

Pam  
Indians



# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INDIAN ?

by FLORA WARREN SEYMOUR

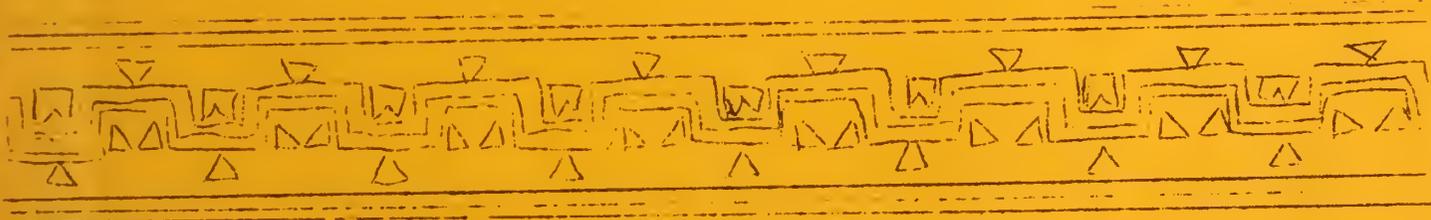


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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "INDIAN"?

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INTRODUCTORY TABLEAUX (optional.)

Indians in costume seated by a camp fire or in front of a tepee, or one motionless figure in costume if impossible to arrange the more elaborate scene. When curtain is opened a voice will say, "This picture represents the past of many Indians in our country. May we ask you now to consider a present day picture of Indian life in the United States?"

(If time is required for changing scenes, a musical number may be introduced, some well-known Indian song.)

Scene: Lunch room in a U. S. O. Canteen. Characters seated at a table or counter where they can keep up action of eating or drinking soda. This should never be so conspicuous as to distract attention from the conversation.)

Cast: Three Indians representing three different tribes. One other American.

A few people with incidental speaking parts or no speaking part, who enter to purchase soda or sandwiches, or pass through with baggage. Some may silently notice the Indian fellow service men by gestures, or may stop to listen a few minutes and pass on.

(This play was originally written for men. Because some groups may prefer to have women or both take part, a few changes for that purpose are suggested. In case of names, substitution is indicated only once for each one.)

Characters with speaking parts:

Cornelius Williams, from the Oneida tribe, a member of the U. S. Army or  
Cornelia Williams, of the Oneida tribe, a member of the WAAC

Ronville Wolfe, a Sioux serving in the U. S. Navy or Marines, or  
Rhoda Wolfe, A Sioux serving as WAVE or SPAR

Frank Begay, a Navajo who works in a government defense plant, or  
Frances Begay, who works in a government defense plant

Jack Bronlea, a Non-Indian in Army uniform, or  
June Bronlea, a Non-Indian in WAAC uniform

Two Listeners who enter late in the discussion

Dear Mr. [Name]

I have your letter of August 17, 1954, regarding the matter of [Subject]. I am sorry that I cannot give you a more definitive answer at this time, but I am sure that you will understand my position.

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "INDIAN"?

Cornelius Williams,  
or Cornelia Williams

Well, here we are, three wards of the Great White  
Father, all ready to do our share to help win the  
war.

Renville Wolfe:(surprised)  
or Rhoda Wolfe

What, are you a ward too?

Frank Begay  
or Frances Begay

But you don't live on a reservation!

Williams: (laughing) No, I live in Pennsylvania where my father settled after  
he attended Carlisle but I am a ward just the same. At least that is  
what the Indian Office calls me. They have my name on an Oneida  
tribal roll up in Wisconsin, in a town I never saw.

Begay: I don't know much about Indians but I know that Onedias live in New  
York State.

Williams: A few of them do, but the official tribe is enrolled in Wisconsin  
and to keep a treaty made a hundred and fifty years ago with the  
Six Nations of New York, every now and then each of us who is on the  
Oneida Roll gets a check for a few cents. If I were a Seneca or a  
Cayuga, I'd get a little piece of calico instead.

Begay: I shouldn't think that would be of much use?

Williams: Well for that matter, I imagine it costs the Great White Father more  
to send my check than it is worth. But so far as I can tell, that  
is the only thing that has been done for me because I am an Indian.  
What do we mean by Indian, anyway? I have much more white blood  
than Indian blood in my veins. The Oneidas have been a much-mixed  
people for generations and my mother is not Indian at all. I am  
no darker in complexion than half the people in Philadelphia. Wolfe,  
you have ancestors who were not Indian either, though you are still  
classed as a Sioux.

Wolfe: True. My mother was the child of a United States Army Officer and



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my father's mother had French blood.

Begay: And in the old days my people, the Navajos, took so many captives from other Indians and from the Spanish-speaking villages around their land, that some people say we are not a true tribe at all, but a great mixture.

Wolfe: I guess each of us knows about many people called Indians who are only a small part Indian. We all remember, I suppose, that there was a Vice President of this country not so long ago, named Curtis. His grandmother lived on the Kaw reservation in northern Oklahoma. Her grandson had no more than one-eighth Indian blood, if as much as that. He grew up among his father's people who weren't Indian at all, and became a Senator and then Vice President.

Williams: In spite of all that, he was still a ward of the government and an "incompetent" as they are called. Doesn't it seem absurd that this country should continue to consider such a man unable to take care of his inherited Indian property! I have heard that even now the Curtis property is being taken care of for his children and grandchildren who of course have even less Indian blood than he had. I wonder if they resent being classed as "incompetent" because of that very small fraction of Indian blood!

Begay: General Clarence Tinker, the celebrated flyer who lost his life at Midway in this war, was an Osage. Was he a ward too?

Williams: Of course. The government takes care of the oil wells in Oklahoma for all the Osages and gives them the income from the oil every few months.

Wolfe: You'd think a hero who had worked up to the rank of General could look out for himself!

Williams: Yes, wouldn't you? But Indians have done all sorts of things - won scholarships to study in England because they were tops in their states; have become successful doctors and lawyers and preachers,

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

On 10/10/2001, the following information was received from the [redacted] office:

The [redacted] office has advised that [redacted] has been identified as a [redacted] individual.

It is noted that [redacted] has been identified as a [redacted] individual.

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It doesn't make any difference! If they are part Indian they have to be under the care of the Indian Bureau or at least they are counted as being under its care.

Begay: And if you get a chance to finish your law course after this war is over, you'll still be a ward?

Williams: Yes, unless the government decides to take some action that will release Indians from wardship.

Begay: How did all this wardship begin, anyway?

Williams: Oh, it started in colonial times. The people who came over here from Europe believed that because this country was not organized into nations, therefore the land belonged to their king - to the King of England along the Atlantic, and that along the Saint Lawrence River, further North, to the King of France.

Begay: And the King of Spain in the southwest, I suppose, but the Navajos didn't bother much about foreign kings!

Wolfe: Neither did the Sioux, in those early days.

Williams: Just the same, the kings in Europe felt that they had dominion over the whole country even if they had never seen it, and acted as if all the Indian owned was the right to roam over it and hunt and fish. And that was all he had to sell when the newcomers wanted to make treaties and buy the land from him.

Begay: That doesn't seem quite fair, does it?

Williams: No, but that was only the beginning. The King was supposed to be a sort of guardian for the native people and when the United States took over from England, that idea was accepted. Any sales of land had to be made to the government, not to individuals. It was even provided in the Constitution that Congress should be in charge of carrying on any business and trade with the Indian tribes. That was

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the way wardship began.

Wolfe: Did they call the Indians wards in those days?

(Enter Jack or June Bronlea in time to hear this question.)

Williams: No. In their councils and speech making they usually said "Brothers". or "Children" or something of that sort. So far as I know, it wasn't until a little more than a hundred years ago that the word "ward" came into use.

Bronlea: Hey, you Indians, what kind of pow wow is this anyway? (In bantering tones.)

Williams: Oh, we're discussing the strange situation in which we find ourselves -- all doing our part in this war just like other citizens and yet we Indians, unlike other citizens, are all wards of the government.

Bronlea: Wards? I thought wards were minors or incompetent people. (Tapping his head)

Williams: Usually are, but Indians seem to be the exception that proves the rule.

Wolfe: And Williams, being the lawyer of the bunch, is helping us to understand how it all happened. (Williams rises and bows low with mock ceremony.)

Bronlea: I'd be interested in that. Mind if I listen in? (Seating himself)

Williams: Not at all. Join in the discussion if you like, As to how wardship began, let's go on with the story. It was in the early part of the 1800's at the time when the Cherokees were objecting to being sent from Georgia to the western country along the Arkansas River. The Cherokees, with the help of white missionaries, had organized a government of their own with an elected "Principal Chief", like a President. They tried to bring a suit in the Supreme Court of the United States against the state of Georgia but the court decided they were not a foreign nation to be dealt with, and in 1831 Chief Justice John



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Marshall who wrote the decision, called them a "domestic dependant nation", and added: "Their relation to the United States resembles that of a ward to his guardian."

Wolfe: So he just said they were like wards, not that they really were wards.

Williams: Yes, that is all, and besides, it was one tribe he was talking about, not all Indians nor individual Indians. The idea that individual Indians were wards didn't come about until much later.

Begay: I imagine that was long before the United States had ever heard of my people, the Navajos.

Wolfe: And my people, the Sioux, were still roving over the northern country, seeing only an occasional white trapper or trader.

Bronlea: Believe me, I'm going to brush up on my history!

Williams: But since Columbus landed on this continent, Eastern Indians had been in contact with white people and when Marshall made his decision many of them were already of mixed blood. John Ross who was principal chief of the Cherokees for fifty years was only one-eighth Indian.

Bronlea: An Indian Chief only one-eighth Indian? That's news to me.

Williams: At that time the settled part of the United States didn't reach so very far west, and men thought the population would never spread west of the Mississippi, so they had an idea that these tribes, though they were wards, could go on being "nations" as Marshall called them, and manage their own affairs within the tribe while the United States government was in a position "resembling" that of a guardian, so far as outside affairs were concerned.

Wolfe: But it didn't work out that way, did it?

Williams: No. Fifty years later, when the United States had reached across the the continent and white people were living all over the country west of the Mississippi, it was found necessary to make laws to take care

... of the ...

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of things among the Indians themselves. Most of the Indians had very little government that was at all like the law and government of the white man - no courts, no officers, no rulers with any real power.

Bronlea: (astonished) No Indian kings or princesses, either?

Williams: No, all that royalty stuff was something the white man conjured up. Even the Indian chiefs were part of the white man's imagination. There might be an Indian whom the others followed on the war path, but that didn't give him any power when they came back home again. The Indian "chiefs" were more often set up just to parley with the men from the United States government and to try to influence their tribes to carry out treaties, also to distribute money and presents that were sent to pay for land.

Begay: But how did we get to be citizens one by one, instead of by tribes?

Wolfe: That puzzles me, too.

Williams: The Allotment Act of 1887 had something to do with that. It provided that land should be held in trust for twenty-five years which brought about a sort of guardianship for each one who had an allotment of land, especially when the courts decided that no taxes could be charged on trust land.

Begay: We Navajos don't have allotments but we don't pay taxes on our reservation and for that reason we are not permitted to vote in Arizona or New Mexico. So I suppose that explains why we are wards, or is it the other way around?

Wolfe: It's funny we can be wards and citizens too but it seems to be true.

Williams: Yes, all Indians are citizens since a law was passed in 1924, but many of us were citizens when we were born. My father became a citizen when he got his land.

Wolfe: Mine didn't; he had to wait until 1918, when he had been to school

The first part of the history is a general account of the state of the world at the beginning of the world, and of the progress of the human mind from that time to the present.

1700  
1710

The second part is a more particular account of the progress of the human mind in the different parts of the world, and of the different ages of the world.

1720  
1730

The third part is a more particular account of the progress of the human mind in the different parts of the world, and of the different ages of the world.

1740  
1750

The fourth part is a more particular account of the progress of the human mind in the different parts of the world, and of the different ages of the world.

1760  
1770

The fifth part is a more particular account of the progress of the human mind in the different parts of the world, and of the different ages of the world.

1780  
1790

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and the superintendent thought he knew enough to take care of his own land. But I was born a citizen because he was one.

Begay: I suppose I was not a citizen until 1924.

Williams: We might put up an argument about that. When the country in which the Navajo lived was turned over to the United States at the close of the Mexican War in 1846, it was agreed that all those who had been citizens of Mexico would become citizens of the United States if they stayed north of the border. That made the Pueblo Indians citizens from the start, because the Mexicans had given citizenship to all Indians who lived settled lives. Now, how settled were the Navajo Indians at that time? Can you answer that one? (all laugh)

Begay: Well, Kit Carson called us the "hardy agricultural Navajo" about that time, but I fancy the Mexicans didn't think of us the same way, there was too much fighting back and forth. So I think we'd better date our citizenship from the Act of 1924 and our wardship from the time we came into the United States in 1846, wasn't it?

Williams: Well, we are all citizens now, and most of us wards, too.

Bronlea; But not all voters?

Williams: No. You see, the states decide who are to be voters. Most of those who have many Indians let Indians vote just like other citizens but some have laws that exclude Indians, usually on the basis of their being wards. As Begay has said, Arizona and New Mexico refuse to let Indians vote. The State of Washington has such a law though I have heard that they do not enforce it but let Indians vote if they want to.

Wolfe: A friend of mine told me that in North Carolina they have a law requiring a voter to read and write to the satisfaction of the election judges but that if a judge knows a person is a non-tax paying Indian, it is very hard to satisfy him, so the Indian loses his vote though



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he is a citizen.

Bronlea: What else does wardship mean besides no taxes and no vote?

Wolfe: Sometimes it means no law!

Williams: There's a whole bookful of things to say about that. Sometimes an Indian has to be taken in charge by the Federal Government instead of the state, if he commits a major crime on an Indian reservation. But if he is off the reservation he may have to answer to the state or county. Then, in some places I am told they have tribal courts to settle a lot of things not so important as murder or burglary or other major crimes.

Wolfe: Oh, yes, we have such courts in the Dakota country.

Begay: So have we in the Southwest and if one of the tribal judges or policemen doesn't like you, it's just too bad for you and your family.

Bronlea: (puzzled) That seems to leave a lot of things for which Indians are not responsible to any one - or else they're responsible to too many people!

Williams: Much of this doesn't apply to me of course; I have to do whatever the State of Pennsylvania and the city of Philadelphia say, as long as I live there. But if I were out on a reservation, I probably wouldn't have to go to school if I didn't feel like it nor stay away from other people if I had the measles.

Wolfe: And you could be married "Indian custom" without any license or preacher.

Begay: And have two or three wives at a time!\* For a long while the government discouraged that practice among the Navajo, but I am afraid a few Navajo are still taking two wives at a time. I have actually seen a

\* Substitution - And you might be only one of two or three wives!

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

THE EARLY SETTLEMENTS

THE GROWTH OF THE COLONIES

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

THE CONSTITUTION

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE UNION

THE WESTERN EXPANSION

THE CIVIL WAR

THE RECONSTRUCTION

THE GROWTH OF THE UNITED STATES

THE PROGRESS OF THE NATION

THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES

THE FUTURE OF THE NATION

THE CONCLUSION

THE END OF THE HISTORY

THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

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Washington circular telling some Hopi they do not have to obey the marriage laws in the State where they live.

Wolfe: Suppose we count the things wardship does to us, and decide whether they are good or bad. Then we can tell better whether we want to keep on being wards or not.

Bronlea: (taking out paper and pencil) I'm going to jot down these things and tell the young people at home what you say. I'm sure they don't know a thing about this wardship business. By the way, how many Indians are there in the United States anyway?

Williams: Less than 400,000 even counting those who have only 1/64 Indian blood or less: some of 1/256 Indian blood are counted. But lots of them do not live on reservations.

Wolfe: What a queer mess it all seems.

Williams: Well, let's count our differences first: no taxes on your allotment (pointing to Wolfe) or your reservation (pointing to Begay.) I suppose some would call that good. I haven't any allotment of land or any share on a reservation so that makes no difference to me. If I should ever buy a home anywhere I would have to pay taxes on it like any one else, and so would either of you, for that matter.

Wolfe: I haven't an allotment either but of course there are many Sioux who have. These days I should think any of them could pay taxes on his land if he had to just as white people do, for many are busy with different kinds of work and some have money coming to them from sons and daughters who are in the service or away at war work. Any way, the Indian ought to be as able to pay taxes as white people are. Perhaps in hard times it wouldn't be so easy to pay.

Begay: Many of my people feel that white people living around them would treat them better if they all paid taxes alike. Not long ago, the



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Navajo wanted to buy more land because they need more for their sheep so they asked the Indian Office to let them have it and pay taxes on it like everyone else.

Williams: Well, that seems to be one of the things that has some good points, but perhaps is not so good when you look at it closely.

Begay: I suppose we'll all agree that it is not good to be refused a vote because we are wards.

Both  
of others: Sure!

Williams: What about school? I went to public school so I didn't get any good out of being a ward. (others laugh)

Wolfe: I went to a public school for the early grades and then went to the government school for Indians at Haskell, Kansas.

Williams: Yes, I met you at Haskell when I visited my sister who was teaching there.

Wolfe: But now the younger boys and girls on our reservation have to go to a government school through all the grades - the government stopped the public schools on our reservation. My people don't like that so very well.

Begay: My schooling was the other way around. I started at a government school and later I attended a mission school which taught the subjects used in the public high schools.

Williams: You have probably been where there were no public schools you could attend. I think one of the greatest things about going to a public school is that you get acquainted with boys and girls who are not Indians and you learn to get along with them and not to be afraid of people who are different.

Wolfe: Yes, and they learn to think of us as if we were just the same, and not curiosities.



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- Begay: or some kind of wild thing wolf, for instance! (slapping Wolfe on the shoulder. All laugh.)
- Williams: Queer, isn't it, how people look at us when they learn we have Indian blood? They gush over us and ask silly questions about chiefs and princesses or else they look as if they expected us to burst out with war whoops and scalp them! How about you Bronlea:
- Bronlea: I guess I used to be as bad as anyone but I've learned to know a lot of Indians in the service and so far as I can see, they're just good Americans.
- Wolfe: Being separated from other people is what does it. When we get really acquainted they lose that silly attitude and know we are people just like themselves.
- Bronlea: So the schools provided by the government seem to have some good points and some bad points, but isn't the segregation of Indian children in special schools a bad idea? I can't see why there should be separate schools for them.
- Wolfe: Many of us certainly feel that way about it.
- Williams: What about the hospitals? The Federal Government has hospitals for Indians only. I suppose it seems good to some people to get hospital care for nothing, but after all there are hospitals in most communities for all citizens who need them.
- Wolfe: There has been talk about making a rule that Indians who can afford to pay for hospital service should pay for it. I don't see why anyone should object to that. Then the free service could be for people who were too poor to pay for it just the way it is among other people who are not Indians.
- Begay: And I don't see why other people should not be helped by the government hospitals too, when they are too poor to pay. Out in my country there



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are fine hospitals for Indians, but hardly any within hundreds of miles for the people that speak Spanish and English. That is another thing that makes them dislike us - to see us getting for nothing something they can't get even by paying for it.

Williams: Yes, it seems as if these things we call benefits only make our neighbors dislike and distrust us so that even the privileges do us harm instead of good. But how about having to obey the law?

Wolfe: I don't see why we shouldn't obey the law. There was once a time perhaps when our people were too ignorant and too set in old customs to follow the white man's ways, but that time is past for most of us. I'm sure I don't want to give anybody the measles and just as sure that I don't believe in plural marriages!

Begay: That goes for me too, I don't see why I can't obey the laws as well as anyone else. That is just another thing that makes other people look down on us. And I know it would be good for the Navajo boys and girls if they all went to school. Not more than half of them are in school now and even those who are don't go very regularly.

Bronlea: (jumping up suddenly) Say, I've found this so interesting I have forgotten about my train. So long! If I ever get a chance, I'll vote that Indians be released from wardship. (Exit)

Wolfe: When we count it all up it looks as if wardship is more loss than gain. But how can we get rid of it?

Williams: Well, in the case of old decisions like the one that makes us wards of the government there is a simple way, it seems to me. Let the Federal Government pass a law saying that at a certain date all Indians shall cease to be wards of the United States and before the specified date which should not be too far off--ten years at the most--let the government implement that law by adjusting all matters of Indian land-hold-



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ing, of money held for Indians, and remove restrictions that give to Indians a status that differs from that of citizens in general.

Begay: How could such changes be brought about? Who would start this?

Williams: The Bureau of Indian Affairs, with its trained staff of some thousands of people might initiate action. You know about 389 Treaties have been signed with Indian Tribes. Many of them have been fulfilled but there are a few that should also be cleared up. New York State is an area involved in this matter.

Wolfe: I think you are right. Treaties still in existence should be taken care of one by one. But I don't see why there couldn't be a law made for us all, that we have to be governed by the same laws as the people around us. Of course there might be some lawbreakers, but there are plenty of lawbreakers among people who are not Indians, too. The law isn't given up because some people disobey it.

Begay: New Mexico and Arizona would have to make a law to let us vote, wouldn't they? or if we weren't wards any longer we could vote because their law would no longer stop us. That would mean paying taxes on our lands. We Navajo would have to join together to do that, since we have the land all together, not owned one by one. This is chiefly because we have sheep and they need large spaces in which to graze. But we could do it. Some Navajo live on land which is leased from outsiders and there have been times when the government didn't pay the lease money. Then the Navajo all got together and collected the money to pay for it. We could manage, I know.

Wolfe: And if you paid taxes you could have public schools if you wanted them. It doesn't sound to me as if it would be too hard to stop this wardship business and become just real citizens, like other people.

Williams: I think that is what we all really want to be—good citizens and to hold



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up our heads wherever we go. When something like this war comes along where we all have to work together, Indians can do their share and hold up their end of the log. And I believe we can do it all the time if we can shake off the things that tie us up and make us different from others.

Wolfe: We have seen that some things must be done to the laws and the treaties - not too many things, or too hard, but something. We ought to think about all this and discuss it with other Indians we know and with our people at home. Then we can ask our Congressmen and Senators to discuss it and make the laws we need to set us free. Everyone needs to understand it better.

Begay: It is kind of queer that so much emphasis is placed on our blood when the U. S. population is made up of people of various cultures who have come here from all over the world. In five years they can become full citizens while we whose ancestors were the first inhabitants are held down because our citizenship is complicated by this wardship. What a life!

Listener who has joined them late in the discussion:

Well, I've not heard all of your talk but I've heard enough to say that we had better begin practicing democracy at home!

American Girl who has been listening:

All right, Let's begin to practice it in this town. The young people of my church are having a social tonight and I want all of you to come as my guests. Please say you will.

All three: Sure we will. Begay adds in low tone, "If you won't show us off as Indians."

Williams: There is plenty of education needed all around. We must study and understand this ourselves and make it clear to other people. If we

The first part of the history is devoted to a description of the country and its inhabitants. The author describes the various tribes and their customs, and the different parts of the country. He also mentions the various rivers and lakes, and the different kinds of animals and plants which are found there.

1700

The second part of the history is devoted to a description of the various wars and battles which have taken place in the country. The author describes the different battles and the names of the commanders and soldiers who were engaged in them. He also mentions the different treaties and alliances which have been made between the various tribes.

1750

The third part of the history is devoted to a description of the various customs and manners of the different tribes. The author describes the different ways of life, the different kinds of food and clothing, and the different customs and manners of each tribe. He also mentions the different religious beliefs and the different kinds of superstitions which are found among the people.

1800

The fourth part of the history is devoted to a description of the various events and occurrences which have taken place in the country. The author describes the different events and occurrences, and the names of the persons who were engaged in them. He also mentions the different treaties and alliances which have been made between the various tribes.

1850

The fifth part of the history is devoted to a description of the various events and occurrences which have taken place in the country. The author describes the different events and occurrences, and the names of the persons who were engaged in them. He also mentions the different treaties and alliances which have been made between the various tribes.

1900

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INDIAN?

think and work hard at it, the day ought not be very far off, when we can stop being wards. That is what we all want, just the chance to have the same treatment as other people - not be kept in a class by ourselves or held back from anything because we have Indian blood in our veins. We want people to think of us first of all as men and women, and as loyal Americans and only afterwards remember that we are men and women of Indian descent.

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The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated 10th day of January, 1862. The letter is addressed to the Governor and is signed by the Secretary of the State. The letter contains the following text:

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8th inst. in relation to the application of the State of New York for a writ of habeas corpus in favor of the State of New York. I have the honor to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,  
 Your obedient servant,  
 J. B. Thompson, Secretary of the State.

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