

U.S. POLICY WITH INDIAN NATIONS

The U.S. Policy with Native American tribal nations defined much of George Washington's foreign policy during his terms as president and established precedents in diplomatic and military action that defined a century of relations.

LEVEL:

High School (Grades 9 – 12)

TIMEFRAME:

Approximately one class session

STANDARDS:

- Early Republic
- Civics
- Tribal Sovereignty
- Critical Thinking

LEAD THEME:

Our Changing Landscape

QUESTIONS:

- How were Indian Nations and their people and the United States government and its citizens influenced by the development of Native American government policy during Washington's presidency?
 - How has the land we inhabit—from local community to states and territories to the American Republic—changed over time, and how have we shaped it?
 - What different perspective are there on these changes and on the cost and benefits of these changes?
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PLAN:

Engage:

- It is important for students to understand how the United States government developed Native American policy and began to establish the **principles** of tribal sovereignty.
 - Start by saying that Native Americans and their perspectives are often left out when students learn about the Founding Era.
 - For additional information, see *The Indian World of George Washington*, in which historian Colin G. Calloway argues that “Restoring Indian people and Indian lands to the story of Washington goes a long way toward restoring them to their proper place in America’s story.”

Explore:

- In this lesson, students will read a secondary source article that examines the development of Native American policy during George Washington's presidency, and looks at how Native American policy affected Indian peoples and United States citizens.
 - Then, students will participate in a discussion evaluating the goals of the United States government's Native American policy – land acquisition and assimilation.
 - Students will analyze who benefited from and who was harmed when the United States expanded.
- The "U.S. Policy with Tribal Nations Reading" (included in the PDF) has an overview of how Washington developed policies towards Native Americans throughout his presidency, followed by a case study of the Creeks. Distribute this for students to read.

Explain/Evaluate:

- After the reading, there are a series of "Reading Comprehension Questions" to assess for students' understanding and "Discussion Questions" to engage students in a more in-depth discussion, which requires critical thinking (both are located in PDF).
- Teachers may adapt the "U.S. Policy with Tribal Nations Reading" and "Reading Comprehension Questions" to meet the needs in their classrooms.
 - The students and teacher could read the article together in class, answering the "Reading Comprehension Questions" aloud while reading the article.
 - This would transition into a more in-depth discussion with the "Discussion Questions."
 - Teachers could also assign the reading and written responses to the "Reading Comprehension Questions" as a homework assignment.
 - Then, the students and teacher would discuss the "Discussion Questions" in class.

Extend:

- Teachers may choose to extend the lesson by working with students on the "Primary Source Analysis – Peace Medals Presented by George Washington." This is accompanied by the "Peace Medal Background" sheet.

- Students will analyze the 1792 peace medal using the provided questions. They will also analyze a portrait of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha) to contemplate why he chose to wear the peace medal presented to him by President Washington in his portrait.

LANGUAGE USAGE

Many terms are used when referring to the indigenous peoples of North America. The most accurate term that you can use is the specific name of the nation. This lesson utilizes the names of individual nations and uses a broader term when referring to two or more nations. These broader terms are Indians and Native Americans. These terms are used interchangeably by federal, state and tribal governments.

Consideration also must be given to using the words tribe or nation. In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People* (adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese), Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz argues that “the word *nation* is more accurate than the word *tribe* because it acknowledges that long before the United States existed, the many different Native peoples had governments and made agreements with each other, just as other nations have always done. The U.S. government and tribal governments also use the terms *tribe* and *nation* interchangeably.” This lesson uses both terms, tribe and nation.

READING AND QUESTIONS

Background:

A few months after becoming president in 1789, George Washington declared that a fair Indian policy was one of his highest priorities. He explained that "The Government of the United States are determined that their Administration of Indian Affairs shall be directed entirely by the great principles of Justice and humanity."¹

In 1787, the Confederation Congress passed an important law. The Northwest Ordinance opened land further west, the Ohio Valley, to American settlers. A group of Indian nations called the Western Lakes Confederacy fought back, using armed resistance to protect their land.

The land disputes and subsequent violence in the northwest made it more important for Washington to develop a formal way to manage Indian affairs. In the U.S. Constitution, the President can make treaties with other countries with the "advice and consent" of the Senate. Washington declared that a similar practice should also apply to agreements with Native Americans. The Senate agreed with Washington and accepted treaties as the basis for interacting with Indian tribes. Indian tribes were considered sovereign, foreign nations, so states had no authority over Indian tribes.

Washington and his Secretary of War Henry Knox worked together to develop the nation's policy towards Native American nations. Knox argued that for practical and moral reasons, it made more sense to make treaties with Indian tribes than go to war. Wars were risky and expensive. Also, using force would be unjust because the Indians had rights to their land. Washington agreed that the United States would gain Indian lands by treaty. Treaties would allow the United States to expand in an orderly and peaceful manner. During his eight years as president, Washington oversaw seven treaties.

Congress approved a treaty with seven northern tribes – the Shawnee, Miami, Ottawa, Chippewa, Iroquois, Sauk, and Fox. They lived in a region from New York through the present-day Midwest near the Great Lakes. However, the treaty did not provide meaningful protection of tribal land. American settlers continued to settle on tribal lands despite the treaty. This showed the northern tribes that the American government had little control over its own citizens, so the tribes questioned whether they could trust the United States government. Members of the northern tribes believed it was necessary to use force to prevent more Americans from settling on their land.

Washington wanted to protect American citizens, so he decided to use military force. In 1790 and 1791, Washington sent armies to confront native forces. Both times, the Americans were soundly defeated. Americans were embarrassed by these two setbacks. Congress authorized a 5,000 man regular army to stop the resistance of the northern tribes. The United States forces defeated the Indian confederation decisively in 1794. This American victory and a new treaty (the Treaty of Greenville) brought a tentative peace to the northwest in 1795.

At the same time, Washington also faced challenges from the four southern tribes. These tribes were located in the Southeast United States. Washington sent messages of friendship and plans for trade with three of the tribes – the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. The formidable Creeks were the fourth southern tribe. After treaty negotiations in the United States national capital of New York City, Creek chiefs agreed to the Treaty of New York in 1790.

The Treaty of New York established a process meant to assimilate Indians into the larger American society. The United States government called it a "plan for civilization." The United States government encouraged Indian tribes to settle in one place to raise livestock and grow crops. This would be a great change from Indian men hunting across their vast lands. With training, the United States government presumed Indians would become self-sufficient farmers. The assimilation plan ignored the fact that Indian tribes were more

than capable of clothing and feeding themselves. United States government officials disregarded how moving away from hunting would profoundly impact Indian societies and cultures.

The United States government had another goal for assimilating Indian tribes. If Indians settled on small farms and stopped hunting across all of their lands, they would need less land. As American settlers sought new land, the Indians might be more willing to negotiate treaties and sell their land. Then, the United States government could acquire Indian lands peacefully by signing treaties.

Washington and Knox governed to provide safety for native tribes while also assimilating them into American society. Their priority remained acquiring Indian lands to strengthen the United States economy. Reluctantly, the two men came to recognize, however, that it was the settlers pouring into the western frontier who controlled the national agenda regarding Native Americans and their land. By 1796, Washington had concluded that holding back all of the settlers had become nearly impossible. He wrote that "I believe scarcely anything short of a Chinese wall, or a line of troops, will restrain... the encroachment of settlers upon the Indian territory."²

Conclusion

Although Washington, Knox and other leaders struggled with how to deal honorably with Indian peoples, acquiring their land was never in doubt. Washington understood how important Indian lands were to the future growth of the United States. However, Washington and others felt an obligation to “civilize” Indian people, which the United States leaders considered to be honorable.

The main goal of Washington’s Native American policy was to purchase Indian lands by negotiating treaties. Then, the United States government would establish and maintain clear boundaries and regulate trade with Indian tribes. At the same, the United States government would encourage assimilation to transform Indian life and culture. Washington wanted to minimize conflict with Indian tribes. He would only resort to war if the Indians refused to sell their lands when Washington deemed the offer was reasonable. However, the majority of the federal budget during Washington’s presidency was spent on wars against Indians.

While Indians were of central importance for Washington during his presidency, Americans were one part of a larger world for Indian tribes. Indian tribes had their own trade networks and alliances among multiple nations. During Washington’s presidency, Indian power remained strong in many areas of North America but the United States had become more important to the Indian tribes who lived east of the Mississippi River. American settlers were streaming into Indian lands. According to historian Colin G. Calloway, Indian peoples “told their own stories, organized and lived their lives in distinct ways, and had different visions of America and its possibilities.”³

A Case Study: The Creeks

In the 1780s, the Creeks had negotiated three treaties with the state of Georgia. Georgia said that the Creeks had given up land in the treaties but the Creeks disagreed. The disagreement over the interpretation of these treaties made George Washington wary when he approached the Creeks about negotiating a treaty with the United States government.

The Creeks' leader was Alexander McGillivray, a mixed-race chief who spoke fluent English and was a strong negotiator. Twenty-eight Creek chiefs led by McGillivray accepted Washington's invitation to travel to New York City in 1790 to negotiate a new treaty.

The result was the Treaty of New York, which asserted United States authority. The state of Georgia could no longer try to make its own treaties with the Creeks. The treaty restored to the Creeks some of their lands and provided annual payments (annuities) for the rest of the land. The Creek chiefs agreed to place themselves under the protection of the United States. In return, the United States confirmed the rights of the Creeks to their land within the boundaries defined by the treaty.

The treaty also established a process meant to assimilate Indians into the larger American society. The United States government offered to provide livestock, agricultural tools, and four interpreters, who would be farm advisors, as part of its “plan of civilization.”

In August 1790, the Creek chiefs formally approved the Treaty of New York. However, the Treaty of New York failed to achieve its goals. The United States government could not stop the relentless flow of American settlers onto “protected” Indian lands without major federal intervention.

The “plan for civilization” went forward. In Creek society, women were in charge of farming. The women were willing to experiment with new crops. The United States government provided some Creek women with spinning wheels and looms and taught them how to spin and weave. They could produce their own cloth instead of buying cloth manufactured in Europe. Almost every Creek family already owned cattle, hogs, and horses. Some individuals became wealthy by becoming ranchers with large herds. The most Creek resistance came from curbing men’s hunting activities. In Creek society, hunting was important work to men, so they were offended when men were asked to farm, which was women’s work.

Creek opinion about the assimilation program was divided. The Creeks recognized that the United States government was encouraging assimilation in order to get Indian land. There was tension between Creeks who viewed assimilation as necessary for their cultural survival and those who viewed assimilation as destroying their culture.

The Creeks fought a civil war in 1813-1814. One side destroyed anything and anyone associated with the “plan of civilization.” They threw plows and looms into the rivers. They killed hogs, horses, and cattle, all symbols of America and the “plan of civilization.” Fearing an uprising, the United States government sent troops under Andrew Jackson to fight the Creek rebels, who were defeated at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in August 1814.

Notes:

1. "George Washington to The Commissioners for Negotiating a Treaty with the Southern Indians, 29 August 1789," *The Writings of George Washington*, 30:392 & 392N.
2. "George Washington to the Secretary of State, 1 July 1796," *The Writings of George Washington*, 35:112.
3. Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian World of George Washington* (New York: Oxford UP, 2018), 9.

Sources:

Calloway, Colin G. *The Indian World of George Washington*. New York: Oxford UP, 2018.

Encyclopedia of Alabama, “Plan of Civilization” by Robbie Ethridge of the University of Mississippi at <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/Article/h-1131>

Mount Vernon Digital Encyclopedia, “Native American Policy” by Richard Harless of George Mason University at <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/native-american-policy/>

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why was developing an Indian policy one of Washington's highest priorities when he became president?
2. How did Washington decide that the United States government would formally interact with Indian tribes?
3. Why did the northern tribes use force against Americans after approving a treaty? How did Washington respond to this violence?
4. Under the "plan for civilization," how did United States government officials encourage Indian tribes to change their societies? How might the United States benefit from the assimilation of Indian tribes?
5. Identify and explain at least three of Washington's goals as he developed Native American policy.
6. What did each side – the Creeks and the United States government – get in the Treaty of New York?
7. How was Creek society and culture affected by the "plan for civilization"?

Discussion Questions

- Some Indian tribes resisted the United States government's efforts to assimilate tribes. Other Indian tribes chose to transform their cultures in the ways encouraged by the United States government. For Indian tribes, what might have been reasons to assimilate or resist assimilation? Cite evidence from the reading to support your answer.
- American settlers continued to move onto "protected" Indian lands. How do you think this reality affected how Indian tribes and the United States government made decisions and interacted with each other?
- From the start of his presidency, Washington believed that Native American policy should be based on the "great principles of Justice and humanity." Did Washington's Native American policy live up to these principles?
- Who benefited from and who was harmed when the United States expanded? Was territorial expansion a zero-sum game?

ANSWERS: Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why was developing an Indian policy one of Washington's highest priorities when he became president?

The Northwest Ordinance opened lands to American settlers. Some tribes were using violence to protect their lands.

2. How did Washington decide that the United States government would formally interact with Indian tribes?

The President would make treaties with Indian tribes with the "advice and consent" of the Senate. Indian tribes were sovereign, foreign nations.

3. Why did the northern tribes use force against Americans after approving a treaty? How did Washington respond to this violence?

After the treaty, American settlers still continued to move onto Indian lands. So, the northern tribes used force. Washington responded by sending two armies in 1790 and 1791 and they were both defeated. It took a much larger U.S. army in 1794 to stop the resistance of northern tribes.

4. Under the "plan for civilization," how did United States government officials encourage Indian tribes to change their societies? How might the United States benefit from the assimilation of Indian tribes?

The United States government encouraged Indian tribes to settle in one place to raise livestock and grow crops. This would be a great change from Indian men hunting across their vast lands. If Indian tribes relied on farming, they would no longer need all of their expansive lands. United States government officials hoped that tribal representatives would be more willing to negotiate treaties and sell more of their lands to the United States government.

5. Identify and explain at least three of Washington's goals as he developed Native American policy.

Washington had many goals as he developed Native American policy.

- Acquire Indian lands by negotiating treaties.*
- Establish and maintain clear boundaries.*
- Regulate trade with Indian tribes.*
- Introduce agriculture to encourage assimilation.*
- Protect U.S. citizens. Resort to war against Indian tribes if necessary.*

6. What did each side – the Creeks and the United States government – get in the Treaty of New York?

Some the Creek lands were returned and they were compensated for the ceded land. The United States government confirmed the Creeks' right to their lands defined by the treaty. In return, the Creek chiefs agreed to be under the protection of the United States. The United States government encouraged the assimilation of the Creeks.

7. How was Creek society and culture affected by the "plan for civilization"?

Creek women experimented with new crops. The Creeks no longer needed to buy cloth because Creek women could spin and weave their own cloth, using spinning wheels and looms provided by the United States government. Some Creeks became wealthy ranchers with large herds. Most Creek men resisted giving up hunting and were offended that the United States government encouraged them to farm, which was considered women's work. The divided opinions about assimilation among the Creeks were one cause of the Creek Civil War of 1813-1814.

EXTENSION BACKGROUND

INFORMATION: PEACE MEDALS

Alliances with Native American tribes were extremely important to the young United States. George Washington's administration presented silver peace medals to Native American leaders as gestures of goodwill and attempts to cultivate loyalty to the U.S. government. The design of the 1789 peace medal featured a Native American chief and a classical warrior. Such gifts were prized possessions among some Native leaders, who often wore the medals around their necks as symbols of power, as depicted in the portrait of Seneca chief Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha).

Washington presented Red Jacket with a silver peace medal of the 1792 design, which replaced the classical warrior with a figure of Washington himself. The president, wearing a uniform and holding a sword by his side, gestures toward an Indian who smokes a peace pipe. The Indian's tomahawk lies at his feet. In the background, a man plows a field behind a team of oxen. There is a house in the distance. According to Colin G. Calloway, "the message was that Indians could attain peace and progress by giving up their weapons and their way of life." Almost every U.S. president from Washington in 1789 to Benjamin Harrison in 1889 had peace medals made and presented to Indian leaders (the exceptions being John Adams, who used the medals from Washington's second term, and William Henry Harrison).

Sources:

Calloway, Colin G. *The Indian World of George Washington*. New York: Oxford UP, 2018.

Mount Vernon Collections "The Material Culture of the Presidency: Indian Peace Medal and Red Jacket, Seneca War Chief" at <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/collections-holdings/the-material-culture-of-the-presidency/>

EXTENSION PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

Peace Medals Presented by President Washington

Secretary of War Henry Knox recommended that the new United States present Indian chiefs with silver medals, following the practice used by Britain, Spain, and France for decades. Washington presented peace medals to Indian leaders throughout his presidency. The medals were large, oval, silver discs with an engraving. The United States government officials expected that an Indian leader would wear the peace medal around his neck.

Below is a drawing of a 1792 peace medal that President Washington presented to Indian leaders. The arms of the United States were on the back of the medal. You will analyze the picture, featuring two central people, on the front of the medal.



Drawing of the 1792 engraved silver peace medal that Washington presented to Indian leaders

Source: *The Indian World of George Washington* by Colin G. Calloway, page 332

- Describe the picture on the front of the peace medal in 1-2 sentences. Explain what the picture shows as if you were describing the image to someone who has not seen it.
- Identify as many individual objects and people you can in the picture.
- What message do you think Washington and the U.S. government were trying to send when he presented peace medals to Indian leaders?
- How might Indian leaders have responded to the presentation of a peace medal? Different Indian leaders had different perspectives. What might have been the different ways that Indian leaders interpreted the meaning of a peace medal presented by President Washington?
- What purpose did these peace medals serve? What purpose do medals serve today?

Comparing Peace Medals Presented by Washington

Here are photographs of two engraved silver Peace Medals. The first medal from 1792 is of the same design as the drawing. The second is an earlier medal from 1789.

What similarities and differences do you see between the 1792 and 1789 peace medals?



George Washington engraved Peace Medal, 1792

Source: Engraved Peace Medal, Courtesy of the Gilcrease Museum, Kravis Discovery Center Collection, Tulsa, Oklahoma



George Washington, President, Peace Medal, 1789
Source: Peace Medal, 1789 given to Mount Vernon by the Stanley King Family Foundation

Teacher information about the peace medals

Alliances with Native American tribes were extremely important to the young United States. George Washington's administration presented silver peace medals to Native American leaders as gestures of goodwill and attempts to cultivate loyalty to the U.S. government. The design of the 1789 peace medal featured a Native American chief and a classical warrior. Such gifts were prized possessions among some Native leaders, who often wore the medals around their necks as symbols of power, as depicted in the portrait of Seneca chief Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha).

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Sources:

Calloway, Colin G. *The Indian World of George Washington*. New York: Oxford UP, 2018.

Mount Vernon Collections "The Material Culture of the Presidency: Indian Peace Medal and Red Jacket, Seneca War Chief" at <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/collections-holdings/the-material-culture-of-the-presidency/>

Portrait of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)

Sagoyewatha (1758? – 1830) was a chief of the Seneca, one of the Six Nations Iroquois (Haudenosaunee). Sagoyewatha, along with other Iroquois, fought on the British side during the Revolutionary War. He received the name “Red Jacket” from the bright red coats he often wore. After the formation of the United States, Sagoyewatha served as a negotiator with the United States government and he was known for his great oratory (speaking) skills. He resisted American settlers moving onto their ancestral lands and the assimilation efforts of the U.S. government to transform their customs and beliefs.

In March 1792, Sagoyewatha led an Iroquois delegation to meet with George Washington in the U.S. capital of Philadelphia. President Washington presented Sagoyewatha with a peace medal. Sagoyewatha supported the Americans during the War of 1812. But after participating in several battles, he proposed that Native Americans fighting on both sides withdraw from the war.

Sagoyewatha often wore the peace medal presented to him by Washington. The peace medal appears in the portrait of Sagoyewatha painted by Charles Bird King in Washington in 1828.

Source: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution at https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.94.108



Portrait of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)

Engraving by Albert Newsam, based on the 1828 painting by Charles Bird King

Source: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution at https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.94.108

- What were Sagoyewatha's goals when he negotiated with the United States government?
- What do you think might be some of the reasons why Sagoyewatha chose to often wear the peace medal presented to him by President Washington?
- What do you think the peace medal might have represented to Sagoyewatha?

Comparing Portraits of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)

The following portrait of Sagoyewatha was painted by Robert Walter Weir in New York City in 1828, the same year that Charles Bird King painted his portrait of Sagoyewatha.

What similarities and differences do you see between the two portraits? What do you think each artist was trying to convey in his portrait of Sagoyewatha?



Portrait of Red Jacket (Sagoyewatha)
Painted by Robert Walter Weir in 1828

Source: [New York Historical Society](https://emuseum.nyhistory.org), gift of Winthrop Chanler at <https://emuseum.nyhistory.org>