

# Federal Policies and the American Indian in the 19th Century: An Eighth Grade Lesson Plan

## Part I: The Lives of American Indians in the Nineteenth Century

**A note about organization of the materials:** Following is the basic information, presented in outline form, needed for a lecture/discussion on the topic of American Indians lifestyles in Nineteenth Century America. As you read along, you will note references to maps, overheads, and assignments. These have not been incorporated into the body of the outline, but rather, are located at the end of the entire lesson plan. To simplify your review of the materials, you may click on any map, overhead, and assignment reference and be taken directly to that information. When you duplicate the lesson, however, you will need to be sure to duplicate \_\_\_\_\_.

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**Introduction:** Today we are going to begin learning about how our new nation - the United States of America - and its new governmental leaders - our founding fathers - decided to deal with the American Indians. But before we can learn about the actions of our governmental leaders, we need to learn something about the people who lived on the land that we now call the United States of America.

I. **Geography.** When the US was born, it consisted of 13 states. The rest of the United States was owned by the French, the Spanish, and the American Indians. ***[MAP #1 - The North American Continent, 1779]***

- A. Between 1776 and 1853 - just 77 years - all of that land came under control of the United States government.
- B. An important part of our study about American Indians is just how the original inhabitants of North America lost almost all of their land during this period.
  - 1. As you can see on this map ***[MAP #2 - Cultural Areas of Native Americans]***, before the English colonists arrived in the early 1600s, all of the North American continent was under the control of the many Indian tribes.
  - 2. But by the end of the nineteenth century, almost all that land had come under the control of non-Indian peoples.
- C. But before we can learn how the American Indians lost their land, we need to learn a little more about who they were and how they lived when the United States was born.

II. **The American Indians before the Nineteenth Century**

- A. When the US Constitution was signed, hundreds of tribes lived in North America

- tribes that had been living there for thousands of years. Tribal members spoke hundreds different languages, practiced many different spiritual beliefs, and experienced a wide variety of different political, cultural, and economic lifestyles. Indeed, the Indians of North America were **diverse** peoples.

1. Discuss the word “diversity.” What does it mean in general? What is cultural diversity? Spiritual diversity? Political? Economic?
2. Discuss the concept that from the time of European contact forward, North America became even more diverse, especially in terms of race.

Racial diversity arrived early to North America. Indeed, as early as 1619 when the first Africans arrived, the continent became the home to at least three races of people - Anglo Europeans, black Africans, and American Indians.

3. Ask students if they think there is much diversity among themselves? Ask them to relate some information about their ancestry and emphasize how truly diverse they are - even though they may not appear to be diverse.

B. Not only were the Indian peoples of North America quite diverse, they were also politically **sovereign**. Does anyone know what sovereignty is? [**OVERHEAD - AMERICAN INDIAN SOVEREIGNTY.**]

C. But many Americans, instead of recognizing either the diversity or sovereignty of American Indians, instead referred to them as “savages” or “noble savages.” Let’s examine what these words mean. [**OVERHEAD - “SAVAGE”**]

D. Now, let’s take a brief moment to think about our own beliefs and attitudes about American Indians who lived over 200 years ago. [**ASSIGNMENT #1: AMERICAN INDIANS**]. When the assignment is completed and turned in, the following discussion should follow.

1. Discussion: What is stereotyping? Do you think that American Indians have been stereotyped?

Stereotyping occurs when an entire group of people is characterized by mistaken ideas of how they behave, live, dress, or think.

2. What types of stereotypes exist about American Indians in our society?
3. What is harmful about such stereotyping?

Stereotyping degrades Indian people and their cultures and it distorts the reality of Indian people for non-Indian people. It is dehumanizing.

E. Despite the stereotypical belief of many Americans that Indians were uncivi-

lized savages, the truth was that many tribes had achieved a great deal of technological, agricultural, and political **sophistication**. A really good example of such sophistication was the Cherokee nation.

### **III. Case Study - The Cherokee Nation**

#### **A. Early Life of the Cherokees**

1. The Cherokee were a large tribe that lived in northeastern Alabama, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and western North and South Carolina. (show these areas on a large map and use **MAP #8 - the Cherokee Nation**)
2. Cherokee houses were **conical**-shaped and built along the streams and waterways. Several families lived together in the houses. **[OVERHEAD - CHEROKEE HOME]**. The Cherokee people were good hunters, fishermen, traders, farmers, statesmen, artists, and medicine people.
3. The Cherokee nation was divided into seven **clans** - which are groups of people who consider themselves to be blood relatives. Each clan is named for and associated with an animal or natural phenomenon: The Bird, Paint, Deer, Wolf, Blue, Long Hair, and Wild Potato. **[OVERHEAD - CHEROKEE CLANS]**
  - a. Children automatically belong to the mother's clan.
  - b. Each clan member is bound by honor to defend any member of that clan from wrong.
  - c. The clans were important in tribal government. Each clan appointed a counselor to represent them in their governing body called the Civil Council. It was the Civil Council that made most decisions for the clan.
4. Each village clan had three major tasks to perform:
  - a. assign the property to be used as gardens to households of the clan women;
  - b. regulate marriage; and
  - c. create and carry out an orderly plan for resolving disputes between villages.
5. When Europeans arrived, the Cherokees had a national government which was divided into three sectors: peace, civil, and war.
  - a. There were two elected tribal chiefs: the Peace Chief who conducted council meetings when the tribe was at peace, and the War Chief who was in command during times of war.
  - b. Those who were allowed to attend the council meetings were the chief, representatives from each clan, the chief's seven counselors, and sixteen officials (nine men and seven honored women).
  - c. The civil sector of the government - which was presided over by the Peace Chief - conducted religious ceremonies, held court, and made laws.

- B. The Adaptation of the Cherokee Nation to American Standards. Shortly after the United States was born, various members of the Cherokee nation realized it was time to make some changes in their lifestyles if they were to survive as a people. To learn more about the resulting transformation, we are going to complete a short assignment. **[ASSIGNMENT #2: THE CHEROKEE NATION]**

### III. Part I Summary

1. At the time of European contact in the early 1600s, the North American continent was populated by hundreds of Indian tribes that were culturally spiritually, and politically diverse. Additionally, the Indian people had achieved a great deal of technological, agricultural, and political sophistication.
2. Each of the tribes were **inherently** sovereign at the time of European contact. Such sovereignty was reinforced when colonial governments signed government-to-government treaties with various Indian nations. Indian sovereignty was further reinforced when the US government was established, especially through the Commerce Clause of the US Constitution which created two sovereign entities: the federal governments and tribal governments.
3. Despite Indian diversity and tribal sovereignty, most European settlers had little understanding of the cultural, spiritual, and political beliefs of Indians. Thus, they believed the Indians were “uncivilized heathens” and “savages” who needed to be civilized and Christianized.
4. Although some Indian tribes became culturally, spiritually, and politically assimilated into American society, they still were not integrated into American life nor were they accepted as equals.

**For More Information.** Teachers may wish to introduce students to some earlier concepts and ideas about American Indians prior to the establishment of the US government. The following are some possibilities for expanding this lesson to incorporate some sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century topics dealing with American Indians.

1. ***Bafa Bafa.*** This cross-cultural simulation is terrific and appropriate for grade levels 8-12 as well as adults. It takes between 1-3 hours, depending on the number of students (between 18 and 36 is ideal, but can be played with less or more.) The simulation creates two complex cultures, the Alphas and the Betas and then places the participants in opposite cultures. The visitor is usually lost and uncomfortable in this different setting and wishes to return to the culture where he/she know the rules. This initial discomfort often results in intolerance and stereotyping of members of the opposite culture. These feelings emerge during the debriefing whre the participants' reactions and reasons for them can be further explored.

The goals are fivefold:

- To examine cultural differences and how these differences can lead to prejudice, misunderstanding, intolerance, and a sense of ethnic superiority.
- To experience the feelings of loneliness, alienation, and lack of confidence often felt when one encounters cultures different from their own.
- To demonstrate the need to avoid being judgmental or critical of other cultures on the basis of minimal information.
- To develop an awareness that fully understanding a culture requires study, experience, and an open mind rather than quick judgments and stereotyping.
- To demonstrate how cultures consist of many subtle dimensions and values that are not readily observable.

**Bafa Bafa** is a copyrighted game. Full instructions and all materials required to operate the game can be obtained from Simile II, Box 910, Del Mar, California, 92014. Cost is \$35 and the kit includes a cassette recording of the Beta culture rules and one of the Alpha culture rules, Alpha chips, Beta trading cards, director's manuals and Alpha cards.

2. **Discussion about "Indian Origins in North America"**. Two major opposing theories exist about when and how the first people originated on the North American continent: a migration theory from the academic community and an **indigenous** origin theory from American Indian tribes.
  - a. Academic Community. Most **archaeologists** believe that human beings did not evolve in the Western hemisphere because no fossils of pre-**Homo Sapiens** have been found on the American continent.
    - 1) Most believe that somewhere between 13,000 and 40,000 years ago, people first came to the Americas via the Bering Strait.
    - 2) The Bering Strait theory suggests that a landmass once bridged the body of water between Siberia and Alaska - now known as the *Bering Strait* - and that the early ancestors of American Indians crossed this land. **[MAP #3 - BERING STRAIT LAND BRIDGE]**
    - 3) Recent findings of a woman's thigh bones in Southern California's Channel Islands suggest that the first Americans may have come by sea rather than the Bering Strait.
  - b. American Indian Tribes. Many tribes have histories and creation stories that illustrate they have been in the Americas "since the first day of light," and that they were created in the Americas by their Creator. They question the validity of the Bering Strait migration theory.
3. **Comparisons of European and Traditional Indian Cultural Value Systems**. When Europeans arrived in North America, it was clear that their cultural values varied greatly

from those of the indigenous Indians. This chart explains some of those differences.  
**[OVERHEAD - COMPARISON OF CULTURAL VALUE SYSTEMS]**

4. **A Case Study of Sophisticated Society - The Mound Builders.** Over 800 years ago, one of the most highly organized civilizations in the world existed in the lower Mississippi Delta. There, an incredibly skilled people - now known as the Mound Builders - built huge earthen monuments which were the centers of their lives. To provide a better understanding of these peoples and the remains of their structures, the National Park Service has created a terrific web site called "Ancient Architects of the Mississippi" located at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/feature>. Have students read the first page and then click on and read the following subsections: "Life Along the River," "The Mound Builders," "Traders and Travelers," "Emerald Mound." Then have them write and explain at least four new facts in the reading that were surprising or interesting to them.
  
5. **Discussion - "The Revitalization of an Ancient People - The Makah."** The Makah of northwestern Washington State are an ancient people who experienced a rebirth and revitalization of their culture in the 1970s. After a particularly aggressive storm hit the west coast, an entire village was unearthed at nearby Ozette. Archaeologists and tribal elders worked for years to identify thousands of artifacts and to bring new life to the Makah people. One of the major findings was a deep-rooted link to whaling which many experts judge to have been a Makah tradition for over 2000 years. To fully understand this process, show the students the video "A Gift from the Past" (A PBS Production available through \_\_\_\_\_ —).

After viewing, provide them with an update on the whaling tradition of the tribe. In 1855, the US signed a treaty with the Makahs promising to secure their right to engage in whaling. (This is the only treaty ever made by the US with this specific guarantee). In the 1920s, the Makah had to stop whaling due to the scarcity of gray whales. When it became apparent in the late 1990s that the gray whale had made an astonishing comeback, the Makah petitioned the International Whaling Commission, asking to resume their practice of whaling. The rationale for resumption was based upon the treaty obligations of the US government, as well as the Makah's belief that health problems had resulted with the loss of their traditional diet of whale meat and that young people were in trouble due to lack of discipline and pride in their culture that the whaling tradition had previously provided.

In 1997, the Commission gave the Makah permission to hunt up to five whales per year, beginning in November 1998. In turn, the tribe established the Makah Whaling Commission to help determine the ceremonial requirements for the hunts. The first hunt was conducted in late May, 1999. To find out more about how the Makah conduct their hunt in the Makah tradition, students can consult their web page at <http://combio.rice.edu/nae/docs/makahfaq.html>.