Prudence and Moderation: George H. W. Bush and Federal Indian Policy

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On November 11, 1992, nearly 3,000 people gathered at the Little Bighorn National Battlefield in southern Montana to observe Veterans Day. In what one reporter described as a “solemn but jubilant ceremony,” an assembly of Sioux and Cheyenne singers, dancers, and drummers honored the deeds of warriors past and present—particularly those who had fought and defeated George Armstrong Custer’s 7th Cavalry over a century earlier. In 1881, just five years after Custer’s “Last Stand,” the War Department ordered a thirteen-foot-tall granite obelisk be erected at the 765-acre “Custer Battlefield” to memorialize the soldiers of the 7th Cavalry, but the Indian role (and perspective) remained silent and unacknowledged by the majority society. During the 1960s, Native American men and women called for the battlefield to be renamed and a monument erected to recognize the hundred or so Sioux and Cheyenne killed at the Little Bighorn. Their efforts came to fruition in February 1991 when Rep. Ben Nighthorse Campbell introduced legislation (H.R. 847 and H.R. 848) to change the battle site’s name and to erect a second memorial. Opposition to both pieces of legislation was surprisingly intense. Critics of the name change included Rep. Ron Marlenee (R) of Montana, who threatened to oppose future Indian appropriations if the legislation passed, and Bill Wells of the Custer Battlefield and Historical Museum Association, who likened the proposed memorial to building a monument to the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. George Armstrong Custer III—a great grandnephew of the colonel—called the name change “just one more slap in the face” (to Custer) and threatened to remove family artifacts from the park if the re-designation effort succeeded. Despite such pressures, Congress approved legislation on November 25, 1991, establishing a new memorial at the “Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument” that would honor the Indian participants in the battle. A little over two weeks later, President George H.W. Bush—a Republican not known for sympathy to—or interest in—Native American issues signed the controversial legislation into law (P.L. 201-201) a decision that the Wyoming Indian Affairs Council hailed as “a big step in the efforts to further unify the crucial relationships between Native Americans, and Non-Indian People.”

Symbolic gestures such as the Little Bighorn episode were an important component of Bush’s Indian policy. They were inexpensive—which was an important consideration to a politician who had promised to rein in government spending and to reduce budget deficits, and they provided opportunities to demonstrate and publicize the Bush administration’s concern for Native Americans. Education was also a critical component of Bush’s Indian policy, an issue that Bush spoke frequently about while campaigning for the presidency. Just weeks after taking office, in fact, Bush appeared before a joint session of Congress to discuss his administration’s goals and declared his desire to become known as the “Education President.” Beyond symbolic gestures and an emphasis on education, Bush’s Indian policy was largely consistent with those of his predecessor (and political partner) in the White House. Like Ronald Reagan, Bush sought to expand tribal self-government and to make self-determination a reality—especially through the mechanism of expanded tribal contracting. The Bush administration’s policies regarding Indian land claims likewise mirrored those of Reagan, as did modest efforts to improve coordination and cooperation among the dozens of government departments and agencies that provided services for Indian communities. Bush’s plans to energize reservation economies also drew on precedents established during the Reagan years, and the proliferation of reservation-based high stakes gambling establishments accelerated during Bush’s presidency.
These Indian policy continuities developed despite the differences in political philosophies and leadership styles between Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Scholars generally interpret Bush’s political leanings as more moderate than those of Reagan and more in tune with the Republican Party’s center. Bush was more a conservative moderate, writes biographer Herbert S. Parmet, than a moderate conservative. A product of the eastern progressive (or Rockefeller) wing of the Republican Party, Bush’s politics rested on a foundation of duty, fair play, and noblesse oblige. Unlike many Reaganites, Bush did not instinctively distrust government nor subscribe to the notion that government activism was responsible for the nation’s many problems. While certainly dedicated to fiscal responsibility, traditional American values, and suspicious of radical change, Bush was more pragmatist than ideologue. In his inaugural address, Bush called for compromise, harmony, tolerance, and “an easy-goingness about each other’s attitudes and way of life.” As president, he strove to “use power to help people” and supported a more expansive government role in environmental protection, civil rights, education and an increase of tax credits for families with children. Instead of mobilizing the nation to continue—if not expand upon—the so-called “Reagan Revolution,” Bush declared that the guide for his presidency would be “the hope of a saint: In crucial things, unity; in important things, diversity; in all things, generosity.” Such pronouncements were inconsistent, however, with the political reality of the time. Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate, partisan bickering was on the rise, and Bush had publicly pledged to bring down budget deficits without raising taxes. The president’s ability to reconcile his desire to be generous with his promise to be frugal would have significant implications for Native Americans.


In federal Indian policy, the most significant achievement of the post WWII era had been the triumph of tribal self-determination as the solution to the stubborn and multifaceted problems facing Native communities. Self-determination broadened Indian participation in and control over the government programs and services that touched their lives, helped build greater pride and resourcefulness within Indian communities, and promised increased program effectiveness and efficiency since Indians would be managing them rather than government bureaucrats. As President Nixon declared in his July 8, 1970 special message to Congress, the federal government “needs Indian energies and Indian leadership if its assistance is to be effective in improving the conditions of Indian life.”

While scholars still debate the specific origin of the self-determination policy and who/what deserves credit for advancing it, most would agree that it emerged during the 1960s as an alternative to the much-despised policy of termination. In effect during the 1950s and early 1960s, the termination policy (H.C.R. 108) sought to end the government’s trust responsibilities (or legal and moral obligations) to Native Americans on the pretext that doing so would “liberate” them from the government’s stifling paternalism and hasten Indian assimilation into the majority society. Between 1954 and 1962, the federal government terminated 114 rancherias, bands, and tribes, severely weakening tribal governments, shattering reservation economies, and leaving entire communities hopeless, helpless, and furious at what they considered the betrayal of sacred treaty promises. Both the Johnson and Nixon administrations responded to the devastation wrought by termination by publicly repudiating the policy and declaring self-determination as the guiding principle of their respective Indian policies. The passage in 1975 of Public Law 93-638—the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA)—formalized this new direction in Indian affairs, ensuring greater Native American control over the administration of government programs and services to tribal communities.
In the years immediately following passage of ISDEAA, federal Indian policy went into a holding pattern of sorts as the country grappled with the aftershocks of Watergate, the Vietnam War, economic uncertainty, and a growing white backlash against minority civil rights gains. When former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter took up residence in the White House in January 1977, Indian affairs were not a critical priority. Carter’s chief concern was reorganizing government and reducing its costs by rooting out waste, inefficiency, and duplication. According to historian Dean Kotlowski, the Carter Administration “approached Indian issues unenthusiastically” and although the president endorsed the policy of self-determination, he never issued a major policy statement to that effect. When career bureaucrats in the BIA and their allies in Congress sought to stall implementation of ISDEAA by extending the timeline by which tribes could take control over government programs and services (Indians, they argued, needed to develop a civil service first) the president did little to intervene. An article appearing in Indian Country Today characterized Carter’s failure to reign in the bureaucracy and to allow meaningful change to occur in Indian affairs to his moral rectitude… “he remained a gentleman when the scars of a warrior would have become him more.”

Intent on streamlining government to improve efficiency and cut costs, the Carter administration sought to reduce expenditures for Indian programs, to transfer Indian education from Interior to the newly established Department of Education, and to replace the office of commissioner of Indian affairs with an Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian affairs. Native Americans were not impressed. While many applauded Carter’s support for the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (which helped restore and protect Indian cultural practices) and the Indian Child Welfare Act (which provided tribal governments with a stronger voice in child custody proceedings) substantial numbers of Native Americans did not believe that the administration had served their needs very effectively. The results of the 1980 presidential election suggested that most Americans felt the same way.

Like his predecessor, Ronald Reagan took office intent on cutting costs, but while Carter sought to reduce expenditures as a means of streamlining and reorganizing government, Reagan did so to advance the ideological goal of devolving power from Washington, D.C. to state and local governments—the so-called New Federalism. Native American leaders remained wary—any talk of limiting the federal government’s role in society and strengthening the power of states sounded ominously like termination—despite Reagan’s campaign promises to respect treaties and to promote tribal self-determination. For Reagan, there was no inconsistency. “Instead of fostering and encouraging self-government,” he declared in his January 24, 1983 statement on Indian policy, “federal policies have by and large inhibited the political and economic development of the tribes. Excessive regulation and self-perpetuating bureaucracy have stifled local decision making, thwarted Indian control of Indian resources, and promoted dependency rather than self-sufficiency.” To realize the concept of self-government, Reagan argued, tribes had “to reduce their dependence on federal funds by providing a greater percentage of the cost of their self-government.”

The resulting budget cuts to Indian-related programs (education and human services in particular), were painful. Reagan’s fiscal 1982 budget called for a $136.9 million decrease in Indian Health Service (IHS) funding, a $72.9 million cut in BIA funding, and an end to funding for the construction of reservation water and sanitary facilities. Funds for public service employment (e.g. jobs created under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act and similar programs in the Economic Development Administration) were also cut, as were allocations to Indian education. While administration officials justified these measures as necessary sacrifices during difficult economic times, tribal officials viewed the reductions as the ultimate breach of trust or as what one scholar described “a callous form of termination by accountants.”
In keeping with Reagan’s perception that the best way to advance Indian self-determination was through economic self-sufficiency and greater control over their own affairs, the administration moved in ad hoc fashion to provide tribal governments the means to do so.

In his January 24, 1983 statement on Indian policy, Reagan listed several avenues of potential reservation economic development: manufacturing, agribusiness and modern technology, fishing, livestock, arts and crafts, and energy resources (coal, oil, gas, uranium). The free market, he believed, would provide tribes the capital necessary to develop these resources. Adopting virtually the same language as the Nixon administration had used a decade earlier, Reagan encouraged a three-way partnership between tribes, private sector businesses, and the federal government. To help promote this partnership and to identify obstacles to reservation economic development, Reagan issued an executive order establishing a Presidential Commission on Reservation Economies. Its November 1984 report singled out several legal and governmental obstacles to reservation economic development, offered recommendations on how to remove them, and provided suggestions to promote private sector participation in the development and growth of reservation economies.13

Reagan’s advocacy of an expanded private sector role in bolstering weak reservation economies had mixed results. The “creative agreements” and “joint ventures” between tribes and private businesses (such as the 1982 Indian Mineral Development Act that permitted tribes to enter agreements for the disposition of tribal mineral resources) help explain modest development on some reservations, but also the decline in the amount of tribal lands used by Indians (and subsequent increase in the exploitation of tribal lands by non-Indians). A self-declared champion of free enterprise, deregulation, and states’ rights, Reagan signed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, which acknowledged and limited the inherent authority of tribes to operate gaming enterprises on Indian lands and required that gaming revenues be used to promote the economic development and welfare of the tribes. Indian-owned gaming operations spread rapidly in the 1990s, but the social and economic effects of casino gambling in Indian country remain mixed. While some reservations experienced significant job creation and invested gambling proceeds to support tribal governments, social welfare services, and tribal language programs, they also reported a spike in auto thefts, larceny, violent crime, and bankruptcies. Certainly beneficial to some tribes, casino gambling as the “solution” to the poor economic conditions endemic to Indian country remains, for want of a better word, a gamble.14

The Reagan administration was more successful at promoting self-determination via contracting, bolstering the “government-to-government” relationship between the United States and Indian tribes, and convincing Congress to formally repudiate termination. The ability of tribes to contract with the federal government for the administration of programs and services had stalled under Jimmy Carter, but with Reagan’s support, Congress amended the contracting system to remove bureaucratic obstacles and to cover indirect costs. The new contracting system also required that the Secretary of the Interior institute a five-year Tribal Self-Governance Project that permitted tribes to receive block grants with the power to plan, conduct and administer programs formerly provided by the federal government.15

To give Native Americans a stronger voice in Washington, D.C. and to improve the federal government’s administration of Indian Affairs, President Lyndon B. Johnson had established the National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO) in March 1968. Chaired by the vice president and including executive department heads and six presidentially appointed Indian leaders, the NCIO provided Native Americans unprecedented access to the top decision makers in the executive branch of the federal government. Having top officials in the same room also facilitated interdepartmental cooperation and coordination.
The NCIO staff, meanwhile, worked behind the scenes arranging meetings between tribal leaders and federal officials and pushing agencies to expand opportunities for tribal communities. For a variety of reasons, President Ford discontinued the NCIO and federal officials struggled to find an alternative.\textsuperscript{16} Under Carter, Indian-related matters fell to an assistant to the president for domestic affairs or to the Secretary of the Interior. Reagan’s solution was not any better. In his January 24, 1983, Indian Policy, Reagan announced that he was “moving the tribal government contact” to the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and requested Congressional authorization to expand membership on the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations to include a representative of tribal governments. Lastly, he tasked his Cabinet Council on Human Resources to act as a “review and coordination mechanism” to ensure that Indian-related programs were cost effective and consistent with the goal of encouraging tribal self-government.\textsuperscript{17} None of these \textit{ad hoc} remedies did a very effective job replacing the NCIO and the problems of poor interdepartmental cooperation and coordination continued.

Finally, the Reagan administration advanced the cause of self-determination by calling on Congress to “expressly and formally” repudiate the termination policy declared in H.C.R. 108. Although discredited and implicitly rejected by the 1975 Indian Self Determination Act, the “lingering threat” posed by termination, Reagan argued, “continues to create among Indian people an apprehension the United States may not in the future honor the unique relationship between the Indian people and the federal government.” On April 28, 1988, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled Schools Act, which included a provision that repudiated and rejected “House Concurrent Resolution 108 of the 83d Congress and any policy of unilateral termination of Federal relations with any Indian nation.”\textsuperscript{18}

Scholars continue to debate the merits of the Reagan administration’s Indian policies.\textsuperscript{19} The president’s desire to reduce government spending was borne out in the steep cuts to Indian-related programs and services, while his espousal of the New Federalism was consistent with his administration’s support for tribal self-determination via expanded contracting, block grants, and the Tribal Self Governance Project. Reagan’s promotion of entrepreneurial capitalism, private investment, and the free market were reflected in his policies for reservation economic development. While many aspects of these policies were flawed to some degree, Reagan’s most enduring legacy may have been to show that “the ideas of conservatism and those of Indian self-determination were not always at odds.”\textsuperscript{20}

**Candidate George H.W. Bush and Federal Indian Policy**

Like Carter and Reagan, George H.W. Bush entered the Oval Office with virtually no hands-on experience in Indian affairs or close personal relationships with Native Americans.\textsuperscript{21} According to George Pierre Castile, as vice president in the Ronald Reagan administration, Bush “had no active role in Indian matters, nor had he when in Congress or in any of his other governmental positions.”\textsuperscript{22} Not surprisingly, as a candidate for the presidency in 1988, Bush did not expend a great deal of time or effort courting the Indian vote. Instead, he echoed the platitudes common to politicians running for office in either party. He promised, for example, to consult closely with Indian leaders before making policy changes, to “respect and honor all treaties, laws and court decisions which establish the unique political status for American Indians,” and to settle “all just claims as rapidly as possible.” In other areas, Bush relied upon policy prescriptions dating back to the Nixon era. To address endemic poverty on reservations, for example, Bush pledged to encourage partnerships between tribal governments and the private sector and to offer businesses federal incentives to locate on reservations. To improve quality of life, Bush stated he would “work for progress” in expanding Indian access to high quality health care, particularly for women and children. Declaring education his number one priority, he vowed to “help
native American parents take charge of the educational system on the reservation just as parents do elsewhere” and to expand government support for Indian higher education. Native American leaders likely had mixed reactions to Bush’s professed support for tribal self-determination and “American Indian self-government” while simultaneously declaring his intention to “emphasize the individual rights and economic well-being of Native Americans on or off the reservation” and the “responsibilities of tribal governments to their members.” For Indian leaders, government mandates involving the individual rights of tribal members constituted meddling in the internal affairs of tribes and violated the spirit of tribal self-determination and sovereignty. Bush’s interest in emphasizing the responsibilities of tribal governments to their members also likely rang hollow given the federal government’s previous support for terminating its responsibilities to Native Americans. 23

The Draft Executive Order on Indian Policy and White House Task Force

Given Bush’s history of disengagement in matters relating to Native Americans, his leadership style, his administration’s other priorities, and serving at a time with Congress firmly in opposition control, it should come as little surprise that the Bush administration’s Indian policies evinced a limited agenda that drew heavily on precedents reaching back nearly two decades. In a draft executive order dated June 19, 1989, Bush cited Nixon’s and Reagan’s Indian policy declarations as the foundations for his own. The purpose of the proposed executive order, in fact, was “to implement and extend the two previous policies” and to ensure that federal departments and agencies recognized and acted on the principles of self-determination and the government-to-government relationship that existed between federal and tribal governments. That being the case, the document supports the view that Bush’s Indian policy was consistent with those of his Republican predecessors, thereby confirming the growing consensus on the policy of self-determination. 24

The draft executive order also sought to clarify the “unique political relationship between the United States and Indian tribes.” On the one hand, tribal governments were sovereign entities with primary authority and responsibility over Indian country, yet federal agencies still carried out many tribal governmental functions (law enforcement, development and management of natural resources, health care, education) which undermined the concept of self-government. Consequently, Bush’s draft order declared, “as far as possible, the federal government shall take appropriate actions to move away from this role” while simultaneously meeting “the highest standards in fulfilling its trust responsibility to tribes and their members.” 25

Bush’s draft order also likened the federal government-to-tribal government relationship to that which existed between the federal government and state governments. While acknowledging that tribal authority over Indian country was based on inherent sovereignty and was not in any way derived from states, the document declared “tribes should play the same role in a federal-tribal partnership in Indian country that states traditionally play in the federal-state partnership.” Like states, tribes should be eligible for grants and other types of assistance, and like states, tribes could—and should—assume delegable responsibilities. To promote improved tribal-state relationships, the federal government would “facilitate communication and promote cooperation and mutual consideration” among tribal governments and “neighboring entities” including states, other tribes, and local governments. 26

For reasons that remain unclear, Bush chose not to issue the executive order outlining his Indian policy. Native Americans certainly would have appreciated the administration’s affirmation of self-determination and the government-to-government relationship, but would have likely taken issue with
the equivocation on the federal government’s trust responsibilities and the administration’s vow to “take appropriate actions to move away from this role,” which sounded ominously like termination. They also would have rejected Bush’s comparison of the relationship of tribal governments to the federal government as akin to states. Tribal governments, Indian leaders insisted, were sovereign nations and the government-to-government relationship was between sovereign nations. Equating the sovereignty of Indian nations to that of states placed them in an unacceptable position of deference and dependence and did not square with their interpretation of the appropriate government-to-government relationship. Finally, there is no evidence that Bush administration consulted with Indian leaders in drafting the executive order, which likewise called into question its commitment to tribal sovereignty and a genuine government-to-government relationship.

Bush’s draft executive order on federal Indian policy likewise revealed the nagging problem that accompanied the dissolution of the National Council on Indian Opportunity in 1974—the problem of poor interdepartmental cooperation and coordination among the twelve federal departments and agencies that oversaw some 73 programs for Native Americans. The Carter and Reagan administrations had attempted to accomplish this difficult task via the creation of ad hoc work groups comprised primarily of White House aides. A report compiled by the National Commission for Employment Policy in January 1989 declared that “overlap and fragmentation” characterized federal departments and agencies serving Indian communities and that past efforts at interdepartmental coordination had failed “in part because of ‘turf’ conflicts within the federal program system.”

Bush’s response to the critically important and complex problem of poor interdepartmental coordination and cooperation was in keeping with what Reagan had done six years earlier. In 1983, Reagan had moved Indian matters from the Office of Public Liaison to the Office of Intergovernmental Relations. When Bush became president, he appointed Mary McClure—Special Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs—as the administration’s point person on Indian Affairs. In late June 1989, McClure convened an initial meeting of a “White House Task Force on Indian Affairs” attended by representatives from departments and agencies with Indian-related responsibilities. Policy and program issues they planned to review included ways to encourage reservation economic development, protecting tribal resources, Indian land claims, and improving the coordination and effectiveness of Indian-related programs and services. McClure followed up with a “Survey of Interagency Indian services” to find out what programs federal agencies were offering Native Americans and the key contact in each.

This rather unimaginative and modest start stalled out quickly. McClure had to go on extended leave due a family emergency and the task force drifted. At its September meeting, task force members (described by one participant as an “unstructured group of interdepartmental people involved in a task force on Native Americans) spent an hour and a half discussing the need to get organized and to draft an agenda for the next meeting. By January 1990, Bush’s White House Task Force on Indian Affairs was dead. In a memorandum dated January 23, 1990, Associate Director for Domestic Policy Daniel R. Heimbach described the task force as “a very informal group with no charter, no policy authority, and no history to speak of.” Debra R. Anderson, the Director of White House Intergovernmental Affairs (and McClure’s supervisor), meanwhile, was “seeking to discourage expectations about the group and would in fact like to disband it.”

The early demise of the task force along with periodic calls for the president to meet personally with Indian leaders led to a brief conference in the Roosevelt room on April 17, 1991 between the president and a delegation of seventeen tribal leaders. Also present were Bush chief of staff John Sununu, Senators
Daniel Inouye and John McCain, Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, and several White House aides. Chief Oren Lyons (Onondaga) presented Bush with a list of critical issues facing Native Americans and made four requests:

1. A formal statement from the President reaffirming the government-to-government relationship
2. Designation of a White House senior staff member to serve as liaison with Indian tribes
3. Prompt discussions with tribes on how best to carry out the government-to-government relationship
4. Annual meetings of tribal leaders with the President

Although the meeting with Bush lasted only about 15 minutes, the Indian leaders believed it was significant and would send a strong signal to the federal bureaucracy about the importance that Bush attached to the government-to-government relationship. Menominee tribal chairman Glenn Miller believed the visit signaled “the dawn of a new era” in Indian relations with the administration. Bush had appeared receptive to their concerns, willing to listen, and had promised he would act on their requests.31

True to his word, on June 14, 1991, Bush authorized the release of a brief policy statement formally reaffirming the government-to-government relationship between federal and tribal governments. The Reagan-Bush administration had recognized and reaffirmed that relationship in its January 24, 1983 policy statement, Bush declared, and it remained the “the cornerstone of the Bush-Quayle administration’s policy of fostering tribal self-government and self-determination.” Similar to Bush’s June 1989 draft executive order, the statement waffled on tribal sovereignty, referring to Indian nations
as “quasi-sovereign domestic dependent nations” and as sitting “in positions of dependent sovereignty along with the other governments that compose the family that is America.” The statement also mentioned the creation of an Office of Self-Governance within the Department of the Interior that would design “creative ways” to expand contracting and transfer “decision-making powers over tribal government functions from the Department to tribal governments.” The Interior Department would likewise house a new Office of American Indian Trust to oversee its management of tribal resources and to ensure that “no Department action will be taken that will adversely affect or destroy those physical assets” held in trust for the tribes. Lastly, the statement announced Bush’s designation of a senior staffer—the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs—as his personal liaison with all Indian tribes.

Although addressing three of the four requests made by tribal leaders at the April 17, 1991 meeting in the Roosevelt room (annual meetings were apparently out of the question), Bush’s brief policy statement did not create much of a stir in Indian country nor in Congress. Senators Inouye and McCain asked that the statement be printed in the Congressional Record and publicly thanked the president for his leadership, but the policy was little more than a confirmation of the status quo. Many aspects of Bush’s Indian policy (contracting, land claims) also showed considerable continuity with the Indian policy advanced during the Reagan years—but leaders generally receive only modest (if any) credit when preserving the status quo is their primary objective. The Bush administration, as we will see, enjoyed its greatest Indian policy successes in areas (education, cultural preservation, federal funding Indian programs and services, and symbolic gestures such as designating 1992 as both the “Year of the American Indian” and the “Year of Reconciliation between American Indians and Non-Indians”) that did not closely mirror the policies of Reagan-Bush.

Contracting

In regards to advancing self-determination via tribal contracting, Bush built upon the successes of the Reagan administration. The Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975 had empowered tribes to contract with the federal government for control of programs and services provided by the Indian Health Service and the BIA. The Carter administration had done virtually nothing to promote this, but Ronald Reagan embraced contracting as a means of empowering tribal governments while reducing federal expenditures by shifting the administrative costs of these programs on to the tribes. During Reagan’s first term, the volume of contracted federal services grew from $203 million in 1980 to $315 million in 1984. In his final year in office, Reagan signed legislation that lifted restrictions on contracting and provided tribes with additional funds to cover indirect administrative costs. The legislation also called on the Secretary of the Interior to establish a five-year Tribal Self-Governance Project that permitted tribes to receive block grants to administer programs and services formerly provided by the federal government.

The Bush administration expanded tribal contracting even further. Despite lingering concerns among some tribal leaders that contracting was a government ploy to reduce funding levels, in July 1990, Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan announced new contracting agreements with the Quinault Indian Nation of Washington ($3.9 million), the Lummi Indian Nation of Washington ($2.2 million), the Jamestown Klallam Indian Nation of Washington ($687,000), the Hoopa Valley Indian Tribe of California ($2 million), the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma ($6.1 million), and the Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa of Minnesota ($267,000). Lujan also announced the creation of a Self-Governance Demonstration Council to oversee tribal contracting efforts and to assist “pioneering tribal governments exploring a new path to tribal self-determination.”
Bush supported passage of the Tribal Self-Governance Demonstration Project Act, which extended the contracting period for tribes from five to eight years, increased the number of tribes participating in the project from twenty to thirty, and expanded the types of programs and services eligible for contracts. After signing the legislation into law on December 4, 1991, Bush declared that the demonstration project had been “an important step in Indian self-determination, in improving the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the United States, and in helping Indian tribes develop independence.” Leaders from participating tribes agreed. The contracting effort provided them “greatly increased flexibility in directing resources toward tribal needs and priorities” and their people now exhibited “a much greater level of interest in tribal council sessions.” Joe De La Cruz, chairman of the Quinault Indian Nation, declared that the hardest thing about contracting was “to convince our own people that we could do it” but “now we don’t have all the bureaucrats to go through, all the hoops and the red tape.” By the time Bush left office, approximately twenty tribes operated programs with a total budget of $60 million under the self-governance program. The upward trend in contracting continued into the Clinton administration. By 1994, the number of contracting tribes had risen to twenty-eight with annual funding agreements totaling approximately $100 million.

Land Claims

In hopes of settling historic Indian land claims stemming from government land grabs stretching back to the nation’s founding, Congress had passed the Indian Claims Commission Act in August 1946, but the only remedy offered was a monetary settlement. Some Indian claimants, however, demanded a return of their lands and refused to accept monetary awards. In the early 1970s, the Nixon administration broke with precedent by returning 48,000 acres to the Taos Pueblos of New Mexico, 21,000 acres to the Yakama Nation of Washington, and 40 million acres to Alaskan Natives. The president’s motives for doing so remain a matter of considerable debate (political opportunism, humanitarian concerns, the extraordinary nature of the claims, because Nixon’s beloved college football coach was Native American) and critics were quick to warn that his actions would precipitate a flood of new land claims. Nixon attempted to quiet critics and Indian claimants by announcing that his support for these specific land restoration requests were exceptions and did not alter the government’s preference for monetary awards.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, the at times militant protests of Indian rights organizations such as the American Indian Movement, court rulings that upheld Indian hunting and fishing rights, and the growing number of tribal attempts to regain lost territories contributed to an anti-Indian backlash in and out of Congress. One manifestation of this backlash was the federal government’s restoration of the pre-Nixon era status quo concerning land claims. When the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes asserted claim to over 12 million acres of land in Maine, Carter supported a cash payment of $81.5 million from which the Indians could purchase up to 300,000 acres. The Reagan administration likewise endorsed monetary settlements but added caveats that states be required to pay a portion of the cost toward any land claim agreement and that administration officials be included in negotiations before Congress entertained any land claims legislation. Although Reagan later agreed to settle Indian land claims with land in lesser amounts and on a case-by-case basis, the era of large land settlements ended with Nixon.

Given the burgeoning national debt and concerns about asking taxpayers to pay for land claims stretching back decades (if not centuries), the Bush administration followed the example of Carter and Reagan. Soon after taking office, Bush officials had to decide whether to support legislation calling for a $162 million settlement for land claims registered by the 1500 member Puyallup Tribe of Washington. Although the federal government’s share of the award stood at less than half the total amount...
($77 million), Bush officials initially opposed what they viewed as an “unwarranted Federal cash payment” that would establish “a seriously adverse and costly precedent.” That Congress had negotiated the final settlement without Executive Branch participation compounded the administration’s discomfort and on May 18, 1989, Bush notified Congress of his opposition. Just a month later, however, Bush grudgingly signed the Puyallup Indian Land Claims Settlement Act admitting that the complexity of Indian land claims made it difficult to establish hard-and-fast rules to determine exact settlement contributions by federal, state, and local authorities.44

In November 1990, Bush signed legislation that provided a $60 million award ($35 million from the federal government and $25 million from the state of New York) to settle a century old land dispute between the Seneca Nation and the residents of Salamanca, New York, a city located largely within the Seneca Nation’s Allegany Reservation. In 1892, Seneca leaders were reportedly plied with liquor and coerced into signing a 99-year-lease that allowed non-Indian owned businesses and homeowners to remain in Salamanca at steeply discounted rents—some as little as $1 a year. In February 1990, however, the terms of the lease expired and the Senecas demanded their land back. The Seneca Nation Settlement Act of 1990 authorized the tribe to negotiate new leases with area residents, but withheld the $60 million award until after the new lease agreements had been executed. In a nod to tribal self-determination (or perhaps out of Bush administration concern about being caught in the middle of contentious lease negotiations), the agreement stipulated that the Seneca Nation was solely responsible for negotiating leases and that the approval of federal and state governments was not required.45

A third major land claims settlement agreement negotiated during the Bush presidency involved Maine’s Aroostook Band of Micmacs, a group excluded from earlier claims settlements since they were not a federally recognized tribe. In 1980, the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act had awarded over $81 million to the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Maliseet Nations of Maine, but the Micmacs lacked documentation to prove their historical presence in the area. By 1991, however, the tribe had gathered the necessary evidence and requested both federal recognition and a land claims settlement. In a statement of administration policy dated November 12, 1991, the Bush administration opposed recognition via legislation since doing so would circumvent the federal “acknowledgement” process, which required that the government conduct a detailed review of applicant materials in an “objective and uniform manner.” Just two weeks later, however, Bush signed legislation granting the Micmacs federal recognition and a $900,000 land acquisition award. While again worried about setting an adverse precedent, Bush’s handling of the Micmacs—like the Palluyups and Senecas—demonstrated continuity with the land claims policies of Carter and Reagan but also a degree of flexibility and fair-mindedness by allowing “equitable considerations” to guide certain aspects of his Indian policy.46

**Federal Funding for Indian Programs and Services**

As noted earlier, George H.W. Bush took office pledging to begin a new chapter in American governance characterized by “unity, diversity, and generosity.” The federal debt in 1989 stood at $2.8 trillion, however, three times larger than it had been in 1980. Bush also inherited a crisis in the savings and loan industry that cost billions to clean up. This financial situation severely limited the President’s ability to make good on his pledge of “generosity” and to enact major domestic policy programs. Democratic Party control of the House and Senate further weakened Bush’s capacity to implement his administration’s budget plans—a reality made painfully evident in budget negotiations during the summer of 1990 when Democrats succeeded in maneuvering Bush to break his much heralded “no new taxes” pledge. That said, during the Bush presidency, government funding for Indian related programs witnessed a modest
rebound (see Tables 1-4) from the steep cuts imposed during the Reagan era. To a large extent, these gains came despite administration efforts to rein in spending. On February 28, 1990, the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs convened hearings on the Bush administration’s fiscal year 1991 budget requests. In a powerful opening statement, John McCain (R:AZ), the committee’s vice chair, pointed to a series of charts that provided a vivid illustration that funds for Indian programs had been in decline for twenty years. What the charts did not show, McCain declared, was that the eligible Indian service population—which suffered the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the Nation—had nearly doubled in size during the same period. The reason for the imbalance, according to McCain, was that “Congress is not appropriating and the Administration is not requesting sufficient annual funding to keep pace with inflation.” By continuing this trend, McCain continued, “we are effectively compelling our poorest citizens to bear a disproportionate share of the Federal fiscal burden.” Committee member Kent Conrad (D: ND) concurred with McCain’s pessimistic assessment. In a heated discussion with Eddie Brown (Pascua Yaqui), the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, Conrad criticized the proposed BIA budget and Brown’s “moral failure” and “failure of responsibility” to stand up to the administration and demand more funding. Cuts to the Indian housing budget drew especially strong condemnation. “This is America in the 20th century and we have 20,000 Indian homes that have never had sanitary hookups,” Conrad lectured, “and you do not ask for more money. I really do not understand it.”


Reminiscent of the Reagan years, Congress responded by appropriating additional funds for Indian affairs.49 For fiscal year 1991, for example, Congress appropriated over $800 million above the President’s proposed budget for Indian programs. Senators John McCain and Daniel Inouye of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs characterized the revised budget as “an almost unprecedented success for Native American people” that had “led to a dynamic boost of energy in Indian country.”50 When Bush’s fiscal year 1992 budget proposal eliminated virtually all the increases realized during the previous year, Congress restored them.

**Indian Education**

A “marked difference” between the Reagan and Bush administrations’ Indian policies was the latter’s interest in, and acknowledgement of, education as “an integral part of the federal trust responsibility.”51 As a candidate for president, George Bush had declared that education was “a number one priority” and after his inauguration, informed Congress of his desire to be the “Education President.” “We must reward excellence and cut through bureaucracy,” Bush insisted, and “we must help schools that need help the most.” Foremost among the schools needing “help the most” were those institutions responsible for educating the nation’s 380,000 Native American students. Reformers had oft touted education as the “solution” to the myriad problems facing Indian communities, but the nation’s track record in Indian education had been nothing short of appalling. Inadequate funding, culturally insensitive curriculums, low expectations, anemic parental involvement, and sparse employment opportunities for graduates yielded predictable results: Native children had the lowest test scores and the highest dropout rates of all Americans.52

During the Reagan administration, the two key Indian education positions in the federal government (one housed in the BIA and the other in the Department of Education) were placed under the direction of
temporary “acting directors” who lacked the necessary influence to advocate forcefully for programmatic reforms or funding. After Bush took office, he restored permanent leadership to the two positions and endorsed significant national studies on Indian education. While Native American leaders welcomed the appointments, some questioned the necessity of additional studies, which they interpreted as a pretext for procrastination. A special Senate investigation into Indian education completed in the late 1960s (aptly titled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*) had already laid bare the many problems in Indian education. Chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy, the committee cited a lack of parental participation or control of schools, coursework that rarely recognized Indian histories, cultures, and languages, and anti-Indian attitudes on the part of school administrators and teachers as major obstacles to student success. To encourage Native American participation in addressing these issues, Senate investigators recommended the creation of an independent Indian Board of Education and called on the executive branch to convene a White House Conference on Indian Education to consider creating one. 53

In October 1989, over two decades after the publication of *Indian Education: A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*, Bush’s Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos called for a new study that he believed “could prove revolutionary for Indian education” and which would involve Native American citizens and educators to once again “analyze the problems that Indians face with education.”54 The following March, Cavazos established a fourteen member *Indian Nations at Risk Task Force* to investigate problems in Indian education and to make recommendations for “positive, lasting, systemic changes to the schools that serve American Native students.” Co-chaired by Reagan’s Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell and Professor William Demmert, Jr. (Tlingit/Sioux), its October 1991 final report *Indian Nations At Risk: An Educational Strategy for Action* echoed several of the themes found in *A National Tragedy—A National Challenge*—namely the need for more culturally sensitive curriculums, greater parental involvement, increased funding, a renewal of the language and cultural base of Indian communities, clearer lines of accountability, and better cooperation between tribal, local, state, and federal education officials.55

Shortly after the release of the *Indian Nations at Risk* report, Bush administration officials made final preparations for convening a White House Conference on Indian Education (WHCIE). This initiative, first voiced by Edward Kennedy’s Senate committee, had gained momentum following passage in April 1988 of legislation (P.L. 100-297), which required the president to “to call and conduct a White House Conference on Indian Education” to consider establishing an independent U.S. Board of Indian Education and to improve the relevancy of Indian education programs.56 Given the close proximity in time between the *Indian Nations at Risk Task Force* and the WHCIE (which met from January 22-24, 1992), there was a good deal of cross-pollination. Several participants in the *Indian Nations at Risk* study, for example, participated in the WHCIE and several of the *Indian Nations at Risk* recommendations were included in the WHCIE final report. The main difference between the two efforts, however, was that the White House Conference recommended solutions that sought to create “a holistic picture that brought light Indian education, health, and cultural needs.” It also deliberated on the merits of creating a U.S. Board of Indian Education. In the end, the WHCIE recommended against creation of a national board since it ran contrary to tribal self-determination and sovereignty. According to historian Margaret Szasz, the WHCIE “underlined the belief that local control was in the best interests of tribes” and alongside the *Indian Nations at Risk* task force, was the “Bush administration’s most important contribution to Indian education.”57
Cultural Preservation

Even though the White House Conference on Indian Education convened just a few blocks from the White House, President Bush did not attend, nor even make a brief appearance, an oversight that apparently left conference delegates “deeply disappointed.” Writing in April 1992, Senator John McCain urged Bush’s advisors to consider the importance of such symbolic gestures on the part of the president. Appearing at tribal gatherings “would not take an inordinate amount of time,” McCain argued, “But I believe the results would be manifold and, above all, it would send a signal to Native Americans around the country that President Bush does care.”

The Bush administration had actually done a good deal to demonstrate its commitment to preserving Indian cultures and by extension, its genuine interest in reaching out to the First Americans. In 1987, Senators Daniel Inouye and John McCain and Representatives Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Morris Udall had introduced legislation calling for the establishment of a new museum to house and display artifacts of Indian culture, history, and art. On November 28, 1989, Bush signed the legislation (P.L. 101-185) endorsing the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Combining the Heye Foundation’s collection of artifacts with those of the Smithsonian Institution, the new museum promised to “preserve and exhibit the many and varied contributions of the first “Americans.” Bush’s 1991 budget included $19.4 million toward its construction.

In July 2000, almost 138 years after the federal government’s suppression of Minnesota’s Dakota uprising of 1862, a small square piece of tanned skin—the final remains of Dakota Sioux warrior Marpiya Okinajin (He Who Stands in the Clouds)—was repatriated to the Lower Sioux people of Minnesota. Formerly in the possession of the Public Museum of Grand Rapids, Michigan, the skin was reburied with honor in a ceremony that Indian participants described as “part of a healing process” that would promote forgiveness and reconciliation. Ceremonial reburials such as this resulted from a November 1990 piece of legislation that Bush signed—the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Designed to prevent the untimely disturbance of Indian remains (or the sale of such remains) and to ensure the proper treatment and care of remains, the legislation complemented the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian by creating a process that empowered Indian tribes and other native groups to make claims to human remains, funerary objects, and religious and ceremonial artifacts housed in the collections of museums around the country. After months of negotiations between anxious museum curators who feared their collections would be gutted and Indian groups such as the Native American Rights Fund, who suspected that their claims would run into a stonewall, compromise language emerged that permitted the repatriation of some human remains and sacred materials while ensuring better treatment of materials retained by museums. Although NAGPRA protected only those sites and remains within the federal purview, the spiritually charged first repatriations (such as those involving the remains of the Dakota warrior) demonstrated the law’s profound implications for cultural revitalization among Native peoples.

Bush also endorsed mildly controversial legislation—the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-477)—that sought to preserve, protect, and promote Indian languages by recognizing the rights of tribes to use Native American languages in any public proceeding and as a medium of instruction in all BIA schools. Two years later, Bush signed the Native American Languages Act of 1992 to strengthen the 1990 measure by authorizing $2 million in grant funding for Indian communities to establish programs seeking to preserve Native American languages. Since both the Indian Nations at Risk Taskforce and the White House Conference on Indian Education had adopted resolutions expressing support for the
preservation of native languages, there was little doubt what President Bush would do once a bill reached his desk. Nonetheless, Rep. Harris Fawell (R: IL) a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor, opposed the appropriation and threatened to prevent the bill from moving forward. A phone campaign by Native activists to Fawell’s office paid dividends when after just a few days the congressman threw in the towel and agreed to allow the bill to proceed. President Bush signed the measure into law on October 26, 1992. Although not supportive of including Native Hawaiians and urban/off-reservation Indians in the law’s purview, Bush remarked that “Traditional languages are an important part of this Nation’s culture and history and can provide Native Americans with a sense of identity and pride in their heritage.”

Finally, in hopes of regulating the authenticity of Indian art and to protect Native American artisans from frauds and “wannabes,” Bush signed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990. According to a Department of Commerce study conducted in 1985, an estimated fifteen to twenty percent of the annual sales from the $400-$800 million Indian arts and crafts industry were being siphoned off to foreign counterfeiters in China, Mexico and the Philippines. The new law provided stiff penalties (heavy fines and prison time) for violators and authorized only members of state or federally recognized tribes to sell “authentic” Indian art—although non-enrolled members could obtain certification as Indian artisans from the tribes. The Republican-sponsored legislation (Rep. John Kyle in the House and John McCain in the Senate) was well intentioned and not terribly controversial when Bush signed it into law on November 29, 1990. Problems soon arose, however, regarding the definition of “Indian” and the exclusion of Native American artists (some quite prominent) who were not members of state or federally recognized tribes. This has led to inter-tribal quarrels, a loss of incomes, and legal challenges from artists with Native American ancestry who argue that the law denies them their First Amendment rights to express their heritage.

Conclusions

George H.W. Bush was certainly no crusader for Indian policy reform. At a December 12, 1990 meeting before the National Conference of State Legislatures, Mary McClure—Bush’s point person on Indian affairs—was invited to discuss the Bush administration’s policy toward Native Americans. “President Bush has consistently stated that his Administration continues to support the philosophy of his immediate predecessors,” she declared, and then spent the remainder of her time discussing what Nixon and Reagan had done to advance tribal self-determination and the government to government relationship. What Bush hoped to do, McClure concluded was to “continue on this course” and to seek “improvement of the Indian condition” and an “improved and strengthened government to government relationship.” It comes as little surprise, therefore, that scholars have characterized Bush’s Indian policy as “an offshoot” or an “aftermath” of the Reagan policy. Constantly distracted with foreign policy matters, handcuffed by budget deficits, and challenged by a Congress controlled by the opposition party, Bush had few illusions about his prospects for successfully advancing an ambitious “agenda” when he took office in January 1989. Like Reagan and Carter before him, Bush “41” had scant knowledge or experience with federal Indian policy. He endorsed the federal government’s commitment to tribal self-determination, the necessity of empowering tribes to exercise greater control over government programs and services, and the need for closer consultation with tribal leaders before constructing laws that affected Indian country. On other critical matters, such as tribal sovereignty, however, the Bush administration equivocated, referring to tribes as “quasi-sovereign domestic dependent nations” sitting in positions of “dependent sovereignty” with a status in the federal system akin to states. Like Reagan and Carter, Bush sought to settle Indian land claims with monetary awards while simultaneously seeking to address the spiraling national debt by reining in domestic spending—including spending on Indian programs.
While continuities between Bush and his immediate successors certainly existed, there were differences between the Reagan administration’s Indian policy and that of the Bush administration—not surprising given their contrasting leadership styles and political philosophies. Bush’s leadership style and moderate brand of conservatism led him to shy away from ideology-inspired arguments and obstructionism and instead to work for compromise, tolerance, and “an easy-goingness about each other’s attitudes and way of life.” Instead of continuing the so-called “Reagan Revolution,” Bush sought to inaugurate the “age of the offered hand.” In short, Bush was not, as one scholar described him, “Reagan’s ideological and temporal successor.” Contrary to Reagan, Bush acknowledged education and other human services as an integral part of the federal trust responsibility and took concrete steps (Indian Nations at Risk Task Force, the White House Conference on Indian Education, increased funding for Indian programs) to shore up both. Bush’s support for Indian-related symbolic gestures—even when controversial—demonstrated his administration’s commitment to tribal self-determination and cultural pluralism. NAGPRA, the Museum of the American Indian, the birth of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Historic site and Monument, support for the preservation of Native American languages and for the and protection of Indian arts and crafts were, from a Native American perspective, extremely significant gestures that reflected Bush’s empathy and moderate political leanings. While Americans will likely remember him for his leadership in foreign affairs and/or for breaking his no tax pledge, Bush left a generally positive legacy in favor of Indian affairs—a legacy that was indeed more than simply a continuation of the Reagan-Bush years. An article published in Indian Country Today published a decade after Bush left office praised the president for his “fundamental decency,” his “staunch commitment to doing the most nearly right thing as he saw it,” and for possessing instincts that were “decent when it came to Native peoples.”

Endnotes


11 Statement by the President, Indian Policy, January 24, 1983, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Counsel’s Office, Jay S. Bybee Files, GHWBPL; Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 620-628.


13 Statement by the President, Indian Policy, January 24, 1983; Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 644-645.


17 Castile, *Taking Charge*, 20; Statement by the President, Indian Policy, January 24, 1983; Reagan Administration Indian Policy Initiatives, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Counsel’s Office, Jay S. Bybee Files, GHWBPL.

18 Statement by the President, Indian Policy, January 24, 1983; See 25 USC 2501.

19 C. Patrick Morris writes that “The Reagan Indian policy has been a terrible failure, both in leadership and results.” Dean Kotlowski argues that Reagan was fairly pragmatic when it came to Indian affairs and
that by the end of his second term, “tribes had gained new and enhanced powers in a number of areas.” See See Morris, “Termination by Accountants,” 742; Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 650.

20 Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 651.

21 Two possible exceptions were Herbert Hoover, who lived on the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma as a child, and Richard Nixon, whose college football coach Wallace Newman (La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians) was reportedly influential on Nixon’s subsequent interest in Indian affairs.

22 One possible—but important—exception is a reference in the Bush Presidential Papers that Bush helped prepare Reagan’s “Indian Policy” Statement of January 24, 1983. See Informational Memorandum for the Chief, Special Programs Division, 14 September 1989, Mary McClure folder “Interagency Indian Meeting,” GHWBPL; Castile, Taking Charge, 95.

23 George Bush to Indian Leaders, October 10, 1988, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL; George Bush on Native Americans, October 11, 1988, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Emily Mead Files, GHWBPL.


25 Draft Executive Order, GHWBPL.

26 Ibid.

27 National Commission for Employment Policy, “An Overview of the Labor Market Problems of Indians and Native Americans,” Research Report No. 89-02 (January 1989) in Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL. In June 1991, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes passed a resolution calling for the creation of a ten to twelve-member Indian Board of Directors who would meet with officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other departments to “discuss critical issues involved with Self-Governance and other issues related to the self-sufficiency of Indian Tribes.” See Fort Hall Business Council to Dr. Eddie Brown, June 6, 1991, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL.

28 Policy and Program Issues Worth Pursuing, Notes of White House Task Force on Indian Affairs, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL.

29 Survey of Interagency Indian Services, July 1989, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL.

30 Informational Memorandum for the Chief, Special Programs Division re: White House Interagency Meeting on Native Americans, September 14, 1989; Memorandum for Kenneth P. Yale from Daniel R. Heimbach re: White House Interagency Indian Task Force, January 23, 1990, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL.

31 “Tribal Leader meets with Bush,” Shawano Leader (April 18, 1991); Memorandum from Mary McClure to Debra R. Anderson re: Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs Meeting, July 12, 1989,
Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL; John J. Rhodes III to Bush Chief of Staff John Sununu, April 3, 1990; Summary of Presidential Meeting with Tribal Chairmen, April 17, 1991, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL.

32 Statement by the President reaffirming the Government-to-Government relationship between the federal government and tribal governments, June 14, 1991, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Ed Goldstein Files, GHWBPL.

33 Created in January 1991, the Office of Self-Governance was headed by William Lavell.

34 The American Indian Trust Fund Reform Act (See P.L. 103-412 passed October 25, 1994) established an Office of Special Trustee for American Indians.

35 That individual was Debra R. Anderson


37 Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 643


41 Hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs, US Senate, 103rd Congress, 1st session, October 20, 1993, Senate Hearing 103-441 “Implementation on the Tribal Self-Governance Demonstration Project” pp. 4-5; “Old Angers Still Fresh as Indians meet Lujan,” The New York Times (September 30, 1990), 22.


43 Kotlowski, “From Backlash to Bingo,” 628-634; In November 1988, for example, Reagan signed the Southern California Indian Land Transfer Act restoring 303 acres to the Pechanga Band of Luiseño (Mission) Indians of California. See P.L. 100-581 (H.R. 2677).


46 Bush’s fair-mindedness had its limits. The Bush administration refused a request from the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Council to waive a six-year statute of limitations permitting them to challenge a 1972 land claims settlement. It likewise ignored demands by the Intertribal Council of Tongva (Gabrielino Indians) that the federal government compensate them for the loss of 49,440 square miles of land by delivering nearly $190 trillion in gold to council headquarters on Turtle Island in California. See Memorandum for the President on S. 2342, June 15, 1992; Memorandum from Intertribal Council of Tongva to the IRS, May 19, 1992, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL; Statement of Administration Policy, H.R. 932-Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act, November 12, 1991; Statement of the President signing S. 374, November 1991, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL; P.L. 102-171, 102d Congress, Nov. 26, 1991.


50 John McCain and Daniel K. Inouye to Jim Sasser, March 11, 1991, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Ed Goldstein Files, GHWBPL.

51 Cook, “Ronald Reagan’s Indian Policy in Retrospect,” 23.


53 Indian Education: A National Tragedy--A National Challenge. 1969 Report of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, Made by Its Special Subcommittee on Indian Education. Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Washington, D.C. ED 034 625; Margaret Szasz,


John McCain to Nicholas Calio, Assistant to the President, April 27, 1992, Bush Presidential Records, Staff and Office Files, Cliff Alderman Files, GHWBPL.


Remarks of Mary McClure before the NCSL Task Force on State-Tribal Relations, December 12, 1990, Staff and Office Files, McClure Files, GHWBPL.
65 Cook, “Ronald Reagan’s Indian Policy in Retrospect,” 11, 22; Castile, Taking Charge, 98.
