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MERIAM REPORT ON INDIAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE SURVEY OF CONDITIONS OF THE INDIANS IN THE U.S



This collection comprises two sets of documents that helped the response to 40 years of failed Native American policies. The first is the full text of the report entitled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, better known as the *Meriam Report*. The second comprises the 41-part report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs detailing the conditions of life and the effects of policies and programs enacted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on Native Americans. Both of these collections provide unique documentary insights into many major tribes: Sioux, Navaho, Quapaw, Chickasaw, Apache, Pueblo, Ute, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kickapoo, Klamath, and many others.

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Content: 24,382 images

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Detailed Description:

The Dawes Act (or General Allotment Act) of 1887, split up into small parcels for individual owners, tribal lands previously held in common by Indian nations. The Federal government's premise behind the Dawes Act was to encourage self-sufficient farming by Native Americans. But, there were abuses with the Dawes Act and some land parcels were sold to non-Indians and Native American owners lost their land due to poverty and their inability to pay taxes or other debts.

Forty years after the implementation of the Dawes Act, the Secretary of the Interior ordered an investigation into its consequences, and in 1928 the 160-page *Meriam Report* declared that allotment had been a disaster for Native American communities. Non-Indians had acquired almost half of all Indian lands in the U.S., and poverty, disease, and anger had all skyrocketed on reservations.

Meriam Report

The *Meriam Report* was a survey of conditions on Indian Reservations in twenty-six states. It was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and supervised by Lewis Meriam of the Institute

for Government Research (Brookings Institution). The survey team consisted of ten experts in various fields, including sociology, family life and women's activities, education, history, law, agriculture, health, and research methods.

Titled *The Problem of Indian Administration*, the *Meriam Report* was called the most important treatise on Indian affairs since Helen Hunt Jackson's *Century of Dishonor* in 1881. The idea of commissioning a study of Indian administration began in 1913, when Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs Frederick H. Abbott suggested to the Board of Indian Commissioners that the government seek advice on how to make the Indian Office more efficient. In 1925 two members of the board, Warren K. Moorehead and Hugh Scott, offered separate plans for the office's reorganization. Others on the board urged the improvement of Indian health. Ultimately Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work proposed that the Rockefeller Foundation support a survey by the Institute for Government Research.

Five years after the *Meriam Report*, the Federal government began overhauling its Native American policy with the Wheeler-Howard Act (Indian Reorganization Act of 1934). Though far from perfect, and hampered in its application by the nationwide economic depression, it was the Federal government's attempt to reform the worst outrages and improve the most dramatic hardships described in the Report.

Scholars disagree over whether or not the Meriam Report was a harbinger of the Indian New Deal. Some regard it as a precursor of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Margaret Szasz called it "the symbol of a definitive response to the failure of fifty years of assimilation policy." But Donald Critchlow claimed that Meriam and his associates were efficiency experts and that their recommendations contrasted sharply with the radical program of John Collier and the American Indian Defense Association (AIDA). The AIDA wanted to end individual ownership of land and to move toward tribal ownership by restoring allotments to the reservations from which they had been drawn. Rather than call for an end to allotments, the *Meriam Report* said allotments should be made with extreme conservatism.

Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States

Following the release of the *Meriam Report* in 1928, the Senate ordered full hearings in an effort to figure out how to fix the worst of the Native American conditions presented in the *Report*. Broadly speaking, these conditions included: charges of impropriety by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Indian land matters; reported conditions of poverty and disease among Indians; and the apparent lack of success in acculturating Indian people into the rest of American society.

Lasting 15 years and totaling almost 20,000 pages, this 41-part report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs details the conditions of life and the effects of policies and programs enacted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on Native Americans. It provides insights into many major tribes: Sioux, Navaho, Quapaw, Chickasaw, Apache, Pueblo, Ute, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kickapoo, Klamath, and many others.