

The speaker discusses their motivations and research focus on the concept of Indian wardship, which lacks a clear definition but has been historically utilized in U.S. policies regarding Native Americans. This video term, which has roots in legal rulings from as early as 1832, often appears in discussions about assimilation and the treatment of native peoples as wards needing guidance. Despite the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granting citizenship to Native Americans, the term "wardship" continued to be used in a derogatory sense, associating Native Americans with negative stereotypes of dependency and welfare.

The speaker initiated their research in 2014, motivated by earlier studies on Native American participation in tourism. They explored various government records and archival materials to understand how Native Americans engage with policies and state agents, particularly during the expansion of the federal welfare state in the mid-20th century.

Their analysis specifically examines legislation like the Social Security Act and the GI Bill, highlighting how Native Americans interacted with these welfare benefits amidst bureaucratic oversight from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The speaker argues against conflating "wardship" and welfare, asserting that they represent different concepts—wardship embodying treaty rights and obligations of the U.S. government towards Native nations, while welfare pertains to individual assistance.

The speaker advocates for a nuanced understanding of citizenship, critiquing the simplification of citizenship as solely a positive status without considering its implications for Native sovereignty and rights. They emphasize the need for further research into termination policies and their ongoing impact on Native nations. Overall, the speaker calls for a critical exploration of welfare and citizenship concepts in relation to Native American history and experiences.