

The California Rancheria Termination Act of 1958: The Continuous Assertion of Tribal Governments for Self-Determination

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Abstract

Throughout the history of the United States, the relationship with its original inhabitants has been marked by inequity, persisting from its inception in 1776. This qualitative case study delves into the enduring repercussions of the Rancheria Termination Act of 1958 on California's American Indian communities. Guided by a transformative axiological assumption rooted in respect, beneficence, and justice, this research seeks to shed light on this act's profound and lasting impacts. The California Rancheria Termination Act of 1958 (Rancheria Act) represents a joint effort by the United States government and the State of California to circumvent federal treaty responsibilities and transfer portions of tribal lands to the state. The findings of this study reveal that the Rancheria Act (1958) set tribal governments back by over 650 years. With an average of 17 years of non-existence before restoration, the 41 tribal governments affected by inequitable and racist policies continue to wage a resilient battle to reclaim their identity. In defiance of the federal government's actions, tribal governments persist in their struggle to safeguard their culture, language, spiritual practices, societal contributions, and indigenous identity. These were once threatened by the classification of terminated rancheria inhabitants as non-Indian Indians. The study has uncovered a compelling need for further research into the holistic impact of the Rancheria Act. Such research can provide the foundation for developing initiatives that empower American Indians and tribal governments to exercise their right to self-determination. These initiatives can also foster community reconciliation, addressing historical injustices impacting present issues.

Keywords: American Indian; inequities; policy; resiliency; social justice