

## LESSON PLAN

# PRESIDENT WASHINGTON’S NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY

### LEVEL:

Middle/High School

### TIMEFRAME:

Approximately one class session

### OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to analyze various primary sources, identify key elements of those sources, and make a reasonable claim based on their analysis of the sources.

Students will be able to create an evidence-based concluding interpretation based on the primary sources that interpret the priorities of George Washington’s Native American policy.

### STANDARDS:

- The Federal Period
- Native Americans
- Analysis of Primary Sources
- Integrate Evidence of Multiple Primary Sources into a Reasoned Argument about the Past
- Evaluation of Primary Sources
- Speaking and Listening
- Working in Groups

### LESSON HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Much had been learned during the Articles of Confederation, and much had yet to be defined in the new United States Government formed under the Constitution. This was especially true when it came to Native American policies. As Historian Joseph Ellis put it, “*Under the Articles, Indian policy had been an incoherent blend of federal and state jurisdiction, with a gloss of reassuring rhetoric that covered a crude reality of outright confiscation [of Native American land].*” Change was coming. In 1787, the Constitution was written. In 1788, the Constitution was ratified. And in 1789, George Washington took the oath of office, becoming the first President of the United States. Ellis continues, “*Now for the first time, the power to implement a coherent national policy toward the Indian tribes...was vested in the federal government and, more specifically, in the executive branch.*”<sup>1</sup> Two men would emerge as the principal architects of Native American Policy during Washington’s Administration; President George Washington and his Secretary of War, Henry Knox.

### MATERIALS:

Images of the 1789 Peace Medal and 1792 Peace Medal  
Peace Medal Analysis Worksheet  
Timeline of Washington’s Native American Policy  
Timeline Analysis Worksheet

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic* (Alfred A. Knof, 2007) 128.

## PROCEDURE:

### 1. Warm Up: *President Washington Peace Medals, 1789 and 1792*

- a. Read the *Lesson Historical Background* to the students
- b. Present the Essential Questions to the class and ask students what they might expect to discover, from this lesson, based on the essential questions.
  - i. What was the goal of Washington's foreign policy for Native nations?
  - ii. What was the goal of Washington's priorities for the United States' domestic policy?
- c. Place students into groups of two or three.
- d. Distribute Peace Medal/Warm Up Activity. It may be helpful to also display an image of each Peace Medal for the entire class to view.
  - i. Using the "Peace Medal Analysis Worksheet" (included in PDF), have students identify key elements and actions within the etching
    1. Examples key elements may include: President Washington, a Native American, or tree. Examples actions may include: standing, plowing, or facing each other.
    2. Helpful tip: it may be helpful to use an image thinking routine that students are already familiar with (such as See/Think/Wonder or visual thinking strategies) to start their observations.
- e. Have students share their ideas with the class.
- f. Have students complete the *Summary Title* assessment on the activity
  - i. A summary title considers the key elements and actions of the Peace Medals to convey the message of each Peace Medal.
  - ii. Students must justify why their title is a correct Summary Title for each Peace Medal.
  - iii. Have students share and discuss their summaries.

### 2. Lesson Activity: *President Washington's Native American Policy*

- a. Place students into new groups of two or three.
- b. Distribute Timeline of Washington's Native American Policy Activity.
- c. As a class, read through and discuss the historical background for the activity and the activity instructions.
  - i. Please refrain from giving too much interpretation of the documents; instead allow the students to make their own interpretations.
- d. Allow students time to work through the activity.

### 3. Whole class discussion:

- a. As a class, discuss the essential questions, "What was the goal of Washington's foreign policy for Native nations?" and "What was the goal of Washington's priorities for the United States' domestic policy?"
  - i. Make certain, that as students discuss these questions, they are defending their arguments with evidence from the documents.
- b. In addition, ask students, "How might these experiences shape Native American Policy for future Presidents?" Make certain, that as students discuss these questions, they are defending their arguments with evidence from the documents.

## WARM UP: PRESIDENT WASHINGTON PEACE MEDALS, 1789 AND 1792

### Essential Questions:

1. What was the goal of Washington's foreign policy for Native nations?
2. What was the goal of Washington's priorities for the United States' domestic policy?

### Historical Background:

*“From the time the United States was born, images of Indians...began to appear on American maps, buildings, and medals as emblems of an independent American nation...”*<sup>1</sup>

As the United States government continued to reorganize itself under the guidelines of the Constitution, President Washington worried about its survival. The British were still a potential threat to the North, and the Spanish lay to the West and South. Native nations occupied United States lands most in danger of European Encroachment, and provided neither security nor support. Diplomacy (and then warfare) with tribes in the Northwestern Confederacy was foremost in the minds of George Washington and Henry Knox.

After the defeats of Harmar's forces [October 1790] and St. Clair's forces [November 1791] at the hands of two separate Native American armies, Washington realized force was not the answer. At the same time, halting plans for westward settlement was not the answer either. Adam Stephan acknowledged this when he wrote to James Madison in April 1789, stating; *“The Western Country is daily growing into greater importance...”*<sup>2</sup> **What to do?**

Washington turned to Peace Medals. Peace Medals had long been distributed amongst Native American leaders as signs of peace and friendship with the French, Spanish, and British. They were highly valued, and seen as cherished objects. Now that the United States was its own country, Washington determined that it, too, would honor Native Americans in a similar fashion. Medals were given to Native leaders for significant occasions and treaties. With these Peace Medals, Washington hoped that peace would be secured between Native American nations and the United States.<sup>3</sup>

### Activity Instructions:

1. Critically analyze the 1789 and 1792 Peace Medals.
2. Identify the key elements and actions of the Peace Medals.
3. Complete the critical thinking pieces.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian World of George Washington* (Oxford University Press, 2018). [Edited with permission from the author]

<sup>2</sup> Adam Stephan to James Madison, April 12, 1789, 1789 Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/item/mjm023542/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mjm023542/)

<sup>3</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *Peace and Friendship: Indian Peace Medals from the Schermer Collection, National Portrait Gallery* (National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution Castle, January 26 – June 3, 2001), 8.

PRIMARY SOURCE

PEACE MEDAL: George Washington President, Engraved Peace Medal, 1789



PRIMARY SOURCE

PEACE MEDAL: George Washington President, Engraved Peace Medal, 1792



LESSON PLAN: NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY  
 WORKSHEET: PEACE MEDAL ANALYSIS

1. When looking at the 1789 Peace Medal and the 1792 Peace Medal – what do you see? What do you think? What do you wonder?
  
2. Identify key elements and actions from the Jacquemart etching of the 1789 Peace Medal and the 1792 Peace Medal. List those below without interpretation.

	1789	1792
Actions		
Elements		

3. Critical Thinking Item #1
  - a. Give each image a Summary Title:

1789:

1792:

4. Critical Thinking Item #2
  - a. Based on the two Peace Medals, does George Washington want to prioritize foreign policy with Native Americans?
  - b. Based on the two Peace Medals, what was the goal of Washington’s priorities for the United States’ domestic policy?

1789:

1792:

## LESSON ACTIVITY: PRESIDENT WASHINGTON’S NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY

### Essential Questions:

1. What was the goal of Washington’s foreign policy for Native nations?
2. What was the goal of Washington’s priorities for the United States’ domestic policy?

### Historical Background:

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1783, George Rogers Clarke wrote, “...I have found that nothing will so firmly bind them [Native Americans] to us, as the fear of our [United States] arms...”<sup>1</sup> In October of 1787, under the Articles of Confederation, the Secretary of Congress wrote to Governor St. Clair instructing him on treaty negotiations with “Indian tribes.” These instructions stated:

*“Altho the purchase of the Indian right of Soil is not a primary object of holding this treaty, Yet You will not neglect any opportunity that may offer of extinguishing the Indian rights to the westward as far as the river Mississippi.”*<sup>2</sup>

Later, during Washington’s Presidency in January of 1791, Massachusetts Representative George Thatcher wrote, “...I think it must now be determined whether the Indians shall be exterminated, or the settlement of that Country [United States] be abandoned.”<sup>3</sup>

Were war or inaction the only two policy options? It was under this scrutiny, from both United States citizens and Native Americans, that President Washington would write his Native American Policies.

### Activity Instructions:

1. Review the timeline of events from President Washington’s administration.
  - a. Feel free to mark up the document using a pen, pencil, or highlighter.
2. Answer the essential questions by constructing an argument and providing three pieces of evidence from the documents to support your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen: Geo: Rogers Clarke to the Governor of Virginia, May 22, 1783, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and other Manuscripts*, Richmond Virginia, volume 3, page 489.

<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of Congress to Governor St. Clair, October 26, 1787, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, volume 2, pages 78 and 79,

<sup>3</sup> George Thatcher to Nathaniel Barrell, January 30, 1791, *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress, 1789-1791*, volume 21, page 614.

## TIMELINE OF PRESIDENT WASHINGTON'S NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY

**April 30, 1789**, *George Washington takes the oath of office becoming the first U.S. President.*

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**1789**, [\*President Washington's Memoranda on Indian Affairs\*](#)—"To preserve the attachment of the several Indian Nations bordering on the U. States, it appears expedient that some adequate means of supplying them with Goods & Ammunition at moderate prices should immediately be adopted... This would be a part of the duty imposed upon the Superintendent, Agent or Commissary... An expedient of this sort is highly necessary to prevent persons of bad character from defrauding the Indians—from making still more unfavourable impressions upon the inimical Tribes—and from Alienating the affections of the friendly Tribes from the United States."

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**May 23, 1789**, [\*Henry Knox to President Washington\*](#)—"That it may be proper to observe that the Indians are greatly tenacious of their lands, and generally do not relinquish their right, excepting on the principle of a specific consideration expressly given for the purchase of the same.

That the practice of the late english Colonies and Government in purchasing the indian claims has firmly established the habit in this respect, So that it cannot be violated, but with difficulty and an expence greatly exceeding the value of the object.

That the said treaties have been opposed and Complained of, will appear by the representation to Congress, accompanying this report...

**Enclosed in Letter: 18 Dec. 1786 speech, addressed to the Continental Congress**  
– 'kindled your council fires where you thought proper without consulting us, at which you held seperate treaties, and have entirely neglected our plan of having a general conference with the different nations of the confederacy'"

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**June 15, 1789**, [\*Henry Knox to President Washington\*](#)—"The Indians being the prior occupants possess the right of the Soil—It cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent, or by the right of Conquest in case of a just War—To dispossess them on any other principle would be a gross violation of the fundamental Laws of Nature...

The principle of the indian right to lands they possess being thus conceded, the dignity and interest of the nation will be advanced by making it the basis of the future administration of justice towards the indian tribes.

As the settlements of the whites shall approach near to the indian boundaries established by treaties, the game will be diminished and the lands being valuable to the indians only as a hunting grounds, they will be willing to sell further tracts for small considerations..."

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**July 7, 1789, [Henry Knox to President Washington](#)**—“As the great source of all indian wars are disputes about their boundaries, and the United States are from the nature of the Government liable to be involved in every war that shall happen...it is highly proper that their authority and consent should be considered a essentially necessary to all measures for the consequences of which they are responsible... The independent nations and tribes of Indians ought to be considered as foreign nations, not as subjects of any particular State...”

It is however painful to consider that all the Indian tribes once existing in those States...have become extinct. If the same causes continue...in a short period the Idea of an Indian...will only be found in the page of the historian.

How different would be...that instead of exterminating a part of the human race by our modes of population that we had preserved through all difficulties and at last imparted our Knowledge of cultivation, and the arts, to the Aborigines of the Country by which the source of future life and happiness had been preserved and extended...

That the civilization of the indians would be an operation of complicated difficulty. That would require the highest knowledge of the human character, and a steady perseverance in a wise system for a series of years cannot be doubted...

Were it possible to introduce among the Indian tribes a love for exclusive property it would be a happy commencement of the business.

Missionaries of excellent moral character should be appointed to reside in their nation, who should be well supplied with all the implements of husbandry and the necessary stock for farm.

Such a plan although it might not fully effect the civilization of the Indians would most probably be attended with the salutary effect of attaching them to the Interest of the United States.”

**August 29, 1789, [President Washington to the Commissioners to the Southern Indians](#)**—“The united States consider it as an object of high national importance, not only to be at peace with the power full tribes or nations of Indians south of the Ohio, but if possible by a just and liberal system of policy to conciliate and attach them to the Interests of the union.”

**January 4, 1790, [Henry Knox to President Washington](#)**—“The practise of the British Government and its colonies of giving presents to the indians of North America is well known—They see, to have been convinced that it was the cheapest and most effectual mode of managing the Indians—The idea of fear, or purchasing a peace is not to be admitted in the cases above stated—But the conduct appears to have been dictated by wise policy...”

**January 8, 1790**, [\*Henry Knox's Notes on the State of the Frontier\*](#)—“Hence the importance of the administration of indian affairs being conducted by fixed principles established by Law, and which being published should be rigidly enforced. The obligations which the United States owe their own dignity require that while the unenlightened tribes of Indians are treated with justice and humanity...If upon mature consideration it should be thought practicable to impart some of the blessings of civilization to the Indian tribes...Open an liberal treaties in which their rights and territory should be well ascertained, and secured, seem to be the only equitable foundation of peace with the Indian tribes.”

**August 21, 1790**, [\*Gazette of the United States\*](#), *New York, NY*, page 3

### NEW-YORK, AUGUST 21.

We hear that the President of the United States had a very fine passage to Newport, at which place he arrived on Monday evening last—he was expected at Providence on Thursday, where preparations had been made for his reception.—He will probably arrive in this city this evening.

On Thursday last Col. [Colonel] McGillivray, and the other Chiefs of the Creek Nation, sailed from this port for St. Mary's River, in high spirits, and greatly pleased with having concluded a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the United States.

The issue of the negotiation with the Creeks, observes a correspondent, must give pleasure to every friend to humanity, and the peace and honor of the United States.—The solemn ratification of this just and equal Treaty, with which the Creeks appear to be so fully satisfied, and which has received the deliberate sanction of the President of the United States, and of the Senate, affords the happiest prospects of lasting peace and tranquility to our southern Frontiers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gazette of the United-States. (New-York [N.Y.]) 1789-1793, August 21, 1790, Page 567, Provided by Library of Congress, Washington, DC,

1. What was the goal of Washington's foreign priorities for Native nations? Support your claim with three pieces of evidence from the documents.

a. Claim:

i. Evidence #1:

ii. Evidence #2:

iii. Evidence #3:

2. What was the goal of Washington's priorities for the United States' domestic policy? Support your claim with three pieces of evidence from the documents.

a. Claim:

i. Evidence #1:

ii. Evidence #2:

iii. Evidence #3:

3. How might these experiences shape Native American policies for future presidents?