

Professor examines new developments in mapping tribal displacement

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The history of indigenous displacement and land dispossession is a long, troubled and still incomplete history of the United States. It's been widely reported that since 1776, the year America was founded, the U.S.

has seized more than one billion acres of land that was home to hundreds of nations of American Indians. Yet many Americans are only vaguely familiar with how this situation came to be.

A first-of-its-kind data synthesis is now providing more context to the history around indigenous displacement and land dispossession in the United States and researchers hope that by taking a look back through [data analysis](#), they will be able to help the outlook forward as Native peoples seek out solutions for current critical issues affecting their communities.

"With human population increases, decreasing natural resources, and [climate change](#), these data need to be shared widely, and research partnerships formed, with organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians," writes Donald Fixico, Regents Professor of History at Arizona State University, in a Perspectives article for *Science* magazine. "The Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona of 21 tribes, Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes in Oklahoma, and other Native organizations could use these data and partner with researchers in planning toward sustaining natural resources."

An analysis of the dataset synthesized by various researchers also appears in the current issue of *Science*. According to Fixico, the authors drew on sources of information that, while known for many years, "had not been integrated because of the enormous task involved." This analysis, he says, provides a more accurate quantitative reexamination of the stages or phases of land dispossession and better informs us of the location of tribes after their forced migrations.

Publication of the dataset analysis comes as [federal officials](#) and Native American tribes re-start discussions on efforts to protect and restore tribal homelands, according to a [recent report](#) by Reuters.

Still, even with access and analysis of the data now available, Fixico says more work needs to be done to present a more inclusive picture of what Indian country looked like as it was displaced and diminished.

"Objectivity is one of the challenges facing this research because most of the data sources have been produced by non-Indigenous parties," explains Fixico. "Without sufficient Native perspectives, there is a continual general bias in studying United States–tribal relations."

More information: Documenting dispossession of Indigenous North Americans, *Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1126/science.abl6288](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abl6288)

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