Contemporary Ethnic Geographies in America

EDITED BY
INES M. MIYARES AND CHRISTOPHER A. AIRRIESS

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The indigenous peoples of the United States—Native Americans—include a variety of people who identify as American Indians or Alaska Natives, but most commonly identify by a tribal nation affiliation. While the percentage of individuals in the United States identifying as Native American (or American Indian/Alaska Native) is not large, the ethnic geographies of non-immigrant indigenous people are distinctive in many respects and provide essential insights to understanding the construction of the American state and the plurality of ethnic and national identities in the United States.

In discussing Native American people in the early twenty-first century, there must be an understanding of times past. The experience of colonization deserves attention in understanding contemporary Native Americans and their geographies. As the indigenous people of North America, Native Americans were colonized on their own land, the places to which they trace their social, cultural, and religious origins. Russell Thornton describes America as a series of changing frontiers created through interactions between Europeans (and later Euro-Americans) and diverse Native peoples, through which all were changed. Today many Native Americans seek to remain as sovereign nations distinct from American society while simultaneously participating in it. Native Americans are unique among ethnic and racial groups in their formal tribal affiliations and in their relationship with the larger United States.

This chapter underscores the diversity of tribes/bands, languages, governments, cultures, spiritual beliefs, resource use, and land control among Native Americans. At the same time, important commonalities have been highlighted: the importance of the past in shaping present indigenous identity, the significance of U.S.-tribal governmental relations, the resiliency of Native Americans, the character of Indian Country, and issues of tribal sovereignty and nationalism.

Historical Experience

At least 500 distinct indigenous peoples lived in the present-day territory of the United States at the time of the Conquest. Estimates of their precolonial population range from
1 million to 18 million to many millions more.\textsuperscript{3} Theories of their origins include the theory of an Asian origin across the Bering Strait land bridge, as well as the many varied “creation stories” of individual tribes that trace their origin elsewhere. Whatever their origins or population numbers, the Native peoples of pre-colonial America were marked by incredible cultural diversity in terms of language, land use, material culture, spiritual systems, social customs and organization, and political and economic structures.

**SPATIAL DIVERSITY**

Native languages developed as part of different language families, ranging from the small Keresan or Penutian families to the spatially widespread Algonquian, Siouan, Iroquoian, and Athabascan families. The spatial extent of the larger families provides evidence of ancient migrations. The Algonquian family, for example, includes the Mi'kmaq (Micmac) and Ojibwe (Chippewa) in the east, and the Skisika (Blackfeet) and Yurok in the west. The Athabascan family includes the Dene in Alaska and the Northwest Territories, and the Hoopa and Diné (Navajo) in the south.

Although tribes may be related linguistically, they have adapted to the material culture of the area in which they settled. The Hoopa and Yurok, for example, are of different language families, but have a remarkably similar riverine culture and ceremonial life revolving around salmon, deer, plant reeds, and other natural resources of the northern California coast. Tribes can be defined as part of larger “culture areas” based on ecological similarities such as the Arctic tundra, Subarctic boreal forests, Northeast woodlands, the Southeast, and semiarid Southwest, as well as areas defined by the landscapes of the Pacific Northwest and inland Plateau region, the California coast, Great Basin, and the Great Plains.

Within each of these culture areas, different tribes or bands practiced different modes of subsistence, stressing hunting, fishing, gathering, or farming, usually in seasonal cycles. These cycles coincided with distinct migratory cycles of individual villages located within well-defined territories, in movements later mistaken by Europeans for nomadic roaming. In the Columbian Exchange, Native peoples of the Americas contributed many crops, such as corn, tomatoes, potatoes, chocolate, and many medicines, and traditional ecological knowledge to the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{4}

The social organization, family structures, and customs of Native peoples also exhibited wide spatial variations. Native peoples lived in highly decentralized and democratic bands subsisting on roots and tubers in the Great Basin, or fish and wild rice in the northeastern woodlands. Mississippian-culture peoples built Cahokia (near present-day St. Louis), which at its height around 1200–1400 A.D. was a large city with 20,000 inhabitants organized in a highly centralized and religiously hierarchical society centered on huge ceremonial mounds. In addition to strict behavior codes, Native American family and kinship were heavily influenced by a deep sense of spiritual relationship.\textsuperscript{5} Types of social organizations and lifeways could even vary within a cultural area. As some culture groups lived on fish or marine mammals, others actively shaped the landscape through fire to enhance prospects of hunting or growing crops.
The Conquest beginning in 1492 also affected different Native peoples in different ways. The European “Doctrine of Discovery” defined the Americas as *Terra Nullis* (Empty Land) that could be inhabited by Native peoples, but not under their sovereign control. European powers were interested in religiously converting Native peoples, and in controlling natural resources, such as land, gold, and furs. Some eastern tribes positioned themselves as valuable “middlemen” in the fur trade, and at first held a military and political advantage over European powers in their domains. Some tribes (particularly on the coasts) were devastated by common European diseases that had not yet swept across American territories. In response, some tribes or parts of tribes converted to Christianity or had children with Europeans, while other tribes strongly held onto their spiritual and cultural beliefs, even if they practiced them underground. Native peoples who adopted Christianity sometimes mixed it with indigenous beliefs and customs.

Euro-Americans emphasized not only religious conversion but transformed Indians into farmers who would practice the more “civilized” form of sedentary agriculture, settling them on reservations to make way for American settlement. Native resistance to American settler colonialism had some limited successes, such as unity around Tecumseh’s rebellion in the 1810s, or Lakota defeats of the U.S. Army in the 1860s-1870s. Yet Americans prevailed by dividing and conquering tribes, carrying out massacres of Native rebels and civilians, and exterminating their natural resource base (such as trees and buffalo). By the 1890s, most Native Americans in the continental United States were confined to reservations, which were only a tiny fraction of their original homelands. Others were forced to move from their original homelands, and some were left completely landless. To most U.S. citizens at the turn of the twentieth century, Native Americans had become a tiny minority that had lost their cultures and lands, and were on their way to disappearing as distinct peoples.

**CONTESTING GOVERNMENT CONTROL**

Early formal treaty-making was a colonial policy to secure alliances with Native peoples before rival colonial powers did so. As a result, these policies generally treated the Native nations as sovereigns. The U.S. government signed approximately 371 treaties with Native nations, whether as part of peace settlements, land cessions, material aid agreements, or a combination of different provisions before federal processes were changed in 1871. The treaties also played a major role in consolidating different Native bands into a single voice in relation to the settler society. Treaties also defined and set boundaries between Native “national” territories, where only mutual understandings and shifting land-use agreements between Native peoples had previously existed. As a result, Native nations assumed some characteristics of European sovereign states—with more centralized authority and demarcated boundaries.

Federal Indian policy is commonly misinterpreted as having granted Native peoples new political or territorial rights, or as having “accorded special group rights.” Rather than serving as gifts to the tribes, many treaties instead served as the tribes’ concessions of their preexisting rights over land and resources to the United States, with
certain access and use rights retained by the tribes in order to end or prevent armed conflict between the two signatory nations. Many of the treaties contained clauses for continued use of the treaty-ceded territories outside reservations for cultural or economic sustenance uses—such as religious ceremonies, hunting, gathering or fishing—in effect maintaining treaty lands as part of “Indian Country.” This is why many recent Native rights battles have centered on treaty rights, since those rights contain or imply a larger recognition of nationhood. Article VI of the U.S. Constitution defined treaties as the “supreme law of the land.”

Federal Indian policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries swung like a pendulum between unilateralist policies that sought to assimilate Indians, and bilateralist policies that recognized tribes as distinct peoples. Policies that were intended to weaken Native territorial or cultural identity often backfired on government policymakers, and had the unintended effect of heightening Native nationalism.

During the Removal Era of the 1820s–1850s, federal troops marched many Native peoples westward to new reservations west of the Mississippi River. While some forced removals were largely successful from the federal government’s perspective, such as the “Trail of Tears” from the Southeast to Oklahoma, other attempts, notably in the western Great Lakes region, were strongly resisted and stimulated a Native determination to stay in or return to their homelands. After the 1850s, a primary concern of federal Indian policy was to settle Native Americans on reservations and diminish their control over their homelands, while recognizing at least a modicum of Native territoriality. Ironically, the “trust responsibility” established by federal agencies toward their Indian “wards” was later used as a legal tool to defend tribes from control by state and local governments.

Federal policies changed in the Allotment Era of the 1880s–1920s, as the federal government privatized many reservation lands and sold off large tracts of “excess” lands to non-Indians. Allotment undermined tribal control over the reservation land base. At the same time, many Native youths were moved to boarding schools in a coordinated church-government effort to forcibly assimilate them into mainstream American culture. The schools brought Native youths into contact with each other, and inadvertently educated some of the youths in the skills they later used to fight for tribal rights. Under the 1924 Citizenship Act, all American Indians were made U.S. citizens, in addition to their Native national citizenship.

The resulting economic devastation of the Allotment Era led to calls by the late 1920s for increased Indian self-government, which were realized under the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). The IRA, initiated as part of the “Indian New Deal,” established federally approved tribal council governments on reservations that voted for the system. While most tribes approved the IRA system, some tribes or factions within tribes rejected the IRA as undermining their traditional chief system or self-organized tribal council. Other tribes that adopted this model for government structure, such as the Apsaalooke, or Crow, managed to use the reservation council system to reinforce their tribal identity. In other cases, federally recognized tribal government and the traditional governance system functioned as parallel institutions for decades—sometimes in intense conflict (such as on South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation). While the IRA was partly intended to replace Native governance structures with U.S. models of governance, it did not replace all traditional forms of leadership.
In the **Termination Era** during the 1950s and early 1960s the federal government unilaterally sought to "terminate" the federal status of some economically successful tribes, such as the Menominee in Wisconsin and the Klamath in Oregon. The stated goal was to encourage tribal members to more fully assimilate into American society. Termination policies triggered a cultural and political counterreaction among both traditionalists and IRA tribal governments that brought an end to the policy. Concurrent with termination policies were federal policies that sought to assimilate Native Americans and improve their economic standing by relocating them to urban areas. Tribal members were provided with some minor financial incentives to move to urban areas and given the false promises of jobs and good housing, while at the same time termination policy foresaw a cutoff of federal aid to rural reservations, giving tribal members little choice but to leave for the cities. Federal Indian urban relocation policy resulted in members of different tribes being brought together in cities such as Chicago, Minneapolis, Denver, and Los Angeles, which led to increased mutual discussions and action, and the emergence of a loose "pan-Indian" social identity. Urban-based Indians were also directly exposed to the civil rights and "Black Power" movements, showing them how a pan-Indian community could be politically mobilized.

Urbanization served as a "transmission belt for nationalism" by overcoming localism and increasing alienation. The birth of the "urban Indian" built bridges between indigenous peoples that would not have been possible on reservations spatially isolated from one another. Native militancy and the formation of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the late 1960s and 1970s furthered this process as dislocated Indians became a receptive audience, especially those who had been brought up by traditionalist families on the reservations. Diverse tribes externally became defined as a single Amerindian "race"—a status that many Native Americans resented, but also utilized in order to increase intertribal unity. The Indian rights movement pushed U.S. policy and legal decisions toward recognizing tribal governments' political "self-determination," that in some respects is similar to the bilateral policies of the Indian New Deal. As an example, in 1978 Native religions were legalized when Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

This trend toward greater federal recognition of Native sovereignty stimulated a counterreaction among some non-Indians both on and off of the reservations. Several anti-treaty organizations were founded in the 1970s to protest Indian treaty rights and tribal sovereignty. Such groups united non-Indian reservation residents who opposed tribal jurisdiction with sportsmen who opposed tribal hunting and fishing rights. Tribes were criticized both for their social and economic dependency on the federal government and for promoting tribal economic development and cultural revitalization on reservations. At the same time, non-Indians continued to romanticize Native Americans and often exploited Native cultures and religions for their own purposes.

The 1990s ushered in a new era in Indian Country that extended the idea of "self-determination" beyond the political realm to include economic, cultural, and environmental concerns. AIM activists diversified their organizing to form reservation-based environmental and women's groups. The rise of Indian casinos gave some tribes economic opportunities they had not had for centuries. The protection of burials, sacred objects, and cultural images became somewhat easier, and some tribes began to regulate
environmental quality, in some cases even protecting the environment of rural non-Indians living outside the reservations. Despite these advances, there are continuing problems facing Indian Country with reference to diminishment of reservation land bases, rising rates of disease, crime, and youth alienation in many Native communities, and continued poverty for many Native Americans.

Settlement Patterns

In 2000 nearly two-thirds of Native Americans (64%) lived off reservations or tribal lands (Fig. 3.1). Many lived in major urban areas as indicated by the largest absolute population of Native Americans being concentrated in urban counties. Table 3.1 shows that many of the counties with highest populations of Native Americans are large urban counties in the western United States, such as Los Angeles County, and Maricopa County centered in Phoenix and Tucson. In these urban counties the proportion of Native Americans to the total population is quite low.

The concentration of Native Americans in urban areas is partially the result of mid-twentieth-century federal policies on urban relocation. Economic and social reasons, such as more employment opportunities and greater educational options, also

*Figure 3.1. Percent Native American Population by Place of Residence, 2000.
Source: Census 2000, Summary File 4.*
Table 3.1. Counties with Highest Population Numbers of American Indians/Alaska Natives (AIAN) in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total County Population</th>
<th>Total AIAN Alone Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>9,519,338</td>
<td>76,988</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maricopa</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>3,072,149</td>
<td>56,706</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>McKinley</td>
<td>NM</td>
<td>74,798</td>
<td>55,892</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Apache</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>69,423</td>
<td>53,375</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Robeson</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>123,339</td>
<td>46,896</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Apache</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>69,423</td>
<td>53,375</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>NM</td>
<td>113,801</td>
<td>41,968</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Coconino</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>116,320</td>
<td>33,161</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tulsa</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>563,299</td>
<td>29,316</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>843,746</td>
<td>27,178</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2000.

provide an explanation for the growing number of Native Americans residing in cities. Specific places within a city may be invested with meanings in ways that contribute to pan-Indian urban culture and community, such as a common reference for a particular coffee shop, art gallery, business, or roadside wall. So-called urban Indians often spend part of their lives in a city and part on a reservation. Circular migration between city and reservation corresponds to individual options and family and community obligations. Urban tribal members can vote in most tribal elections.

In addition to large metropolitan areas, many Native Americans live in towns and cities adjacent to their reservation (Map 3.1). These “border towns” may provide enhanced economic and educational options for tribal members and still allow for spatial proximity to family and opportunities on the reservation. On the other hand, these communities often are a major source of friction with reservation residents and exploit tribal members for financial gain. An example of an off-reservation border town is White Clay, Nebraska, a tiny community adjacent to the Pine Ridge Reservation. While there is a population of only 22 people, four million cans of beer are sold in White Clay annually to residents of the “dry” reservation, contributing to problems of alcoholism and social instability among the Oglala Lakota.

Native Americans in pre-contact periods lived in traditional settlement communities. Traditional homelands provided familiar sources of sustenance that met physical and spiritual needs. For those tribes relocated to far-removed sites in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their new reservation lands often seemed barren and harsh. Geographically based cultural and spiritual systems that were attached to particular environments were difficult to maintain. Destruction of these environments caused spiritual and psychological injury for many Native Americans, as in the case of the inability of Mohawks on the St. Regis (Akwesasne) Reservation to fish in the polluted
St. Lawrence River. Nevertheless, decades of family living on reservations has invested reservation lands with a sense of place for many tribal members.21

Many Native Americans today still spend part of their lives residing on a reservation. Table 3.2 and Map 3.2 show that counties with the highest proportion of Native Americans are primarily rural counties with dispersed populations. Many of these counties are adjacent to or surround one or more reservations or Alaska Native communities.

Economic conditions on some reservations have changed with the advent of tribal gaming on reservation lands. Tribal gaming has enabled Native nations to fund social programs, add to the reservation land base, develop businesses, protect the environment, and lobby and litigate for their legal protection. In many counties with casinos, the tribes have become the largest employers, not only of tribal members but of non-Indians, and welfare rates have dropped dramatically. Yet gaming has also led to divisions and high debt within tribes, conflicts with tribes situated in areas with less population or tourist access, and increased conflicts with state and local governments wanting a stake in the economic gains.
Table 3.2. Counties with Highest Proportion of American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Population in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>County Name</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total County Population</th>
<th>Total AIAN Alone Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>12,466</td>
<td>11,743</td>
<td>94.2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Wade Hampton Census Area</td>
<td>AK</td>
<td>7,028</td>
<td>6,503</td>
<td>92.5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Menominee</td>
<td>WI</td>
<td>4,562</td>
<td>3,981</td>
<td>87.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>9,050</td>
<td>7,747</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sioux</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>4,044</td>
<td>3,421</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Northwest Arctic Borough</td>
<td>AK</td>
<td>7,208</td>
<td>5,944</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bethel Census Area</td>
<td>AK</td>
<td>16,006</td>
<td>13,114</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>2,032</td>
<td>1,658</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Apache</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>69,423</td>
<td>53,375</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nome Census Area</td>
<td>AK</td>
<td>9,196</td>
<td>6,915</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1; Internet release date: August 13, 2001.

Native American Identity and Population

Any discussion about settlement patterns of Native Americans in the United States raises significant issues about who is Native American. In other words, central to any geographic discussion of where Native Americans live are questions about how identity is distinguished. Two basic perspectives have developed with respect to Native American identity. The first is that each federally recognized tribal government defines its own members. The second is self-identification, and this is the basis of U.S. Census demographic profiles of Native Americans. The growth and decline of Native American population counts reflect both historical conditions and governmental policies.

Each tribal government determines its criteria for membership so that membership is not based on self-identification. Some tribes establish that a member must be of a specified blood quantum, and others define a member to be a descendant enrolled on a historic membership list. Other criteria that have been used to demarcate a population include community recognition, cultural association, residence within a geographic boundary, and common language usage.

The enrollment process has origins in the historical practices of the federal government vis-à-vis American Indian and Alaska Native people and their rights as specified in treaties. "As the U.S. government dispossessed Native peoples, treaties established specific rights, privileges, goods, and money to which those party to a treaty—both tribes as entities and individual names of tribal members—were entitled. The practices of creating formal censuses and keeping lists of names of tribal members evolved to ensure an accurate and equitable distribution of benefits."

Today 562 federally recognized tribal governments maintain databases of tribal member enrollees. Federal legislation as well as increasing tribal government needs require formal maintenance and regulation of tribal rolls by tribal governments. Tribal members have tribal membership cards and usually have a tribal enrollment number. Tribal membership is a hallmark—one in a succession—that depicts relationships between the federal government and Native Americans.

In contrast to formal identification as a tribal member, the U.S. Census does not require proof of membership from an individual who identifies as American Indian or Alaska Native. In 2000, the Census identifies American Indian/Alaska Native as one of five possible self-identified racial categories based upon Office of Management and Budget definitions and guidelines. Population estimates of Native Americans based on racial data in the U.S. Census represent a single moment in time that relies upon individuals' self-identification of ethnicity and race.

Self-identification as Native American warrants examination. An individual (or group of individuals) may change responses to race and ethnic identity questions over time due to variations in question wording or changes in political, social, or economic conditions. Some of the stigma of being identified as Native American was reduced by indigenous political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s (through AIM and other groups) along with other ethnic pride movements. This change affected people of mixed racial and ethnic ancestry who previously might have refused to identify their Native American background because of a stigma as well as individuals with trace
Native American background who wanted to affirm their support for marginalized groups or a romanticized ethnic identity. Improving fertility and mortality rates in combination with increased numbers of people identifying as Native American who had only partial or distant indigenous ancestry produced a phenomenal growth rate in Native Americans from 1960 to 1990, which Jeffrey Passel described as "demographically impossible without immigration" (Fig. 3.2). Gary Sandefur, Ronald Rindfuss, and Barney Cohen attribute a 4.2 percent increase of the Native American population during this time period to changes in self-identification from one census to the next.

Between the 1990 Census and 2000 Census federal government definitions and public perceptions converged to produce an extraordinary range of population growth estimates from 26.4 percent to 110 percent (Table 3.3). The 26.4 percent increase, twice the U.S. general population growth, includes those people who indicated only one race—that of American Indian/Alaska Native. But because the 2000 Census allowed for single or multiple racial categories, a total of 2.2 million people (1.5% of the U.S. population) identified as American Indian/Alaska Native. This statistic includes those with only a single racial identity as American Indian/Alaska Native as

well as all those who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native in combination with one or more other racial identities. This results in a 110 percent increase from the 1990 Census when respondents could report only one race.

Scholars often portray ethnic movements as a throwback to preserve consciousness from a past era. Native nationalists are often accused of seeking a return to premodern social and political forms. Yet Native traditional systems today are not simply backward-looking. The contemporary Native movement can instead be viewed as a resurgence, or even as a renaissance. Much as the Italian Renaissance adapted Greco-Roman values to a new historical context, the Native Renaissance adapts traditional values to modern society, without necessarily re-creating old societies. Native scholars tend to reject both premodernist and modernist analysis, arguing that Native nationalists do not seek a strict reimplementation of previous forms, but a selective revitalization of elements of an existing culture, adapted to a global technological society. The goal is not a simple regression to the tribal past, but for modern Native nations to move beyond the colonial “negation” of tribal societies, and progress on their own terms.

Native communities in the United States today are not monolithic, and contain their own diversity and schisms. Non-Indian outsiders attending a powwow may see a singular pan-Indian identity. But to the Native dancers and their families, differences between tribal identities are always in the foreground, as are band, clan, and family differences within tribes. Class differences affect Native communities, though they are profoundly shaped by Indian-white relations and tribal government structures. Gender, sexuality, and age differences also affect the Native social landscape, and interact with cultural and spiritual practices in ways that are often unfamiliar to non-Indians.

Table 3.3. National Change in Native American Population, 1990–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population Site (U.S. totals)</th>
<th>Percent of Total U.S. Population</th>
<th>Percentage Increase, 1990 to 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut</td>
<td>1,959,234</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) only</td>
<td>2,475,956</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone and in combination with one or more races</td>
<td>4,119,301</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Native Americans have their cultural and spiritual life strongly integrated with the rest of the natural world, their distinct spiritual identities cannot be simply defined as part of a vague indigenous animism. Cultures have identified specific sacred sites as important in their origin stories, clan structures, spiritual mythology, or ancestral burials. Protecting these sacred sites from modern abuse or development has become a priority of some tribes, rendered more difficult by the prohibition on revealing spiritual matters to nonadherents. The sites construct a sacred geography that equates spirituality with place, rather than only with religious dwellings. 32

Different tribal factions may take diverse approaches to basic questions of Native rights and land use, particularly under strong economic or political pressure from the dominant society. Different factions within tribes may address land use with terms so vastly different that it is difficult to tell they are describing the same plot of land. Tribal officials often take a proprietary or economic approach to land use, tribal attorneys usually stress legal jurisdictional questions, and tribal traditionalists emphasize ethnohistorical and spiritual values attached to land. 33 This is an oversimplified picture, since tribal factions often overlap, and Native political survival skills seem to overcome most temporary factional schisms. But at any point in time, an overly generalized view of Native perspectives can gloss over the range of identities and opinions within Native nations.

Case Study: The Nez Perce Nation

The life that we have is the life that we want to hold on to—our Indian ways. These ways were left here from our old people. Our ancestors done it that way—one heart to the other. It's still here.

—Nez Perce elder Horace Axtell 34

The homeland of the Nez Perce (Nimiipu) Nation once encompassed 13.2 million acres in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. After the introduction of livestock by the Spanish in North America, the Nez Perce became known for their vast herds of Appaloosa horses and Spanish cattle, and became one of the most powerful tribes in the Plateau culture area (Map 3.3).

The Nez Perce welcomed the peaceful message of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805. It was not long, however, before their homeland was overrun by traders who introduced diseases and alcohol, American settlers who took tribal lands, and Christian missionaries who took issue with the Nimiipu Longhouse religion.

Like other tribes in the Columbia-Snake Basin, the Nez Perce signed the 1855 treaty with the federal government. The treaty recognized their control over a 7.5 million-acre reservation. 35 With the discovery of gold in the Wallowa Valley of northeastern Oregon, the tribe was forced to negotiate an 1863 treaty that further diminished their reservation to 750,000 acres. 36 The band led by Chief Joseph was offered a reservation in the Wallowa Valley, but local settlers vociferously opposed the offer.

In 1877, land conflicts in the valley led to all-out war between the U.S. Army and those Nez Perce who had refused to sign the treaty. Chief Joseph led the efforts of
The 1877 Nez Perce War was a turning point in the history of the Nez Perce nation. Chief Joseph and other chiefs who refused to sign a treaty giving up their Wallowa Valley homeland retreated, and successfully repelled U.S. military attacks until they almost reached Canada. After their defeat, most Nez Perce ended up on a reservation in Idaho, while Joseph’s followers were sent to the Colville Reservation in Washington State and others settled on the Umatilla Reservation, closer to the Wallowa Valley.

“Nontreaty” Nez Perce who did not want to sign away their homeland. As spiritual leader Toolhulhulsote stated in talks with the U.S. Army, “The earth is part of my body and I never gave up the earth. . . . What person pretended to divide the land and put me on it?” Chief Joseph and other nontreaty chiefs led 800 refugees in a 1,600-mile, three-month retreat across four states. Two hundred fifty Nez Perce warriors fought a running series of battles that held off U.S. soldiers in more than twenty engagements. The soldiers targeted not only Nez Perce civilians, but also killed many of their Appaloosa horses. Finally, in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana, only forty miles from safety in British Canada, the Nez Perce were defeated. Chief Joseph delivered his famous “I will fight no more forever” speech, and surrendered to the U.S. Army.

The remnants of Joseph’s band were forcibly removed to unfamiliar and distant lands in Oklahoma and Kansas, where many died. After ten years they were allowed to return to the Northwest, but not to the Wallowa Valley. Joseph returned twice to Wallowa Valley to resecure land, but was rebuffed both times by white settlers. His band settled instead on the Colville Reservation, at Nespelem, Washington, where Joseph died in 1904. Other nontreaty Nez Perce moved to the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon.

Bands that signed the treaty were allowed to form a federally recognized reservation around Lapwai, Idaho, where many Nez Perce were converted to Presbyterianism. Yet they lost most of their tribal landholdings during the Allotment Era, with 500,000 acres opened to white settlement, and only 250,000 acres remaining in the hands of the tribe or individual tribal members. The dispossession of much of their reservation land
base, combined with the loss of their horse and cattle herds, rendered the Nez Perce economically dependent and poor. Access to the salmon runs that had been guaranteed in the treaties was also severely restricted, and the salmon themselves were threatened by the loss of habitat and dam construction.

Through the late twentieth century, the Nez Perce remained geographically divided between the Lapwai, Colville, and Umatilla reservations, but their divisions were not only physical in nature. The splits between treaty and nontreaty Nez Perce, and adherents of traditional and Christian religions also remained. The Nez Perce of Idaho set up an IRA government during the Indian New Deal, but Nez Perce on other reservations had to function as minorities within multitribal governments. Like other Native Americans, the Nez Perce were pressured to leave the reservations for boarding schools and urban employment (in cities such as Seattle), particularly during the mid- and later twentieth century.

Facing a potential loss of their culture and the natural resources upon which it depended, the Nez Perce began to again fight for their rights, this time in the courts. In a 1943 fishing case and a 1951 deer hunting case, tribal members reasserted their off-reservation treaty rights. Their court victories were part of the larger and mostly successful fight for tribal treaty rights in the Northwest during the mid-1960s and 1970s. The political and cultural resurgence of the tribe was marked by the 1977 centennial of the Nez Perce War, which initiated Lapwai’s annual Chief Joseph and Warriors Powwow, honoring the descendants of the warriors who earlier fought the U.S. Army.

With three other reservations, the Nez Perce Tribe is part of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC), which advocates for tribal positions on salmon restoration. The CRITFC tribes have called for the dismantling of four hydroelectric dams on the Snake River, which adversely affect salmon migration and spawning. In 2004, the tribe initiated a federal lawsuit accusing the state and federal governments of prioritizing hydroelectric production over implementing an agreement to restore salmon runs. The Nez Perce have been critical of the Dworshak Dam on the North Fork Clearwater River within the reservation. The tribal government established an office of fisheries program, which cooperated with local, state, and federal agencies to repair salmon habitat and restore salmon runs.

In the 1990s, the tribe began to regain a foothold in the Wallowa Valley, and even limited control over land and natural resources. In 1997 the tribe took title to 10,300 acres in the valley as mitigation for past tribal land losses, and these lands are currently held in escrow by a nonprofit group. The Nez Perce named the site the “Precious Lands,” and negotiated a payment agreement that met the county’s economic needs without compromising tribal sovereignty by paying taxes. Furthermore, this return of the Nez Perce has been supported by some non-Indian Wallowa County residents mindful of the tribe’s historical experiences.

In response to the tribal reassertion of its sovereignty and territorial rights, many non-Indian residents of the Lapwai reservation have joined with local and county governments around the reservation to form the North Central Idaho Jurisdictional Alliance (NCIJA). Fearful of losing their tax base, some non-Indian local governments have challenged Nez Perce tribal land acquisitions. These types of responses reflect larger regional and national initiatives to legally extinguish or politically modify tribal
sovereignty. The tribe, however, offered a “payment in lieu of taxes” as compensation for a land parcel it took off the tax rolls in one case in Nez Perce County, Idaho. As a result, the Nez Perce County government has declined to join in the NCIJA challenges to Nez Perce sovereignty.

In 1997, a 320-acre powwow grounds was purchased in the Wallowa Valley by a partnership of Nez Perce and local non-Indian citizens to fulfill the longstanding dream of a tribal return to the valley. The annual Tamakaliks powwow draws Nez Perce from the Lapwai, Colville, and Umatilla reservations, educates non-Indian residents about Nimiipu culture, and brings money into the ailing logging community. One organizer commented, “It’s ironic that they boot us out of there in 1877 because they wanted the land and resources. Now they’re asking us to come back and help them with their economic development because they’re not surviving.” The powwow grounds have become a designated site of the Nez Perce National Historic Park.

The return to the Wallowa Valley is one part of a larger, ongoing project to rebuild a Nez Perce identity and begin to reunite dispersed tribespeople. Symbolic “home­lands” represent both their past “golden age” and future resurgence. Defending their Idaho reservation, asserting tribal sovereignty, and restoring the salmon and horses as central icons of their culture, are other essential elements as the Nez Perce nation moves into the twenty-first century.

**Conclusion**

Studying Native American geography and history involves not only exposing the oppression and conditions of a racial group, but examining the conquest and colonization of diverse ethno-national groups. In questioning the role of the U.S. government, Native American geography raises issues about the territorial origins of the United States. Native geography critiques federal and state government policies and the clouded acquisition of the resource and land base on which those policies take place. It not only addresses political, economic, and demographic systems but the cultural underpinnings of European civilization. Native American geography therefore encompasses studying the indigenous peoples of North America, and in so doing it opens a Pandora’s box about societies that colonized those peoples.

In the United States, many people tend to view Native Americans as the smallest and least significant minority group, who live on isolated reservations and do not affect national politics or the labor market to nearly the same degree as other minority groups. Treatment of American Indians as merely a demographic afterthought ignores the role that Native nations have played in American history, their complex geographies, and the continued existence of their cultures and land rights within the boundaries of the United States.

Different perspectives within U.S. society today view Native Americans as a single race, as a collection of ethno-linguistic groups, or as sovereign (or semi-sovereign) national entities. These views often correspond, respectively, to biological, cultural, and political explanations for differences between peoples. The very concept of Native Americans reflects a constructed racialized identity rooted in historical developments in
North American history. A collective pan-Indian image of Native Americans has been constructed in the United States, partially through the articulation of non-Indian perspectives, through Native reactions, and through federal Indian policies, such as those of the 1950s which terminated some reservations and relocated tribal members to urban areas. Yet most indigenous North Americans prefer their distinct national (tribal) identities, which have themselves been constructed by tribal self-definition and colonial relations (Fig. 3.3).

A nation can be generally defined as a people or ethnic group that has been territorialized (or attached to a specific land base), possesses an awareness of common social attributes (such as language), and claims a common past, present, and future. Before the arrival of Europeans in North America, most indigenous peoples possessed a band-based or clan-based identity. Some bands unified as tribes, and some tribes even unified as confederacies, such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Six Nations Confederacy), whose political unity served as a model for the emerging United States.46 Through their interactions with the colonial and settler societies, localized identities coalesced into ethno-linguistic groups, which became recognized and territorialized as tribal nations.

Until recently, debates over nations and nationalism often focused on the development of European nations.47 Yet European notions of nations and nationalism are notoriously difficult to apply to Native Americans. Without a peasantry, bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, industrialization, or strong class stratification, Native peoples obviously
developed different paths to nationhood and nationalism than did European peoples. A Native-centered analysis cannot center on what made “peasants into Frenchmen,” but rather can examine what made “Oglalas into Lakotas”—the processes that coalesced diverse peoples into tribal “nations.” Native American nationalism cannot be explained by labor market roles or a goal of equal political representation, but rather by centuries of resistance to cultural assimilation, economic marginalization, and the diminishment of Native national territories.

Nations are constructed not only territorially, but by claiming a people’s common past, present, and future in a place. Claims upon the past encompass Native American treaty rights and preexisting aboriginal rights in ways that reinvigorate forms of indigenous sovereignty originating in the past. In the present, tribal governments extend their powers through control over reservation lands. As for the future, Native sovereignty may lie in creative combinations of tribal territorial powers on and off the reservations, drawing on the cultural past to create new economic and political realities on the land.

Notes

1. Although indigenous to the lands of the United States, Native Hawaiians have not been covered in this chapter.
34. Horace P. Axtell and Margo Aragon, A Little Bit of Wisdom: Conversations with a Nez Perce Elder (Lewiston, ID: Confluence Press, 1997), 206.
42. Sissell A. Waage, “(Re)claiming Space and Place through Collaborative Planning in Rural Oregon,” *Political Geography* 20, no. 7 (2001): 839–858.
44. Lyris Wallwork Winik, “We’re Doing It Because We Think It’s Right,” *Parade* (15 June 1997).
46. Bruce E. Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois, and the Rationale for the American Revolution* (Ipswich: Gambit, 1982).