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American Indian Policy in the Old Northwest, 1783 - 1812

Reginald Horsman*

IN the years from 1783 to 1812 the one consistent element in American Indian policy in the Old Northwest was the desire to acquire the land between the Ohio and the Mississippi. The host of subsidiary objectives were all subordinated to this end. In theory, its attainment was simply a matter of telling the Indian inhabitants of the region that England had ceded it to the United States in 1783 and that the Indians could live only on lands allotted to them by the American government. In practice, it soon became apparent that the Indians were not prepared to acknowledge the English right to give away Indian land, and the Americans were obliged to obtain their objective in other ways. Between 1783 and 1812 the American government developed a policy that would secure land in the simplest and least expensive manner. Not only did it thus secure land, it also succeeded in convincing itself that what it was doing was in the best interests of the Indians. What had started out in 1783 as naked desire for land had, by 1812, been transmuted into lofty moral purpose. By 1812 American leaders were not only trying to convince others, but apparently had also convinced themselves that they were working for the ultimate benefit of the Indian. The manner in which national interest and moral purpose became entangled is a key to the history of nineteenth-century expansion.

The first phase of post-Revolutionary American Indian policy in the Old Northwest lasted from 1783 to 1787. In the Treaty of Paris which ended the Revolution the British ignored their Indian allies. The Indians were left to make their own peace with the Americans, and their position was complicated by the fact that the Americans desired more than the cessation of hostilities in the Northwest. American frontiersmen had long since pushed into western Pennsylvania and down the Ohio to Kentucky. They were now anxious to settle the rich lands northwest of the Ohio.

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Moreover, the government of the Confederation had a financial interest in the movement of settlers into that region. By the sale of lands the Confederation hoped to solve its acute financial problems. It had already been agreed that the states with claims north of the Ohio would cede them to the central government, and by 1786 these cessions were accomplished. On October 10, 1780, Congress had promised that lands ceded to the United States would be disposed of for the common good, "and be settled and formed into distinct republican states."¹ Thus, in establishing peace with the Indians of the Northwest, the Confederation wished to begin the process of acquiring the lands between the Ohio and the Mississippi.

The document on which the Confederation based its Northwestern Indian policy from 1783 to 1787 was the report presented to Congress by James Duane, chairman of the committee on Indian affairs, on October 15, 1783. This resolved that a convention should be held with the Indians to make peace and establish boundary lines. The Indians were to be told that the land on which they lived had been ceded by Great Britain in the Treaty of Paris, and that as they had fought on the side of the British during the Revolution, they could justly be expelled to the north of the Great Lakes along with their allies. However, it was argued that America was prepared to forgive what was past and to draw a boundary line between the Americans and the Indians. As the United States needed land, both for her expanding population and for extinguishing her national debt, the Indians would have to cede a portion of their territory. This was justified as reparations for Indian hostility during the war. A boundary line was suggested that would have given most of the modern state of Ohio to the United States.² Though these suggestions were to be modified in detail, they formed the basis of policy until 1787.

The reasoning behind this report can best be understood by a consideration of letters sent to the committee on Indian affairs during the previous summer. The suggestions that most obviously influenced the committee were those made by George Washington and by General Philip Schuyler. Washington had twice written to express his views. In June

¹ Worthington C. Ford and others, eds., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, 1904-37), XVIII, 915.

² *Ibid.*, XXV, 680-694. The boundary suggested was from the mouth of the Great Miami northward to its confluence with the Mad River, thence by a direct line to Fort Miami on the Maumee, and along the Maumee to Lake Erie. The committee that made this report consisted of James Duane, Richard Peters, Daniel Carroll, Benjamin Hawkins, and Arthur Lee.

1783 he had supported the plan for establishing settlements of ex-soldiers in the west, arguing that the appearance of such formidable settlements in the vicinity of the Indian towns "would be the most likely means to enable us to purchase upon equitable terms of the Aborigines their right of preoccupancy; and to induce them to relinquish our Territories; and to remove into the illimitable regions of the West."³ A far more comprehensive plan was submitted by Schuyler on July 29. He argued that America would be ill-advised to continue the war with the Indians to expel them from the country—it would cost a great deal, and the Indians would return if the force that expelled them should retire. Moreover, if driven to reside in British territory, the Indians would add strength to Great Britain. Even if America could expel the Indians at moderate cost, Schuyler argued, it would not be worth while. America should merely take the land she needed for present purposes: "It will be little or no obstacle to our in future improving the very country they may retain, whenever we shall want it. For as our settlements approach their country, they must from the scarcity of game, which that approach will induce to, retire farther back, and dispose of their lands, unless they dwindle comparatively to nothing, as all savages have done, who gain their sustenance by the chase, when compelled to live in the vicinity of civilized people, and thus leave us the country without the expence of a purchase, trifling as that will probably be."⁴

Schuyler's ideas had influential support. On September 7, 1783, Washington wrote to Duane telling him that his sentiments exactly coincided with those expressed by Schuyler in his letter of July 29, and making further suggestions for the guidance of the committee. The Indians should be informed of the British cessions, and told that because of their hostility in the Revolution they might well be expelled beyond the Great Lakes. The United States, however, was prepared to be generous, and would draw a boundary line between the Americans and the Indians. Washington thought that America should not grasp too much, and that if the Indians were dissatisfied with the boundary they should be given compensation. Also, settlers should be restrained from crossing the boundary line. This would keep the peace and would make possible further land

³To the President of Congress, June 17, 1783, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, 1931-44), XXVII, 16-18.

⁴To the President of Congress, July 29, 1783, Papers of the Continental Congress, No. 153, Letters of Schuyler, III, 601-607, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

acquisitions. "The Indians as has been observed under Genl Schuylers Letter," wrote Washington, "will ever retreat as our Settlements advance upon them and they will ever be ready to sell, as we are to buy; That is the cheapest as well as the least distressing way of dealing with them." And he left little doubt of his own view of the Indians: "the gradual extension of our Settlements will as certainly cause the Savage as the Wolf to retire; both being beasts of prey tho' they differ in shape."⁵

The committee on Indian affairs thus paid close attention to the advice of Washington and Schuyler in its report of October 15, 1783, though needless to say the report did not mention that the drawing of a boundary line was intended as the prelude to the gradual extermination or expulsion of the Indians. In carrying out this policy in the following years, the Confederation stressed the idea that the Northwest had been ceded by the British, but it paid little attention to Washington's suggestion that the Indians should be conciliated in order to facilitate future land acquisitions. Between 1783 and 1786 land northwest of the Ohio was acquired by three treaties—Fort Stanwix in 1784, Fort McIntosh in 1785, and Fort Finney in 1786. They were all dictated treaties. Though the extent of the lands treated for was not as large as that envisioned by Congress originally, these negotiations resulted in the cession to the United States of what is now eastern and southern Ohio.

The treaty of Fort Stanwix in October 1784 divested the Six Nations of their nebulous claims to the Ohio country. There were few subtleties of negotiation. The commissioners—Oliver Wolcott, Richard Butler, and Arthur Lee—told the Indians: "The King of Great Britain ceded to the United States *the whole*, by the right of conquest they might *claim the whole*."⁶ In the resulting treaty the Six Nations ceded all their claims to the land west of Pennsylvania.⁷ In January 1785 at Fort McIntosh the American commissioners, with George Rogers Clark in place of Wolcott, met in council with the Wyandots, Delawares, Ottawas, and Chippewas. The pattern of Fort Stanwix was repeated. The Indians were told that "you

⁵ To James Duane, Sept. 7, 1783, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVII, 133-140.

⁶ "Treaty of Fort Stanwix, in 1784," Neville B. Craig, ed., *The Olden Time* (Pittsburgh, 1848; reprinted Cincinnati, 1876), II, 426.

⁷ *Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, VII (Boston, 1853), 15-16. The Six Nations yielded all the land west of a boundary line that was drawn from a point four miles east of Niagara, thence southerly to the mouth of Buffalo Creek on Lake Erie, thence south to the northern boundary of Pennsylvania, west to the west boundary of that state, and then south to the Ohio River.

being conquered, your lands must be at our disposal." When the Indians said that they were pleased that the Six Nations had given the United States part of their country, they were told: "it is quite the contrary. We have given the hostile part of the Six Nations some of the country which we conquered from them." The Americans emphasized that it was not a question of the Indians ceding *their* lands—the United States already owned the Northwest, and was "to *give* not to receive."⁸ The treaty that was signed on January 21, 1785, "allotted" the Wyandots, Delawares, Ottawas, and Chippewas lands on which to live in northwestern Ohio. Their lands were to be bounded by Lake Erie on the north, the Cuyahoga River on the east, the Maumee River on the west, and a line across what is now central Ohio on the south.⁹

The last of these treaties based solely on the idea of conquest from Great Britain was that of Fort Finney in 1786. Reflecting the increased Indian opposition to the events of Stanwix and McIntosh, only the Shawnee attended. The American commission was led by Richard Butler and George Rogers Clark, and once again the terms were dictated to the Indians. There was a flash of resistance when Chief Kekewepellethe told the commissioners that "as to the lands, God gave us this country, we do not understand measuring out the lands, it is all ours," but the resistance was soon overcome. The Shawnee were told that "this country belongs to the United States—their blood hath defended it, and will forever protect it."¹⁰ The Indians saw that resistance at the council was useless. The treaty that was signed on January 31, 1786, "allotted" the Shawnee lands to live and hunt upon to the west of the Great Miami River.¹¹

Despite its apparent success, the Indian policy from 1783 to 1786 was disastrous. The United States not only proceeded on the assumption that the Indians should cede some of their land as retribution for their part in the Revolution, but also assumed that the territorial sovereignty granted by England in 1783 completely eliminated any Indian right to the soil of the Northwest. The Indians who inhabited the region naturally would

⁸ "The Fort McIntosh Treaty Journal," Timothy Pickering Papers, LIX, 122-123, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁹ *Statutes at Large*, VII, 16-18.

¹⁰ See Richard Butler, "Journal of General Butler," Craig, ed., *Olden Time*, II, 521-524.

¹¹ *Statutes at Large*, VII, 26-27. The boundary was drawn from the forks of the Great Miami westward to the River de la Panse (Wildcat Creek), and down that river to the Wabash.

not accept this interpretation of the Treaty of Paris. They could not conceive that the lands upon which they lived and hunted were not their own, and, moreover, during the colonial period they had become accustomed to the idea that the whites would purchase the Indian right to the soil in formal treaty. The American post-Revolutionary policy quickly produced Indian opposition. By 1786 hostilities were breaking out on the Northwest frontier, and the Indians were ready to fight to prevent American settlement northwest of the Ohio. The Shawnee almost immediately disavowed Fort Finney, and the Mohawk Joseph Brant was, with British assistance, striving to unite the Northwestern tribes.¹² America had treaties to show her ownership of lands northwest of the Ohio, but in her straitened financial position she could not occupy and defend them.

An indication that force might soon be tempered by diplomacy came in the famous Northwest Ordinance of July 13, 1787. In regard to the intended acquisition of land from the Ohio to the Mississippi, the ordinance was perfectly in accord with previous policy. It laid down the system by which the land between those two rivers would come into the Union, and provided for not less than three nor more than five states in that area. This plan of course included the land allotted to the Indians between 1783 and 1786, in addition to Indian lands farther to the west. It was Article Three that foreshadowed a change in American thinking. "The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians," it stated; "their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty, they never shall be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorised by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity shall from time to time be made, for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them."¹³

Though the language of the ordinance seems so incongruous in view of what had gone before, the United States was in fact changing her policy in the summer of 1787. The objective of land acquisition remained the same, but the methods were to be modified. The change had been forced upon the United States by the extent of Indian resistance. On July 10, 1787, Secretary of War Henry Knox reported to Congress that there was

¹² The growth of Indian resistance, and the encouragement given by the British, is discussed in Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795* (Pittsburgh, 1940), 279 ff.

¹³ Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington, 1934—), II, 47, 39-50.

neither sufficient money nor an adequate army to carry on an Indian war. Peace was essential.¹⁴ Within two weeks Knox again told Congress of the precarious position and argued that it was better to spend a small sum on the purchase of land than to fight an expensive Indian war.¹⁵ Knox's report was referred to a congressional committee on Indian affairs, headed by Nathan Dane. The committee reported on August 9, 1787, recommending changes in American Indian policy. It argued that American desires could be obtained more simply than by war. Rather than acting from a position of superiority, the United States should treat with the Indians on a basis of equality and "convince them of the Justice and humanity as well as the power of the United States and of their disposition to promote the happiness of the Indians." Would it not be better, it was asked, to proceed on the principle of fairly purchasing lands rather than of giving lands to the Indians as though the land were already American?¹⁶

In accord with the suggestions of Knox and the committee, the United States moved toward a more diplomatic policy. On October 5 Congress acted on the committee report and recommended a general treaty. Later in the month it appropriated twenty thousand dollars for holding Indian treaties wherever Congress thought it necessary.¹⁷ This sum was added to in the following years, and the United States attempted to follow a policy of purchase rather than conquest. However, the object of acquiring all the land to the Mississippi had not been abandoned—far from it. The instructions sent at the end of October 1787 to the governor of the Northwest Territory, Arthur St. Clair, told him: "You will not neglect any opportunity that may offer of extinguishing the Indian rights to the westward as far as the river Mississippi."¹⁸

The general treaty with the Indians, which was suggested as desirable in the summer of 1787, took a long time to accomplish. Neither the Con-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-35.

¹⁵ W. C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, XXXIII, 388-391.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 477-481. The committee consisted of Nathan Dane, Benjamin Hawkins, John Kean, William Irvine, and Edward Carrington.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 611-612, 665-666 (Oct. 12).

¹⁸ Secretary of Congress to St. Clair, Oct. 26, 1787, Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers*, II, 78-79. It was suggested that a suitable line might be one by which the Indians ceded everything south of a line drawn from the southern boundary of Pennsylvania to the Mississippi. On July 2, 1788, it was recommended that a better line might be the 41st degree of north latitude—this would have given considerably more to the United States all the way to the Mississippi; *ibid.*, 117. St. Clair realized that Indian resistance would make it impossible to obtain either line; *ibid.*, 130-132.

federation nor the Indians were noted for speed in negotiation, and it was not until the close of 1788 that Governor St. Clair met with the Indians at Fort Harmar on the Ohio in an attempt to bring peace to the Northwest. The council lasted into January 1789, and eventually St. Clair accomplished two treaties—one with the Six Nations and the other with the Wyandots, Delawares, Ottawas, and Chippewas. It was found impossible to obtain the boundaries suggested in St. Clair's instructions, but at least the new American policy was partially put into effect. In essence, St. Clair told the Indians that though the United States claimed the land by conquest she was prepared to pay for it as well. He obtained confirmation of the treaties of Fort Stanwix and Fort McIntosh by large payments to the Indians. Though he did not fully concede the Indian right to the land of the Northwest, he did reintroduce the principle of purchase. The treaty with the Wyandots and the other western tribes attempted to keep the peace by deceiving them as to America's future intentions. The Wyandot treaty stated that the Fort McIntosh line was confirmed "to the end that the same may remain as a division line between the lands of the United States of America, and the lands of said nations forever."¹⁹ This was nothing but a meaningless formula.

Thus in the spring of 1789, when the Federal government came to power, American policy was already changing in regard to the manner of acquiring lands. This change was to be accentuated by the new government. An immediate problem, however, was that the heavy-handed policy since 1783 had produced a crisis in the Northwest. The Fort Harmar treaty pleased the Indians no more than the treaties of Stanwix and McIntosh had done. It did nothing to solve the basic Indian dissatisfaction at losing their lands. Encouraged by the British, the Northwestern tribes were ready to insist once again upon an Ohio River boundary. They demanded that American settlers advance no farther.²⁰

Henry Knox, who continued as Secretary of War, now made a determined effort to develop the new tendencies in American Indian policy. From this time forward the element of national honor played an increasingly important part in determining the methods of land acquisition. In a report of June 15, 1789, Knox urged negotiation rather than war. Even

¹⁹ The proceedings of the Fort Harmar treaties are in the Draper Manuscripts, 23U75-143, State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. The treaties themselves are in *Statutes at Large*, VII, 28-35.

²⁰ At the Fort Harmar council the first Indian proposal had been for a boundary along the Ohio; see Draper MSS., 23U115-123.

if the necessary force were available, he argued, it was debatable from the point of view of justice whether it would be wise to use it. In addition, he maintained that America did not have sufficient money to expel the Indians. Justice and expediency made negotiation essential. Knox estimated that to attach the Indians north and south of the Ohio to the United States for the next fifty years might cost \$15,000 annually, whereas to coerce them would not only cost more money, but would also stain the character of the nation "beyond all pecuniary calculation." After these praiseworthy sentiments a rather more realistic calculation, reminiscent of Philip Schuyler's suggestion of July 29, 1783, entered into Knox's report: "As the settlements of the whites shall approach near to the Indian boundaries established by treaties, the game will be diminished, and the lands being valuable to the Indians only as hunting grounds, they will be willing to sell further tracts for small considerations. By the expiration, therefore, of the above period [fifty years], it is most probable that the Indians will, by the invariable operation of the causes which have hitherto existed in their intercourse with the whites, be reduced to a very small number."²¹

Several weeks later, in a report mainly concerned with the southern Indians, Knox moved a step further in suggesting an acceptable Indian policy. He pointed out that in time there would probably be no Indians east of the Mississippi and he asked whether, instead of extermination, there should not be civilization of the Indians. He suggested the possibility of the use of missionaries and argued that even if this did not fully civilize the Indians, it would at least attach them to the American interest. To accomplish this, he also urged fair purchase from the Indians, the recognition of the Indian right of soil, the treatment of the Indian tribes as foreign nations, and the regulation of white emigration.²² Knox was moving toward the idea that the acquisition of Indian land could be accomplished more easily, and with fewer pangs of conscience, if accompanied by a spreading of American civilization among the Indians and the protection of the Indians from brazen insult.

In the following years America was to pass various laws designed to protect the Indians from overt acts of violence and from exploitation. Regulations concerning the mode of white settlement, the encroachment on Indian land, the selling of liquor, and fair trading practices toward

²¹ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I (Washington, 1832), 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, 52-54 (July 7, 1789).

the Indians were all put into effect. These often did not work, owing to the problem of controlling the frontiersmen, but the American government was sincere in its effort to make them work. Everything possible was to be done to keep the Indians at peace. If fixed boundaries were established and peace were maintained, the land of the Northwest would eventually be absorbed by the American government at a small cost. Moreover, it would be absorbed in a manner that, it was presumed, would cast least discredit on the government.²³

The irony of the situation was that the United States, though moving rapidly in 1789 toward a policy of peace and absorption, found it necessary to wage a five-year Indian war for which she had not the slightest desire. The Indians by 1789 were actively resisting the American advance—they did not want to yield any land beyond the Ohio either by war or purchase, and America would have to wage a successful campaign before she could put her desired policy into effect. General Josiah Harmar's defeat in 1790 made another campaign essential, and in 1791 St. Clair was sent into the Indian country. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson expressed the position clearly in April 1791 when he said before St. Clair's expedition that "I hope we shall drub the Indians well this summer & then change our plan from war to bribery."²⁴ Unfortunately for the United States it was St. Clair who was drubbed, and this necessitated another three years of crisis before Anthony Wayne defeated the Indians at Fallen Timbers in August 1794. While these hostilities were proceeding, the American government advanced its plans to avoid such conflicts in the future.

In his messages to Congress, Washington advocated fair dealing with the Indians, impartial justice, reasonable trading practices, and strict regulation of the manner in which Indian lands might be obtained.²⁵ He also moved further in desiring the Americanization of the Indian. By 1792 the idea of teaching the Indians how to farm, to keep domesticated animals, and to build comfortable homes was entering into the instructions of American envoys to the Northwest. In May of that year Knox wrote to Rufus Putnam, who was being sent in an effort to attain peace with the

²³ A brief account of the governmental measures to prevent exploitation and injury of the Indians can be found in George D. Harmon, *Sixty Years of Indian Affairs . . . 1789-1850* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 18-19, 94-123.

²⁴ To James Monroe, Apr. 17, 1791, Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1904-05), VI, 242.

²⁵ See James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897* (Washington, 1896-99), I, 59, 104-105, 125-127, 141, 167, 185.

Wabash tribes, that "The United States are highly desirous of imparting to all the Indian tribes the blessings of civilization, as the only mean of perpetuating them on the earth."²⁶ The American government, particularly Knox, was becoming most concerned with the effect of its Indian policy on the national honor. Knox wrote to Anthony Wayne on January 5, 1793, that "If our modes of population and War destroy the tribes the disinterested part of mankind and posterity will be apt to class the effects of our Conduct and that of the Spaniards in Mexico and Peru together."²⁷ In fact, while America fought her bitter battle in the Northwest from 1789 to 1794, the late Confederation policy of fair purchase was transmuted into the idea of just treatment of the Indians in all matters *except* the vital one of their lands. For the land problem there was no real solution. The rapidly expanding American population could no more be expected to ignore the rich, sparsely settled lands to the west than could the Indians be expected to yield them without a struggle. The American government could make the process less painful, but it could not solve the basic dilemma. When Knox retired from office at the end of 1794, he issued final words of advice regarding American Indian policy. Once again he spoke of the necessity for fair dealing with the Indians, of bringing them the advantages of civilized life, and he warned that "a future historian may mark the causes of this destruction of the human race in sable colors."²⁸ Yet, as earnestly as Knox advised justice, there would be no lasting peace while land remained the object of American Indian policy.

The military victory of Anthony Wayne in August 1794 allowed the government to put into effect its desired Indian policy. Already, in April 1794, instructions in regard to the peace had been sent to Wayne. He was to obtain the boundaries of the Treaty of Fort Harmar and could confirm to the Indians their right of soil in the remainder of the Northwest. However, and this was vital, the United States must have the right of pre-emption.²⁹ According to the prevalent theories the Indians would inevitably want to sell more lands, and all the United States needed was the

²⁶ *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 235 (May 22, 1792). See also the instructions to Capt. Alexander Trueman, Apr. 3, 1792, *ibid.*, 229-230.

²⁷ Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Campaign into the Wilderness: The Wayne-Knox-Pickering-McHenry Correspondence* (Columbus, Ohio, 1955), II, 5.

²⁸ Report of Henry Knox, Dec. 29, 1794, *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 543-544.

²⁹ Knox to Wayne, Apr. 4, 1794, Northwest Territory Collection, William Henry Smith Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

exclusive right to purchase them. This had been a *sine qua non* of peace with the Northwest Indians since the start of the new national government in 1789.³⁰ Given the right of pre-emption, America inevitably would advance to the Mississippi.

When, in the spring of 1795, Wayne was near to the conclusion of a treaty with the Northwestern Indians, the new Secretary of War, Timothy Pickering, sent additional instructions for his guidance. Pickering explicitly renounced the policy pursued by the Confederation government in the post-1783 period—that is, the policy of claiming the Northwest by conquest—and said that the land belonged to the Indians. He stressed that peace and the satisfaction of the Indians were the most important considerations in the treaty. As a result the United States would claim little more land than had been obtained in 1789 at Fort Harmar.³¹ This seems most reasonable unless another statement made by Pickering to Wayne is taken into consideration. “When a peace shall once be established,” he wrote, “and we also take possession of the posts now held by the British, we can obtain every thing we shall want with a tenth part of the trouble and difficulty which you would now have to encounter.”³² He was paying his respects to the now well-established idea that if a boundary and peace were established Indian lands would soon fall into the hands of the Americans. Ten years before, Pickering had urged caution in the acquisition of more land at that time: “The purchase will be as easily made at any future period as at this time. Indians having no ideas of wealth, and their numbers always lessening in the neighbourhood of our Settlements, their claims for compensation will likewise be diminished; and besides that, fewer will remain to be gratified, the game will be greatly reduced, and lands destitute of game will, by hunters, be lightly esteemed.”³³ Pickering, like Washington, Knox, and Schuyler, saw that war was not the easiest method of removing the Indians from the land of the Northwest.

³⁰ Though the United States was so anxious for peace, the Senate did not ratify the treaty made by Rufus Putnam with the Wabash tribes in Sept. 1792 on the grounds that it did not contain a clause guaranteeing the American right of pre-emption. See *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 338; *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America* (Washington, 1828—), I, 128, 134-135, 144-146.

³¹ Pickering to Wayne, Apr. 8, 1795, Knopf, ed., *Campaign into the Wilderness*, IV, 19-32.

³² Apr. 15, 1795, *ibid.*, 34.

³³ To Rufus King, June 1, 1785, Charles R. King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King . . .* (New York, 1894-1900), I, 105.

The resounding phrases of the famous Treaty of Greenville thus meant very little. Though only eastern and southern Ohio, together with a strip of what is now southeastern Indiana, were granted to the United States, and though the United States relinquished her claims to all lands beyond these boundaries, it was quite evident to the American government that this was not a permanent division. Article Five gave the right of pre-emption in the remaining land of the Northwest to the United States—it was put in because it was quite obvious that it was going to be used. Moreover, by the treaty, the United States was given sixteen reservations of land on the Indian side of the boundary line to use as posts and was also granted free communication between them.³⁴ Indians throughout the Northwest were to have the contact with white civilization that would result in their withdrawal or diminution in numbers. The Indians thought the Greenville line was to last forever, the Americans knew better. The territorial organization of the Northwest proceeded in spite of the Greenville line; in 1796 Wayne County was organized, stretching westward to Lake Michigan, and in 1800 the organization of the Indiana Territory also ignored the division made at Greenville.³⁵ The peace that reigned after Greenville allowed American settlers to pour into the ceded areas.

The period of calm lasted little longer than the administration of John Adams, for American settlers soon looked beyond the land ceded at Greenville. From 1801 to 1809 President Thomas Jefferson sought the land between the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers with all the eagerness of the Confederation. With the ambivalence that is so characteristic of Jefferson, he was able to combine an apparent genuine interest in the welfare of the Indian with a voracious appetite for Indian land. In his public utterances Jefferson viewed the harsh realities of American-Indian relations through a roseate mist. His first annual message, December 1801, expressed happiness that the Indians were becoming “more and more sensible” of the advantages of farming and “the household arts” over hunting and fishing.³⁶ The wish was apparently father to the thought. In the following month he told a visiting delegation of Miamis, Potawatomis, and Weas that the United States would “with great pleasure see your people become disposed to cultivate the earth, to raise herds of the useful animals and to spin and weave, for their food and clothing, these

³⁴ *Statutes at Large*, VII, 49-54.

³⁵ Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers*, II, 567-568, III, 86-88.

³⁶ Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, I, 326.

resources are certain, they will never disappoint you, while those of hunting may fail, and expose your women and children to the miseries of hunger and cold."³⁷ This became the rallying call of Jefferson throughout his presidency. He was convinced that the United States should take every opportunity to persuade the Indians to abandon their old modes of life. His motives were not entirely altruistic.

In January 1803 Jefferson submitted a message to Congress recommending the continuance of the system of American trading factories among the Indians.³⁸ He went on to comment upon American-Indian relations and told Congress that the Indian tribes had been growing increasingly uneasy at the diminution of their land, and that the policy of refusing to contract any further sales had been growing among them. To counteract this policy, "and to provide an extension of territory which the rapid increase of our numbers will call for," Jefferson recommended two measures. The first suggestion was to encourage the Indian tribes to abandon hunting and to engage instead in stock raising, agriculture, and domestic manufacture. He argued that it would be possible to show the Indians that by following this new way of life they could live better with less land and less labor. Their extensive forests would thus become useless to them, and they would see the advantage of exchanging these lands for the means of improving their farms and increasing their domestic comforts. His second suggestion was to multiply trading-houses among the Indians, "and place within their reach those things which will contribute more to their domestic comfort than the possession of extensive but uncultivated wilds." These measures would, he argued, prepare the Indians to share ultimately in the benefits of American government and civilization. "I trust and believe," stated Jefferson, "we are acting for their greatest good."³⁹

The intimate connection of these plans with Jefferson's desire for land in the Northwest can plainly be seen from his letter to Governor William Henry Harrison of the Indiana Territory in the following month. Already in 1802, acting on the suggestion of the American government, Harrison

³⁷ Jan. 7, 1802, War Department, Secretary's Office, Letters Sent, Indian Affairs, A, 143, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

³⁸ The Indian factory system had been established in 1796 to protect the Indians from unscrupulous traders, attach them to the United States, and counteract British and Spanish influence; see Ora K. Peake, *A History of the United States Indian Factory System, 1795-1822* (Denver, 1954), passim.

³⁹ Jan. 18, 1803, Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, I, 352-353.

had prepared the way for a large cession in Indiana by "defining" the Vincennes tract, which had been granted to the United States at Greenville,⁴⁰ and now Jefferson urged him to continue the appropriation of land to the Mississippi. The President informed him on February 27, 1803, that as the Spanish had ceded Louisiana to the French the Indians would become reluctant to make further land cessions. Harrison was told, therefore, that "whatever can now be obtained, must be obtained quickly." Earlier in this letter Jefferson had stated that he wanted perpetual peace with the Indians (though his desire for lands would, of course, make this impossible) and had told Harrison of his plans to encourage agriculture, spinning, and weaving among the Indians. They would then need little land, and would exchange it for other necessaries. Jefferson urged the extension of trading-houses among the Indians, and stated that he would be glad to see influential Indians run into debt. When the debts were more than they could pay, he argued, they would be willing to settle them by a cession of land. The President added that he would like to see the purchase of all the country east of the Mississippi. Needless to say, he wanted the letter to be kept a secret from the Indians.⁴¹

The transformation of the Indian into an American farmer, and the resulting surplus of land that would be happily yielded to the United States, was a vision which beset Jefferson throughout his two terms as president. Time and time again he told visiting delegations of Indians that the United States wanted them to abandon the difficulties of the chase and engage in the pleasures of farming. As game became increasingly scarce, he warned them, their families would starve.⁴² Jefferson did not merely want the Indians to live in the American manner, eventually he wanted them to be absorbed into the American population. He spoke of the ultimate point of rest and happiness for the Indians as being when the two races would become one people and when the Indians would become American citizens.⁴³ The Indians would throw off their own traditions and would assume those of the United States. The original aim of appro-

⁴⁰ See Henry Dearborn to Harrison, Jan. 23, 1802, War Dept., Secretary's Office, Letters Sent, Indian Affairs, A, 146; also Logan Esarey, ed., *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison* (Indianapolis, 1922), I, 41-43, 56-57.

⁴¹ Esarey, ed., *Messages and Letters of Harrison*, I, 69-73.

⁴² See messages from Jefferson to the various Indian tribes, War Dept., Secretary's Office, Letters Sent, Indian Affairs, A, 315, 413-415; B, 147-148, 279-282, 369-373, 394-397, 400-402, 410-413.

⁴³ To Benjamin Hawkins, Feb. 18, 1803, P. L. Ford, ed., *Works of Jefferson*, IX, 445-449.

priating Indian land was now becoming inextricably entwined with the moralistic aim of bringing civilization to the Indians.

Thus Jefferson conjured up a dreamland in which the Indians would agree that the white man's civilization was superior and would be eager to yield their surplus lands to the expanding Americans. The fact is, of course, that Governor Harrison of Indiana, acting on instructions from Jefferson, pressed the Indians into selling a goodly portion of the modern states of Indiana and Illinois between 1802 and 1809. Jefferson's letter of February 1803, which urged the purchase of land westward to the Mississippi, produced immediate action by Harrison. The treaties that were signed between 1803 and 1805 not only extended American control over southern Indiana, but also encompassed lands far to the west. Harrison rode roughshod over Indian opposition. Though the Indians were most reluctant to confirm the Vincennes cession of the previous September, their uneasy acquiescence was secured by Harrison at the treaty of Fort Wayne in June 1803. Encouraged by this success, he treated for much of southern Indiana by the close of 1805.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, giant strides carried the United States to the Mississippi. In August 1803 at Vincennes the remnant of the Kaskaskias ceded much of what is now southern Illinois to the United States, and this large foothold on the Mississippi was greatly enlarged in 1804 when Harrison journeyed to St. Louis. On November 3, 1804, the Sac and Fox ceded a vast area in what is now northwestern Illinois, northern Missouri, and southern Wisconsin.⁴⁵ Jefferson's aim of purchasing all the land east of the Mississippi was near to realization.

While Jefferson spoke in his messages to Congress as though all this met with the approbation of the Northwestern Indians,⁴⁶ the intensity of their resistance was becoming increasingly obvious in the years after 1802. Rather than rushing forward to sell their surplus lands to taste the delights of agriculture, spinning, and weaving, the Indians were in these years becoming infuriated at the flouting of promises made at Greenville. By 1805 Tecumseh and the Prophet were beginning to organize resistance in the Northwest, and by the time Jefferson left office in 1809 the area was on the verge of war. In spite of this, Harrison in September 1809 secured

⁴⁴ The treaties of these years are in *Statutes at Large*, VII, 74-77, 81-84, 91-93, 100-101. See also Esarey, ed., *Messages and Letters of Harrison*, I, 69-187, passim.

⁴⁵ *Statutes at Large*, VII, 78-79, 84-87.

⁴⁶ Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, I, 343-344, 359, 371-372, 386-387.

yet another tract of land in Indiana.⁴⁷ This American pressure for land in the first decade of the nineteenth century greatly simplified the British task of preparing for the war that was to come in 1812. Though the British had deserted the Northwestern Indians in 1783 and in 1794, Indian anger at the American land policy insured that the Indians would once again be in the British camp.

Meanwhile Jefferson continued his policy of peace, civilization, and land appropriation. For a time, after the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, he toyed with the possibility of removal west of the Mississippi as a solution to the Indian problem, but his interest in this project soon faded.⁴⁸ To the end of his second term, his desire for land, and the linked desire of civilizing the Indians, continued unassuaged. In his annual message in December 1805, the year the Prophet began his activities at Greenville, he was able to say: "Our Indian neighbors are advancing, many of them with spirit, and others beginning to engage in the pursuits of agriculture and household manufacture. They are becoming sensible that the earth yields subsistence with less labor and more certainty than the forest, and find it their interest from time to time to dispose of parts of their surplus and waste lands for the means of improving those they occupy and of subsisting their families while they are preparing their farms."⁴⁹ For a man of Jefferson's brilliance this was a remarkably nonsensical statement.

In December 1808 he told the Miami chief, Little Turtle, of the advantage of agriculture over hunting, and then continued by saying that "I have therefore always believed it an act of friendship to our red brethren whenever they wished to sell a portion of their lands, to be ready to buy whether we wanted them or not—because the price enables them to improve the lands they retain and turning their industry from hunting to agriculture the same exertions will support them more plentifully."⁵⁰ It would seem that Jefferson had come to believe that not only was the civilization of the Indian convenient for acquisition of land, but that he was also acquiring land in order to civilize the Indian.

Shortly before he left office he spoke with conviction, and with an

⁴⁷ *Statutes at Large*, VII, 113-116.

⁴⁸ See Annie H. Abel, "The History of Events Resulting in Indian Consolidation West of the Mississippi," American Historical Association, *Annual Report . . . 1906* (Washington, 1908), I, 241 ff.

⁴⁹ Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, I, 386-387 (Dec. 3, 1805).

⁵⁰ War Dept., Secretary's Office, Letters Sent, Indian Affairs, B, 400-401.

eloquent peroration, when he told an assembled gathering of Northwestern Indians: "I repeat that we will never do an unjust act towards you—On the contrary we wish you to live in peace, to increase in numbers, to learn to labor as we do and furnish food for your ever increasing numbers, when the game shall have left you. We wish to see you possessed of property and protecting it by regular laws. In time you will be as we are: you will become one people with us: your blood will mix with ours: and will spread with ours over this great island. Hold fast then my children, the chain of friendship which binds us together: and join us in keeping it forever bright and unbroken."⁵¹

It was magnificent, but it was not realistic. Jefferson bequeathed to James Madison a host of Indian problems in the Northwest, stemming directly out of the cession of lands beyond the Greenville line in the years after 1795. Madison had no time to develop an Indian policy for the Northwest—his administration was soon to be plunged into war, both with the Indians and with England. Yet, following the tradition of Jefferson, Madison assured Congress in December 1810 that "With the Indian tribes also the peace and friendship of the United States are found to be so eligible that the general disposition to preserve both continues to gain strength."⁵² This was only a few weeks after Tecumseh had visited the British at Amherstburg to tell them he was ready for war.⁵³

American Indian policy in the Northwest during these hectic years revolved around the problem of the acquisition of land. The Confederation government first tried the simple methods of force, and discovered there was no surer way of producing Indian war. Anxious to avoid war, from financial as well as humanitarian motives, the Confederation turned to a policy of purchase, which involved the recognition of Indian rights to land beyond certain boundary lines. Recognition of this right did not mean that America expected any difficulty in acquiring further areas of land. The government acted on the assumption that the pressure of white population up to the demarcation line would produce a diminution in game, a reduction in the Indian population, and a desire to sell land cheaply. The

⁵¹ To chiefs of the Wyandots, Ottawas, Chippewas, Potawatomis, and Shawnee, Jan. 1809, *ibid.*, B, 412-413.

⁵² Dec. 5, 1810, Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, I, 484.

⁵³ See speech of Tecumseh, Nov. 15, 1810, enclosed in Matthew Elliott to William Claus, Nov. 16, 1810, Transcripts from the Colonial Office, Series Q, CXIV, 74-75, 77-79, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

new federal government inherited this policy from the Confederation and added to it. The most important addition was a more acute awareness that the national honor was involved. An attempt was made to give the Indians as much justice as was compatible with the wholesale acquisition of land. In fact, the government was prepared to defend the Indian against everyone except itself. In the 1790's there was a growing governmental interest in the possibility of bringing civilization to the Indian—that is, in transforming him into an American farmer. There seems to have been little realization that the Indian might not consider this an advantage. From the American point of view it was an ideal solution, for the Indian would cede his vast lands, and what was left of the Indian population would be absorbed into American civilization. This concept received far greater development after 1800 during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. Though comparatively little progress was made in this direction, Jefferson acted as if the whole program was taking tremendous strides and proceeded to support William Henry Harrison in the acquisition of considerable areas of land. He never seemed to realize the wide discrepancy between the lofty nature of his aims and the rather sordid land-grabbing that was taking place in the Northwest.

The basic object of American Indian policy in this period—the acquisition of land—was a striking success. The subsidiary aims of peace, friendship, and the eventual absorption of the Indian into the American way of life resulted in failure. This failure was to be repeated throughout American history, for wholesale land acquisition and friendship with the Indians were incompatible. However much members of the government might desire to win the friendship of the Indians, they could only do so by establishing a permanent barrier to the expansion of the American population over the North American continent. This would have meant leaving the area to the Indians, who were considered savages by the majority of the American people. While Indians roamed freely over the rich Mississippi Valley, the United States would have confined its rapidly increasing population to the eastern portion of its internationally recognized boundaries. Even if the government had desired such a policy, it could hardly have enforced it. Thus the American government was forced into the dilemma of trying to reconcile wholesale land acquisition and justice to the Indians. The dilemma was never solved—probably because it was insoluble—and America discovered very early in her history that the lot of a colonizer with a conscience is not a happy one.