## American Genocide Name:

You are going to be investigating whether or not the treatment of American Indians can be considered a genocide. Use the United Nations definition of genocide to instruct your answers.

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| **U.N. Genocide Definition:** "… acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group…" which may include: killing, causing serious physical or mental harm, causing living conditions meant to physically destroy (in part or in whole) the group, preventing births, or forcibly transferring children to another group. |

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| **Disease** | |
| The greatest killer of American Indians by far was disease. Many estimate that 90-95% of American Indians died of disease within the first 400 years of European presence in the Americas. This certainly would count as a genocide if it could be shown that it was intentional on the part of Europeans to introduce these diseases to the Americans. | |
| **Evidence 1: Amherst:** There is only one direct evidence of this happening. Sir Jeffrey Amherst, Commander of all British forces in America gave an order in 1763. The order commanded that “You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians [with smallpox] by means of blankets, as well as to try every other method, that can serve to [exterminate] this [cursed] race.” Shortly after, soldiers and traders under his command distributed blankets from the army infirmary to the American Indians with clear intention to give those people smallpox. | **Why does this support the idea that Europeans committed genocide?** |
| **Counterevidence 1: Vaccination:** Smallpox Vaccines were available as early as 1796. In 1801, the American President, Jefferson, gave an order to vaccinate all American Indians in the United States. Implementation of this order was not great and would not be finished for over a century but it did reduce fatality rates among American Indians. | **Why does this suggest that European-Americans were not attempting to commit genocide?** |
| **Did Europeans and European-Americans use disease as a method of genocide?** Support your answer. | |
| **Massacres** | |
| The story of America, especially the story of westward expansion, contained numerous slaughters of Native peoples. Europeans and American Indians got along well enough at first but rising tensions led to a number of violent conflicts, especially Metacomet’s War which saw both sides committing atrocities. After that war, European views of American Indians became considerably less friendly. After this point, wars between European-Americans and Native-Americans would contain massacres as a rule rather than an exception. | |
| **Evidence 1: Massacres:** There are too many massacres to go over each. Many don’t even have names. But Wounded Knee is the most famous. A US Army detachment arrived to disarm a Lakota Warband. In the process of doing so, they killed not only all of the warband but also all of the old men, women, and children. 20 of those doing the killing were given the Medal of Honor. | **Why does this support the idea that Europeans committed genocide?** |
| **Evidence 2: Attitudes:** European-Americans by the 19th century firmly hated American Indians. Reverend William Crawford stated the opinions of his fellow Coloradoans as “There is but one sentiment in regard to the final disposition which shall be made of the Indians: ‘Let them be exterminated—men, women, and children together.’” Meanwhile one of the two commanders of the US army in the Great Plains stated “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.” | **Why does this support the idea that Europeans committed genocide?** |
| **Evidence 3: Scalps:** Probably the most convincing example of genocide was the scalp trade. In the 1820s, Mexico began to offer bounties for any dead American Indians, paid per scalp. This bounty continued for decades and was paid to Mexicans and Americans alike. America never had a nationwide policy of scalp-hunting but towns or states would occasionally offer them. Massachusetts even offered scalp bounties back in 1694, paying for boys as young as 10. | **Why does this support the idea that Europeans committed genocide?** |
| **Counter-Evidence 1: Government Efforts:** the US federal government generally tried to stop or discourage native killings. Many of the people in charge of massacres were tried for murder. However, the problem was that those people would usually walk because the average American had such a low opinion of American Indians that they would not convict people who killed them. | **Why does this suggest that European-Americans were not attempting to commit genocide?** |
| **Do these massacres represent genocide on the part of European-Americans?** Support your answer. | |
| **Forced Assimilation** | |
| Forced assimilation is the only obvious and consistently pursued method for the destruction of native peoples to be conducted by the US federal government. This did not destroy the people, but did have the effect of deeply depopulating that group by making them abandon their ethnic identity. As a result of these policies, the number of people reporting Native ancestry were only 250,000 by the 1920s. | |
| **Evidence 1: Indian Boarding Schools:** starting in the early 1800s but increasing in the 1870s, Native American children would be forced to attend boarding schools. At these schools they were forbidden to speak their native language or practice any of their own customs. Here they were forced to learn the English Language and American customs. One of their chief architects once stated “A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” The system lasted until the 1980s and 1990s. | **Why does this support the idea that Europeans committed genocide?** |
| **To what extent do these acts apply under the UN genocide definition?** |
| **Counterargument:** There isn’t really any counterevidence for Indian Boarding Schools. They were prevalent and definitely resulted in tens or even hundreds of thousands abandoning their American Indian identities. However, it is debatable whether these actions would apply as a genocide. In the UN genocide definition it specifies that the actions must result in the “physical destruction” of a group. When a group is forced to change the identity that made them a group, is that group “physically” destroyed? | **Why does this suggest that European-Americans were not attempting to commit genocide?** |
| **Was the forced assimilation of American Indians a genocide?** Support your answer. | |

Well this was a sad worksheet…