

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980. By Michael L. Lawson.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/83j926nd>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 8(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Schulte, Steven C.

Publication Date

1984

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Eisenhower administration, 1953–1961. Since the termination policy originated before that period and since some of its implementation and most of its effects came after the period, the reader is given a truncated story. The Introduction and the Conclusion, both largely derivative and not well worked into the main story, do not overcome this weakness. The dissertation origin shows, too, in the inclusion of details whose pertinence to the main study is not indicated and in the more or less chronological recitation of "facts" without much of an overarching theme.

The termination policy had a tremendous psychological effect on Indian communities. Its importance may lie more in this realm than in the actual termination of tribes. All subsequent proposals for Indian programs were eyed critically by the Indians and their lawyers lest they contain some hidden germs of termination. This was especially true of economic development programs, for it was feared that any tribe's advance in handling its own affairs might be interpreted as evidence of readiness for the withdrawal of federal programs. While the factual account in Burt's book helps us to understand this phenomenon to some extent, the book does not directly address the problem.

The studies on termination will no doubt appear, augmenting and refining what Burt has done. But his book will remain an essential tool for understanding the post-Collier period in American Indian Affairs.

Francis Paul Prucha
Marquette University

Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944–1980. By Michael L. Lawson. Foreward By Vine Deloria, Jr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982. 352 pp. \$19.95 Cloth.

Michael L. Lawson's *Dammed Indians* is an example of an encouraging trend in American Indian Historiography—to analyze recent developments in Indian-White relations. Until the last few years historians have been reluctant to address Native American problems in the post-1945 era. The appearance of *Dammed Indians* along with Larry W. Burt's *Tribalism in Crisis*, Peter Iver-

son's *The Navajo Nation* and Nicholas C. Peroff's *Menominee Drums* are indications that the study of recent Native American History has started to receive the scholarly concern it deserves. More popular accounts such as Peter Matthiessen's *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* and *Indian Country* have reinforced the recent academic interest.

Lawson, a historian for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has written an important case study which details the Pick-Sloan Plan's destructive impact on the Missouri River Sioux after World War II. A compromise flood-control, power generating and land reclamation plan, Pick-Sloan represented the combined visions for the Missouri River Basin's future to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation. Lawson focuses on the generally negative impacts of the Pick-Sloan projects on several South Dakota Sioux reservations. Five large dams and reservoirs flooded more than 550 acres of tribal lands and forced the evacuation and relocation of over 900 Indian families. Lawson documents the prolonged sufferings of the Sioux as they attempted, mostly in vain, to safeguard their sovereignty against this large public works project.

As Sioux author Vine Deloria, Jr. writes in his Foreword to the book, "the Pick-Sloan Plan was, without doubt, the single most destructive act ever perpetrated on any tribe in the United States" (xiv). Rarely consulted by the federal government, tribal leaders fought, with little success, to mitigate the project's impact. Lawson's study severely condemns the government agencies involved. The Army Corps of Engineers especially took a callous and combative attitude toward Indian concerns. While tribal leaders fought to obtain the most advantageous damage settlements possible, government agencies systematically worked to reduce federal financial obligations. The Sioux received little help from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or South Dakota's Congressional delegation in presenting their case. In short, they had to fight hard for every resettlement dollar. Sioux political factionalism complicated tribal leaders' impossible task. While a comprehensive tribal rehabilitation program remained the goal of most groups, strong factions also demanded a division of federal rehabilitation funds into per-capita shares.

Dammed Indians is an often chilling and disconcerting story of a government bureaucracy operation with little regard for the rights of American citizens—both Indian and White. Lawson

points out that the Sioux tribes, because of their treaty rights and special ward status, received stronger financial compensation consideration than non-Indians affected by Pick-Sloan. Unfortunately this interesting assertion receives little elaboration. Lawson also indicts the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the government agency charged with responsibility for protecting Indian interest. According to Lawson the Bureau failed to "protect adequately the interests of its wards" (p. 30).

Lawson's study is rich and filled with insights into contemporary federal Indian policy problems. He could, however, have strengthened his argument by developing several topics in greater depth. For instance, Lawson could have more explicitly developed the connection between the Missouri River Basin projects and the government's trust termination program. It could also be argued that the operation of the Pick-Sloan plan among the Sioux represented the most visible implementation of the termination policy in Sioux country. Lawson also missed an opportunity to say something meaningful about the Missouri Basin projects and Sioux leadership development. Did the experience gained fighting federal agencies help spur later movements toward tribal self-determination? Finally, while Lawson skillfully assesses the general damages—both physical and psychological sustained by the Sioux people, the human element to this sad story is strangely missing. More personal stories describing the human toll taken by the endless, futile negotiations, the loss of tribal burial grounds and the tragic uprooting from ancestral lands would have added a rich dimension to a story already well told.

Lawson makes excellent use of government sources, especially the records of the Missouri River Basin Investigations Project. He also utilized the records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, papers of various agency administrators, newspapers and several important interviews with tribal leaders. Research in the political papers of Congressman E.Y. Berry (R-SD) and Senators Karl Mundt (R-SD) and Francis Case (R-SD) would have also bolstered the study.

Aside from these suggestions, *Dammed Indians* is a well-written study that deserves a wide audience. Not only is it a valuable contribution to federal Indian policy scholarship, but it should also attract the attention of anyone fascinated by the operations of the federal bureaucracy. It is surely encouraging that scholars

such as Lawson have moved beyond 1945 to emphasize topics relevant to the problems of today's Indian people.

Steven C. Schulte
College of the Ozarks

American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History. eds., Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980. 36 pp. index, illus. \$18.00 Cloth. \$9.95 Paper.

It is no coincidence that the interest in Native Americans during the 1970s and early 1980s parallels the rise of the "ecology movement." Many Americans were concerned with what they saw as a deterioration in the environment brought on by Western values and technology that encouraged destructive exploitation of resources in the name of progress. In the search for solutions many looked to other cultures, notably Medieval Europe and Buddhist China, for answers to how society could exist in harmony with its natural surroundings. Most "environmentalists," however, choose a model from their own heritage: the American Indian. These Americans fell back on a traditional "Noble Savage" motif which since the fifteenth century has seen the Indian as a child of nature. It should not be surprising, then, that a volume entitled *American Indian Environments* should appear. Nor should it be surprising, given the wide range of interests in this topic, and the traditional tendencies of such collections of presented papers, that the volume is of decidedly uneven quality. Without detailing the case, let's look at the extremes.

The best essays in the volume cannot be categorized neatly. The essays by Wilbur R. Jacobs ("Indians as Ecologists and other Environmental Themes in American Frontier History") and William T. Hagan ("Justifying Dispossession of the Indian: The Land Utilization Argument") and Calvin Martin ("Subarctic Indians and Wildlife") are very different but each in its own way is useful. Jacobs' essay analyzes Euro-American expansion in the New World with its repeated theme of despoliation and it seems at first glance to be out of place in this volume because the editors did not place it nearer the beginning of the volume where it could serve to provide a solid basis for the rest of the essays. Hagan's