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"We Are Still Here"

American Indians since 1890

Second Edition

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WILEY Blackwell

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To All Our Teachers

thereafter caused the US government to abandon promises it had just made. Federal officials never received the signatures of three-quarters of the adult Lakota population required to alter the Fort Laramie treaty, but they still approved the "Agreement" of 1876, which robbed the Lakotas of their sacred land.

Anger over federal actions sparked renewed resistance among the Lakotas. During the summer, just before the United States observed its centennial, the Lakotas and their allies had triumphed at the Little Bighorn over George Armstrong Custer and his men. Memories of Lakota military prowess remained vivid among the members of the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's unit. The era since the triumph on the Greasy Grass had been increasingly difficult for the Lakotas. In 1889 further pressure from intruders had prompted the US government to reduce and fracture the Great Sioux Reservation into fragments: Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Lower Brule, and Crow Creek. Restricted in their movements, hungry, and embittered, many Lakotas as well as many Yanktons, Yanktonais, and Santees were receptive to the teachings of a Native prophet in distant Nevada. The Paiute prophet, Wovoka, had promised a new day, when the whites would disappear, the buffalo would reappear in great numbers, and the Indians would be reunited with their loved ones who had gone before. Lakota representatives traveled to Nevada to meet with Wovoka, and they brought home their own interpretations of the Ghost Dance. They believed that the shirts they wore in observing the ritual would make them invulnerable to bullets.

In 1890 a new federal agent, Daniel Royer, arrived at Pine Ridge. He proved to be ill-suited for this assignment. The Lakotas quickly gave him a name: Young Man Afraid of Indians. Royer panicked at the sight of the Ghost Dancers on Pine Ridge. Just days after he arrived, he began to appeal to the US Army for troops. Such military assistance was hardly necessary, but the army's own designs made a confrontation almost inevitable. The army brass, especially General Nelson Miles, was determined to put on a show of force. Miles believed that the army rather than the civilian agency, the Office (later Bureau) of Indian Affairs, should be in charge on the reservations. Taking control would

provide a role for the western army in peacetime and would guarantee order in the chaos of the early reservation years. Miles thus acceded to Royer's request, and soon the bluecoats were in the field. Some of them hailed from the Seventh Cavalry.

In December two terrible confrontations occurred. One took place on Standing Rock on December 15. There, in a violent stand-off between some of his followers and Lakotas who had joined the agency police force, the old Hunkpapa leader, Tatanka Iyotanka (Sitting Bull) was killed. The other tragedy transpired two weeks later at Pine Ridge. Mnikowoju Lakotas under the leadership of Big Foot had left their home at Cheyenne River, both terrified by the news about Tatanka Iyotanka and anxious to visit Pine Ridge at the invitation of Red Cloud. However, Big Foot's band, riddled by hunger and illness, never made it to Red Cloud. Intercepted by the Seventh Cavalry, they were taken to Wounded Knee Creek, about 20 miles from the village of Pine Ridge. On the following morning of December 29, the Lakotas were ordered to surrender all their weapons and implements. Members of the cavalry took away nearly all of the Lakotas' weapons before an argument between a Lakota who refused to surrender his rifle and some soldiers almost instantaneously escalated into a hail of fire from the soldiers' rifles and the four Hotchkiss cannons that had been placed on a hill above the encampment. There are different estimates of how many of the Lakotas were killed, but at least 153, and probably scores more of them, died in the massacre. Twenty-five whites also perished, some of them fatally wounded by cross fire from within their ranks. Many of the Lakota dead were women and children who had been killed immediately or who had been shot down as they tried to flee into the countryside. The federal government later awarded the American soldiers present at Wounded Knee twenty congressional medals of honor.

Disappearing Peoples?

Wounded Knee in time became a metaphor for the struggle between whites and Indians in the West. In his poem "American

Names," Stephen Vincent Benet wrote, "bury my heart at Wounded Knee." Writer Dee Brown used the phrase in 1970 as the title for his history of the "Indian wars" in the American West. In 1973 Native protesters who took over the village of Wounded Knee briefly captured the attention of the national media. The year of the first Wounded Knee, 1890, was also used by the Superintendent of the US Census to declare the end of the frontier. The young historian Frederick Jackson Turner soon employed this census report to speak of the end of an era in American life.

Interpretations that used the 1890 massacre and census to denote the end of an era were overstated. Wounded Knee was forever carved in the Lakota memory. But the event did not have exactly the same meaning for all Indians. Many other Native nations had their own wars to remember. For those who resided east of the Mississippi River, South Dakota was distant, unknown land. So other occurrences took precedence in their memories and shaped separate tribal identities. Wounded Knee was ignored or conveniently forgotten by most non-Indians who lived in other parts of the country. If recalled, it became a "battle" rather than a "massacre." And 1890 did not signal the end of the frontier. Prospective farmers, ranchers, miners, and others continued to seek the natural resources of lands new to them, whether or not those lands already were occupied. They still found their way into the interior of the West and ventured north to Alaska.

However, it did appear in 1890 that a transition was well under way. Three years after the United States signed a series of treaties with Indian tribes in 1868, confident that the tide had turned in the wars to gain control of the West, Congress passed a law calling for an end to formal treaty-making. From now on any compact signed would be formally labeled an agreement rather than a treaty. Congressional representatives thus stated that the balance of power had shifted sufficiently that the United States no longer needed to enter into the same kinds of negotiations. Custer's defeat in 1876 suggested Congress had been premature in its declaration, but the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the growth of towns and cities, and the development of new

industries to exploit the natural resources of the West all testified to increasing US control over Indian communities. Whether they were labeled treaties or agreements, these documents were taken more seriously by the Indians who signed their names or left their marks upon them. Non-Indians thought they knew better. They saw the pacts as convenient, bloodless means through which Native lands would be opened and their occupants confined. They perceived the treaties and agreements as legal documents that provided legitimate and permanent claims to lands that would hereafter be theirs.

Non-Indian Americans, after all, tended to portray American history as beginning with the arrival of their particular ancestors or with the landing of the first English-speaking immigrants. However, because Indians were here first and had every intention of remaining on their lands, various colonial and then US representatives had to confront the aboriginal nations. In the early years of the United States, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall was forced to consider the nature of the Indian presence and the kinds of rights the Indians possessed. Law professor Charles F. Wilkinson has concluded: "Chief Justice Marshall's opinions made it clear that Indian tribes were sovereign before contact with Europeans and that some, but not all, sovereign powers continued in existence after relations with Europeans and the United States were established." In *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), Justice Marshall declared that before contact "America, separated from Europe by a wide ocean, was inhabited by a distinct people, divided into separate nations, independent of each other and of the rest of the world, having institutions of their own, and governing themselves by their own laws." He added: "The Indian nations had always been considered as distinct, independent political communities retaining their original natural rights, as the undisputed possessors of the soil, from time immemorial, with the single exception of that imposed by irresistible power."

Here were the roots of the "tribal sovereignty" that became the rallying cry of Indian peoples in the twentieth century. Marshall's court considered specifically the situation faced by the Cherokees

of the southeastern United States. The state of Georgia, with the full support of President Andrew Jackson, was trying to justify its attempts to deny the Cherokees their rights to remain within Georgia's borders. Georgia, in essence, denied that the Cherokees had any right to exist as any kind of separate entity. Marshall's decision in *Worcester* did not prevent the removal of thousands of Cherokees from their home country. It did establish the legal foundation for the movement for modern Indian sovereignty through which tribes, as Wilkinson has written, attempt to achieve or maintain a form of self-rule that sustains self-determination and self-identity. Thus, sovereignty entails a governmental structure and a way of life "premised on a unity with the natural world, a stable existence, and a deep connection to place and family." These ideals, present 100, 200, 500, and more years ago, continue to inform the Native American presence on this continent. They provided a kind of anchor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when nearly all non-Indians concluded that Indians were destined for disappearance.

Such a disappearance, non-Indians generally determined, was in everyone's best interest, including the Indians themselves. Non-Indians saw the reservations as little more than temporary enclaves. The Indians, said newcomers who wished to grow wheat and graze cattle on these lands, were not even using their remaining acreage to full advantage. The Indians, said Christian missionaries who wished to convert them to different, often competing, versions of a new faith, were not worshipping the proper God. The Indians, said federal officials who observed the onrush of immigrants past Ellis Island, were not speaking the correct language or adjusting to the ways of modern America. The Indians, they all determined, needed less land and more of everything else: more Christianity, more English, more private ownership. They needed "real" houses, "real" marriages, and "real" names.

The interested parties predicted that such a transition should not take long. Indian peoples' wills seemingly had been broken. One could see defeat and submission in the images of the day. One heard of Geronimo (Goyathlay) of the Chiricahua Apaches

and Joseph (Heinmot Tooyalakeet) of the Nez Perces living in exile. The federal official in charge of the government bureau responsible for Indian policy, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan, predicted that other than the Sioux, the Navajos, and the Pueblo communities, most tribes would disappear. "The great body of Indians," Morgan forecast, "will become merged in the indistinguishable mass of our population." The census takers in 1900 offered evidence in support of Morgan's prediction. When they counted the Indians in Vermont, they came up with a grand total of five. The Mashantucket Pequot population had dwindled to less than twenty. The photographer Edward Curtis believed that a way of life was coming to an end. He thus embarked upon an extended foray to portray on film what he termed "the vanishing race." In 1911, the last survivor of the Yahi people made his way out of the foothills in northeastern California. One by one, members of his tribe had been killed or had died from diseases brought in by newcomers. Anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Thomas Waterman took this man from the town of Oroville to San Francisco. He became known as "Ishi," the word for "man" in the Yahi language. In the city, living within the confines of the University of California Museum of Anthropology, this quiet, gracious person offered Kroeber and Waterman the details of his people's history and culture. In 1916 he died from tuberculosis. During the previous year, sculptor James Earle Fraser had fashioned "The End of the Trail." This bronze of a slumped warrior on horseback was created for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Fraser's statue demonstrated altered circumstances. He paired it with another of a pioneer confidently gazing into the future.

A group of non-Indian men and women had begun to address the status of American Indians in American life. These "Friends of the Indian," as they called themselves, had started to gather in 1883 for an annual meeting at a new hotel on Lake Mohonk, New York. The hotel's owners, Albert and Alfred Smiley, had a strong interest in the subject under consideration; Albert Smiley had been appointed in 1879 to the Board of Indian Commissioners, a group of wealthy philanthropists who advised the government

on its policy toward Indians. Some of the people who came to Lake Mohonk also had joined the Indian Rights Association (IRA), organized in 1882 and already the most significant of the associations lobbying for reform of that policy. The IRA's leader, Herbert Welsh, spoke in 1886 at Lake Mohonk on "The Needs of the Time." He argued that such reform would "make the Indian a man among men, a citizen among citizens." Welsh knew that Indians could "be safely guided from the night of barbarism into the fair dawn of Christian civilization."

In Welsh's view, Indians were no different from other Americans. They should be treated just like everyone else; they should be expected to meet the same standards that society set for others. When given access to schooling, Christianity, private property, and the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship, Indians would compete equally in contemporary America. The reformers thus embarked upon a crusade to reach these objectives. This drive to assimilate the Indians—to make the Indians at home in America, as one proponent phrased it—dominated the federal agenda from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, contrary to the expectations of Edward Curtis, the Indians did not vanish. Their lands and their lives changed, to be sure. The assimilative assault of the period had severe consequences. Indians lost millions of acres of land to sale and cession; still more lands were leased to outsiders. Indian religious ceremonies were prohibited; Native children were compelled to attend school, often in institutions far from home. At the same time, the reservations did not entirely disappear and new ones were even established in the early years of the twentieth century. For those who inhabited them, these reservation lands began to take on new meaning and new significance. Indian religious observances may have been outlawed, but that did not mean they either stopped or were erased from memory. An emerging peyote religion also won thousands of Native adherents. Even in the matter of education, the results proved more complicated than one might have assumed. These additional developments are also central to an understanding of these decades.

In the late 1970s, an old man looked back upon this time. Olney Runs After remembered the occasion as though it had taken place just the other day. He had traveled to Dupree, South Dakota, a new town constructed on land that had once been part of the Cheyenne River Reservation. In 1912 the future of the reservation seemed very much in doubt. Runs After recalled the words of a speaker at the fair, Congressman Henry L. Gandy: "... he said forty years from now there won't be no Indians. He come near make it ... But we Indians will be Indians all our lives, we will never be white men. We can talk and work and go to school like the white people, but we're still Indians."

Education

An examination of Native American education, religion, ties to the land, and identity helps clarify what Runs After meant. Providing schooling for American Indians represented a challenge, because public education remained out of reach for many Americans, especially those who were poor and who did not speak English as a first language. The states showed little, if any, interest in educating Native students. Indians on reservations lived far away from established schools for non-Indian children, and the reservations lacked a tax base to pay for school construction and operation. Moreover, many Indian parents distrusted the means and ends of non-Indians' kind of education.

The federal government and Christian denominations both believed that a proper education would lead Indian children to assimilate. And during this era most Native children who went to school did so at an institution operated by the government or by a Christian church. Many of these institutions boarded their students, requiring many of their charges to move far away from home. Proponents of these distant boarding schools argued that such isolation was necessary to remove children from the harmful, counterproductive influences of their homes and communities. The students, they contended, should even be encouraged never to return to their former residences. At the