

American Indian Freedom Controversy: Political and Social Activism by Southern California Mission Indians, 1934-1958.

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Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century, anthropologists and politicians alike predicted the extinction of American Indians. Yet, Native Americans survived, persevered, and instituted political activism concerning the United States federal Indian policies in that century. Drawing upon Bureau of Indian Affairs and State of California archival materials, oral histories, and tribal records, this dissertation addresses American Indian political movements in Southern California Mission Indian country in the years 1934-1958. This study focuses on the different factions on and off the Southern California Indian reservations and the federal Indian policies that inspired resistance within these communities.

I argue that the implied passivity that the Bureau of Indian Affairs and reformers labeled California Indians was a myth. The political movements established during the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates that the Mission Indians had the required tools to maintain their tribal land and sovereignty. This dissertation starts with the impending implementation of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act and covers the administration of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and the reactions to the Indian New Deal by the Mission Indians in Southern California. The Indian Reorganization Act stimulated grassroots movements on and off Indian reservations throughout the United States. I follow the groups that flourished in California during the years between the IRA and the passage of House Concurrent Resolution 108, which allowed for the termination of federal trust protections of Indian reservations that included California's Indian reservations. I evaluate how the shifting, yet static federal Indian policies contributed to political lobbying against the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the effective uses of media rhetoric on both sides of the issue. Finally, my study demonstrates how the actions of a few individuals in California Indian country successfully combated the Bureau of Indian Affairs' termination legislation, tribal factionalism, and the State of California. This accomplishment eventually allowed for the establishment of lucrative Indian gaming operations in the twenty-first century in Indian country.

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