Federal Indian Law

The field of federal Indian Law regulates the legal relationships between Indian tribes and the United States. It is incredibly complex and has significance for everyone. The field of Indian Law involves issues of real property, international law, administrative law, constitutional law, water law, federal jurisdiction, procedure, contracts, criminal law, etc.

Sovereign Status

Indian Tribes were recognized by "Discovering Europeans " as Sovereigns i.e. governments. Therefore they entered into treaties with the Indians. The purpose of the treaties was to make alliances with tribes for peaceful relations originally and later as a means of securing tribal lands in exchange for various promises of "protection. "

Treaties were the earliest attempt to establish a relationship between tribes and the United States. Treaties began the trust relationship which continues today between the United States and tribes. Sovereignty is a political concept. It means the right to govern.

Treaties

Indians often made treaties without really understanding the European concepts of property. The Europeans frequently negotiated treaties with persons who were not leaders in the tribe. Indian treaties are essentially laws. The treaties were negotiated by the President (Executive Branch) and ratified by the Senate. Treaty rights in effect today include beneficial ownership of Indian lands, hunting and fishing rights, and the rights to certain federal services such as
education or health care. Other rights may also exist based on statutory and executive orders. Congress has the power to abrogate treaty provisions. Treaties are an important aspect of the trust relationship that exists between the Indians and the Federal Government.

Print Sources of Treaties


(Volume 7 is entirely treaties)

Internet Sources of Treaties

Early Recognized Treaties with American Indian Nations (University of Nebraska)  
http://earlytreaties.unl.edu/

Text of 9 treaties not included in Kappler. 7 that were with the British and omitted from Kappler and 2 that were never published in the Statutes at Large, but are published in the first volume of American State Papers. Biography of Kappler is also found at the University of Nebraska website http://kappler.unl.edu/

http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Kappler/ Website created by Oklahoma State University.

European Doctrine of Discovery and American Indian Rights

When the Europeans came to this continent they found people with an advanced civilization already inhabiting it. Because of the great numbers of Indians, in the beginning the Europeans had no hope of outright conquest. The Europeans brought a theory called "Discovery" based on the centuries-old European legal heritage. The discovering potentates believed they took title to the land by the act of "discovery" and in return brought Christianity and civilization. This theory was applied by Great Britain and was continued by the new federal government. The treaties with Indians recognized the tribes as sovereign entities. That is, Indians had the power to regulate their internal affairs.

The earliest concepts of Federal Indian Law were established by the "Marshall Trilogy."
Foundational Supreme Court Cases - The Marshall Trilogy

Johnson v. M'Intosh 21 U.S. 543 (1823)

"Indian inhabitants are to be considered merely as occupants, to be protected, indeed while in peace, in the possession of heir lands, but to be deemed incapable of transferring absolute titles to others".

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia 30 U.S. l (1831)

Establishes Indians as wards and the United States government as a guardian.

Worcester v. Georgia 31 U.S. 5 15 (1832)

Recognizes principles of tribal sovereignty.

There have been many court cases interpreting federal Indian law. A good source for rounding up the most significant cases is:


Over the years the Supreme Court has more and more entered the arena of interpreting the law and making new law, even though Congress is supposed to be the main source of federal Indian law.

Cases

Print Sources of Cases


Supreme Court Reporter St. Paul, MN : West Group

Supreme Court Reports, Lawyers edition. Charlottesville, VA :Lexis Law Publishing

U.S. Law Week Washington, DC :Bureau of National Affairs

Federal Reporter, St. Paul, MN : West Group

Federal Supplement St. Paul, MN : West Group
Internet Sources of Cases

Legal Information Institute. Supreme Court
http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/index.html

FindLaw US Supreme Court Opinions (decisions since 1893)
http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme.html

National Indian Law Library, Indian Law Bulletins
http://www.narf.org/nill/bulletins/ilb.htm The bulletins provide summaries of
court cases for Federal and State courts specifically dealing with Indian Law.

LEXIS (subscription database)

Federal Court Cases, Combined
Federal & State Cases. Combined
US Supreme Court Cases, Lawyers’ Edition

WESTLAW (subscription database)

Federal Native American Law – Cases
Federal Native American Law – Supreme Court Cases
Federal Native American Law – Court of Appeals
Federal Native American Law – District Court Cases

Digests

Print Sources for Digests

Digests provide a means of listing together court cases by subject and
jurisdiction. Digests are arranged by topic and key number and also have case
name table. Key numbers are assigned by editors according to the point of law
each case concerns.

West’s Federal Digests -- (Federal Digest, Modern Federal Practice Digest;
West’s Federal Practice Digest, 2nd; West’s Federal Practice Digest 3d, West’s
Federal Practice Digest 4thCentury Digest and Decennial Digests); West
Publishing Company,

Supreme Court Digest, St. Paul, MN : West Group
Internet Source

The Westlaw Database has a digest function for doing topical searches identified by the editorially assigned key number system that brings together the cases by subject matter. This is called a “Custom Digest.”

Constitutional Sources of Federal Indian Law

U.S. Const. art. I, sec. 8, cl. 3 “The Congress shall have power... to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States and with the Indian Tribes.”

Thus Congress exercises plenary power over the Indian tribes. Plenary = full, complete, entire, unqualified, absolute power. This Article also puts Indian tribes on a par with the states. The courts have recognized Congressional “plenary and exclusive authority” over Indian affairs. United States Constitution is published in the federal statutes.

Congress

Major acts of Congress include the Indian Civil Rights Act imposing on tribes such basic requirements as the protection of free speech, free exercise of religion, due process, and equal protection of the laws (1968); the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act, expanding tribal control over reservation programs and authorizing federal funds to build public school facilities on or near Indian reservations (1975); the Indian Health Care improvement Act clarifying trust responsibilities of the Indian Health Service (1976). The American Indian Religious Freedom Act in which Congress recognizes its obligation to "protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express and exercise traditional religions (1978); Indian Child Welfare Act, establishing U.S. policy to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by giving tribal courts jurisdiction over children living on reservations (1978); the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988); the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act requiring return to Native American claimants of human bones and artifacts recovered from government-sponsored archaeological excavations on public lands (1990).

Print Sources

House and Senate Documents and Reports on microfiche (also available in paper at some libraries)

House and Senate Bills on microfiche
Congressional Information Service Index and Abstracts, including microfiche of indexed documents

Statutes at Large Public Laws of the United States Congress

U.S. Code Title 25

U.S. Code Title 18 secs. 1152-1153, sec 3242 and other criminal statutes

Congressional Record

Internet Sources of Congressional Resources

Congressional Universe (subscription database)


Thomas-Legislative Information on the Internet http://thomas.loc.gov/

United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs http://indian.senate.gov/public/


Executive Orders

The Constitution grants to the President and to Congress what have been construed as broad powers over Indian affairs. Executive orders are official documents, numbered consecutively, through which the President of the United States manages the operations of the Federal Government.

Print Sources of Executive Orders


Libraries that retain all revisions of CFR title 3 have a valuable historic resource

Internet Sources of Executive Orders

Executive Orders http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/ links to the 3 databases listed below:


LEXIS Database (subscription database)

CFR and Federal Register

Executive Orders Pertaining to Native American People 1854-thru current

Presidential Proclamations Pertaining to Native People

State Administrative Agency Decisions, Combined

WESTLAW Database (subscription database)

Federal Native American Law – Code of Federal Regulations

Federal Native American Law - Federal Register

Federal Native American Law-Executive Documents 1871-

Executive Orders
Presidential Memoranda
Presidential Proclamations

Periods of U.S. Policy toward Indians

Source: American Indian Law in a Nutshell, editions 2-5

Sovereignty (1608-1830)

Tribes dealt with as nations

Removal (1830-1850)

Competition with non-Indians for land led to removal to Indian Territory i.e. Oklahoma. Removal was forced. For example Cherokee removal from Georgia was became known as the "Trail of Tears."
Treaties (1778-1871/Reservations 1850-1887)

In 1871 Congress passed a statute providing that no tribe should thereafter be recognized as an independent nation with the United States and could not make treaties. Existing treaties were not affected. Reservations established after 1871 were not affected. Reservations established after 1871 were accordingly created either by statute or until 1919 by executive order. Reservations were originally intended to keep distance and peace between Indians and non-Indians, but they came to be viewed also as instruments for "civilizing" native peoples.

Allotments and Assimilation (1871-1928)

The goal was in theory to civilize the Indians by dividing the reservations into 160 acre parcels for heads of households and 80 acres for others (or double if land suitable for grazing) so they would become yeoman farmers. Excess lands were sold to non-Indians.

Indian Reorganization (1928-1945)

Allotment policy decimated tribes and reduced tribal land holdings from 138 million acres to 48 million acres. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was intended to re-establish tribes as governments. A key issue was the creation of tribal charters and constitutions.

Termination (1945-1961)

Intent was to assimilate Indians by making them subject to the same laws as applicable to all United States citizens and by ending their special relationship with the federal government and subject to state laws. Over 100 tribes were terminated.

Self-Determination (1961-present)

Termination was deemed a failure. President Nixon stressed the continuing importance of the trust relationship between the federal government and the tribes and urged a program of legislation to permit the tribes to manage their affairs with a maximum degree of autonomy.

Treatises, Casebooks and Law Reviews

Print Sources


Cohen’s handbook of federal Indian law, Newark, NJ: LexisNexis, c2005


Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law, Michie, 1982
This edition was written by a board of authors and editors headed by Rennard Strickland to update Indian law issues after 1941


American Indian Law Review, Norman : University of Oklahoma College of Law 1974-

### Internet Sources of Treatises and Periodicals


Deals with Indian lands and territories and includes maps, bibliographical sources, glossaries of terms, and references to online sources.


Native American Constitution and Law Digitization Project [http://thorpe.ou.edu/cohen.html](http://thorpe.ou.edu/cohen.html)


Administrative Law

Administrative law is created through the work of government agencies for which Congressional action has delegated authority. It includes regulation and decision making by boards, bureaus, commissions, and specialized courts. Agency functions are set out in the Code of Federal Regulations. The most important agency is the Bureau of Indian Affairs.


The BIA was created as part of the War Department in 1824 and transferred to the Department of Interior when the latter was established in 1849. The United States has a unique legal and political relationship with Indian tribes and Alaska Native entities as provided by the Constitution of the United States, treaties, court decisions and federal statutes. The role of the BIA has evolved over the years. Its current role serves to assist Indians and Alaska Native People to manage their affairs under the trust relationship with the Federal Government; to assist in the full development of human and natural resources potential; to mobilize public and private aids to the advancement of Indian and Native Alaskan people; and to promote self-determination.

Print Sources

Code of Federal Regulations Title 25 Indians (The CFR volumes are recompiled with current rules as scheduled)

Regulations of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior; Indian
Arts and Crafts Board, Department of the Interior; National Indian Gaming Commission, Department of the Interior; Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation; Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Interior, and Indian Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services; Office of the Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior; Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians, Department of the Interior.

Decisions, Reports Dockets and other Documents of the Indian Claims Commission (Clearwater, 1979 microfiche)

This Commission was in existence from 1946-1978. It was established to permit certain types of suits against the U.S. Government for mistakes, fraud, failure to pay agreed upon compensation, claims based on fair and honorable dealings that are not recognized by any existing rule of law or equity. (Primary function was adjudication)

Decisions of the Interior Board of Indian Appeals, (The Board, Vol. 1 1970-)

Deals primarily with disputes involving the Bureau of Indian Affairs and probate cases.


Internet Sources of Administrative Law

Decisions of the Interior Board of Indian Appeals
http://www.oha.doi.gov/about_ibia.htm

The Interior Board of Indian Appeals is an appellate review body for decisions made by the Bureau of Indian Affairs regarding tribal government disputes, economic development matters, treaty rights, management of Indian lands, and probate cases.

Decisions of the Interior Board of Land Appeals
http://www.oha.doi.gov/about_ibla.htm

The Interior Board of Land Appeals provides appellate review of decisions made primarily by the Bureau of Land Management regarding the use and disposition of public lands and their resources.

Indian Claims Commission Decisions
http://digital.library.okstate.edu/icc/index.html
This Commission was in existence from 1946-1978. It was established to permit certain types of suits against the U.S. Government for mistakes, fraud, failure to pay agreed upon compensation, claims based on fair and honorable dealings that are not recognized by any existing rule of law or equity. (Primary function was adjudication)


The Solicitor’s Office performs the legal work for the United States Department of the Interior. The Solicitor is the chief attorney and principal legal advisor to the Secretary of the Interior.

WESTLAW (subscription database):

Interior Board of Indian Appeals Decisions

Solicitor General Opinions 1917- 1974

LEXIS (subscription database):

Native American Solicitor's 1917-1974 Opinions

Tribal Law

Tribal Law is intertwined with federal Indian law. State law also impacts tribes primarily in the subject area of economic development through compacts negotiated between the tribes and the governor. These compacts are similar to treaties but can’t be called that. Although the self-governmental process may be fairly independent, many structures and limitations on sovereignty are imposed by the federal government on today’s tribes. Major reasons are the trust responsibility that derives from treaties and from court decisions and Congress's plenary power.

Trust responsibility is administered by the Interior Department and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Information can be found about a major case brought in a long running class action suit can be found at http://www.cobellsettlement.com/class/index.php (Cobell v. Salazar Settlement Agreement). This law suit alleges that the Secretary of Interior has failed to fulfill financial responsibility for the individual Indian trust resulting in the loss,
misdirection, and unaccountability of several billion dollars of monies held in trust or which should have been held in trust.

Historically many tribes governed themselves by consensus and were willing to take the time required to achieve consensus. Laws were passed on orally with reasons for the law explained through history and/or legend. Traditional ways ultimately were not viable in the hostile-to-Indians environment created by the non-Indian society. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 provided for tribes to establish tribal Constitutions and to achieve federal recognition. Federal recognition was to be the new basis for the government to government relationship with tribes. There are more than 500 tribes in the 48 state area. (In Alaska each tribal village is considered a tribe). A list of federally recognized tribes is published periodically in the Federal Register.  
http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/biaind.pdf as of August 11, 2009

Tribal Constitutions and Codes

Print Sources of Tribal Constitutions and Codes

Cherokee Code (Equity, 1986)

Cherokee Code Annotated (West Publishing Co., 1993)

Act of Union between Eastern and Western Cherokees
1839 Constitution
1975 Constitution
Titles I-23 of 1992 Code

Jicarilla Apache Tribal Code, (Equity, 1987)

Navajo Tribal Code (Equity, 1962)

Navajo Tribal Code (Executive Secretary for the Navajo Tribe, 1969)

Navajo Tribal Code (Equity, 1978)

Navajo Nation Code (Office of the Legislative Counsel, 1995)

Internet Sources of Codes and Constitutions

Tribal codes are available at various websites as a public service. Codes which publish laws according to their subject matter require frequent updating as new laws are passed. The only source of authoritative codes is to be found through contact with the tribe. Many tribes publish their codes online. A listing of tribal
governments can be found at USA.gov Tribal Governments
http://www.usa.gov/Government/Tribal_Sites/index.shtml

Iroquois Constitution http://www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm This Constitution served as a model for the Constitution of the United States.

Indian Reorganization Act era constitutions and charters http://thorpe.ou.edu/IRA.html According to the National Congress of American Indians, about 60% of tribal constitutions are based on IRA Constitutions created in the 1930’s.

Constitutions are available online as a public service at various websites. The only versions that should be relied upon for currency and authority are those found on tribal websites or otherwise provided and verified by the tribe itself.

National Indian Law Library http://www.narf.org/nill/

Native American Constitution and Law Digitization Project http://thorpe.ou.edu/

Tribal Court Clearinghouse : A project of the Tribal Law and Policy Institute http://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/constitutions.htm

Cases (Tribal Courts)

There are tribal courts administered by the tribes according to their constitution. There are also federal courts which function as tribal courts called Courts of Indian Offenses (also known as CFR courts). Title 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations delineates the functions and role of the Courts of Indian Offenses.

Print Sources of Tribal Court Decisions

Indian Law Reporter (American Indian Lawyer Training Program, 1974-)

Navajo Reporter (Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation 1969-1983)

Oklahoma Tribal Court Reports v. l- 1994-(Native American Legal Resource Center, Oklahoma City University.

West’s American Tribal Law Reporter : Cases Decided in American Tribal Law Courts, and Decisions of the United States Courts of Appeals and Supreme Court of the United States, v.1- 2009-

Internet Sources of Tribal Court Decisions

Tribal Court Clearinghouse http://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/justice.htm
WESTLAW (subscription database)

Oklahoma Tribal Court Reports

West’s American Tribal Law Reporter - Headnotes

Treatises and Periodicals

Print Sources


American Indian Law Review. Norman: University of Oklahoma College of Law, 1974-

Internet Sources of Treatises and Periodicals


Native American Constitutions and Law Digitization Project
http://thorpe.ou.edu/Alaska.html

An Introduction to Indian Nations in the United States, published in PDF by the National Congress of American Indians.
http://www.ncai.org/fileadmin/initiatives/NCAI_Indian_Nations_In_The_US.pdf
This booklet provides a basic overview of the history and underlying principles of tribal governance. It is a very thorough summary.

Indigenous Nations and Peoples Law e-Journal published on SSRN Social Science Network
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/JELJOUR Results.cfm?form_name=journalbrowse&journal_id=841786 e-journal published by the Center for Indigenous Law, Governance, & Citizenship at Syracuse University College of Law. Anyone may view articles. Institutional subscribers receive e-mail notifications of new articles. There is no subject organization so articles have to be viewed from going through a list.

Tribal Law Journal (e-journal) Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, School of Law v. 1-2000-
http://tlj.unm.edu/
Indianz.com  http://64.38.12.138/ Online news magazine published weekdays on topics including legislation, court decisions, health issues and politics.

WESTLAW (subscription database)

Westlaw Topical Highlights – Native American Law

Portals and Guides

Ross-Blakley Indian Law Portal http://www.law.asu.edu/?id=1138 This portal was created to support the curriculum of the Arizona State University College of Law Indian Legal Program as well as to benefit the Indian Legal Community. It includes legislative histories and a historical timeline with sources.

Tribal Law Gateway at the National Indian Law Library hosted by the Native American Rights Fund http://www.narf.org/nill/triballaw/index.htm The National Indian Law Library is a public law library devoted to federal Indian and tribal law. It includes access to the library’s catalog, full text constitutions and codes online, and Indian Law Bulletins current awareness information.

American Indian Law. University of California Berkeley Law Library http://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/dynamic/guide.php?id=49 This is a research guide at an introductory level.

Tribal Court Clearinghouse http://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/decision.htm This is a project of the Tribal Law and Policy Institute. It is a comprehensive website to serve as a resource for American Indian and Alaska Native Nations. It includes federal, state, and tribal law information, full text documents, and directories to resources pertaining to tribal justice systems.


Blogs

Native American Law Blog http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/nativeamerican/ Member of the Law Professor Blogs Network.

Turtle Talk http://turtletalk.wordpress.com/ Turtle talk is the blog for the Indigenous Law and Policy Center at Michigan State University College of Law.