
EPILOGUE

Surviving as Vanishing Americans

Indians' hopes that they could stop or stall American expansion were not to be realized. Nor was Cornplanter's hope that the United States would deal justly with his people. After General Anthony Wayne's victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, tribal leaders ceded most of Ohio to the United States at the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. Indian resistance shifted westward. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Shawnee war chief Tecumseh and his brother the Shawnee Prophet revived Indian resistance in the North and preached a message of pan-Indian unity throughout the eastern woodlands, but Tecumseh was killed in battle. In the South, the Creeks fought a bloody war of resistance in 1813–1814, but General Andrew Jackson inflicted a series of crushing defeats and confiscated millions of acres of Creek land, opening the way for the expansion of the cotton kingdom and slavery. The Indians' wars for independence in both the North and South were over. They now had to find ways to continue being Indians in a society that insisted that Indians were a "vanishing race."

For more than two hundred years, Indian peoples in the eastern woodlands of North America had adjusted to massive changes in their world generated by the European invasion of America. Amid the chaos, they dealt with the newcomers in a variety of ways. They traded with them and negotiated with them; they listened to their teachings and offered them alternative ways of life; they made war and made love; they avoided them and lived alongside them. However, as Americans in the new nation looked back across the long span of colonial history, they rarely saw anything but instances of Indian hostility. All Indians came to be regarded as warlike "savages" who had fought against the pioneers and had resisted "civilization" every step of the way. The struggles of Indian peoples to defend their lands and cultures provided their conquerors with further justification to take what was left of their land and destroy what remained of their traditional ways of life. Indian people

had been virtually everywhere in colonial America, but there could be no place for "savages" in the new nation Americans were building. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, and thousands of Indian people were driven from their ancestral homelands in eastern America to seek new homes beyond the Mississippi. Americans assumed that Indians were doomed to extinction.

They were wrong, of course. The removal policies of the 1830s simply opened another chapter in the history of Indian peoples. Despite generations of continued assault on Indian lands, resources, and ways of life, Indian people and Indian tribes survived. The U.S. census of 1900 recorded fewer than 250,000 Indian people in the country; the 2010 census recorded 2.9 million people who identified as Indian and another 2.3 million who identified as part Indian. Despite the enduring legacies of colonialism and many failed government policies, Indians in the past fifty years have demanded their rights, defended their sovereignty, and staged a remarkable revival. The Penobscots and Passamaquoddies in Maine brought and won substantial lawsuits for lands taken from them illegally in the past. The Iroquois in New York and Canada waged recurrent conflicts with state and federal governments over issues affecting their sovereignty. The Mashantucket Pequots and Mohegans in Connecticut achieved unprecedented economic success through operating bingo halls and gaming casinos. The Mashpees of Cape Cod, still living on the lands where they first met the Pilgrims, finally achieved federal recognition of their status as an Indian tribe after a long fight. Nearly 570 Indian tribes are federally recognized in the United States; other tribes seek federal recognition, and others have state recognition. Contrary to popular notions that all Indians inhabit rural reservations in the West, most now live in urban areas and many continue to live in the eastern United States. Some Indian people live in communities that are distinctly Indian; others live and work alongside other Americans. Many go quietly about their lives, without drawing attention to themselves as Native Americans; others—academics, authors, and attorneys; poets, politicians, and playwrights; musicians, ministers, and museum directors—hold positions that provide the opportunity or obligation to make their words count in the continuing struggle for indigenous rights, resources, and lifeways.

In modern America as in early America, Indian people are making their voices heard.