Reform and Sovereignty

Federal policy and American Indian Nations, 1928 to 1936

OKH.C.7.4 "Describe the changing relations between the federal government and American Indian Nations as influenced by the Meriam Report and reflected in the Indian Reorganization Act ("Indian New Deal") and the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline a problem the Meriam Report identified, circle the options the two laws offered, and number the limits on Tribal sovereignty to trace what changed and what did not.

A Change With Limits

1. In the 1920s, federal officials often treated American Indian Nations as wards rather than governing partners. Under allotment, the government had divided many Tribal lands into individual parcels; land left over was often sold to non-Native buyers. The 1928 Meriam Report documented poverty, poor health care, and failing schools under federal policies. It urged better services and a move away from policies that broke up Tribal land and ignored Native communities' needs.

2. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, often called the Indian New Deal, marked a shift from allotment toward Tribal self-government. It stopped further allotment of Tribal lands and offered ways to restore land to Tribal ownership. Nations could adopt written constitutions and organize business corporations, but these options did not mean complete independence: the federal government still held approval power over constitutions. Some Nations rejected the act because its model of government did not fit their traditions.

3. Most provisions of the 1934 act did not apply to Oklahoma, where allotment had also weakened many Tribal land bases. Congress passed the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act in 1936 to offer Oklahoma Nations similar options to organize governments, create business corporations, and acquire land. This gave some Nations new legal tools to exercise sovereignty, yet federal oversight and the losses caused by earlier land policies remained. Reform changed the relationship, but it did not erase the federal government's power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Meriam Report challenge the federal government's treatment of American Indian Nations?

2. How did the Indian Reorganization Act change federal policy toward Tribal land and government?

3. Why did Congress pass the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, and what options did it offer?

4. How could a Nation gain authority under these reforms while still facing federal control?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum exhibit says, “The Indian New Deal ended federal control of Tribal governments.” Write a 65 to 85 word correction that connects the Meriam Report, both laws, and one reason the claim is misleading.

ANSWER KEY

Reform and Sovereignty

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.7.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline a problem the Meriam Report identified, circle the options the two laws offered, and number the limits on Tribal sovereignty to trace what changed and what did not. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Meriam Report challenge the federal government's treatment of American Indian Nations?	**It documented poverty, poor health care, and failing schools under federal policies and urged a move away from policies that broke up Tribal land and ignored Native needs.**
2	How did the Indian Reorganization Act change federal policy toward Tribal land and government?	**It stopped further allotment of Tribal lands and offered ways to restore land and organize Tribal governments.**
3	Why did Congress pass the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, and what options did it offer?	**Most provisions of the 1934 act did not apply to Oklahoma. The 1936 law offered Oklahoma Nations options to organize governments, create business corporations, and acquire land.**
4	How could a Nation gain authority under these reforms while still facing federal control?	**A Nation could organize a government and acquire land, but federal oversight remained, including approval power over constitutions under the Indian Reorganization Act.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Meriam Report exposed the harm of federal policies that had broken up Tribal land and neglected Native communities. The Indian Reorganization Act halted further allotment and offered new paths to Tribal government. Because most of that act did not apply in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act offered similar options there. These reforms strengthened Tribal authority, but federal approval of constitutions under the 1934 act and continued land losses meant sovereignty was not complete.

Accept responses that distinguish new opportunities for Tribal self-government from continuing federal power. Students may name federal oversight or the lasting effects of allotment as a limit.