

Thomas Jefferson and US Indian Policy

- Jefferson is a key figure and a formative influence in the shaping of US Indian policy in the 19th century
- Two documents handed out by Prof. Calloway – #1) speech given to Delaware and Shawnee Nations by Henry Dearborn (Jefferson’s Secretary of War) in Winter of 1802-03; #2) confidential letter between Jefferson and William Henry Harrison, Governor of the Territories, on Feb. 27, 1803
 - Jefferson in this letter and speech makes some insidious suggestions (like letting Indians run up their debts, so that they would have no choice but to sell their land to the US government) as to what to do with Native Americans on the frontier
 - This is Thomas Jefferson! If we can’t trust Jefferson, who can you trust!
- [*Everything You Know About Indians is Wrong, by Paul Chaat Smith*](#)
- The United States after 1781 is broke and needs to expand its borders to cover their debts
 - There is dual commitment to expansion, but treating the Indians with “honor”
 - There is a clause (**in a document**) that says the United States will always deal honorably with Native people, to the best of their abilities, and will not invade Native lands, unless justified by war (approved by Congress)
 - The Northwest Ordinance sets up a blueprint for expansion by giving territories an avenue to become states of the United States
 - How is this “duality” going to work out? Expand but honorably?
 - Congress tries to regulate trade in the Western frontier by licensing who can trade with Natives in the Ohio Valley
 - How did Jefferson reconcile with this question of “duality”?
 - His bottom line: We’re going to take Indian lands!
 - Jefferson was a man of the ENLIGHTENMENT (and especially the Scottish Enlightenment) – people aren’t inherently different, so that although Jefferson believed Indians are inherently inferior, they can be “brought up” and “civilized” to become educated
 - That idea changes by the time Andrew Jackson becomes President – it doesn’t matter that the Cherokees have their own newspapers, adopted white ways (farming, owning slaves, etc.) – their inferior status is permanent, and they must be moved out of the way
 - So Jefferson believes that Indian cultures must make the change to becoming an agricultural society – but really, he means that MEN should be farming and not WOMEN, as they do in many Indian societies
 - Jefferson also realizes that a hunting society requires MORE LAND than farming! He wants them to take LESS LAND! He believes they are going to DIE OUT if they continue hunting
 - Jefferson presents Indians with a choice – we are going to take more of your land in order for you to give up hunting and allow for their “survival” by taking up farming (he thought he was “saving them from themselves”)
 - Were Native Americans actually better off if they had maintained their lifestyles?
 - This was true in the early stages because white settlers living in the frontier lived in poverty, while many Indian villages were trading with Europeans and had much of the STUFF that made them wealthy (furs, silver, pottery, silk, etc.)

- Prof. Calloway's new book is titled *Pen and Ink Witchcraft* because it describes the ways in which US Indian policy and treaty-making was like "pen and ink witchcraft...because it made you say and write things you normally wouldn't do...and would regret later"
- [*Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans, by Anthony Wallace*](#)
- Lewis and Clark is a product of Jefferson's Indian policy – they imagine the landscape that they see teaming with white Americans in the future