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“The Old System Is No Success”: The Blackfeet Nation’s Decision to Adopt the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934

PAUL C. ROSIER

If the condition of the Blackfeet Indians at this time is to be taken as an index of the character of trusteeship which the Government imposes upon other Indians, the work has been a failure. The spectacle is a depressing one and calls not only for immediate relief but for an entire and permanent change in the manner of handling their affairs.

—Senator Harry Lane, 1914

Give us a fair and new deal as we know ourselves the old system is no success.

—Blackfeet Councilman Rides at the Door, 1933

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), the cornerstone of the Indian New Deal, is the most important piece of legislation in twentieth-century American Indian policy-making. Earl Old Person, the great full-blooded Blackfeet leader, discussed the IRA’s role in twentieth-century Indian progress in his speech to the 1966 convention of the National Congress of American Indians. “The first breakthrough came with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This permitted a Government policy of organization by allowing tribes to adopt constitutions which provided terms for managing their own affairs.”¹ The IRA represented the start of a long-sought and much-needed dialogue between Indian leaders and federal officials, whose organizing principle under Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier rested on “the revolu-

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tionary proposition that Indians were not obstacles, but peoples.”² The IRA became an attenuated version of Collier’s vision of Native political economy—a syncretic economy managed by empowered tribal governments that would adopt white business practices and, Collier hoped, encourage a renewal of Indian culture.

Most studies of the IRA naturally have focused on its impact on tribal economic and political organizations.³ The judgment of most historians is that the IRA, and the Indian New Deal in general, failed to solve the problems of Indian America largely because it was the product of white bureaucrats. Thomas Biolsi argues in *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and the Rosebud Reservations*—the best case study of the Indian New Deal to date—that “[t]he Indian New Deal in general and the IRA in particular were clearly not Indian ideas.” Graham Taylor concludes in *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934–5*—the best general study of the Indian New Deal to date—that the “reforms of the Indian New Deal failed to endure because, in the last analysis, they were imposed upon the Indians, who did not see these elaborate proposals as answers to their own wants and needs.”⁴ This interpretation of the adoption and administration of the IRA is not entirely mistaken, but the impact of the IRA on Native American communities is too variegated to justify sweeping statements that deny Indians the acuity and agency to adopt the legislation and to use intelligently its various provisions for political and economic change.

The case of the Blackfeet Nation revises this prevailing notion of Indian passivity and white imposition; the tribe’s decision-making process was more interactive than coercive. This essay does not study the impact of the IRA on the Blackfeet Reservation, but rather the impact of the idea and the promise of it. The focus is the impetus of the Blackfeet Nation’s decision to adopt the IRA: why, given the historical and historiographical opposition to the IRA, did 83 percent of the Blackfeet electorate that voted on October 27, 1934, brave a snowstorm to support it? The essential argument is that Collier’s vision and the legislative form it took in the IRA mirrored the Blackfeet Nation’s own reform agenda, a mixture of wants and needs and assumptions about its past and its future that had formed during two decades of government supervision. At the same time, the Blackfeet’s active participation in the IRA debate influenced the outcome of the bill by helping important policymakers—like John Collier and Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana, who, as chairman of the powerful Senate Indian Affairs committee, was both the act’s cosponsor *and* its most vocal critic—understand the viability and desirability of its key provisions. The Blackfeet Nation presents a good case study for several reasons. First, the Blackfeet had a tradition of political activity; thus their debate on the IRA was relatively advanced and thoughtful. Second, Senator Wheeler’s relationship with the Blackfeet affected the final shape of the IRA because *his* conception of it was based largely on his decade-long experience with the tribe. Third, the tribe was resource-rich but underdeveloped; the essay will thus help answer Marjane Ambler’s question whether oil resources played a part in certain tribes’ decision to adopt the IRA.⁵

An understanding of the Blackfeet's decision-making process would be incomplete without some background on the tribe's political and economic development. The first part summarizes twenty years of such development in what is hoped is a felicitous fashion. The second part examines the IRA debate on the Blackfeet Reservation and in Congress during the winter and spring of 1934. The Blackfeet, where appropriate, speak for themselves. Their voices emerge from tribal meetings, council minutes, congressional testimony, and personal letters. If interviews with Blackfeet voters were available, dissenting voices, particularly those of full-bloods unable to speak the English language, would have been more accessible. But the essay is, in the final analysis, about the emergence of a tribal political action which developed as a result of the Blackfeet speaking among themselves, asserting their interests through elected officials and community leaders, and collectively making the decision to adopt "terms for managing their own affairs."

THE BATTLE OVER THE TRIBAL ESTATE

Scores of federal allotting agents began swarming like locusts through the American West after Congress passed the 1887 General Allotment Act to start the engines of progress designed to remake the physical domain and cultural character of the American Indian in the image of the yeoman farmer. Allotment came relatively late to the Blackfeet Indians of northwestern Montana. It was not until Congress passed the act of March 1, 1907, that authorization was granted to begin the allotment of the Blackfeet Reservation.⁶ One of the most debilitating aspects of the 1887 act was the provision that required tribes to sell their "surplus" land to white homesteaders; the 1903 Supreme Court decision in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* prohibited any legal challenge to Congress' right to abrogate treaties and thus its authority to order the sale of surplus land. The mandated sale of the Blackfeet's 156,000 "surplus" acres divided the tribe during the 1910s. Between 1913 and 1916, open conflict between two factions manifested itself both on the reservation and during congressional hearings held to determine the fate of the Blackfeet land base. Class politics and attendant conceptions of land use emerged as the tribe debated the best way to utilize the reservation's resources from which it hoped to become "self-supporting." The dissension in the tribe was not simply between mixed-bloods and full-bloods, though this was a principal division, but between large stockowners and small stockowners; in 1885 only eighteen mixed-bloods lived among roughly 2,000 full-bloods, while in 1914 there were 1,189 full-bloods and 1,452 mixed-bloods.⁷ The Blackfeet allotting agent reported in 1910 that the tribe suffered from an unequal distribution of agricultural wealth: "[Twenty-nine] families, all but one being mixed bloods, own practically one half the number [of livestock], while many full bloods have but one or two if any." In 1915, fifty of the fifty-six owners of more than one hundred head of stock on the reservation were either mixed-blood or white.⁸

The predominately mixed-blood faction comprised large stockowners acting in congress with white business leaders who supported the sale. Faction

leaders appeared before congressional committees in 1914 and 1916 to argue that the proceeds of the surplus land sale should be spent to expand the Blackfeet livestock industry.⁹ Robert Hamilton, a mixed-blood who represented the interests of the mostly full-blood faction, testified in 1914 that “it looks as though the white man, in many instances, was the beneficiary of the reservation.”¹⁰ Hamilton’s opposition to the land sale centered on three issues. One, he opposed the unilateral nature of the sale, asking a joint congressional commission in 1914 that Blackfeet “consent be first obtained before any lands are again arbitrarily taken from us.”¹¹ Two, he believed that the government’s intent to sell the land to homesteaders was misguided, given the vicissitudes of northwestern Montana weather; government agents had been arguing for decades that farming was a tenuous proposition in Blackfeet country.¹² Three, and most important, Hamilton wanted to use the land as a means to further the tribe’s management of its economic affairs, offering a three-point plan that involved the leasing of the surplus acreage to cattlemen, farmers, and mining companies. The Blackfeet have been suffering, he told Congress in 1916, “while the lands lie idle.... Lands have been sought by persons willing to pay for the use of them. The development of mines, the development of beet raising, and grazing would give many Indians employment who can not now get anything to do.” He also argued that the land contained large deposits of oil and gas that could make the Blackfeet “self-supporting” and called for the protection of the tribe’s mineral rights. The Blackfeet were

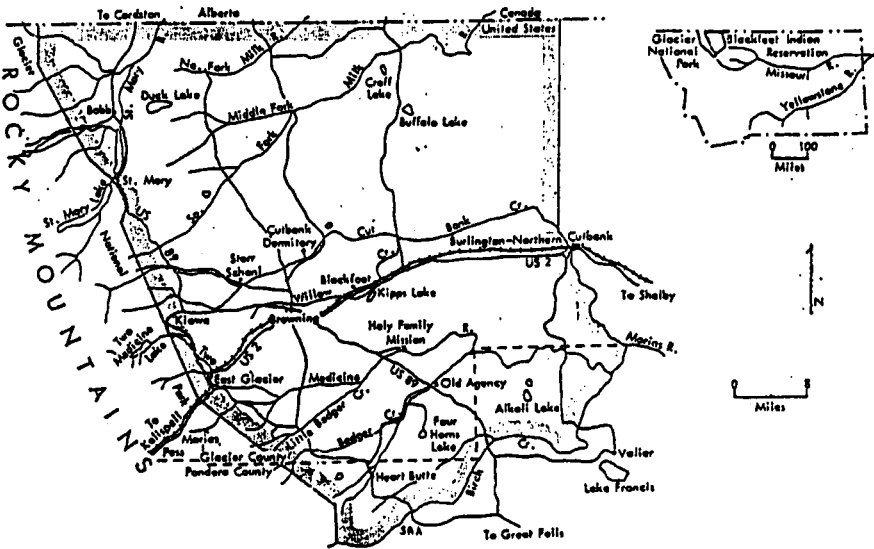


FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE BLACKFEET RESERVATION.

ready to work, Hamilton told Congress. "The blame lies with the governmental supervision."¹³ BIA administrators had failed to listen to Blackfeet voices about what would work in their part of the world; policies conceived in Washington would not necessarily take root in Blackfeet soil.

Congress decided the fate of the 156,000 acres when it passed the act of June 30, 1919, which included many of the provisions proposed in a 1916 bill. But it did not order the sale of the land; as a result, each enrolled Blackfeet received an additional eighty-acre allotment.¹⁴ After a long struggle against an "iron triangle" of interests, to use Theodore Lowi's phrase,¹⁵ Hamilton and his full-blood supporters succeeded in preserving the territorial integrity of the Blackfeet Reservation. Although the land was no longer capable of being used for economic development *in toto*, the tribe's mineral rights to the land were protected and it remained in Blackfeet hands. The question for the Blackfeet in the coming decade was whether they would be given sufficient opportunity to construct a political economy that was predicated on the cultural and geographical realities of Blackfeet life rather than the pedagogy of its "guardian."

OIL AND AGRICULTURE DON'T MIX

Robert Hamilton had been the *de facto* political leader of the Blackfeet since 1915, when he assumed control of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council (BTBC) and began campaigning to secure exploration of the tribe's putative oil reserves and to expand tribal management of reservation businesses and resources. He told Interior Secretary Franklin K. Lane in 1916 that "we have every reason to believe that our tribe will develop [*sic*] into a self-supporting condition if the natural resources upon this reservation are developed."¹⁶ Congress and the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) refused to grant the council any authority to lease its lands or even acknowledge its modest attempts to further tribal economic control; for example, the OIA ignored Hamilton's reasonable proposal to manage a tribal commissary. After summer drought and harsh winters in 1919 and 1920 wiped out the economic gains created by the demands of war, the discovery of oil in neighboring Cut Bank and on the Crow Reservation in 1921 created an "oil excitement" among the Blackfeet that lasted for most of the decade. Full-bloods and mixed-bloods alike viewed oil leasing as the best means to produce an economic future for the tribe. By 1921, however, the government had failed to approve a single tribal lease, and thus no oil money had been pumped into the Blackfeet treasury. The OIA, using the Osage Indian phenomenon as its model, gambled that the Blackfeet would achieve a higher return on their oil assets if the region could be determined to contain oil rather than just the possibility of oil. The restrictive policy angered both the tribal council, which was focused on developing its putative oil resources, and individual Blackfeet who were denied a chance to generate an annual rental income.¹⁷

The BTBC also blamed new superintendent Frank C. Campbell, who assumed office in 1921, for the lack of progress on oil development. Campbell's passion lay in agriculture, not in natural resource development. Campbell sought to institute a formal program of agricultural production,

directing it to the reservation's full-bloods, who had been dependent on government rations for the most part since the end of World War I. Campbell's Five Year Industrial Program (FYIP), which became the OIA's prevailing agricultural policy, emphasized the cultivation of small gardens and plots of wheat, the construction of a flour mill and a sawmill, and sheep grazing. Its institutional framework comprised twenty-nine chapters of the Piegan Farming and Livestock Association (PFLA); each chapter elected a president, vice president, and secretary to help manage its operations. For full-bloods, Campbell's program represented a comprehensive approach to community living and an opportunity to participate in the management of their domestic affairs. The object of the program, as full-bloods wrote in their charter, was to create a sense of pride in the Blackfeet Reservation that would put it "first among reservations in a united effort towards—Good Homes, Good Citizenship, Self-support and Loyalty."¹⁸

Campbell's assiduous promotion of the FYIP on and off the reservation alienated influential mixed-bloods who had little interest or confidence in subsistence farming. The entrepreneurs of the tribe wanted to expand the reservation economy to include the creation of cash surpluses or profits; they were interested in more than just survival. Campbell's organization of the full-bloods resulted in a polarized reservation: mixed-bloods and the business council they dominated against the full-bloods and their agricultural chapters.¹⁹ The two factions went on the "war path," as one chapter officer put it, when Hamilton and his supporters called for Campbell's termination and for the abolition of the OIA. In pursuing with great zeal the expansion of his "industrial" program, Campbell neglected other issues that mixed-bloods and some full-bloods believed he should have addressed; his inability to facilitate oil leasing and his failure to assist the BTBC's efforts to renegotiate grazing fees proved especially damaging to their relationship. Campbell had succeeded in managing well only one part of the reservation, though investigators disputed his claims that the FYIP deserved commendation. He certainly failed to provide competent administration to the tribe as a whole, particularly in the important area of natural resource development.²⁰

Frustrated by the constraints of the OIA's leasing system and Campbell's neglect of its agenda, the BTBC looked for new ways to expand oil development on tribal land. The tribe received only \$2,729.68 from oil leasing between 1921 and 1926, the product of five lease bonuses ranging from \$500 to \$719; oil leasing on restricted allotted lands netted \$11,740.16 from forty-five leases, most of which the OIA eventually "disapproved."²¹ In February 1927, the council considered a plan devised by Jack Galbraith, whose own tribal lease had been voided due to the inaction of his development partner. Galbraith proposed that the council mortgage the tribe's timber reserves to raise capital, arguing that the Blackfeet should form their own corporation to develop oil rather than rely upon a diminishing number of white oil prospectors; he explained that "if we operate our own well here we will know what is wrong with our money, and our well and why we quit and what is wrong with our resources."²² BTBC members expressed interest in the idea of forming a tribal corporation. Full-blood councilman George Starr told his colleagues:

"The oil is here, it is all around us.... You half breeds are just as smart as any white man and some are smarter and we can do our own drilling, form a company and do our own work and you can do it if you just get it into your neck that you can do it."²³ The council voted to prohibit the use of tribal timber as collateral, but it formed a new oil committee to explore other ways in which the tribe might raise funds to expand its role in developing its own resources.

By late 1928 most Blackfeet had lost confidence in Campbell, who was absent from the reservation for more than eight months each year, and "had apparently changed their minds and were giving a great deal of credence to the theory that they were being very much abused by the government, and that the various investigators were going to correct many of these things and see that their alleged rights were protected."²⁴ For many mixed-bloods and an increasing number of full-bloods, the Blackfeet Nation had reached a point of diminishing returns from federal supervision.

THE MERIAM REPORT AND A CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION

The congressional investigations that the 1928 Meriam Report helped spawn contributed further to the Blackfeet's perception that reservation management needed a literal and figurative facelift. The report focused on, among other issues, the lack of economic progress in Indian communities, blaming this condition in part on the lack of business education and organization on reservations. The report recommended "using the corporate form of organization for tribal property that consists of great natural resources which cannot be economically administered or developed in small allotments," and thus laid out a "vision," previously lacking in federal policy, for the Indian Office to foster the economic advancement of American Indians.²⁵ The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 would embody this vision.

A subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs—comprising Senators Lynn Frazier of North Dakota, Burton K. Wheeler of Montana, and W. B. Pine of Oklahoma—subsequently visited many of the nation's larger reservations to get a firsthand look at the problems of Indian administration and Indian poverty. The subcommittee spent July 24, 1929, on the Blackfeet Reservation and lay bare two decades of agency mismanagement. It charged that Campbell and his predecessors failed to protect Indian property from encroachment by whites, fostered discrimination against Indians in favor of white labor and businesses, failed to assure adequate health conditions, and neglected to keep accurate records of land and business transactions.²⁶ Walter Liggett, a Senate investigator, reserved most of his criticism for the agency's handling of the tribe's resources, concluding that Blackfeet lands

do not bring in the revenue they should.... They are entitled to a bigger return and they could get it if the agency officials acted with the same zeal that they would display if employed by private interests. But, instead of attempting to get every possible penny for their Indian wards, in many cases they appear to be acting as though they represented the white lessees.²⁷

If the Meriam Report was to be used as a guide to bring Indian economies into the twentieth century, then the place to begin, judging from the administration of Blackfeet resources, was with the OIA itself. If the Indian Service was to emphasize economic education, as the report recommended, then it would need new teachers. Assistant Superintendent Forrest Stone would replace Campbell after the hearing, which represented a victory of sorts for the tribe and symbolized the importance of BIA leaders addressing the needs of diverse tribal constituencies.

Both BTBC and PFLA officers pressed for expanded control of tribal finances and expeditious oil development after the 1929 hearing. In May 1931 PFLA members voted to extend the FYIP for another five-year term; attending the annual meeting were influential mixed-bloods Robert Hamilton and Joseph Brown, who were intent on sustaining the tribal unity engendered by the 1929 congressional inquiry. Two resolutions passed at the meeting reinforced the basis of this unity: common frustration with BIA administration and common interest in developing tribal oil reserves. Resolution #1 requested that any tribal money in the United States Treasury be divided equally among members of the tribe and paid out in per capita payments. Resolution #3 promoted the "development of oil and gas on the Blackfeet Indian reservation" and sanctioned the BTBC's role in leasing allotted land as well as tribal land to developers.²⁸ Chapter officers wanted to minimize the OIA's management of tribal finances and economic development; full-bloods were as frustrated as mixed-bloods about the centralized control of Blackfeet policy. If oil leasing succeeded, then PFLA leaders did not want that money held in Washington or used by the OIA for programs like irrigation without the tribe's consent. In addition, the United States Court of Claims was due to render a decision on a suit filed by the Blackfeet and other Montana tribes to win compensation from the government for failing to honor treaty obligations; the Blackfeet called it the "Big Claim."²⁹ The "Big Claim" and oil leasing also dominated business council meetings. John G. Carter, the tribe's attorney in Washington, told the council in July 1932 that he believed Congress would reach a decision on the claim within six months and award the tribe two million dollars. Council members asked him to protect from government meddling whatever judgment the tribe received. James White Calf told Carter, "I am asking you to see to this, that instead of putting it in banks or in Washington, I want to see this money given out to us in cash."³⁰ Rides at the Door was equally concerned with the slow pace of tribal oil development. He asked Carter and the council, "Why is it that these wells on the outside of the reservation are developed and completed, and ours are not? Why is it that the Blackfeet reservation can't be developed?" Natural resource development, he argued, "will help set us on our feet."³¹ The Blackfeet were hoping for two windfalls and desperately wanted to ensure that they could control the distribution of any newfound wealth.

By the end of 1932 the "oil excitement" was again at a high pitch. In late December, the *Cut Bank Pioneer Press* reported that "Stone sees prosperous days ahead for Blackfeet Indians through oil development." Stone did not think the Blackfeet would get as rich as the Osage, but did say "the outlook at

the present time appears exceptionally bright.”³² The Blackfeet finally saw oil flow on their reservation in April 1933 when wildcatter Tip O’Neil’s well produced roughly seventy-five barrels of oil. On April 28, 1933, a group of Blackfeet, including several “Chiefs in full regalia” and the tribe’s famous band, visited the tribe’s first producing well to celebrate mother earth’s new offering.³³ The first oil strike and the per capita distribution that resulted were not large by any means, but after so many years of promises unfulfilled, they were tangible.

COLLIER, CONGRESS, AND A CONSENSUS

The John Collier era in Washington began the same week that the Blackfeet finally achieved a measure of success in oil production, two equally propitious events. The Blackfeet were familiar with Collier from previous visits and from his defense of Indian rights during the 1920s; as executive director of the American Indian Defense Association, Collier battled the OIA and Congress over Pueblo land rights, Indian oil rights, and an Indian’s right to due process.³⁴ Collier also accompanied the Senate subcommittee to Browning in 1929 for its investigation of Blackfeet affairs. He sent Assistant Commissioner William Zimmerman Jr. on a similar journey in 1933 to see firsthand the problems of Blackfeet administration.

When the subcommittee returned to the reservation in October 1933 the two factions were restless and united in their desire for organizational change. The 1933 hearing differed in content and character from the one held four years earlier, in part because the well-traveled Senate subcommittee was familiar with the problems facing the Blackfeet, and because Stone’s superintendency had not generated controversy as Campbell’s had. Despite little progress in oil production and arguably no progress in grazing resource management, the tribe did not point to Stone as the principal source of failure but to the OIA or, more generally, the guardian relationship of the federal government to the Blackfeet Indians. Two weeks before the committee arrived, the venerable full-blood Mountain Chief, the Blackfeet’s oldest “hereditary chief,” organized a meeting to discuss the tribe’s need for better representation in Washington. He told the gathering that he believed a delegation should travel to Washington to outline the tribe’s demand for better management of its natural resources. “We are tired of the leasing of our grazing lands and tired of outside sheep companies. We want to utilize our own resources and develop our oil lands,” he said.³⁵ Rides at the Door, active in pursuing economic development for many years, called for a “‘new deal’ as we want to be treated the same as the white people. Give us a fair and new deal as we know ourselves the old system is no success.”³⁶ The tribe’s full-bloods had had enough of government supervision and became increasingly outspoken about the “mismanagement” of the tribe’s funds and property, joining the chorus of mixed-bloods who had been pushing for more control of the tribal estate since the early 1920s. Those hardened views found expression in other tribal meetings and in the October 19 subcommittee hearing.

The subcommittee first discussed the tribe's dormant irrigation projects, a particularly sore subject for most Blackfeet. The principal question facing the OIA and Congress was whether to abandon several unfinished projects that had been successful only in draining valuable funds from the tribal treasury. Joe Brown, the fifty-eight-year-old BTBC chairman, explained that the council opposed abandonment of the irrigation projects but wanted the tribe and the agency superintendent to take control of them. He told Senator Burton Wheeler that the Blackfeet "can handle them more economically and to the better satisfaction of the Indian than the Reclamation Service."³⁷ Brown urged the senators to facilitate the replacement of white workers with Indian workers when possible, expressing the desire of his people to assume more responsibility for their affairs, the dominant theme of the hearing; of the seventy-three agency employees only thirty-six were Blackfeet. He also requested that Wheeler find government funding to help the Blackfeet develop a tribal oil company and buy a tribal livestock herd. Brown told Wheeler that if the government would provide seed money for a tribal drilling operation then "why not the Blackfeet themselves as a company borrow money and drill these oil wells themselves and get 100 percent of the oil rather than get the 12 1/2 percent that they get now." If white stockmen could turn a profit after paying taxes and grazing fees, he explained, "why can not we, the Indians who own the land and who do not pay these taxes nor do not have to pay for the grazing, make a success of the stock industry."³⁸

While Wheeler opposed tribal control of oil development, he did support Brown's plan to expand the Blackfeet livestock industry. Wheeler continued to champion the allotment policy and a variation of Campbell's Industrial Program, but he also sanctioned greater Blackfeet control of reservation business affairs. "We ought to push as much responsibility onto them as we possibly can," he told Superintendent Stone. Stone answered that if the tribe's competent members were given a chance to manage the livestock industry, tribal irrigation, and a proposed creamery plant, then within ten years "you would find the Blackfeet Indians very largely in control of their own industries." He ended the hearing with an admonishment to the committee: "We cannot afford to lose the interest that they have right now to handle their own affairs."³⁹

Tribal, congressional, and Indian Office leaders reached a consensus during the 1933 hearing that the Blackfeet were able and willing to manage their business affairs. Senator Wheeler remarked at the end of the hearing that "the Indians on this reservation are capable of taking care of themselves."⁴⁰ Four years earlier, Senate investigator Walter Liggett had concluded that "there has been a tragic failure to teach these Indians the true fundamentals of education. After many years in leading strings they are not equipped to cope with the conditions they are facing."⁴¹ The truth lay somewhere between those opposing sentiments. The prevailing perception, however, was that the Blackfeet could do no worse than the OIA in managing their natural, financial, and human resources; their interest in improving tribal affairs was, to understate it, greater than that of their Indian agents. If the Meriam Report recommended eventually "winding up the National administration of Indian

life," then the Blackfeet wanted it sooner rather than later, given the state of affairs on their reservation.

THE IDEA OF THE IRA AND THE FIRST BLACKFEET DEBATE

It was John Collier's sense of mission and passion for Indian reform that led Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to appoint him commissioner of Indian Affairs. Ickes defended his selection and Collier's philosophy by saying: "The whites can take care of themselves, but the Indians need some one to protect them from exploitation. I want a man who will respect their customs and have a sympathetic point of view with reference to their culture. I want the Indians to be helped to help themselves."⁴² The Collier administration was thus poised to produce a "new day" for the American Indian rather than the "false dawn" of Hoover's New Era. In the reform-minded atmosphere of depression America, Collier and his dedicated staff assiduously promoted a vision of organizational change in Indian administration that would be codified as the Indian Reorganization Act. The incorporation of Indian America became the cornerstone of his reform package.

While Collier and his staff prepared a legislative agenda and an attendant public relations campaign in early 1934, the Blackfeet considered the changes that were brewing in Washington. The 1933 Senate subcommittee hearing had created an expectation of reform among interested Blackfeet, and they were eager to see what the new administration had to offer them. Their first exposure to the new regime was Collier's circular letter of January 20, which was sent to all tribes and their superintendents to introduce the philosophy of the Indian New Deal. Collier's twelve-page letter, simply entitled "Indian Self-government," first emphasized his hope that Indians would themselves contribute to the process of improving their affairs. The establishment of Indian self-government and the concomitant expansion of economic opportunity were the program's twin goals, Collier wrote, emphasizing that each tribe should be given "the maximum measure of control over its economic life and, in particular, over expenditures of its own funds."⁴³ He delineated the basic architecture of an organized Indian community, providing a sketchy blueprint for the gradual termination of federal supervision. Collier recommended that state governments assume the responsibilities of education and health matters and ultimately that a reconstituted Indian community, if properly organized, be given "complete supervision over its internal affairs."⁴⁴

On February 5 the business council convened to discuss the letter and Collier's reorganization plan; nearly seven hundred Blackfeet attended the meeting, the largest gathering ever assembled for a discussion of political matters. Superintendent Forrest Stone opened the meeting with a short summary of Collier's letter and legislative agenda, which he called "an opportunity that will never be presented again." He reminded the Blackfeet that the tribe had lost 2.5 million acres of land in the last fifty years and argued that Collier's land policy would end the diminution of the tribal estate and give them "something to hand to your children." Stone raised the controversial issue of communal ownership, saying that the "matter of pooling your lands

will equalize things, even though it does take a sacrifice on the part of some of you to do this.”⁴⁵ Collier’s proposal for Indians to remise their allotted lands to tribal ownership sparked a fierce debate. Few Blackfeet expressed a willingness to make the “sacrifice.” James Perrine, a supporter of Collier’s self-government provisions, expressed skepticism about his land policy, declaring: “We are not Menonites [*sic*] yet.” Owen Heavybreast spoke for many of his fellow full-bloods when he criticized mixed-bloods who would benefit from the pooling of Blackfeet lands, saying that many of them had “squandered” a “share of the reservation” when they sold their allotments; many full-bloods had retained their allotments.⁴⁶ Hugh Jackson was the most outspoken, arguing that “it looks as if we want to be governed under a communistic form of government like in Russia.... I don’t believe we should try any changes.” The Blackfeet, Jackson said, “are living in the United States, and the system is that you have to own property by title. We are not in a foreign country, and we got to travel along with the people in the state of Montana. We got to live like the rest of them.”⁴⁷ Speakers did agree that the tribe’s best economic policy continued to be the development of its oil reserves. Despite some initial success the previous year, the reservation was not being developed in contrast to neighboring Cut Bank; three wells were in operation compared with seventy in the Cut Bank fields. Collier’s proposal failed to mention resource development, Perrine noted, and told the council that it should convince the Interior Department that “this resource should be developed as quickly as possible so that the Indians here will receive the ultimate benefit. Then our reasons for assembling here to ask or beg the government for this and that would be eliminated, because we will then have our own subsistence.”⁴⁸ Perrine’s call for renewed attention to oil development found solid support from both mixed-bloods and full-bloods.

Stone wrote Collier several days later to tell him that despite “doing some pretty strenuous work” explaining Collier’s intentions to the tribe, “the feeling is running quite strongly against the plan.”⁴⁹ The threat of mandatory land consolidation in particular did not appeal to the Blackfeet. There was great confusion about what Collier intended, on the Blackfeet Reservation and elsewhere in the country, especially regarding the idea of communal ownership. Collier wrote Stone three weeks later to encourage him to continue discussing the proposed legislation and explain that “it is not the purpose of the bill to take land away from those who have it and give it to those who have not.”⁵⁰ The kind of confusion and anger that Collier faced from tribes like the Blackfeet was a principal reason he initiated a series of conferences with Indian leaders the following month.

THE GREAT PLAINS CONGRESS

The debate on the Wheeler-Howard Bill—Collier’s forty-eight-page “plan” that was sponsored by Burton Wheeler and Edgar Howard of Nebraska, chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on Indian Affairs, respectively—began in the House on February 22, and in the Senate on the 27th.⁵¹ Collier announced during the House hearings that he would be taking his

reform program to the people it would affect by organizing a series of Indian congresses, the first time the OIA had given its charges an opportunity to consider important legislation before it was imprinted upon their reservations.

Eighteen members of the Blackfeet Nation joined tribal representatives of nearly sixty thousand Plains Indians in Rapid City, South Dakota on March 2, 1934, to hear Collier himself delineate the important facets of his vision of modern Indian administration. In his general remarks to start the conference, Collier emphasized that the OIA and Congress had the authority to unilaterally pass legislation affecting Indians. But they would not do so in 1934, he told the crowd. "We intend to act in partnership with the Indians, and we are not going to act unless the Indians are willing to go with us."⁵² This pronouncement of faith elicited applause from those in attendance, who were as excited by Collier's words as by his presence in front of such a disparate collection of Indian leaders.

Collier spoke at length about his plan for tribal reorganization. The basis of the modern world, he said, was organization, which took form in corporations, associations, cooperatives, and municipal governments. Collier explained that "what is almost the heart of our plan" is the organization of the American Indian for "mutual benefit, for local self-government and for doing business in the modern, organized way."⁵³ Reconstituted tribal organizations would still enjoy the "protective guardianship" of the federal government and the "privilege" of tax exemption, he promised, but they would also enjoy increased responsibility for the internal affairs of the tribe, access to the Indian Office's proposed "credit system," and eligibility for the type of federal assistance contained in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal legislation. No Indian group would be forced to organize, but if it did, Collier said to loud applause, it could "take over many of the things that are now being done by the Indian Bureau, and the money being spent on those things would be transferred to the organized body of Indians and they would spend the money and they would hire their own employees."⁵⁴ Collier forcefully stressed the need for organization, telling his audience of Indian leaders and entrepreneurs that

in the United States, if you are going to do business and make money and protect yourself, you have got to do it in an organized way. Otherwise you are just out of luck. You don't make any money, you are not protected, and the other fellow eats you alive. You can't govern yourselves, you can't do business, you can't protect yourself, unless you organize. That is true regarding everybody in the United States.⁵⁵

The American Indian, Collier told the crowd, was an example of Roosevelt's "forgotten man," who had been "carrying a privileged class" and "big business" on his back. The Indian had an opportunity to benefit from New Deal reforms designed to protect the "common man."⁵⁶ Sounding like a cross between Henry Luce and Dwight Macdonald, Collier thus presented the philosophical "heart of the plan": the need for Indian America to form countervailing or complementary organizations to those of white America. For Collier, the Indian New Deal was as much about class as it was about race.

After Collier reviewed his vision and the legislative version of it, tribal delegates were given a chance to ask questions and ten minutes with which to offer an “unofficial expression of opinion.” Joe Brown opened this segment with a short speech on March 4, telling Collier and his associates that his delegation had tried to be a “good listener” so that its decision would be based on facts. “In the most part of this bill we are in favor of it, and I believe that if we can get together with some of the Bureau officials to work over the objectionable features that we have we are not far apart. Our Reservation is getting so ... checkerboarded with white settlers that it looks like a man with the small pox.”⁵⁷ The opinions expressed after Brown were decidedly mixed. The Crow and the Northern Cheyenne delegations, for example, expressed their belief that their tribes could not operate successfully under the self-government provisions. Several delegations remained convinced that the bill would principally benefit landless mixed-bloods who would take advantage of full-blood assets through the vehicle of communal ownership.⁵⁸ Elderly delegates were given a chance to speak in their native tongue. Rides at the Door spoke for the Blackfeet, telling the assembly that the Blackfeet tribe needed the IRA to protect its resources from white predators: “My people now own a large area of oil land and we have now on our reservation three producing wells, and that is the reason I came here, and I want some law or protection whereby I can always hold that property intact so that no white man can take it away from me,” he said, eliciting applause from the audience. Referring to the Collier delegation, Rides at the Door expressed hope that “with their protection and support, their guidance, we are not going to let any white man do like that to us.”⁵⁹

The Blackfeet delegation was, perhaps, the most supportive and unified of those that attended the four-day conference. It certainly gave Collier the most solid endorsement, both by offering a positive opinion of the bill during its allotted ten minutes and by adopting him into the tribe. During the last session, a Blackfeet delegate generated enthusiastic applause by announcing from the stage that the delegation was going to “adopt” Collier into the tribe and make him a “leader in this community plan”; as a result the Blackfeet “expect him to do more for us.” The delegates gave Collier the name Spotted Eagle because, the delegate said, it “represents the Indian Reservations, the way they are checkerboarded. We hope that those spots will be rubbed off so that every Indian Reservation will be all in one spot.” The Blackfeet closed their unique presentation by singing a Blackfeet song and presenting Collier with a tribal headdress.⁶⁰

Collier ended the conference as he had started it, reminding the delegates of the emphasis he placed on voluntary participation and the need for Indians to organize effectively to “assert their rights” in protecting their assets and their future livelihood. He warned them not to listen to the “local interests,” who would call the bill “communism.” “Your interests,” he said, “are, of necessity, in opposition to many local interests around you.... You want to have the capital to put stock on your own lands and yourself enjoy the profits of the cattle business, and, of course, there are white cattle men and banks that don’t want you to do it.” More important than the conference and the legis-

lation, Collier told the delegates, was the idea that "Indians shall take the responsibility, here and now, of thinking out their own problems and arriving at their own conclusions, and determining their own future."⁶¹ Self-determination through self-government was, Collier concluded, the means to the end of federal supervision as Indians knew it in 1934.

THE SECOND BLACKFEET DEBATE

The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council had tried to assume additional responsibility for the welfare of the tribe for two decades but had faced agency prejudice, favoritism, and in some cases informed opinion. The judgment of tribal, congressional, and agency personnel in late 1933 was that the Blackfeet were, in Senator Burton Wheeler's words, "capable of taking care of themselves." The council now had an opportunity to act upon that judgment. Rides at the Door had said in 1933 that the Blackfeet wanted a "new deal" because "the old system is no success." The Blackfeet Nation now had the option of choosing Collier's new system of political economy to reach its long-standing goal of self-support and self-governance. Collier's speeches at the Great Plains Congress appealed to the Blackfeet because they addressed several important issues besides the rather amorphous notion of self-government, delineating a new system of tribal economic organization that promised a credit-starved tribe access to a revolving loan fund. Collier's pronouncement that his legislation would enable an Indian nation to "take over many of the things that are now being done by the Indian Bureau," spend the money allocated for those activities, and "hire their own employees," mirrored the testimony of Blackfeet leaders during the October 1933 Senate hearing. The Blackfeet had had more practice with representational decision-making than most tribes. The tribe's business council had been in operation since 1915 and its constitution in place since 1922; the election process, however flawed, reminded the Blackfeet of their ability to foster change every two years. The type of centralized government that Collier proposed was not foreign to most Blackfeet, though it was not always acceptable to them. The internecine conflict between the business council and officers of the FYIP had died down, but the legacy of that conflict was a distrust of centralized control of tribal decision-making. Yet the experience that many FYIP leaders had with the opposite model, the disparate collection of chapter organizations, led many of them to oppose any alternative to centralized government.⁶² The debate over which form of self-government the Blackfeet should adopt dominated the BTBC meeting of March 31 and three similar meetings held in the reservation's other voting districts.

Council Chairman Joe Brown conceded at the outset of the March 31 meeting that many Blackfeet, particularly full-bloods, were "mixed up" about the Wheeler-Howard Bill and thus had invited Great Falls attorney Cleve Hall to help explain the amendments proposed by the business council. The principal question was whether the Blackfeet should sanction the charter of one central government or numerous self-governing "communities." The question, as Hall put it to the council and more than one hundred Blackfeet in

attendance, was “whether you would want a number of communities on the one reservation, bearing in mind that these communities take over the tribal funds and lands, or whether you would want one large community for the reservation.”⁶³ The issue had been debated during the mid-1920s, as the “North” community, the mostly mixed-blood districts and the council they dominated, and the “South” community, which found political expression in the chapter organizations, struggled for political legitimacy. The Blackfeet now were faced with the need to define their community, to formalize the structure of governing within the physical boundaries of the reservation. Joe Brown predicted that confusion would reign if the tribe elected to charter more than one community government. “The whole bill means to gradually take over the range of government on your reservation,” he told the crowd, and recommended that the Blackfeet “control our government right here from this office.”⁶⁴

It would be quite natural to suppose that Chairman Brown and other mixed-blood councilmen would prefer the central government of the business council, but a consensus emerged that centralized decision-making was the only option to consider. Several influential full-bloods weighed in with support for one government. Bird Rattler, Many Hides, Weaselhead, and John Ground all testified to the need for one community government. Rides at the Door told the assemblage: “You all now realize the experience of that division of the reservation, known as chapter districts. You all know that you never got along good. There was nothing but continuous disagreement all the way through.” Hugh Jackson also criticized the experiment of chapter organizations, saying that the Blackfeet “should call it one corporation—the Blackfeet Reservation.”⁶⁵ There were detractors of the idea of “one corporation.” Twenty-four Blackfeet opposed the “one community plan,” while eighty-eight sanctioned it. A few holdover opponents believed that “one community” meant the sacrifice of individual property, while some simply did not trust the mixed-blood leadership. Dick Kipp wanted a government like the one the Blackfeet had “in the old times,” complaining that full-bloods were generally shut out of tribal decision-making because they did not understand English. Kipp was the exception, however, as most full-bloods, particularly those who were or who had been active in the FYIP, voted to adopt one central government. John Old Chief spoke after Kipp, telling the meeting, “You know I was president of a chapter. Today, I will throw that away. I am going to join this community self-government.”⁶⁶ Those Blackfeet active in the chapter organizations were both disillusioned with the FYIP and probably wary of seceding from a government controlled by the cohort of mixed-bloods that was active in pursuing oil development; the confusion that Joe Brown described would have made it particularly difficult for full-bloods to monitor the per capita distribution of funds from Court of Claims awards and tribal oil production. While full-bloods in particular held the idea of tribal unity in high regard, they also understood that it was better to work with the principals of any newly formed Blackfeet “corporation” as a member of that corporation than as leaders of competing communities which lacked the requisite business skills for managing the kind of businesses that the Blackfeet needed to expand their economic horizons.

The council also proposed eliminating the secretary of the interior as a policing entity with the authority to affect changes in Blackfeet politics, fearing that a new Republican administration would exercise greater control over any new government. This amendment alarmed Superintendent Stone, who contributed his opinion after a long silence by telling the council that “[i]n every community, every county or state, there is some place a power over it [*sic*]. You could hardly leave that in the hands of the community itself.”⁶⁷ Stone argued that any government needed checks and balances to guard against corrupt or simply incompetent administration. Hall answered that an autocratic interior secretary was the worse option and that if the Blackfeet government did fail to function, then it would “blow up” on its own. The amendment passed over Stone’s objections. Passing the amendment symbolized the Blackfeet’s recognition of the need to control the operation of any new government and thus prevent the federal government from making wholesale changes without the tribe’s consent, the common denominator of the amendments; in several places the council simply replaced “secretary of the interior” with “three-fourths of the adult members of the tribe.” Brown was particularly insistent that any future changes be made “with the consent of the Indian.”⁶⁸ The consensus among Blackfeet leaders was that the tribe needed a statutory mechanism to “terminate” various supervisory functions of the Interior Department. Not every administration would be as supportive of tribal sovereignty as Collier’s. At the end of a long day spent debating the tribe’s future, the council endorsed the amendments presented and the Wheeler-Howard Bill that was then circulating in Congress. Brown and three other delegates were chosen to travel to Washington in late April to present the amendments to the House and Senate committees on Indian Affairs in the hopes that Congress would be as attentive as John Collier was to the wants and needs of the Blackfeet people.

THE SENATE DEBATE AND THE BLACKFEET

Collier resumed his campaign for comprehensive Indian reform after touring Indian America, testifying before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on April 26. The controversial issue of mandatory land transfers and the scope of self-government were the principal points debated. Collier conceded to Senator Wheeler, the committee chairman, that the compulsory nature of Title III remained a barrier, citing the Blackfeet’s protest as an example of the concern that had been “persistently raised” by many Indian leaders; the Blackfeet, Collier told Wheeler, wanted land recombination to be “voluntary.” Collier now had a “very strong leaning” toward making Title III a voluntary provision.⁶⁹ Wheeler had been an initial supporter of Collier’s regime and a sponsor of his original bill, but by April he had lost faith in Collier’s vision and resolved to weaken it.⁷⁰ On several occasions Wheeler asked Collier to clarify his intentions with regard to Montana’s Indians. Collier’s proposal to offer self-government to Montana Indians represented, Wheeler believed, “a step backward for them rather than a step forward.” The Indians of the Blackfeet and Fort Peck reservations already exercised the form of government Collier

was proposing and were “becoming more or less assimilated,” he argued. If the government of the Blackfeet and other Montana tribes were to evolve toward the form of a “complete town government,” he told Collier, then “it would bring about all kinds of conflicts between *your* [author’s italics] Indians and the white people and ... it would set back the Indians.”⁷¹

Joe Brown appeared before the committee two days later to address Wheeler’s contention that the Wheeler-Howard Bill would “set back the Indians.” Brown testified that the tribe had studied the bill after the Rapid City conference and agreed to accept it if the voluntary nature of land transfer in Title III was codified; the tribe would then “think it is a good bill,” he said. He reviewed the tribe’s experience with the FYIP, telling the committee that had government representatives “done their part it would have been a success, but as it was, why, it was mostly a failure.” Brown expressed excitement about the proposed credit fund, which would provide Blackfeet with the money to buy enough stock and feed to help the chapter organizations expand; the Blackfeet, he said, “are aching to get a chance at that \$10,000,000 that is in that bill.”⁷² Wheeler expressed approval of Brown’s enthusiasm for the program and for advocating self-reliance to full-bloods. Senator Lynn Frazier affectionately told him, “I believe you will make good too, Brown.” Brown rejoined that “if we just had another chance we are going to make good. The older people have all received an experience and have learned something.”⁷³ Wheeler and Frazier seemed to have great confidence in Joe Brown’s abilities. Responding to Brown’s request for more Indian employment in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Wheeler asked him: “You could take over the superintendency, more than likely?” Brown thought that the job was too difficult for him and instead offered support for Forrest Stone, who was a “mighty good man.”

Wheeler quickly moved to his critique of the bill, telling Brown that he disagreed with his assertion that the self-government provision of the bill would help the Blackfeet achieve economic and political progress. Wheeler argued that the Blackfeet already controlled most of Glacier County: Indians like Brown were on the school board, were able to run for state senate as Joe Brown had done, and “practically run that community up there now.” The Blackfeet were successfully assimilating into white society and white institutions, and if they were to create an Indian community “separate and distinct from the white community” then there would be “trouble between them.”⁷⁴ When Senator Elmer Thomas asked Brown if he intended to “surrender” involvement in the county government, Brown answered that the bill allowed the Blackfeet to participate in both the community and county government. He provoked laughter when he said that the Blackfeet would “take chances on what laws would be under the community government, because we would make them.” Brown’s response, however, was precisely what made Wheeler “fearful” of an indigenous form of Indian community government. If the Blackfeet Nation passed its own laws, he told Brown, the result would be “a great deal of confusion and a great deal of bitterness and strife between two classes of people, which would be to the detriment” of the Blackfeet. Brown offered to accept an amendment proscribing such a situation. Wheeler

exclaimed, "We *will* [author's italics] amend it."⁷⁵ Frazier followed Wheeler's lead by telling Brown shortly before the session ended that "it seems to me that the best thing to do to handle a group like the Blackfeet is to assist them to take part in county government there, the regular county government, give them fair representation, and I believe they will get along all right." Brown responded that "the bill gives us that privilege. We do not have to go into this unless we want to."⁷⁶ Despite the handicap of blindness in one eye and only an eighth-grade education, Brown acquitted himself very well in front of congressional committees.⁷⁷

Joe Brown and the Blackfeet did not want to be "handled" by Congress. The pending legislation appealed to Brown and his people because it gave them options for economic growth and the "privilege" to choose their own path based on their own reading of those options. The Blackfeet had been successful in Glacier County, but they remained the poor citizens of the county. The Blackfeet may have been "dominating" public life in Glacier County, as Wheeler contended, but they were not dominating economic life. Without credit they never would. Without the right to negotiate with their white tenants they never would. Collier's plan gave the Blackfeet more political power to negotiate with the state and the federal government, and it gave them greater access to credit, the essential elements of a political economy that the Blackfeet had been requesting for nearly twenty years.

Wheeler, for his part, ran the hearings using the Blackfeet Nation as his model tribe. He was very familiar with conditions on the Blackfeet Reservation, having made official visits to Browning on at least three occasions during the previous five years; in addition, he vacationed in nearby Glacier Park, where delegations of Blackfeet would often visit him, and he had once tried to invest in reservation oil leases in the early 1920s. His conception of Indian-white relations and *his* vision of organizational change were predicated, then, on these specific experiences with the Blackfeet Indians and, to a lesser extent, the other tribes of Montana. Though he clearly understood the variegated nature of the country's Indian population, the sheer variety of the nations within the nation, Wheeler viewed the Blackfeet in many ways as a model for assimilation and acculturation. In his mind, as he told Collier and Brown on separate occasions, Indians were moving in the right direction within the institutional world of white America. Joe Brown's seemingly cavalier assertion of the Blackfeet's right to pass laws *supra* or *contra* county laws alarmed Wheeler, who in the end did not have that much confidence in Brown or his people to "do the right thing."

THE HOUSE DEBATE AND THE BLACKFEET

Brown told the House Committee on Indian Affairs several days later that the Blackfeet Nation had been "very much opposed to" Collier's plan in February, principally because it "had not had a chance to study it." The tribe had spent considerable time since the Great Plains Congress discussing the bill in a series of meetings that had given all tribal members an opportunity to participate, with the result, Brown testified, that most now supported it; Collier's

decision to make land transfers voluntary rather than mandatory also had had an impact on voters' support of the legislation. "There are features in this bill that are very acceptable," Brown testified. "They are extraordinary."⁷⁸ He was particularly pleased with provisions advancing Indian education and Indian labor within the Indian Service, changes that he had been requesting for many years; he explained that the Blackfeet could fill every agency position except chief clerk and superintendent, but if the bill passed then the tribe could quickly "develop men that would take those places."⁷⁹ The committee allotted only fifteen minutes to each tribe, but Brown pressed his case for the legislation, telling the committee, "We do not know when we will get a chance of this kind, we do not know when we will ever get a man again in the chair of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs whose heart and sympathies are with the Indian."⁸⁰ Brown's endorsement of Collier provided an opening for Representatives Theodore Werner of South Carolina and Thomas O'Malley of Wisconsin, members of a contingent of pro-assimilation congressmen, who used it to continue their attacks on Collier and his conception of Indian self-government. Brown's request for more time turned into an interrogation.

Werner tried to chip away at Brown's support of Collier by asking him if he thought Collier had either created "false hopes" or blamed Congress for the Indian's problems during the Great Plains Congress. Brown answered that Collier had done neither. O'Malley implied that Brown and his people did not fully understand the legislation, despite attending the congress and holding several meetings on the bill. He asked Brown, "after what you say was a study of the bill and a discussion of it with members of your tribe, you are in favor of it?" Brown simply answered, "Yes, sir."⁸¹ Representative Werner also questioned Brown's cognitive abilities, asking him, "You say that you have given very careful study to this bill?" Brown simply answered: "Careful in my humble way. I am not a lawyer."⁸² After facing Werner and O'Malley's lengthy contumely, Brown reemphasized the importance of the bill's protection of the Blackfeet's land base and its educational and financial provisions, in particular the revolving credit fund. This "wonderful system," Brown said, is "something that has been needed, because our credit system—we have none"; banks would not give Indians credit because the federal government held in trust the title to their land. Frustrated by the committee's lack of faith in his judgment and his ability to decide what was best for his people, he finished his testimony by saying, "I think we could get together if we just all lower our sights a bit and cooperate. I believe we can put a bill through here that will satisfy the Indians."⁸³

WHEELER'S RE-VISION OF THE IRA

On June 5 Brown and BTBC secretary Leo Kennerly telegraphed to the Indian Office the council's unanimous approval of the pending Wheeler-Howard Indian Bill. Congress passed the bill on June 16, and President Roosevelt signed it two days later.⁸⁴ While the final version of the bill—which became known as the Indian Reorganization Act—contained enough important elements to "satisfy the Blackfeet," Wheeler wielded his power in the

Senate to ensure that Collier's vision of cultural pluralism and Indian self-determination devolved into Wheeler's defense of assimilation. After the formal hearings ended in early May, Collier negotiated an acceptable compromise with Howard and Wheeler, but by this time Collier had lost his leverage. It was Wheeler who dictated what the final bill would look like, going so far as to introduce a new bill, S. 3645, to replace S. 2755. Collier called the IRA a "very much modified, shortened and amended version" of his original bill in his analysis of the act; Wheeler and his colleagues reduced Collier's forty-eight-page bill to five pages and succeeded in deleting Collier's language of self-determination.⁸⁵ The IRA improved Collier's original bill in the area of economic development, but weakened or eliminated key provisions for cultural development and self-government.⁸⁶ The bill was imperfect, the result of a struggle between two competing visions of Indian America: one sought to protect the Indians' right to construct their own version of the American community; the other fought to sustain the Indians' gradual adoption of white mores and institutions to "fit them as American citizens," as Wheeler put it. Congress wanted to assist Indians in making economic progress, but it did not want to create nations within the nation that held powers in conflict with the dominant society it wanted Indian citizens to eventually adopt. Joe Brown's assertion of his tribe's right to pass laws symbolized for Wheeler, and other influential lawmakers, the danger inherent in Collier's vision of Indian self-determination. As a result, Wheeler had significantly weakened Collier's provision for Indian home rule.

The IRA would not affect any tribe whose majority of eligible voters rejected the legislation, but once a tribe did so it could not claim any benefits provided under the law.⁸⁷ Given that Wheeler and other congressmen had successfully weakened Collier's reforms, the OIA leadership struggled to secure tribal votes on the IRA before an even more hostile Congress assumed office the following fall. Felix Cohen, the chairman of the OIA's Organization Committee, wrote in July 1934 that "it is important that a number of tribes strategically located be actually organized before the next session of Congress, since the failure to do this will subject the Indian Office to considerable criticism."⁸⁸ The committee decided in September that thirty-three tribes should vote on the IRA by October 27, 1934. The Blackfeet Nation, given its size and its relatively consistent support of the bill's major provisions, was among the thirty-three slated for an early vote.

THE BLACKFEET VOTE

The BTBC's June 5 approval of the Wheeler-Howard legislation would have been rendered meaningless if a majority of the tribe's voting members did not support the IRA. The council organized a series of meetings to inform Blackfeet citizens of the IRA's advantages and enlisted the aid of Hall and McCabe, a local law firm, to analyze the bill to help the council justify its vote for it. Cleve Hall simply recommended that the Blackfeet vote for the IRA, adopt a constitution, and secure a charter of incorporation to gain access to the \$10-million credit fund; in addition, the charter would give the tribe the

legal means to terminate the Interior Department's supervision of its natural resources, provided that a majority of eligible voters supported the termination.⁸⁹ Forrest Stone submitted Hall's analysis to the OIA with the business council's request that the OIA determine the report's veracity before the council distributed it to Blackfeet voters. The OIA called Hall's analysis "very creditable," though not as comprehensive as the OIA's, and recommended that the council distribute it to their constituents for consideration.⁹⁰ The OIA tried to avoid coercing tribes or tribal leaders into adopting the IRA, choosing to support when possible the efforts of tribes like the Blackfeet to secure an independent opinion of the act's merits.

The BTBC took the initiative for deciding the IRA's fate on the Blackfeet Reservation on September 11. Stone encouraged council members to support the act, telling them that the Wheeler-Howard Bill "is very important to the Blackfeet Indians.... We have discussed it from every angle. The time has come for you to decide whether you want it or not." Twelve of the thirteen councilmen decided that they wanted it, and voted to petition the secretary of the interior to approve October 20 as the date for the tribe's referendum.⁹¹ Stone told Collier two days later that "the Blackfeet are pretty well informed at present as to the provisions of this act. They have spent a good deal of time on it and have listened pretty carefully to the explanations that have been offered them by members of the council, employees, and leaders of the tribe aside from council members." Although the Blackfeet did not agree with all the IRA's provisions, Stone believed that they were going to "accept it with the idea in mind that the good contained in the bill far exceeds the objectionable features."⁹²

The Blackfeet proved Stone correct on October 27. Nearly 83 percent of participating voters supported the IRA; 823 Blackfeet voted for it while 171 voted against it. Although a winter storm made it difficult for some Blackfeet to get to the polls, 994 of 1,785 eligible voters turned out to cast their secret ballots; 114 of the 148 Blackfeet who mailed their ballots also voted for the act.⁹³ It is important to note that the act received support from both mixed-bloods and full-bloods, though it is difficult to determine with any precision either the breakdown of voting by blood quantum or the reason nearly eight hundred Blackfeet did not vote; the tribe's rate of participation fell just under the national average of 58 percent.⁹⁴ Some mixed-bloods objected that the IRA granted certain sovereign powers to the BTBC and thus expanded its role in the tribal economy; some full-bloods, largely because of demographic circumstances favoring mixed-bloods by a ratio of four to one, objected for the same reason.⁹⁵ In most political communities, an unfortunately high number of voters elects not to participate in the democratic process because of cynicism, despair, or laziness. It was likely no different on the Blackfeet Reservation, particularly when one considers the history of Blackfeet-white relations of the preceding decades. This history, however, compelled more than one thousand Blackfeet to embrace the opportunity to alter the trajectory of those relations. For whatever reason a large number of voters did not have the same urgency. Snow-swept roads probably kept some older voters home. Some Blackfeet were probably unfamiliar with or uninterested in the

issues that day and simply chose to ignore the referendum. But they did not stay home because no one bothered to tell them of this opportunity. The agency staff and leaders of both factions held a series of meetings in mixed-blood and full-blood communities, made themselves available to answer questions, and distributed appropriate information to inform the Blackfeet body politic of its voting options. The 1929 and 1933 Senate subcommittee hearings and the 1934 IRA debates on the reservation and in Washington politicized Blackfeet citizens at a time when they as well as most Americans were looking for answers to a crisis of confidence and comfort. It was a good time to be political.

CONCLUSION

A year after a Senate subcommittee judged the Blackfeet Indians to be “capable” of running their own affairs, the Blackfeet Nation expressed agreement by overwhelmingly adopting the Indian Reorganization Act and thus grasped the tools of a modern political economy to realize its long-standing goal of “self-support.” The business council, under the steady and pragmatic leadership of Joe Brown, had created an environment in which debate and discussion could take place among the reservation’s various factions and communities. The Blackfeet participated in an exercise of tribal democracy, electing to “take the responsibility,” as Collier told them they should, “of thinking out their own problems and arriving at their own conclusions, and determining their own future.” The Blackfeet’s widespread acceptance of the IRA resulted from an open and organized debate about the tribe’s future and remembrance of a past largely influenced by the vagaries of OIA management. Blackfeet factions agreed during the IRA debate that in order to “decrease Federal overlordship,” as Harold Ickes called the OIA’s heavy-handed management of tribal affairs, the tribe had to assume greater economic and political control over the development of the reservation’s natural and human resources by securing the tools of modern administration offered in the IRA. The IRA would give a reconstituted tribal council the authority to negotiate with other political bodies and conduct “business in the modern, organized way,” as John Collier had said they must do to survive in twentieth-century America.

Recent historiography generally does not regard the IRA as a success, or else it focuses on Native communities that rejected it. But it is important to remember the excitement the IRA engendered among the tribes that adopted it, as well as the spirited debate it created among those that did not. Many Indian leaders, like Joe Brown and Rides at the Door, considered the IRA to be the best legislative or political means to further their independence from federal supervision that had stifled economic progress and exacerbated tribal dissension. The OIA had failed for twenty years to provide the Blackfeet with a coordinated economic policy: it debilitated the tribe’s search for oil, neglected the tribe’s grazing resources, and usurped tribal funds for costly irrigation projects in its zeal to turn the Blackfeet into farmers in one of the country’s poorest agricultural regions. The Blackfeet, like their Flathead

neighbors to the southwest, embraced the IRA because it gave them access to credit and the statutory power to stage elections to reduce or eliminate federal control of the tribe's financial and natural resources. Unlike their Crow neighbors to the southeast, Blackfeet of all degrees of blood had developed among themselves a confidence that they were capable of self-government. Adopting the IRA's machinery of political economy was a logical first step for tribal members committed to "determining their own future."

The Indian New Deal and the IRA both expanded economic horizons and exacerbated political divisions on the Blackfeet Reservation. Credit programs facilitated the creation of an inchoate Blackfeet middle class by providing livestock, farming, and rehabilitation loans to Indians hungry for economic development. By 1950, 603 individual Blackfeet and four cooperatives had borrowed more than one million dollars from the IRA's Revolving Credit Fund at affordable rates, paid back the money to a high degree, and prospered to an extent greater than that possible without such access to credit, the lifeblood of any business or individual enterprise. The average income for Blackfeet families in 1950 was \$2,639, one of the highest among the nation's Indian communities.⁹⁶ Opposition to the IRA came mainly from the tribe's full-bloods, whose political power had declined due to demographic circumstances that in 1940 favored mixed-bloods by a ratio of five to one. While some younger full-bloods took advantage of IRA and tribal economic programs, an inability or a disinclination on the part of older full-bloods to do so impelled their campaign to repeal the IRA and abolish the business council. Yet even Blackfeet elders were ambivalent about the IRA. Juniper Old Person, Earl Old Person's father, testified during the tribe's 1945 Constitutional Convention, "my children got a start under the [IRA] and I feel proud of them and they will feed me."⁹⁷ For some economically marginalized and increasingly class-conscious Blackfeet, the IRA became a scapegoat for problems created more from cultural resistance, demographic decline, and generational differences than from ethnic or racial discrimination. Labeling the IRA "a nuisance," the leader of the tribe's "minority group" told a congressional subcommittee in 1944 that "each year we just cannot understand it. I want to get rid of the [IRA]."⁹⁸ The council attempted to be solicitous of the full-bloods' demands for political and financial dispensation, spending money on a tribal welfare program and earmarking tribal funds for cultural, medical, and credit programs for older full-bloods; the BTBC funded full-blood celebrations like the annual sun dance and encampment, paid for chiropractic and rheumatism treatment for elderly full-bloods, and established a separate credit fund called "Special Loans for Aged Indians." Full-bloods and other Blackfeet dissidents did have legitimate complaints about the IRA and the BTBC. The council's authority to expend tribal oil revenues under IRA provisions enlarged its role in the tribal economy. This it did to mixed results: councilmen practiced favoritism, extravagance, and, in some cases, outright corruption. A cohort of wealthy mixed-bloods exploited the charter's provision for Indian "preference rights" to enlarge their private domains. In addition, pressure from both mixed-bloods and full-bloods for per capita payments created political instability and retarded long-term investment, limiting the council's effectiveness

as a vehicle for economic development. Social conflict developed principally from different cultural responses to the distribution of revenues earned from development of community-owned oil reserves. Full-bloods in particular demanded per capita distributions and opposed investment in "rehabilitation" programs that chiefly benefited younger Blackfeet couples of low blood quantum. Yet the very people who sought the IRA's repeal in the 1940s used its provisions for democratic reform in the 1950s to reclaim influence and status by creating a dissenting coalition that crossed class and ethnic lines. Full-blood elders used the IRA's constitutional mechanism for establishing referenda to foster changes in income distribution patterns.⁹⁹ In the process, elders became acculturated to democratic practices under IRA administration while retaining what they called their "ancient customs." They also helped to fashion a syncretic Blackfeet political culture based on both "traditional" consensus-oriented decision-making and modern democratic decision-making that rested upon the notion of majority rule.

Regardless of what happened after October 1934 the Blackfeet made the right decision to adopt the IRA. In October 1934 the act made sense to a majority of tribal voters. Hindsight should not preclude a broader understanding of the place where these voters stood as they debated a historic opportunity to take a measure of control over their future. Despite Burton Wheeler's claim that the Blackfeet dominated life in Glacier County, there remained an infrastructure of white interests that had dug its heels into the soil of Blackfeet land. The Blackfeet needed to take the responsibility of managing and protecting tribal assets to ensure that "the wolves," as full-blood leader Oscar Boy called white ranchers and developers, did not "devour" any more of the tribe's natural resources and economic future.

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NOTES

1. "Statement of Earl Old Person, Chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe, Montana, Against the Omnibus Bill (1966)," in Vine Deloria Jr., ed., *Of Utmost Good Faith* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1971). Old Person served as president of the National Congress of American Indians and chairman of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. As of December 1997 he continued to chair the council. Interview with author, September 28, 1995; December 5, 1997. In author's files.

2. Richard Drinnon wrote that Collier "reshaped policy, and to a surprising extent public opinion, with the revolutionary proposition that Indians were not obstacles, but peoples." See *Keeper of Concentration Camps: Dillon Myer and American Racism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 191.

3. *Statutes at Large of the United States*, 48 Stat. 984 (1934). Congress passed the act

as the Wheeler-Howard Bill in June 1934. For analysis of the Indian New Deal and the IRA, see Donald Parman, *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), and *The Navajos and the New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Thomas Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and the Rosebud Reservations* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992); Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), Part II; Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934-45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Kenneth R. Philp, "John Collier and the Controversy over the Wheeler-Howard Bill," in *Indian-White Relations: A Persistent Paradox*, eds. Jane F. Smith and Robert M. Kvasnicka (Washington: Howard University Press, 1976); Laurence M. Hauptman, "The Indian Reorganization Act," in *The Aggressions of Civilization: Federal Indian Policy Since the 1880s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), and *The Iroquois and the New Deal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981); D'Arcy McNickle, "The Indian New Deal as Mirror of the Future," in *Political Organization of Native North Americans*, ed. Ernest Schusky (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980); Clayton R. Koppes, "From New Deal to Termination: Liberalism and Indian Policy, 1933-1953," *Pacific Historical Review* 46 (November 1977); Lawrence C. Kelly, "The Indian Reorganization Act: The Dream and the Reality," in *Pacific Historical Review* 46 (January 1975); William H. Kelly, ed., *Indian Affairs and the Indian Reorganization Act: The Twenty Year Record* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1954); H. Scudder Mekeel, "An Appraisal of the Indian Reorganization Act," *American Anthropologist* 46 (April-June 1944); and Jay B. Nash, Oliver LaFarge, and W. Carson Ryan, *The New Day for the Indians: A Survey of the Workings of the Indian Reorganization Act* (New York: Academy Press, 1938).

4. *Organizing the Lakota*, 83; *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, xiii. The implementation of the IRA certainly was adventitious on some reservations, as Taylor argues. Biolsi's and Taylor's works are indispensable to any study of the Indian New Deal.

5. Ambler wrote: "It is not clear if early energy development influenced tribes' decisions to organize under the IRA or not, but there might be some connection." See Marjane Ambler, *Breaking the Iron Bonds: Indian Control of Energy Development* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 19.

6. *Statutes at Large of the United States*, vol. 34: 1015, 1035 (1907). The effects of the allotment policy, designed to detribalize Indian society, are recounted in Janet McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887-1934* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). According to McDonnell, the allotment policy was particularly cruel to Montana Indians. "Tribes in Montana lost 5,332,317 of their original 11,631,407 acres," she found. "Over 80 percent of the best allotted land in Montana ended up in the hands of non-Indians," 122. See also Leonard A. Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981). For a good overview of Blackfoot culture, see Clark Wissler, *Social Organization and Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Blackfoot Indians* (New York: AMS Press, 1975); and George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962). For a review of missionary activity on the reservation, see Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet* (Norman: University of

Oklahoma Press, 1971). For a review of Blackfeet education, see Jackie Parsons, *The Educational Movement of the Blackfeet Indians, 1840–1979* (Browning, MT: Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980). The best tribal history remains John C. Ewers' *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958). Ewers focused on nineteenth-century Blackfeet history, interviewing full-blood "informants" while he served as curator of the Museum of the Plains Indians between 1941–1944. His coverage of Blackfeet affairs in the first half of the twentieth century, however, is incisive. He kindly took the time to comment on a draft of this manuscript and discussed Blackfeet history with me in two phone interviews shortly before his death in May 1997. For an insightful tribal history and compelling photographs of tribal members, see William E. Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1885–1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983). Malcolm McFee summarizes Blackfeet history to introduce his anthropological study of Blackfeet of the 1960s in *Modern Blackfeet: Montanans on a Reservation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972). The tribe commissioned a number of historical treatments for a 1975 Court of Claims case—*The Blackfeet Tribe of Indians v. United States of America*. See in particular Thomas R. Wessel, "Historical Report on the Blackfeet Reservation of Northern Montana" (Washington, DC: Indian Claims Commission, Docket No. 279-D, 1975); and Michael F. Foley, "An Historical Analysis of the Administration of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by the United States, 1855-1950s" (Washington, DC: Indian Claims Commission, Docket No. 279-D, 1975). The studies were written to secure a legal judgment, and thus the documentation took the form of inaccessible "defense exhibits" rather than traditional footnotes. For an excellent study of Montana's contemporary tribal governments, including the Blackfeet's, see James J. Lopach, Margery Hunter Brown, and Richmond L. Clow, *Tribal Government Today: Politics on Montana Indian Reservations* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990). The study includes a good review of legal decisions affecting American Indians.

7. See Freal McBride, "Ten-Year Program for the Blackfeet Reservation, Montana: Population and Trend," 3. Of the 2,000 Blackfeet, 1,100 were females. National Archives[NA] Record Group [RG] 75 Central Classified File 1940-1956[CCF-2] File 7056-1944-BF-071; E. B. Linnen and F. S. Cook, "Report of Investigation of Affairs on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Montana," NA RG 75 CCF[1907-1939] File 30650-1915-BF 150. By 1934, mixed-bloods outnumbered full-bloods by nearly a four-to-one ratio. And by 1952 it was nearly seven-to-one.

8. "Report of Edgar A. Allen, Special Indian Agent," February 23, 1910, NA RG 75 CCF File 17107-1910-BF-150; "Report of E. B. Linnen, Chief Inspector," February 3, 1916, NA RG 75 CCF File 35332-1916-BF-150, Exhibit D. Linnen discovered that "when the Government has issued cattle to these Blackfeet Indians, the majority of same quite speedily passed into the hands of certain educated half and quarter bloods, who have gotten rich by taking advantage of their full blood brothers."

9. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Surplus Lands, Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Mont.*, Hearings before the Committee on Indian Affairs, 64th Cong. 1st sess., Part I, April 11, 1916 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 1916).

10. U.S. Congress, *Blackfeet Indian Reservation: Serial One*, Hearings Before the Joint Commission of the Congress of the United States to Investigate Indian Affairs, 63rd Cong. 2nd sess., Part 6, February 21, 1914 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1914), 573. Thomas R. Wessel examines Hamilton's life and his impact on Blackfeet tribal politics in his

excellent essay, "Political Assimilation on the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, 1887-1934: A Study in Survival," in Douglas H. Ubelaker and Herman J. Viola, eds., *Plains Indian Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honor of John C. Ewers and Waldo R. Wedel* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982). Wessel writes that "Hamilton and men like him were instrumental in transforming a tribal society, organized around personal relationships and meritorious leaders, into a political community, bound by shared interests that commanded loyalties to new symbols and identified leadership with status."

11. *Ibid.*, 632.

12. The Blackfeet Reservation, the northernmost reservation in the country, is situated at an average altitude of five thousand feet above sea level; the state weather bureau estimated that the growing season in that part of the state lasted roughly seventy-two days, and even during that period agriculture was susceptible to killing frosts.

13. *Surplus Lands, Blackfeet Indian Reservation, Mont.*, 47. Subsequent investigations conducted by Senator Harry Lane of Oregon and OIA inspectors supported Hamilton's claims that full-bloods were suffering from hunger and disease and that the majority of the tribe did not support the land sale. See *Blackfeet Indian Reservation: Serial Two, Hearings Before the Joint Commission of the Congress of the United States to Investigate Indian Affairs, Part 6-A, February 11, 1915* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1915), 657.

14. *Statutes at Large of the United States*, vol. 41: 3, 17.

15. The iron triangle in this case comprised Montana's congressional delegation, the Office of Indian Affairs, and an organization of white and Blackfeet business interests. See Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 279. Lowi has written of an "iron triangle" in Western water development projects, a triangle of interests that, in Donald Worster's words, "has as its three corners a handful of well-placed western congressmen, the Bureau [of Reclamation], and organized agribusiness..." See Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 281.

16. Robert Hamilton to Secretary of the Interior, May 29, 1916, NA RG CCF File 61576-1916-BF-054.

17. Several developers raised the example of wealthy Oklahoma Indians in their presentations to the council. For a study of Osage energy development, see Terry P. Wilson, *The Underground Reservation: Osage Oil* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). Also see Angie Debo, *And Still The Waters Run* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940). The OIA received several letters from frustrated allottees. Mary Dogears, a "full-blood widow," protested her canceled lease by writing: "Under the terms of the leases, as I understand it, I would have received money sufficient to carry me through this long cold winter and possibly to prevent my death from hunger, cold and insufficient housing and clothing. Does the department intend to supply my needs in some other manner?... Why then should the Department refuse to approve this lease and thereby cause me to suffer from hunger, cold and lack of shelter?" Louise Dogears to Commissioner of Indian Affairs[CIA], January 4, 1922, NA RG 75 CCF File 84814-1921-BF-322.

18. "Five Year Industrial Program from April 1, 1921 to April 1, 1926. A Ground Plan to Place the Indians of the Blackfeet Reservation on a Self-Respecting and 90% Self-Supporting Basis," NA RG 75 CCF File 81643-1924-BF-100. Accompanied by the agency physician, Campbell visited nearly every family on the reservation before initiating his program. The organizing principle of the FYIP, he wrote, was to "awaken the Indian to his own condition and to the fact that the time has come when he can no longer rely

upon the government to gratuitously support him in idleness." The program paid modest dividends the first year. According to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Charles Burke, the Blackfeet cultivated roughly 6,000 acres in 1922, which yielded nearly 7,000 bushels of wheat and 5,500 bushels of potatoes, among other crops. See *The Progress of the Blackfeet Indians*, by Charles H. Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, OIA Bulletin 18 (1922), Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. The FYIP reflected the tenacity with which Indian reformers clung to the idea of Indian as yeoman farmer. Thomas Wessel examines Blackfeet agriculture in "Agriculture on the Reservations: The Case of the Blackfeet, 1885-1935," *Journal of the West* 28 (October 1979): 17-34. For a good general study of Indian agriculture see R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1979); and David Rich Lewis, *Neither Wolf Nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

19. It would be misleading to represent this division as being purely between mixed-bloods and full-bloods. As with many other Indian factions, the two sides of this struggle comprised both full-blood and mixed-blood supporters. But given the preponderance of full-bloods in the Heart Butte and Old Agency districts, where most of Campbell's activities took place, the principal division remained one between mixed-blood and full-blood districts. Mixed-bloods supported the idea of helping full-bloods through small-scale farming until Campbell began to neglect their agenda. The PFLA acted as a countervailing form of power to the BTBC. Neither the council nor the chapter officers had much real impact on OIA policy-making and decision-making, however, serving instead as lobby groups for their various constituencies.

20. Chief Inspector J.F. Gartland found little cause to "share the general enthusiasm concerning the five year program." He wrote that it was "possible that as a promoter of the five year program [Campbell] gives full value to the government. We seriously doubt that he does in any other way." Gartland and Burlew, Memorandum for the Secretary, October 11, 1926, File 48633-1926-BF-150.

21. "History of Oil Leasing on Blackfeet Reservation," 1926, sheet 1 and sheet 2, NA RG 75 CCF File 35135-1926-BF-324.

22. "Blackfeet Tribal Council Proceedings," February 24, 1927, NA RG 75 CCF File 16072-27-BF-054. Thirteen council members were elected from four farm districts—Agency, Seville, Heart Butte, and Old Agency—for two-year terms. There had been little change in the council's original constitution and bylaws, adopted in 1922, the most substantive being the extension of office terms from one year to two.

23. Ibid.

24. Acting Superintendent Forrest Stone to CIA, October 10, 1928, NA RG 75 CCF File 53578-1928-BF-150. Many full-blood leaders had become frustrated by the OIA's declining financial commitment to the FYIP at the same time that their interest in oil development increased.

25. Lewis Meriam, et. al., *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 462.

26. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Survey of Conditions of Indians of the United States*, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs: part 23, 72nd Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1930).

27. "Report of Walter W. Liggett Blackfeet Indian Reservation," in *Survey of Conditions of Indians of the United States*, part 23, p. 12768.

28. "Minutes of the meeting held at Heart Butte," May 7 and 8, 1931, p. 2, NA RG 75 CCF File 30804-1931-BF-057. The Blackfeet held a series of meetings in July 1929 to prepare for the subcommittee's visit. The speeches given at these meetings, most of them by full-bloods, reflected three major themes: the need for the tribe to present its grievances to the committee as one race, not as competing interest groups; the belief that Campbell no longer advanced Blackfeet interests; and the important role tribal resource development should play in helping the Blackfeet become "self-supporting." Several full-bloods called for greater progress in oil development. Bullcalf argued that "we should look forward to getting developments on our oil resources," and "if we could get these developments done, then I am sure we would be self-supporting. Then we would have plenty of money to put in our pockets." "Speeches of a General Tribal Council Held July 20, 1929," NA RG 75 File 40274-1929-BF-054, pp. 2-3. See also "Minutes of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council," July 16, 1929, *ibid.*

29. The Blackfeet, in conjunction with the Gros Ventres and Fort Belknap Indians of Montana, began pursuing the claim in 1911. For a summary of Blackfeet treaties, see Charles J. Kappler, comp., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 5 vols. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904-1941); and Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs to George Bird Grinnell, February 3, 1908, NA RG 75 CCF File 6624-1908-BF-052.

30. "Minutes of the Meeting of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council," July 12, 1932, NA RG 75 CCF File 1592-1926-BF-059, p. 8.

31. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

32. "Was Joyful Week for the Blackfeet," *Cut Bank Pioneer Press* (Helena: Montana Historical Society), December 23, 1932.

33. "First Reservation Producer," *Cut Bank Pioneer Press*, April 28, 1933.

34. For a history of Collier's reform activities, see Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); and Kenneth Roy Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977). For a brief sketch of Collier's career, see Philp's profile in Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola, eds., *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 273-282.

35. "Report on talks made at a special meeting called by Mountainchief," October 1, 1933, in *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States*, part 31, p. 16772.

36. *Ibid.*, 16773.

37. *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States*, part 31, p. 16698. The OIA appropriated more than \$1 million from the Blackfeet treasury during the 1910s and 1920s to construct irrigation districts, in which few Blackfeet families settled. Frank Knox, a member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, reported on Blackfeet irrigation by writing, "I have never surveyed a more hopeless and what seemed to me a more unwarranted irrigation project in all of my travels." The Blackfeet project, he wrote, "is a monument to the unthinking enthusiasm with which the country 20 years ago embarked upon its reclamation policy." See "Blackfeet Irrigation Project," *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners*, FY 1926 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1926). For an extended report on Indian irrigation, see "Porter J. Preston and Charles A. Engle, "Report of Advisors on Irrigation on Indian Reservations," in *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States*, pt. 6. For a good study of the subject, see Daniel McCool, *Command of the Waters: Iron Triangles, Federal Water Development, and Indian Water*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); see also chapter six of McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian*; and Donald Pisani, "Irrigation, Water Rights, and the Betrayal of Indian Allotment," *Environmental Review* 10 (Fall 1986): 157–176.

38. *Ibid.*, 16728, 16716. Brown supported the efforts of the tribe to expand its oil and gas operations, but he also strongly believed that tribal income should be produced from labor and not simply from leasing. Brown had been on the agency payroll for more than twenty years, serving as livestock supervisor for most of them.

39. *Ibid.*, 16741; Stone's comments appear on 16743.

40. *Ibid.*, 16769.

41. "Report of Walter W. Liggett on Blackfeet Indian Reservation," 12765. According to *Brewers Dictionary of 20th Century Phrase and Fable*, "leading strings" means "to be under the control of another" or "strings used to hold up an infant when learning to walk."

42. Quoted in Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 317. Ickes was a member of the Indian Defense Association and married to a woman fluent in the Navajo language.

43. John Collier to Superintendents, Tribal Councils, and Individual Indians, January 20, 1933, Circular Letter, p. 4, NA RG 75 Entry 1011, "Records Concerning the Wheeler-Howard Act - 1933–1937[RCWHA]," Box 1: Part 1-A, File 4894-34-066.

44. *Ibid.*, 11. The downsizing of federal supervision of Indian health and education began with the Johnson-O'Malley Act of April 16, 1934, which gave the secretary of the interior the authority to appropriate money for state management of Indians in the areas of health, education, agriculture, and relief.

45. "Minutes of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council," February 5, 1934, pp. 2–3, NA RG 75 CCF File 9522-E-1936-BF-054, Part 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 9.

47. *Ibid.*, 13–14.

48. *Ibid.*, 5.

49. Stone to CIA, February 9, 1934, RCWHA Box 1: Part 1-A, File 4894-34-066. Stone did say that the plan had not been "digested," implying that the Blackfeet would support it once they took time to review it.

50. Collier to Stone, March 1, 1934, RCWHA Box 1: Part 1-A, File 4894-34-066.

51. The Wheeler-Howard Bill—S.2755 and H.R. 7902—had four main sections: Title I - Indian Self-Government; Title II - Special Education for Indians; Title III - Indian Lands; and Title IV - Court of Indian Affairs.

52. *Minutes of the Plains Congress, Rapid City Indian School, Rapid City, South Dakota, March 2–5, 1934*, pp. 2, 7, RCWHA Box 3 Part 2AA File 4894-1934-066. The Blackfeet delegation included all thirteen council members, Forrest Stone, and four delegates at large. One hundred ninety-eight official delegates from forty tribes attended. Collier was supported by Walter Woehlke, an OIA field representative, Ward Shepard, a land policy specialist, and Felix Cohen of the Interior Department's Solicitor's Office. The four-day "Great Plains Congress," or Rapid City Congress, was the first of nine conferences that Collier and his associates held throughout the country to address Indian concerns. Blackfeet community leader Mae Aubrey, one of the strongest supporters of the IRA, also attended. Aubrey was elected to the BTBC in 1938, the first woman elected to the council largely because women had not run for office. Blackfeet women played an important role in private welfare organizations like

the Blackfeet Indian Welfare Association, in Works Progress Administration programs, and in cultural preservation programs.

53. Ibid., 15. The United Press account of the gathering described “stern-faced delegates grunting approval” to Collier’s attack on the allotment system while “a horde of resentful redmen glowered in the background.” “200 Indians gather for big parley,” *The Great Falls Tribune*, March 2, 1934. See Box 7 Part 9 for media coverage of the conferences.

54. Ibid., 16. Indians have been “taught that they had to choose between remaining like so many domestic animals being taken care of by the Indian Bureau or else be thrown to the wolves,” he said, a choice they no longer had to make because the Indian could now organize under the protection of a more progressive federal guardianship.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 17.

57. Ibid., 8 (March 4). Brown then thanked the Collier delegation for its attendance and said to applause that he regretted “that our law permits a Commissioner to be appointed according to political affiliations” because “it is just too bad that we can’t keep him there so that with his new program he can see it through and follow it up.”

58. The factional fighting exhibited during the February 5 BTBC meeting was not uncommon in other Indian nations. Flathead full-bloods objected on the grounds that many mixed-bloods had sold their allotments and squandered the proceeds, while full-bloods dutifully tended to their land as the Dawes Act intended. The Flatheads eventually accepted the IRA. See Flathead Superintendent Charles E. Roe to CIA, May 1, 1934, RCWHA Box 4 Part 3A File 4894-1934-066. According to Felix Cohen, Max BigMan, a Crow delegate to the Rapid City Congress, responded to the idea that the Wheeler-Howard Bill would give greater responsibility to Indians by saying: “In the old days the buffalo gave us our meat; the buffalo gave us our clothes; the buffalo gave us our houses, our fuel, our tools. Then the white man came and killed the buffalo. Now the white man is our buffalo. We want him to stay our buffalo.” See “Attitude toward Government,” November 1935, *Felix Cohen Papers*, MSS S-1325, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Series I, Box 1, Folder 7. Collier received thunderous applause when he told the crowd, “We are going to recommend to the Committees of Congress that this transfer of title by the allottee to the community, this transfer shall be exclusively voluntary and that the compulsion feature shall be stricken out,” March 5, p. 14. Despite his impassioned call for the end of checkerboarding and the need for land consolidation to make tribal estates economically productive, mandated property transfers to communal ownership of any kind for any reason did not appeal to the majority of the Plains Indians in attendance. Collier faced opposition to mandatory transfers from both Indian groups and the congressional Indian Affairs committees, and thus had little choice but to sacrifice the provision. Collier’s decision, however, served as an example of his pledge to seek Indian input into the legislative process.

59. *Minutes of the Plains Congress, Rapid City Indian School, Rapid City, South Dakota*, March 4, p. 19.

60. Ibid., 1 (March 5, afternoon session). The Blackfeet also introduced a moment of levity into the proceedings when Walter Woehlke polled the delegates about making the conference an annual event. When only one delegate rose in opposition, Joe Brown cracked, “He can’t help himself, his name is Standing Bear.”

61. Ibid., 9, 21. Opposition to the bill, Collier said, was “fomented and fanned by the crass, unadulterated self-interest” of whites and Indians who believed that they would lose “standing” or assets under the plan. An example of such opposition was the protest registered by the United Indian Traders Association, Inc. over the possible use of federal funds to aid creation of tribal cooperatives, which “might surround any of the present traders under conditions over which the trader will have no control whatever.” Most Indians, of course, were exposed to trading conditions over which they had “no control whatever” since white traders entered Indian life and which contributed to many allotment fire sales. See President, United Indian Traders Association, Inc. to CIA, April 3, 1934. RCWHA Box 6 Part 6C File 4894-1934-066.

62. James Olson and Raymond Wilson argue that “the formal tribal governments on the level envisioned by the architects of the Indian Reorganization Act never really existed among many tribes.... The [IRA] imposed rigid political and economic systems which were often alien to Native American peoples.” James Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 122. Such was not the case on the Blackfeet Reservation. The Blackfeet enjoyed institutional continuity between the 1910s and the 1950s. Full-bloods were very active on the council before and after the tribe adopted the IRA, typically placing a number of men on the council proportionate to their population. They tended to dissipate votes among a large number of candidates, however, and thus failed to create a bloc to represent their interests. The Montana Crow delegation, in contrast, indicated during the Rapid City Congress that it believed the Crow people were not ready for the kind of self-government proposed in Collier’s legislation. The ineffectiveness of the Crow’s Business Committee, superseded by a general council in the mid-1920s, had left the Crows with a suspicion and dislike of centralized government. The Crows resoundingly rejected the IRA when it came to a referendum, despite the support of a Crow superintendent, Robert Yellowtail; only 112 of 801 voters supported it. For a good discussion of Crow tribal politics, see Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805–1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 295–343.

63. “Minutes of the Meeting of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council,” March 31, 1934, p. 2, RCWHA File 4894-34-066 Part 2-A. All of the meetings drew hundreds of Blackfeet, representing some of the largest gatherings ever held on the reservation.

64. Ibid. Brown asked those assembled to “imagine half a dozen governments existing on the Reservation, each one functioning under a president, secretary, its police powers, and its right to a certain portion of the tribal fund.”

65. Ibid., 3, 4. Many Hides said, “We don’t want districts any more—Heart Butte and so on—we should just have one community of the Blackfeet Reservation within the boundaries of the Blackfeet reservation.”

66. Ibid., 6–7. Forrest Stone indicted the OIA’s management of the FYIP in early April, bitterly recounting its lack of real commitment to worthy full-bloods. The FYIP existed as a “convenience of the government,” he wrote, offering only a “pretty hollow platitude” about helping the Indian. As a result, “government restrictions ... always lay like a deadening hand on the spirit of the Indian belonging to and attempting to direct the efforts of his own people.” He concluded that “we cannot shift any part of our responsibility to a safer haven than the shoulders of these Indian leaders who will carry the load more creditably for the Indian people than the government has ever been able to carry it for them.” See “Comment on Blackfeet Reservation Chapter

Organizations,” April 7, 1934, NA RG 75 E1012 General Records Concerning Indian Organization [GRCIO] Box 2 File 9522-1936-BF-068.

67. *Ibid.*, 11.

68. *Ibid.*, 14. Brown also was adamant about preserving the tribe’s right to determine what “the term or definition of the Indian is,” insisting that neither blood quotient nor residence status should affect the “rights and privileges” of Blackfeet enrolled in the tribe.

69. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings on S. 2755, to Grant to Indians Living Under Federal Tutelage the Freedom to Organize for Purposes of Local Self-government and Economic Enterprise*, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., Part 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), 62.

70. Wheeler spent little time discussing his tenure on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee in his autobiography. He wrote that the IRA was the “one bill I was not proud of having enacted” and claimed that he sponsored it “without even having read the bill.” See Burton K. Wheeler with Paul F. Healy, *Yankee From the West* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962). For the short and uninformative section on his dealings with Indians and the IRA, see pp. 314–318. Deloria and Lytle write in *The Nations Within* that, as chairman, Wheeler “reigned supreme, not unlike the manner in which Henry VIII ruled England—absolutely.”

71. *Hearings on S. 2755*, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1934, pp. 66–68.

72. *Ibid.*, 167. When asked by Senator Elmer Thomas why the chapter organizations did not have treasurers, Brown answered, “Well, we never had any money to handle.”

73. *Ibid.*, 168.

74. *Ibid.*, 170. Judging from the press accounts of the IRA debate in the *Glacier County Chief*, the white newspaper published in Browning (the capital of the Blackfeet Nation), Wheeler did not speak for all the county’s citizens. The Browning Lions Club, the whites’ main civic club, approved of the BTBC’s endorsement of the Wheeler-Howard Bill and the council’s amendments. This approval was “a recognition of the close bond which binds the interests of red and white blood alike in all that affects the reservation.” The “white people of the reservation ... are in hearty sympathy with them and their welfare....” Whites endorsed the council’s actions, however, only after it pledged to “preserve their rights.” “Civic Club Endorse Action of Tribal Council Which Approved Amended Bill Now before Congress,” *Glacier County Chief*, April 13, 1934, v. 4, n. 2 (Helena: Montana Historical Society).

75. *Ibid.*, 171.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Interview with Lorraine Owens, August 28, 1996. In author’s files. Ms. Owens, Joe Brown’s youngest daughter, resides in Browning, Montana. Brown had been blind in one eye since boyhood. His brother accidentally shot him as they pretended to hunt grizzly bears. He was educated at a school located at Fort Benton on the Missouri River in the 1880s. He overcame his feelings of inadequacy, Ms. Owens said, by hiring a tutor to help him prepare for congressional and tribal meetings.

78. U.S. Congress, House, *Hearings on H.R. 7902, Readjustment of Indian Affairs*, 73rd Cong., 2nd Sess., Part 5 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), 244.

79. *Ibid.*, 245. Brown mentioned that the Blackfeet “ran up against the civil service,” a reference to the difficulty most Indians had passing the Civil Service examination; there had been a net loss in Indian employment in the federal government between 1900 and 1934.

80. *Ibid.*, 246.

81. *Ibid.*, 247.

82. *Ibid.*, 248, 249. Werner badgered him further by asking if he was “qualified to say that you are for this bill?” Then he asked, “You want this committee to understand that you are for this bill?” Brown answered affirmatively each time. O’Malley and Werner also attacked Brown’s endorsement of the Court of Indian Affairs, which O’Malley believed was “an essential feature to the successful operation of this collectivist plan in the community.” Brown conceded that though the Blackfeet wanted the court, they could “get along without it.” But without it, he argued, “the Indian is shoved aside to be the last one whose case would be brought up before the United States court.”

83. *Ibid.*, 249, 250.

84. Brown and Kennerly to CIA, June 5, 1934, RCWHA File 4894-34-066 Part 2-A. John Freeman examines the conflict between Collier and Congress in “The New Deal for the Indians: A Study in Bureau-Committee Relations in American Government” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1952). For a succinct comparison of the original bill and the final product see *The Nations Within*, Chapter 10 and Appendix.

85. “Facts About the New Indian Reorganization Act: An Explanation and Interpretation of the Wheeler-Howard Bill as Modified, Amended and Passed by Congress,” by John Collier, RCWHA Box 7 Part 8, Memo 90027, p. 1.

86. S. 3645: “A Bill to conserve and develop Indian lands and resources; to extend to Indians the right to form business and other organizations; to establish a credit system for Indians; to grant certain rights of home rule to Indians; to provide for vocational education for Indians; and for other purposes,” RCWHA Box 7 Part 11-B. The IRA’s provisions for education reform modified those of Collier’s, emphasizing vocational training over higher education and providing for reimbursable loans rather than government grants. The complementary employment provision, however, promised greater access to jobs within the BIA than in Collier’s version. The bill authorized the secretary of the interior to create new criteria for the employment of Indians and provided that “[s]uch qualified Indians shall hereafter have the preference to appointment to vacancies in any such positions.” The bill did, as Collier intended, legislate an end to the process of allotment, extend the trust period of existing allotments, and return reservation surplus lands to tribal control. The bill also permitted the creation of tribal economic and political organizations, which Collier had been calling for since the 1920s, by allowing each tribe that adopted the IRA to develop a constitution and bylaws through which a central government could manage the domestic affairs of its members; such a government could employ a tribal attorney, manage tribal assets and land sales, and negotiate with federal, state, and county governments. In addition, each tribe could secure from the secretary of the interior a charter of incorporation to enhance the power of the tribal government to manage its economic assets. To assist in the creation of tribal enterprises, Congress allotted ten million dollars for a revolving credit fund, twice the amount Collier had requested.

87. Collier wrote that such a tribe would not be “abandoned” by the government but “will merely drift to the rear of the great advance open to the Indian race. It will stand still and will probably continue to lose its land while those who accept the Act, its benefits and responsibilities can preserve and increase their lands and will move forward [*sic*].” See Collier, “Facts About the New Indian Reorganization Act, 16.

88. “Memo for the Organization Committee,” July 31, 1934, *Felix Cohen Papers*, Series I, Box 8, Folder 117.

89. Analysis of Indian Reorganization Act, by H.C. Hall, RCWHA Box 8 Part 11-C, File 37045.

90. Collier to Stone, August 30, 1934, RCWHA Box 8 Part 11-C, File 37045. Collier's letter was drafted by a member of the Organization Committee, who told Felix Cohen that Hall's analysis was "harmless" compared to the OIA's, which itself, he admitted, "may not be 100% perfect." The August memo to Cohen stressed that Collier's letter to Stone and the business council should be supportive of the tribe's decision to secure the advice of outside counsel, arguing that "[c]oming from the attorneys engaged by the Indians to advise them in the subject-matter, it may be very advisable to cooperate or 'boost' rather than criticise or 'knock' if we can see our way clear so to do." See Reeves to Felix Cohen, August 17, 1934, RCWHA Box 8 Part 11-C, File 37045. For the OIA's analysis of the act, see John Collier, "Analysis and Explanation of the Wheeler-Howard Indian Act," RCWHA Box 9 Part 11-C.

91. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council*, September 11, 1934, NA RG 75 CCF File 46597-1934-BF-054; "Members of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council to Secretary of the Interior," September 11, 1934, GRCIO Box 2 File 9522-1936-BF-066.

92. Stone to CIA, September 13, 1934, GRCIO Box 2 File 9522-1936-BF-066. The OIA created districts in which a designated superintendent would serve as a "regional promoting man" to distribute "pamphlets of explanation" and other election material, coordinate the dates for each tribe's referendum, and lobby for the IRA on reservations that needed "help." The Blackfeet Tribe, Collier decided in early October, did not need such "help."

93. Stone to Indian Office, October 28 telegram, GRCIO Box 2 File 9522-1936-BF-066. The *Glacier County Chief* reported the Blackfeet vote by writing, "For the first time the Indian was given a voice as to his destiny on the unique and novel theory that he is able to think out some of his own problems and decide some of his own questions." November 2, 1934, v. 4, n. 31. In the end, 181 tribes voted for it, 77 did not.

94. For a breakdown of voter participation in IRA referenda, see Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, 157-158. Blackfeet voting on the IRA, the IRA Constitution, and the IRA Charter of Incorporation was fairly consistent. In the November 13, 1935, constitution election, 58 percent of the electorate participated, and the constitution was adopted by a vote of 884 to 157; Blackfeet in the predominately full-blood Heart Butte and Old Agency districts supported it by votes of 109 to 32 and 113 to 26, respectively. See O'Hara to CIA, November 14, 1935. File 9522-A-1936-BF-068. The Blackfeet's rate of participation was just above the national average for tribes holding IRA constitution elections. For figures, see Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism*, Appendix 2. In the August 15, 1936 election, 737 of 1,038 voters approved of the charter of incorporation. The lowest vote total of the four major districts was in the Old Agency district, where 64 percent of participating voters supported the charter. The opposition to the charter came mainly from full-bloods in the Starr School subdistrict. The decline in support stemmed in part from impatience with reorganization, which had not yet yielded any financial benefits. See "Results of Charter Election August 15, 1936," File 9522B-1936-BF-061. See also the *Glacier County Chief*, August 21, 1936.

95. Forrest Stone's report on FYIP chapters indicates that the IRA and its provisions for self-government appealed to Blackfeet full-bloods, at least those active in the FYIP. Stone heard from many FYIP participants that they wanted more control of their

affairs; the government's failure to support the program greatly discouraged them. The predominately full-blood group of more than three hundred men and women had been, Stone wrote, "united in a determined effort towards self-government with the hope in their breasts that as their abilities were demonstrated that more power and leadership would be given them by the Government.... How hopeless it seems now when we look at thirteen years of effort ... and realize, as they realize, that it was only an idle dream...." This group of Blackfeet had, Stone argued, "a great desire to be self-governing." See Forrest Stone, "Comment on Blackfeet Reservation Chapter Organizations," April 7, 1934. Many full-bloods supported the IRA in the hopes that it would facilitate oil production and thus yield per capita distributions, as well as generate per capita distributions from the Big Claim.

96. See "Estimate of Self-Support attained by Borrowers" and "Individual Loan Summary," in the 1950 *Annual Report of Revolving Fund Operations, Blackfeet Agency*, NA RG 75 CCF (1940–1956) File 17592-1948-BF-031. For income figures, see U.S. Congress, House, *Compilation of Material Relating to Indians of the United States and Alaska*, Serial No. 30 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1950), 736.

97. "Minutes of the Blackfeet Tribal Constitutional Convention Under Sponsorship of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council," May 1, 1945, NA RG 75 CCF-2 File 36128-1945-BF-054.

98. U.S. Congress, House, *Investigate Indian Affairs*, Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Part 3: Hearings in the Field, 78th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1944). A member of the BTBC responded by asking the subcommittee chair, "have you anything in mind that you are going to present that will be better than the [IRA]." The chair answered: "I do not believe that anybody has thought through on the matter and has figured out something to take its place." Records indicate that the BTBC did not discriminate against full-bloods in its administration of government and tribal credit programs. For a breakdown of Revolving Credit Fund loans, see William Zimmerman to Charles Reevis, November 25, 1943, NA RG 75 CCF File 9522-1936-BF-066; and the 1950 *Annual Report of Revolving Fund Operations, Blackfeet Agency*.

99. This finding mirrors that of Thomas Biolsi, who argues in *Organizing the Lakota* that full-bloods helped to "disempower" mixed-blood councils through grassroots political action. In the 1940s and 1950s Blackfeet elders engineered a series of petition drives that increasingly attracted the support of mixed-bloods, including a number of former councilmen and successful ranchers. Although they failed to amend the constitution, elders did succeed in forcing the BTBC to distribute 50 percent of oil revenues in per capita payments. For coverage of Blackfeet political affairs in the 1940s and 1950s, see Paul C. Rosier, "'The Old System Is No Success': The Indian Reorganization Act and the Political Economy of 'Self-support' on the Blackfeet Reservation, 1912–1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1998).