit the number of individuals who legally qualify as Indians. This time, King explores the issues within the specific context of tribal sovereignty, arguing that the diminishing numbers of legally recognized Indians goes hand and hand with the dissolution of tribal sovereignty.*



*King portrays the relationship between tribal sovereignty and Legal Indians as a vicious cycle: as "self-serving and self-defeating." Tribes need a strong community to operate as a sovereign nation. On the other hand, limited land and resources incentivize tribes to restrict official membership to individuals who fulfill a particular set of requirements, such as blood quantum. Blood quantum laws are themselves controversial. The laws were first created by the U.S. government to establish legally defined disparate racial groups. While some tribes require enrolled members to meet a blood quantum requirement, opponents of the law argue that it encourages racism within tribes. For example, many Cherokee enslavers (that is, members of the Cherokee tribe who enslaved Black people) were of partial European ancestry, which implies that this degree of whiteness incentivized their participation in the slave trade.*



*It's also worth remembering that the Indian Act's "two generation cut-off clause" rescinds Status from children born to individuals who have married non-Status Indians for two generations. In its current form, the Indian Act offers no means for federally recognized tribes to regenerate their populations.*



Another reason sovereignty is important to Native peoples is its role in the creation of strong economic systems for reserves and reservations. While reservations with more land have more opportunities for economic growth than reservations with less land, as a whole, they are still considerably limited. One ghastly option King cites as an example available to reservations is to lease portions of their land to waste management companies to be used as garbage dumps. In the 1980s and 1990s, waste management companies sought to convince tribal leaders to allot parts of reservations for dumping sites, since the legal status of reservations enabled companies to forgo many of the environmental regulations enforced by the federal government. Many reservations were so impoverished that such an arrangement appealed to tribal leaders.

The Navajo face an ongoing battle between economic development and land protection, though so far, economic development has been their priority. The Navajo have engaged in resource mining since the mid-20th century, since much of Navajo country boasts significant quantities of uranium and coal. In 1948, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission launched a mining boom when it promised to buy uranium ore at a set price. While the mining boom created a wealth of jobs for the Navajo, they were ill-informed on the health hazards of uranium and radon gas, or the environmental ramifications of resource mining. In July 1976, the collapse of a dam at the Church Rock nuclear facility at the edge of the Navajo reservation led to the permanent contamination of the Puerco River with radioactive waste. The Navajo ultimately banned uranium mining in 2005.

Coal mining has also created ecological disasters on Navajo land. The Four Corners power plant, which was created in 1963, for example, emits over 15 million tons of toxic gases each year, including 600 pounds of mercury, far exceeding any power plant in the U.S. Today, air quality on the Navajo and Hopi reservations is far worse than a major city like Los Angeles.

There have been discussions about launching renewable energy projects on tribal land, and several tribes are already involved in such projects, including the Blackfeet in Browning, Montana, and the Spirit Lake Sioux at Fort Totten, North Dakota.

*King cites the example of waste management companies seeking out reservation land for dumping sites, arguing that this highlights another recurrent trend in Indian-White relations: Whites primarily care about Indian issues when they stand to benefit from them. In this case, waste management companies swiftly become advocates for tribal sovereignty, since such sovereignty would grant tribes the right to use land for purposes outside of federally enforced environmental guidelines.*



*Again, tribal sovereignty is a contentious issue until the possibility of leveraging sovereignty for the economic advancement of Whites becomes a possibility. Unfortunately, the Navajo Nation's situation isn't unusual. Across the continent, tribal land is exploited for the extraction of natural resources. For example, the Dakota Access pipeline's proximity to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation has compromised access to clean air, water, and disrupted land sacred to the Lakota. Construction of the 1,172-mile-long underground pipeline has inspired numerous protests.*



*As of 2020, the Arizona Public Service stated it would decommission the Four Corners power plant by 2031.*



*Renewable energy offers a safer alternative for tribes to generate income that is also more in line with their cultural respect for the land.*



Indian Gaming is another major source of economic growth for tribes and bands of North America and comes at a far lesser cost to the environment than resource mining. While it's true that gaming also comes with an increase in alcohol, drugs, prostitution, and gambling addiction, its profits allow tribes to buy additional land parcels. For example, the Oneida Nation in upstate New York used profits from its Turning Stone Resort and Casino to buy 17,000 acres of land. Furthermore, rather than using this land to contribute to personal wealth (the White American way), tribes have requested that land be combined with their existing reservations and awarded trust status, thus perpetuating the custom of communal living they enjoyed in the past.

But Indian Gaming is not without its critics. After the Tohono O'odham Nation purchased a parcel of land in Glendale, Arizona and announced their plans to build a \$600 million casino there, Glendale's city attorney Craig Tindall expressed his concern about having to deal with "people step[ping] off that land onto [Glendale] jurisdiction," implicitly perpetuating a negative stereotype of "wild and uncontrolled Indians," suggests King. Furthermore, the city of Glendale sued the federal government in 2010, claiming that the 1986 federal law that allowed the Tohono O'odham to purchase new land was unconstitutional.

King connects Glendale's disapproval of the Tohono O'odham's land purchase back to words spoken 150 years ago by Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, who lamented how the land the U.S. government allotted for reservations ended up being more valuable than the government had originally thought and would be wasted by Indians, who didn't know how to effectively cultivate it and take advantage of its resources. King sees Schurz's criticism imbedded in Glendale's opposition to the Tohono O'odham casino: both complaints stem from a fear that Indians will take away land from Whites. King notes the irony of this situation: for centuries, Whites believed that private land ownership would force Indians to assimilate into Western society, yet Native peoples have learned that purchasing land can actually enable them to uphold their cultural traditions.

*The practice of tribes using casino profits to buy additional land is an ironic twist of fate. The U.S. government enacted many policies around the idea that imposing Western culture onto Indians through private land ownership and capitalism would encourage them to abandon their own traditions. And yet, the Oneida engaged in capitalist enterprise to buy additional land in order to preserve their cultural ideal of communal living.*



*The widespread upset over the Tohono O'odham Nation's plans to construct a casino seems unwarranted, given the U.S.'s persistent attempts to absorb Indian Nations into the broader U.S. economy and culture. In this context, it makes little sense that the state would frown on this attempt at economic enterprise. What King seems to be alluding to is that it's not what Native people do that's the issue: it's the fact that they exist at all. Once again, King's idea that America prefers Dead Indians holds true.*



*Schurz's comment about wasted land suggests that any land Whites can't control is useless. It matters little what Indians do with their land; ultimately, the U.S.'s central gripe stems from their desire to control all the land it possibly can.*



## CHAPTER 9. AS LONG AS THE GRASS IS GREEN

King repeats his question from the previous chapter: “What do Indians want?” This time, he proposes that “it’s the wrong question.” Specifically, he argues that the “Indians” in question don’t exist but are instead a fantastical “Indian” that exists only in the popular imagination of the U.S. and Canada. Instead, King suggests, one ought to ask what the Lubicon Cree of Alberta want, or the Tlingit of Alaska. Alternatively, one could ask the question, “What do Whites want?” After all, King argues, the history of Indian-White relations in North America has never been about what Indians want.

According to King, Whites want—and have always wanted—*land*. To Whites, land is even more important than Indian removal or assimilation. While North American attitudes toward assimilation and residential schools have changed over time, their desire for land has never shifted. States King, “[The issue] will always be land, until there isn’t a square foot of land left in North America that is controlled by Native people.” King affirms that Painter saw the truth behind the many government-issued removals, allotments, and reservations: each was aimed at eliminating Native controlled land.

Land is also “a defining element of Aboriginal culture,” at the heart of Aboriginal peoples’ stories, languages, and customs. In contrast, King proposes that North America’s “societal attitude toward land” is to view it as a “commodity.” He cites the Alberta Tar Sands, a major energy-extraction operation with a host of horrific environmental implications, as an example of this attitude of land-as-commodity. King argues that North America doesn’t care about negative consequences of operations like the Alberta Tar Sands because they produce billions of dollars of profits; indeed, there has been little public outcry in response to the Tar Sands.

King cites the U.S. government’s breaking of the Fort Laramie Treaty as another example of prioritizing profit over ethics. Signed in 1868, the Fort Laramie Treaty was an agreement between the Lakota and the U.S. government that promised the Black Hills to the Lakota. However, after George Armstrong Custer discovered gold in the Hills in 1874, masses of White miners traveled to the Black Hills in search of wealth, and the U.S. Army did little to stop them. In 1875, the Lakota appealed to President Grant for help. The federal government’s response was to draw up a new treaty, offering the Lakota \$25,000 to relinquish control of the hills. The Lakota refused to sign the new treaty.

*King cuttingly suggests that it’s more productive to consider the future of Native Nations in terms of what White people want. After all, history tends to unfold according to what Whites want. By making this rather bleak observation, King invites readers to reflect on just how much North American culture has undercut the sense of agency that Indian people might otherwise have when it comes to their own future.*



*King claims that all Indian-White relations can be traced back to Whites’ desire to control land. While the U.S. has undertaken repeated efforts to frame their treatment of Native people in an evangelical or ideological context, even these incentives may be attributed to a desire to control land that Whites feel is wasted on Native peoples who have no cultural or economic interest in developing land for farming or other moneymaking projects.*



*The reason Indian-White relations have remained fraught comes down to vastly different views about humanity’s relationship to land and the natural world. While the U.S. culture sees land as a “commodity” (or as a way to secure and maximize wealth or political influence), Native people have a more spiritual, close connection to the land. For this reason, the U.S. will always have a price tag attached to land, while to Natives, their sacred land remains priceless.*



*The Lakota Nation’s refusal to accept the government’s offer of \$25,000 for the Black Hills demonstrates their spiritual connection to the land. To accept any compensation for the Hills would dishonor them and go against everything they believe in.*



In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. government had illegally taken the Black Hills from the Lakota; however, instead of returning the land to them, the court ordered the Lakota to be paid the original \$25,000 purchasing price outlined in the new treaty—plus interest—which totaled \$106 million. Once more, though, the Lakota refused to compromise.

In North American Indian history, it's nearly impossible to talk about land without talking about treaties. Whereas Natives view Indian land as Indian land, North America (legally speaking) views Indian land as land that the federal government owns and has indefinitely loaned to Indian tribes. One key phrase employed in the treaty process is "as long as the grass is green and the waters run;" however, King reveals, he has yet to read a single treaty that contains this promise in writing. In the end, treaties resulted in a loss rather than a retention of tribal land.

King presents several stories to help the reader understand the issue of land. In 1942, the Canadian government eyed land located on the Stoney Point Ojibway reserve in Ontario to use for a new military-training base called Ipperwash. The Ojibway band refused the government's offers of payment, so the government took the land anyway. In the ensuing years, the Stoney Point Ojibway protested the theft of their land. Finally, on September 4, 1996, 35 Natives occupied the park to protest the land claim. Tensions escalated and violence erupted; in the end, the police wounded two Native protestors and killed Dudley George.

King recalls a second story, this one taking place at the Kinzua Dam in the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania. The dam was completed in 1965 and cost over \$120 million to build. It formed the deepest lake in Pennsylvania, at the bottom of which lies land that was promised to the Seneca tribe in a 1794 treaty. When hearings in Congress began in 1956 to make arrangements and allocate funds toward the dam's construction, no Seneca were in attendance. The Seneca went to great lengths to protest the building of the dam, even writing to President John F. Kennedy, though they received no response.

*The Lakota's unwavering refusal to accept compensation for the Hills—even over 100 years later—reaffirms the sacred place the Hills hold in Lakota culture.*



*One may interpret the phrase "as long as the grass is green and the waters run" to mean "forever." The phrase has come to symbolize the U.S. government's consistent failure to uphold the conditions outlined in their treaties. In fact, the phrase does appear in eight out of nine treaties negotiated between the Confederate States and numerous tribes in Indian Territory, such as the Comanches, in 1861, though none of these original documents exist today. It's particularly tragic that the treaties use poetic land-related imagery to articulate their broken promise. It magnifies the degree of loss the Native Nations suffered when they lost their ancestral lands.*



*King continues his rhetorical strategy of interspersing stories throughout his historical account to show how histories are consciously, purposefully, and subjectively compiled. Dudley George, an indigenous man, was shot but didn't die on impact. When his family attempted to transport him to the hospital to receive life-saving treatment, they were stopped and arrested, and George died a few days later. King includes the Ipperwash Crisis to show how land claims disputes aren't a problem of the distant past: they remain a critical focus of contemporary Indian-White relations.*



*Prior to their relocation following the completion of the dam, the Seneca had maintained a traditional way of life, living without modern amenities such as electricity. However, their forced move to resettlement locations came with a necessity to give in to modern life.*



King tells a third story. In 1717, France gave land located along the Ottawa River to the Sulpician Missionary Society. The main problem with this gift was that France didn't own the land—the Mohawk did, and they would dispute its sale for the next 151 years. In 1868, Joseph Onasakanrat, a Mohawk chief, wrote to the Sulpicians, demanding the return of the stolen land. The Sulpicians ignored the request. Onasakanrat led an armed march on the Sulpician seminary, though local authorities ultimately forced the Mohawk to leave. When the Sulpicians sold the property in 1936, the Mohawk disputed the sale once more, and, yet again, their pleas were ignored.

The Mohawk continued to fight to reclaim their lost land into the 20th century, suffering additional losses, such as when a golf course, Club de golf d'Oka, was built on the land. In 1989, the mayor of Oka, Jean Ouellette, announced that the golf course would be expanded, and luxury condos constructed next door, which would rob the Mohawk of additional land, clearing the trees of a forest the Mohawk referred to as “the Pines.” Finally, in March 1990, the Mohawk occupied the Pines. In July, the occupation turned violent. Ouellette ordered the Sûreté du Québec to attack the Mohawk, which they did, armed with tear gas and grenades.

The conflict between the Mohawk and the Sûreté escalated, leading to the deaths of Corporal Marcel Lemay and a Mohawk elder named Joe Armstrong. This led to the onset of the Oka Crisis. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrived to aid the Sûreté. Other Natives joined the Mohawk. The opposing sides remained in a standoff for 78 days. Of course, the Oka Crisis could have been avoided. Indeed, John Ciaccia, then Quebec's Minister of Indian Affairs, pleaded with the federal government to purchase the land from Oka and return it to the Mohawk (despite the fact that the land still technically belonged to the Mohawk in the first place). Ultimately, the Oka Crisis cost over \$200 million. In 1997, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development purchased the land for just over \$5 million and gave it to the Mohawk.

*King's third story reaffirms how casually and readily European powers exchanged stolen Indian land. The land in question lies on the northern bank of the Ottawa River in the present-day town of Oka, which is northwest of Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The Mohawk first arrived there in 1673 after moving from their homeland, the Hudson River valley.*



*Prior to the violent occupation of the Pines, the Mohawk had attempted to protest peacefully, and the Quebec Minister of the Environment expressed concerns about the project, for which no environmental review was conducted. This non-violent opposition temporarily halted the project, but a 1990 court ruling in favor of the developers meant the project would commence as originally planned, and the remainder of the Pines would be cleared to make way for the gold course.*



*The Oka Crisis is regarded as the first highly publicized conflict between First Nations and the Canadian Government of the late 20th century. When the Oka Crisis ended, it cost Canada \$200 million—far more than the \$5 million it would have cost to buy the land for the Mohawk in the first place (though, as King reminds the reader, the Mohawk still legally owned the land). That the government was willing to throw away such a large amount of money before they were willing to buy back the land for the Mohawk shows that economic development takes a backseat to land control. This confirms King's thesis at the beginning of the chapter: that land always has been and always will be at the center of Indian-White relations in North America.*



King shifts his focus to the Northwest for his fourth story, which involves the salmon that have travelled upstream there for millennia and are vitally important to many tribes who live there. Europeans settled in the Puget Sound area of Washington in 1854, leading to the government imposing the Treaty of Medicine Creek on the Nisqually, Puyallup, Steilacoom, and other western tribes. The Nisqually objected to the loss of land, resulting in the conflicts that are now known as the Puget Sound War. Ultimately, Leschi, the Nisqually chief who objected to the loss of land, was hanged in 1858. After this, Whites assumed control of the land promised to the western tribes, denying Natives their fishing rights.

A series of land disputes followed. Two U.S. Supreme Court cases, *United States v. Winans* (1905) and *Suefert Brothers Co. v. United States* (1919) ruled that Native people had rights to fish in the Northwest's rivers. Even so, in 1945, a 14-year-old Nisqually boy named Billy Frank Jr. was arrested for fishing on the Nisqually River, and in 1954, a Puyallup named Bob Satiacum was arrested for fishing on the Puyallup River. Following arrests like these, Natives flocked to the Northwest's rivers to conduct "fish-ins" in protest. Protestors were arrested and, in 1960, the Pierce County Court ruled that the Puyallup tribe didn't exist. Moreover, a 1963 ruling claimed that Washington state was authorized to subject Indians to "reasonable and necessary regulations."

The conflict over fishing rights escalated, with Hollywood celebrities such as Marlon Brando and Buffy Sainte-Marie traveling to the Northwest to garner media attention. Still, the Department of Fish and Game refused to relinquish their perceived control of the rivers. Critics of Native fishing rights claimed that Natives would damage the ecosystem by "overfishing," yet no such fears were directed toward sports fishers or factory ships. King suggests that opposition to Native fishing rights likely stemmed from Whites not wanting Indians competing in the commercial and sports fishing industries.

*In this story, King addresses another contentious issue regarding Native land rights and tribal sovereignty: the right for tribes to exercise hunting and fishing practices beyond the regulations enforced for U.S. Citizens. The Treaty of Medicine Creek afforded Indians fishing rights in exchange for much of the Nisqually peoples' farmland. The conflict that ensued due to Nisqually chief Leschi's dissatisfaction with the treaty was a controversial issue even at the time. Leschi was tried twice before he was sentenced to death—his first trial ended in a hung jury. In 2004, a court in Pierce County, Washington, ruled to posthumously exonerate Leschi, arguing that the chief should not have been executed for his legitimate role in the Puget Sound War. While this is a nice symbolic gesture, it's yet another example of America's preference for Dead Indians over Live Indians. Only after Leschi's death could the court deem him worthy of respect and adequate legal consideration; in life, he was just another "inconvenient" Indian.*



*The 1957 case Washington v. Satiacum ended in a split verdict in favor of Native American rights to fish. However, the narrow win meant this authorization was only rarely exercised in practice. Furthermore, the overwhelming sentiment during the height of the termination era was that Indians were subject to the same laws as Whites, even if existing treaties stated otherwise. Furthermore, media portrayals of Native Americans at the time were largely negative, implying that they were unwilling to honor new conservation laws. The negative portrayal of Native people in the media helped craft a narrative that essentially coerced Native peoples to comply with conservation laws and fishing regulations to which they weren't technically held accountable, lest they be willing to take the blame for any environmental issues for fluctuations in the fish population.*



*In 1964, Native rights activists established the SAIA to defend Native treaty rights through acts of civil disobedience. Janet McCloud was their first leader. McCloud emphasized the unlikelihood of finding justice through legal battles. The SAIA was a radical organization that accused tribal leaders of being too hung up on pleasing bureaucrats at the BIA. Regardless of the lack of tribal support, they went forward with organizing fish-ins. Capturing the attention of celebrities like Sainte-Marie and Brando was highly effective in bringing media attention to the cause.*



The fishing wars escalated, eventually growing violent. On September 9, 1970, state officials raided a Puyallup fishing camp located along the Puyallup River, arrested 60 people, and bulldozed the village. Ultimately, the conflict went to the District Court of Western Washington. *United States v. State of Washington* ruled that Indians had fishing rights and the right to 50 percent of the rivers' harvestable fish.

*The public largely sided with the Native Americans who defended the Puyallup fishing camp, despite the fact that violence came from both the Native people and state officials. This change in public perception is a testament to the organizing work SAIA undertook to show the public the fuller picture of Native fishing. By the 1970s, the revolutionary movements of the 1960s had drastically changed the atmosphere of the country. This is another example of how history changes according to the stories one chooses to include. Seeing the fuller picture generated a more sympathetic attitude toward Native rights.*



King relays a fifth story. The Shaughnessy Gold and Country Club was a luxury club located in Vancouver that was founded in 1911. When the Canadian Pacific Railroad, from whom the club leased the land, demanded its land back in 1956, the club was forced to move. The club settled on a parcel of 162 acres of land overlooking the Fraser River—land that belonged to the Musqueam Nation. Through a series of discreet, private meetings, club leadership landed a deal for a long-term lease of the land. The Musqueam were hardly consulted about the matter. In fact, it wasn't until 1970 when Chief Delbert Guerin received a copy of the lease.

*When the lease was signed in 1957, the Canadian government signed on behalf of the Musqueam Nation, who were not authorized to sign a lease on their own land. Although Status Indians had officially been allowed to seek legal counsel since 1951, the Department of Indian Affairs prevented the Musqueam from seeking legal advice and barred them from viewing the lease. When Guerin was finally granted access to view Department of Indian Affairs archives in 1970, he found that the lease was vastly different from the conditions conveyed to them at the time of the lease's signing. Once more, we see a dueling narrative of the government appearing to protect Native rights on paper but—in practice—failing to honor those rights, as evidenced by the Department of Indian Affairs' refusal to let the Musqueam seek legal counsel or view the lease.*

Guerin discovered that the Canadian government had leased Musqueam land to the club for 75 years at a price that was roughly half of the land's appraised worth. The situation grew worse when, in 1965, Ottawa entered a deal with a private developer, granting them access to additional Musqueam land. New developments drastically increased the land's value, yet the Musqueam were unable to benefit from the market increase, and the developers who bought the land continued to rent at prices far below the new market value.

*This land dispute between the Musqueam band and the Canadian government bears many similarities to disputes between tribes and the U.S. government regarding Indian Gaming regulations. In both cases, the government acts as though they are giving Indians opportunities for betterment and economic development when, in practice, they take countless steps to ensure their failure. They essentially coerce Native people into entering into deals that are against their self-interest.*





In 1995, when the leases were up for renewal, the Musqueam raised the rent to reflect the higher market value. The non-Natives who lived on this land were furious to learn that their rent would be raised. They argued that it was unfair to raise the price for Indian land, since they were unable to vote in Musqueam elections. Such logic is ludicrous, of course, as it's not uncommon for people to own property in places where they have no voting rights. King points to a Canadian friend of his who owns a house in Florida as an example. Nevertheless, homeowners stopped paying rent and took the matter to court. Canada's Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the Musqueam land was worth only 50 percent of surrounding non-Indian land. However, if the Musqueam sold the land, it could be bought at full market value.

King's final story takes place in New Mexico, which boasts the third-highest percentage of Indians after Oklahoma and Alaska. Created in 1906 by Theodore Roosevelt, the Carson National Forest is located on what used to be 50,000 acres of Taos Pueblo Indian land. Roosevelt offered the Taos Pueblo no compensation for the stolen land. *Ba Whyea*, "Blue Lake," located in a remote corner of the land parcel, was a vital part of the tribe's ceremonies. However, this didn't stop the Forest Service from constructing a trail leading to the lake and stocking it with fish for hobbyists.

The Taos fought to win back their land. In the 1920s, they were awarded nearly \$300,000 by the Pueblo Lands Board. However, the tribe refused the offer, demanding the return of Blue Lake. In 1933, John Collier, then the Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, helped the Taos obtain a 50-year permit granting them year-round, exclusive use of the lake, but the Forest Service delayed the passage of this permit. When the permit finally passed, it was for substantially less access than the original permit had permitted. In 1951, the Indian Claims Commission officially stated that the government had unfairly taken Blue Lake from the Taos, though the Commission lacked the power to actually return the land to the tribe. It wasn't until President Nixon signed House Bill 471 into law that the Taos' land was returned to them.

*King uses the flimsiness of non-Native residents' logic to insinuate that society holds Indians and Whites to different standards. Whites are given opportunities for self-advancement, but Indians are not. Whites' business maneuvers are seen as clever and innovative, but Indian entrepreneurial impulses attract suspicion. The Supreme Court's ruling that Musqueam land was worth only 50% of its surrounding land—but would be worth more if they sold it, presumably to Whites—very obviously illustrates this double standard. The ruling made it clear that what the law valued most was its ability to control Indian land and keep Indians from flourishing.*



*This story further exemplifies the vastly different relationship Indians and Whites have to land. Similar to how the Lakota Nation refused to accept payment for the Black Hills, the Taos Pueblo believe that monetary compensation is no substitute for the return of sacred land.*

*Again, we see a familiar pattern of the U.S. government buying time in a Native land claims dispute by offering increasingly higher buyouts. House Bill 471 granted the Taos Pueblo exclusive use of Blue Lake and the surrounding 1,640 acres. This ruling still stands today, and it's historically significant as being the first of two lands returned to tribes, the second being Mount Adams in Washington state, which was returned to the Yakama Nation in 1972. While such rulings are certainly victories in Native peoples' fight to reclaim stolen land, King emphasizes the arduous legal battles and constant loopholes tribes must navigate to lay claim to what is rightfully theirs. The litigiousness of the U.S. government reinforces its differing attitude toward land. For the U.S., land is something to be won and coveted.*



## CHAPTER 10. HAPPY EVER AFTER

King states his intentions to conclude with a happy ending, because North Americans love happy endings. To aid in this endeavor, he asked his Native friends for signs that point to improved Native-White relations. In their answers, King identifies two recurring topics: the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. Before exploring these historical land-claim settlements, however, King takes a moment to address a third topic: the creation of the Gwaii Haanas National Park and Haida Heritage Site.

In the 1980s, timber companies began to pressure the British Columbia government to access forest land that had previously remained untouched by logging. In 1983, the government authorized MacMillan Bloedel to cut cedar on Meares Island, off the West coast of Vancouver Island. No sooner had the government granted this authorization than Natives and allies assembled on the island to protest the logging project, which began in 1984. Tla-o-qui-aht Chief Moses Martin told the loggers they would not be cutting any trees there. MacMillan Bloedel and the Tla-o-qui-aht fought their disagreement in court. Ultimately, the court ruled with the Tla-o-qui-aht.

In 1985 on Haida Gwaii, logging companies zeroed in on Lyell Island, which was Haida territory. Like the Tla-o-qui-aht, the Haida protested the logging and formed a blockade on the island. The timber industry, in contrast, saw the protest as an assault on their livelihood. The occupation of Lyell Island was remarkably civil, with the Haida sharing their food with law enforcement and loggers. The RCMP reciprocated by acquiring satellite service so everyone could watch the Canadian football game. The occupation lasted 21 months, and in July 1987, the Canadian government and the Haida signed an agreement that created Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site.

King returns to the settlements that are the main focus of this final chapter, starting with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Native land-claims have been a pressing issue in Alaska since it became a state in 1959. In 1966, Alaska Natives formed the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) to aid in settling disputed land-claims. Stuart Udall, the Secretary of the Interior at the time, stated that he would not approve any Alaskan land selections until the state settled unresolved Native land-claims. In 1969, Udall reaffirmed his earlier promise by creating Public Land Order 4582. The law was unpopular with Alaska governor Walter J. Hickel and the state's petroleum lobby, since the legislation stalled the construction of a massive pipeline that was intended to carry Arctic crude oil from the Beaufort Sea down to the Gulf of Alaska.

*King comically concludes his account of Indian-White relations with a happy ending to reinforce the book's theme of storytelling and history's interconnected relationship. The previous two chapters focused on outlooks for Native land reclamations and the future of tribal sovereignty. This chapter has a more direct focus on what recent trends in land disputes and tribal sovereignty can tell us about the future of Native Nations in the U.S. and Canada.*



*The Tla-o-qui-aht people's fight to defend Meares Island against deforestation presents another instance in which differing views on land and land usage creates conflict. As King has stated in previous chapters, non-Natives (generally speaking) primarily regard land as a commodity, whereas indigenous cultures have more sacred attachments to land.*



*Again, clashing notions of land's relationship to humans and society is the root cause of the conflict between the Haida and the logging industry. Today, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site is managed by the Archipelago Management Board, which is comprised of an equal number of representatives from the Haida Nation and the Canadian government.*



*Public Land Order 4582 passed in January 1969 and was set to expire in December 1970. The law ordered all public lands that were unreserved to be allotted to Alaska's indigenous population. The law's unpopularity with Hickel and the petroleum lobby illustrates another instance in which non-Native's tendency to view land as a commodity directly factors into Indian-White conflict. Construction of the planned pipeline ended up being delayed until 1975, since the 1973 oil crisis made exploring the Prudhoe Bay oil field impossible.*



The 1968 discovery of oil on Alaska's North Slope incentivized the state to settle Native land-claims as quickly as possible. From the beginning, the disputes were contentious, with Natives and the state both claiming a majority of Alaska's land. However, it took only three years for the U.S. Congress to pass the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). King compares ANCSA to early treaties between tribes and the federal government, since the settlement involved Natives giving up claims to large parcels of land for smaller, guaranteed allotments. In total, the settlement awarded Alaska Natives 44 million acres and \$963 million in cash—both land and money far surpassing any compensation awarded to tribes on the mainland.

Before ANCSA, Native land in Alaska was trust land, and, therefore, controlled by the U.S. government. Through negotiations, state and federal authorities established that any land compensations Alaska Natives received would be fee-simple transfers. While this type of transfer was concerningly similar to the settlements granted through the 1887 Allotment Act, ANCSA did not relieve Natives of their land as these earlier acts had. This was because the land Alaska Natives were awarded through ANCSA was awarded not to individuals (as had been the case with the Allotment Act) but to twelve Native regional corporations. ANCSA also guaranteed Alaska Natives surface land rights (timber) and sub-surface land rights (oil), which gave them an economic advantage. In effect, ANCSA made tribal and village councils shareholders in the Sealaska Corporation, or the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, to name two corporations created through ANCSA.

King describes meeting a Tlingit friend in Juneau. The friend remarked how, since ANCSA, the younger Tlingit generations now know the name of their "corporation" rather than their "clan." King expands on this point, positing that Corporations "[are] [t]he new reservations." One issue was the unpreparedness of Alaska Natives who experienced culture shock from having to adapt to their new roles as corporate stockholders. While ANCSA protected the awarded assets for the first 20 years, after that, there loomed the threat that Native land would, once more, be subject to seizure by the state.

*Unlike many of the treaties between mainland U.S. tribes and the federal government, Natives were considerably involved in the negotiation process for ANCSA. However, Native opponents of the act take issue with the fact that only tribal leaders were involved in the negotiation process, and Alaska's indigenous population was unable to vote the act into law. Additionally, other critics have claimed that Native support for the bill was predicated on their fear of government retaliation if they rejected the act, which was a common response among U.S. and Canadian tribes, whom the government often coerced into ceding rights to which they were legally entitled.*



*Alaska Native land ownership as outlined in ANCSA differed from land settlements awarded to U.S. tribes, whose reservations were (and still are) on leased land. In contrast, "fee-simple land" means the recipient has sole ownership over the land, as well as full authority to utilize it as they please. Another key difference between earlier U.S. Indian policy, such as the Allotment Act, and ANCSA, was that ANCSA entrusted land parcels not to individuals but to specially formed Native corporations. This structure provided Alaska Natives with opportunities for economic development, employment, and the ability to engage in the communal experiences that Allotment had tried to extinguish from Native life.*



*King's friend's remark about younger Tlingit (an American Indian people native to southeastern Alaska and British Columbia) knowing the name of their "corporation" but not their "clan" mourns the loss of culture the Tlingit endured through White settlement in Alaska. At the same time, though, one might argue that ANCSA's formation of corporations helps preserve the value of shared resources and communal land that the U.S. tried to eradicate through its own Indian policies, such as allotment.*



However, Native leaders worked to create House Resolution 278 (HR 278) in 1991, which amended the original settlement to extend more authority over corporate stock settlements, which had originally only been granted to Alaska Natives born before 1971. The resolution also guaranteed protection of undeveloped Native land against taxation, bankruptcy, and civil judgements. At present, King is skeptical that state and federal authorities will push Native corporations to enter the marketplace, which would open the door for them to be taken over by non-Native interests. He also sees corporations as an updated form of assimilation. Still, the land protection and economic opportunities the historic settlement afforded Alaska Natives opens the possibility of a fortuitous future.

*HR 278 expanded the definition of who legally qualified as an Alaska Native. This accomplishes the opposite goal of other legislation King has explored throughout the book. For example, Canada's Bill C-31, with its "two-generation cut-off clause" effectively diminished the percentage of Canada's indigenous population who could receive Status by denying Status to the children of Natives who married non-Indians for multiple generations. King's wariness about the possibility that Native land will be exploited for non-Native interests is warranted, given the land's fee-simple status. Outside of zoning laws, fee-simple land has no limitations regarding how its owners use it. Theoretically, Alaska Natives could be coerced into leasing portions of their land for energy extraction purposes or other unhealthy and unsustainable business practices for economic reasons. In Chapter 8, King describes how this happened to the Navajo Nation in the form of hazardous coal and uranium mining operations.*



The second land claims settlement King addresses is the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which he frames as the end of a land claim the Inuit initiated in 1976 to lobby for a new territory. That resultant territory, Nunavut ("Our Land" in Inuktitut) encompasses 2 million square kilometers in the eastern side of Canada's Northwest Territories. The Inuit were awarded 350,000 square kilometers of land and over one billion dollars. The biggest difference between this settlement and ANCSA is that while only 10 percent of the total land allotted to the Inuit is fee-simple land, the entirety of the land Alaska Natives received is fee-simple. Of course, it's hardly logical to compare the situations of Alaska Natives and the Inuit; whereas Alaska Natives make up just 14 percent of Alaska's population, the Inuit make up 85 percent of Nunavut's population, for example.

*The remaining percentage of the land allotted to the Inuit is held in trust by the Canadian government, as is the case for Indian Reservation land in the U.S. Today, Nunavut is Canada's largest territory. Its majority Inuit population allows for the designation of Inuit languages as its official languages. King suggests that Nunavut effectively functions as a sovereign nation separate from Canada, whereas Alaska Natives are relatively more involved in and affected by U.S. culture and policy.*



In the Bathurst Mandate that the Nunavut government released in 2000, the Inuit voiced ambitious goals for their new territory, such as the hope that it would be functionally bilingual in Inuktitut and English by 2020. Yet, King isn't optimistic that they can reach this goal. For starters, the high school graduation rate for Inuit students is just 25 percent, and the percentage who go on to attend college is even lower. Furthermore, the amount of financial support the federal government provides the territory for French language instruction is roughly four times as great as that it allots for instruction in Inuktitut.

*The ambitious goals the Inuit harbor for Nunavut reflect their belief in the cultural preservation they can achieve through independent governance. At the same time, Nunavut faces many of the same problems as Native Nations across the continent, namely a lack of financial support from the federal government. The federal government's decision to allocate more funds for French instruction than Inuktitut instruction reflects the country's preferential treatment of Western culture.*



King believes that the history of Manitoba can provide a valuable lesson to Nunavut. When the province entered the Canadian federation in 1870, its population consisted mostly of French-speaking Métis. While the Manitoba Act established French and English as dual official languages and guaranteed a Métis land base, westward expansion had so altered the province's demographics that the Métis became a minority in just over a decade, which jeopardized many of the privileges they were afforded in earlier legislation.

King reaffirms the fact that ANCSA and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement are flawed documents. He also laments the persistent anti-Indian attitudes he continues to encounter around the world, the tired refrain that it's time to "get over it" and stop living in the past. King understands the appeal of such a stance: the ease of forgiving the sins of the past by virtue of our descendants' ignorance. And yet, King counters, "ignorance has never been the problem." Instead, he blames western civilization's "unexamined confidence" and "unwarranted certainty in Christianity" for unresolved tensions in Indian-White relations. In this light, King believes that a closer examination of the past can be an educational, humbling experience.

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret Native history, King argues, it is impossible to ignore how much they have lost. And yet, Native culture has not remained in the past: it has adapted and changed and continues to bring meaning and satisfaction to its people. King concludes his book with a nod to the future, declaring that he regrets that he won't be alive to hear stories about what the next millennia will bring for North America's Native people.

*King fears that history will repeat itself and the Inuit will lose their language and culture as people invariably migrate into Nunavut and change its demographics and policies with the influence of Western culture. This ominous prediction reflects the sentiment King conveyed in Chapter 9—that Whites will not stop until they control the entirety of the continent's Native land.*



*King reflects on the "curious account" he has presented of Indian-White relations in North America to make several conclusions about what the history can tell us about what sort of future Native peoples can expect. His ultimate stance is that it is illogical to order Native peoples to "get over" centuries of colonial violence, since Western values continue to negatively influence North America's indigenous population.*



*King honors the title of the book's final chapter—"Happy Ever After"—by suggesting that the resilience that allowed Native people to survive into the present will sustain them into the future. He closes by reinforcing his opening position on the power of storytelling to shape history and experience.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Charles, Carly. "The Inconvenient Indian." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 22 Apr 2022. Web. 22 Apr 2022.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Charles, Carly. "The Inconvenient Indian." LitCharts LLC, April 22, 2022. Retrieved April 22, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-inconvenient-indian>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Inconvenient Indian* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian*. University of Minnesota Press. 2018.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2018.