

MANIFEST DESTINY – THEN & NOW

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, a dramatic and revealing new movie from HBO Films® based on the acclaimed book by Dee Brown, tells the tragic and powerful story of the attempted subjugation and cultural extermination of the American Indian. It is told through two unique perspectives: Charles Eastman, a young white-educated Sioux doctor who is held up as living proof that cultural assimilation can succeed, and Sitting Bull, the proud Lakota Sioux chief whose tribe won the American Indian's last major victory at Little Big Horn. Following its premiere on May 27, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* received 17 Emmy® nominations to become the most-nominated primetime program of 2007. Now this landmark television event is available on DVD.

The film realistically and powerfully depicts how manifest destiny changed our nation and changed lives. More a concept than a stated policy, manifest destiny refers to the idea of America's "God-given right" to expand westward from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean. In the 19th century, it was the ideological justification for the United States government's eventual displacement of American Indians from their tribal lands.

THE EFFECT OF MANIFEST DESTINY

The term *manifest destiny* was coined by journalist John L. O'Sullivan in an 1845 editorial advocating the annexation of Oregon which was little noticed at the time:

"And that claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to over-spread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us."

O'Sullivan's phrase was later seized upon by Jacksonian Democrats to promote the annexation of Texas and parts of Mexico, and came into wider use as the justification for U.S. expansion into American Indian lands between 1860 and 1890—the period so vividly portrayed in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*. Although the term itself fell into disuse after the 19th century, some observers believe that the concept of manifest destiny took on an international character in the 20th century, and has



Aidan Quinn as Henry Dawes

DISCOVERY

Research how one of the following personalities or events from *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* helped to promote manifest destiny and the eventual displacement of American Indians from their lands.

- ✦ **Henry L. Dawes**— Longtime Massachusetts Republican congressman (1857-75) and senator (1875-93) who saw himself as an advocate for American Indians; worked to enact legislation that he believed would benefit them.
- ✦ **Col. (later Gen.) Nelson Miles**— Key U.S. Army commander, personally involved in many actions throughout the "Indian Wars," from the crackdown on the Sioux after Little Bighorn in 1877 through Wounded Knee in 1890.
- ✦ **General Allotment Act of 1887**— Known as the Dawes Act, it authorized the President to survey and divide American Indian tribal lands into allotments for individual Indians, and opened excess lands for sale to white settlers.
- ✦ **Ulysses S. Grant**— Commanding Union general in the Civil War and 18th President of the United States (1869-77), whose administration was marked by scandal and widespread corruption, notably in the Indian Service.

DISCUSSION

Discuss the following based on your research findings and how they might relate to the world today.

- ✦ Give examples of how supposedly well-intentioned policies meant to benefit American Indians led to their eventual displacement and the attempted destruction of their way of life.
- ✦ What role did differing concepts of "ownership" found in American Indian cultures and white American society play in the conflicts between them?
- ✦ How do events portrayed in *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* reflect on subsequent incidents involving U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century and the current status of Indian Nations?
- ✦ Cite examples of the effects of forcing the values and customs of one culture upon another, both in the case of modern American Indian Nations and in the world today.



Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee / HBO



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AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, the compelling new movie from HBO Films®, aptly illustrates the plight of the American Indian through the eyes of the protagonist Charles Eastman, a Native Sioux who is white-educated at Dartmouth College and held up as living proof of the alleged success of assimilation, and then returns home to his native land. Eastman's story is one that many American Indians have experienced over the last 200 years and one that continues to resonate with American Indians in the 21st century.

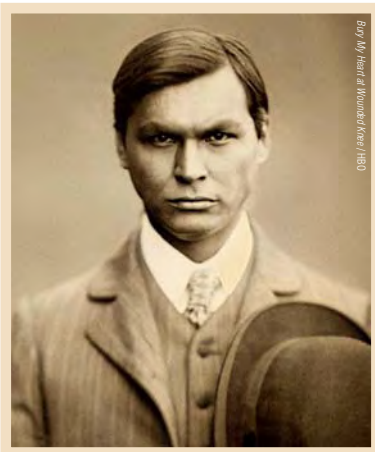
In this and other respects, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* is perhaps the most realistic account of the federal government's policies toward Indian Nations ever created for the screen. The federal policies of Removal, Reservations, and Treaties during the period portrayed in the film helped shape the subsequent policies that threatened to undermine the sovereign status of every Indian Nation that exists today.

SOVEREIGNTY: THEN AND NOW

American Indians and Native Alaskans are members of the original indigenous tribes of the United States, which were considered sovereign nations from their initial interaction with European settlers. Consequently, American Indians have a political relationship, through their tribes, with the United States that is not derived from race or ethnicity. Tribal members are citizens of three sovereigns: their tribe, the state in which they reside, and the United States.

Treaties and laws have created a fundamental contract between

Indian Nations and the United States: Indian Nations ceded millions of acres of land that helped to make the United States what it is today, and in return they received, among other guarantees, the right of continued self-government on their own lands. Today, the 563 federally recognized tribes have governments that are diverse in structure and in their decision-making processes. Tribal governments also provide basic infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and public buildings as well as a broad range of government services, including education, law enforcement, judicial systems, and environmental protection.



Adam Beach as Charles Eastman



August Schellenberg as Sitting Bull



Anna Paquin as Elaine Goodale



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DISCOVERY

Research the following time periods and examine how federal policies of the United States government in each time period shaped Indian Nations, specifically how they affected their cultures, traditions, and economic status.

- ✦ Allotment and Assimilation Period (1887-1934)
- ✦ The Indian Reorganization Period (1934-1945)
- ✦ Termination Period (1945-1968)
- ✦ Self-Determination Period (1968-Present)

DISCUSSION

Discuss the following topics based on your research findings, focusing on how these issues are connected to Indian Nations today.

- ✦ Provide examples of policies that have undermined the constitutional right of Indian Nations to be sovereign entities.
- ✦ Describe the status of the current relationship between Indian tribes and the federal government.
- ✦ What social issues do American Indians face today?
- ✦ Do American Indians continue to speak their traditional languages and embrace their native cultures? Provide examples.
- ✦ Discuss how the film and this activity have had an impact on your perception of Indian Nations today.