

board of indian commissioners

Book Concept: The Board of Indian Commissioners: A Legacy of Reform and Resistance

Book Title: The Board of Indian Commissioners: Shaping and Reshaping Native American Destiny

Target Audience: Anyone interested in American history, Native American studies, government policy, and social justice. The book will appeal to both academic and general readers.

Compelling Storyline/Structure:

The book will adopt a narrative-driven approach, weaving together the historical context of the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC) with compelling human stories. It won't be a dry recitation of facts, but will instead explore the complex interplay of personalities, policies, and cultural clashes that defined the BIC's impact. The book will be structured chronologically, examining the following phases:

1. Formation and Early Years (1869-1880s): Focus on the initial idealism, the diverse motivations of its members (both reformers and those with ulterior motives), and early successes and failures in implementing policies.
1. The Dawes Act and its Aftermath (1887-1900s): Deep dive into the devastating impact of allotment, analyzing its effects on tribal lands, sovereignty, and Native American communities. This section will include accounts from Native Americans who experienced the policy firsthand.
1. The Reformers and their Critics: Profiles of key figures on both sides of the debate surrounding the BIC's policies. This will highlight the internal struggles within the Board and the growing opposition from Native American leaders and activists.
1. The BIC and the Rise of Assimilation: Examining how the BIC's policies contributed to the broader assimilationist goals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
1. Legacy and Lasting Impact: Assessment of the BIC's long-term consequences for Native Americans, including the ongoing challenges related to land rights, sovereignty, and cultural

preservation. This section will also connect the BIC's legacy to contemporary Native American issues.

Ebook Description:

Uncover the Untold Story of a Powerful, Controversial Board that Shaped the Fate of Native Americans.

For too long, the history of Native Americans has been overshadowed by narratives of conquest and displacement. But behind the headlines of conflict and broken treaties lies a complex story of policy and power – a story centered around the Board of Indian Commissioners. Were they genuine reformers, or instruments of assimilation? Did their actions help or harm Native American tribes?

Are you frustrated by the lack of nuanced understanding of U.S. Indian policy? Do you yearn for a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped the modern Native American experience? Then this book is for you.

"The Board of Indian Commissioners: Shaping and Reshaping Native American Destiny" by [Your Name]

Introduction: Setting the historical stage and introducing the Board of Indian Commissioners.

Chapter 1: Formation and Early Years (1869-1880s)

Chapter 2: The Dawes Act and its Aftermath (1887-1900s)

Chapter 3: The Reformers and their Critics

Chapter 4: The BIC and the Rise of Assimilation

Chapter 5: Legacy and Lasting Impact

Conclusion: Reflecting on the enduring relevance of the BIC's legacy.

Article: The Board of Indian Commissioners: Shaping and Reshaping Native American Destiny

1. Introduction: Setting the Stage for the Board of Indian Commissioners

The late 19th century witnessed a pivotal period in the history of Native Americans in the United States. Marked by westward expansion, increasing conflict, and the growing pressure to "solve the Indian problem," the federal government grappled with how to manage its relationship with Indigenous populations. This tumultuous era birthed the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC), a body whose actions would profoundly shape the lives of Native Americans for generations to come. Established in 1869, the BIC was a unique entity – a quasi-governmental commission composed primarily of prominent reformers, philanthropists, and religious figures. Their goal: to oversee the administration of Native American affairs and guide the nation towards a "humane" solution to the "Indian question." However, the reality was far more complex, involving a tangled web of idealism, political maneuvering, and often, devastating consequences for Indigenous communities. This book delves into the story of the BIC, exploring its successes and failures, its impact on Native American

tribes, and its lasting legacy.

2. Chapter 1: Formation and Early Years (1869-1880s) - A Blend of Idealism and Pragmatism

The genesis of the BIC lay in a growing concern among reformers about the injustices faced by Native Americans under the existing system of Indian agents, who were often corrupt and self-serving. The idea was to create an oversight body composed of morally upright individuals committed to fairness and reform. The early members included notable figures like Henry Dawes, a senator known for his progressive views, and individuals affiliated with religious organizations like the Quakers and the Presbyterians.

Their initial efforts focused on improving the administration of Indian affairs, advocating for better treatment of Native Americans, and promoting education and religious conversion. However, the BIC's early years were marked by both successes and significant challenges. While some progress was made in areas like treaty negotiations and the provision of basic necessities, the underlying power dynamics remained largely unchanged. The inherent tension between the reformers' vision of "civilization" and the reality of Native American resistance created an early rift that would define the BIC's trajectory. This period also saw the beginning of the debate over assimilation versus tribal self-determination, a conflict that would shape the course of the BIC's policies.

3. Chapter 2: The Dawes Act and its Aftermath (1887-1900s) - The Devastation of Allotment

The Dawes Act of 1887, often hailed as a landmark piece of legislation, marked a turning point in the BIC's history and had catastrophic effects on Native American tribes. The Act aimed to break up tribal lands into individual allotments, with the surplus land being sold to white settlers. The idea behind this policy was to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society by encouraging them to adopt individual land ownership and farming practices.

The BIC, initially supportive of this policy, played a key role in its implementation. However, the Act's consequences were devastating. It led to the loss of millions of acres of tribal lands, the erosion of tribal sovereignty, and the disruption of traditional ways of life. Many Native Americans were ill-equipped for farming and were unable to retain their land. This policy exacerbated existing inequalities and set the stage for further marginalization and dispossession.

4. Chapter 3: The Reformers and their Critics - Internal Divisions and Growing Resistance

The BIC was not a monolithic entity; its members held differing views on the best approach to dealing with Native Americans. While some were genuine reformers who sought to protect Native American rights, others held assimilationist views, believing that the best way to "help" Native Americans was to force them to abandon their traditional cultures and adopt the ways of white society. This internal division within the BIC itself led to internal conflicts and hampered its effectiveness.

Furthermore, the BIC faced growing opposition from Native American leaders and activists who recognized the inherent injustices of its policies. The resistance ranged from peaceful protests and

legal challenges to armed conflict, demonstrating the limits of the Board's authority and the growing resentment towards government policies. This chapter highlights the various voices and perspectives, exploring the complex dynamics between reformers, assimilationists, and Native American resistance.

5. Chapter 4: The BIC and the Rise of Assimilation - A Policy of Cultural Erasure

The BIC's policies played a significant role in the broader assimilationist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Assimilation aimed to erase Native American cultures and identities, forcing them to adopt the customs and beliefs of white American society. This involved policies such as the establishment of Indian boarding schools, where Native American children were forcibly separated from their families and subjected to cultural indoctrination.

The BIC's involvement in this process was indirect yet significant. The Board often championed policies that, although ostensibly aimed at improving Native American lives, inadvertently or intentionally contributed to the erasure of their cultures. By emphasizing individual land ownership and agriculture, for example, the BIC undermined the communal land-based systems that were integral to many Native American societies.

6. Chapter 5: Legacy and Lasting Impact - A Complex and Contentious Heritage

The Board of Indian Commissioners ceased to exist in 1933, but its legacy continues to resonate in the ongoing challenges faced by Native American communities today. The effects of its policies, particularly the Dawes Act, are still evident in the loss of tribal lands, the disruption of traditional ways of life, and the ongoing struggles for self-determination and sovereignty.

The BIC's legacy remains a complex and contentious topic. While some acknowledge the good intentions of some of its members and their efforts to improve the lives of Native Americans, many criticize the Board for its role in promoting assimilationist policies that led to cultural destruction and the dispossession of Native American people. This chapter explores the ongoing discussions and debates surrounding the BIC's impact, connecting its historical context to contemporary Native American issues.

Conclusion:

The story of the Board of Indian Commissioners is a crucial component in understanding the complex and often tragic history of Native Americans in the United States. It highlights the inherent contradictions of reform movements, the devastating consequences of well-intentioned but misguided policies, and the persistent struggle for justice and self-determination. By examining the BIC's journey, we gain valuable insights into the power dynamics between government and Indigenous peoples, the lasting impact of colonial policies, and the ongoing fight for cultural preservation and recognition.

FAQs:

1. What was the primary goal of the Board of Indian Commissioners? To oversee the administration of Native American affairs and to implement policies aimed at improving their lives.
1. Who were the key members of the BIC? Prominent reformers, philanthropists, and religious figures like Henry Dawes.
1. What was the Dawes Act, and what was its impact? It aimed to break up tribal lands into individual allotments; it led to devastating land loss and cultural disruption.
1. How did the BIC contribute to the assimilation of Native Americans? Through policies that undermined traditional ways of life and promoted the adoption of white American culture.
1. What was the role of religious organizations in the BIC? Several religious groups played a significant role, often promoting religious conversion and education.
1. Did the BIC face any opposition to its policies? Yes, both from within the Board itself and from Native American communities.
1. What is the lasting legacy of the BIC? The ongoing challenges related to land rights, sovereignty, and cultural preservation.
1. What are some of the ethical dilemmas raised by the BIC's actions? The tension between well-intentioned reform and the violation of Native American rights.
1. How can we learn from the history of the BIC to address contemporary issues of social justice? By critically examining the consequences of well-intentioned policies and ensuring the meaningful participation of affected communities.

Related Articles:

1. The Dawes Act: A Legacy of Loss and Dispossession: Explores the details of the Dawes Act and its long-term effects.
2. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School: A Crucible of Assimilation: Examines the role of boarding schools in the assimilation process.
3. Henry Dawes and the Shaping of Indian Policy: A biographical analysis of a key figure in the BIC.
4. Native American Resistance to Assimilation: Highlights various forms of resistance to government policies.
5. The Role of Religion in Indian Affairs: Explores the involvement of religious organizations in shaping policy.
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7. Land Claims and the Legacy of the Dawes Act: Focuses on the legal battles over land rights.
8. The Fight for Native American Self-Determination: Explores the ongoing struggle for autonomy and cultural preservation.
9. Contemporary Native American Issues and the BIC's Legacy: Connects historical patterns to modern challenges.

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