

2

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE ON TURTLE ISLAND

Histories of Resilience and Self-Defense

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Contrast popular understandings of Thanksgiving with its true origins.
2. Identify eight myths and one reality about Indigenous people and colonialism.
3. Explain the intent, significance, and consequences of the rising owning class's genocidal military campaigns and policies.
4. Assess three attempts at unity against U.S. genocidal policy, including the Buffalo Creek Settlement, the Shawnee alliance in Ohio Country, and Black-native alliances in the Seminole Wars.
5. Explain the centrality and the incompleteness of the Wars on Indians for the United States.
6. Describe three aspects of the process of reckoning with genocide.

THE TRUE ORIGINS OF THANKSGIVING

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People. Now our minds are one.

(Stokes & Kanawahienton, 1993)

Thus begins the **Thanksgiving Address**, or “The Words That Come Before All Else.” In centuries-old Haudenosaunee oral tradition, the Address is a greeting and invocation of gratitude to the natural world and an inventory and acknowledgement of everything in it (Kimmerer, 2013). It is delivered differently by different speakers, but its presence is consistent at the beginning and end of celebrations and meetings and every morning to open the school day. To many Indigenous nations of Turtle Island,¹ thanksgiving is an explicit daily practice, not something celebrated once a year.

As a federal holiday in the United States, Thanksgiving is a cultural ritual that reveals mainstream perceptions about Native American and Indigenous people and

¹As of 2022, there were 574 federally recognized Indigenous nations in the territory of what is now the United States, as well as some 400 more unrecognized nations and tribes. In the northeast where I live, many Indigenous nations use Turtle Island as the name for North America.

shared history on this continent. Tellingly, there is very little accuracy in the story that is told and retold about a harvest feast in which benevolent Indians shared with grateful Pilgrims. The holiday has its historical origins in a 1637 celebration by European settlers after the massacre of 700 Pequot men, women, and children by English and Dutch settlers in what is now the state of Connecticut. Settlers originally held a “thanksgiving” celebration after each massacre of Native people; after a time, they were limited to one per year.

In many U.S. classrooms, children learn the harvest feast narrative, often through parades or performances of Indians with feathered headdresses and Puritans with hats with buckles. The story is full of untruths. For example, feathered headdresses were not the dress of the native people who would have met the Puritans. But more egregiously, the Thanksgiving story describes a peaceful, friendly meal, emphasizing harmonious interactions. While some cooperation surely did occur in the early days of the colonies, the reality of the European invasion was violence, brutality, conquest, seizure of land, and attempted genocide of Native people.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), **genocide** means killing or causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of a group, deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to physically destroy the group, imposing measures to prevent births, or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (see Figure 2.1).²

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December 1948.
Entry into force: 12 January 1951.

Article I

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II

In the present Convention, **genocide** means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Source: United Nations General Assembly, 1948.

²The United States ratified this convention in 1988 but has not undertaken serious steps such as reparations, a truth commission, memorial or even an official national apology for Native American genocide, even as other countries begin processes of self-criticism (d’Errico, 2018).

By this definition, the United States was founded on attempted genocide. A **colonial settler-state**, it was premised on trying to destroy and remove the Indigenous populations to make room for a permanent non-Native settler population (Wolfe, 1999). The country required an origin myth that included a whitewashed version of Thanksgiving. It wasn't until the second half of the 19th century, when it was necessary to unite many immigrant groups under the American flag and identity, that the current Thanksgiving story came into being. Inventing a story of a shared communal meal helped to establish cooperation as a founding national value while obscuring attempted genocide, land theft, and enslavement.

WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT 'INDIANS' IS PROBABLY WRONG

As a professor, one of the best parts of my job is to learn from my students. I was lucky to have a student, (now Dr.) Meredith Palmer, who is Tuscarora and is now on the faculty of the Department of Indigenous Studies at the University at Buffalo. In getting to know her over the last several years, I am often struck by realities and histories that I get to glimpse in our conversations. When I first told her I needed to write a chapter about settler colonialism and the European invasion of the Americas, I asked if she would be willing to offer some guidance. In our first conversation, she shared a long list of beliefs, all myths, that such a chapter should debunk. One of the first myths she mentioned was that of *false familiarity*, that White people believe they know about Indians. Standing Rock Sioux historian and activist Vine Deloria, Jr., (1969) uses a dry humor to illustrate this point:

Experts paint us as they would like us to be. Often, we paint ourselves as we wish we were or as we might have been. . . . The American public feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE. These Indians are fierce, they wear feathers and grunt. Most of us don't fit this idealized figure since we grunt only when overeating, which is seldom. (pp. 9–10)

In another conversation, Dr. Palmer got interrupted by her landlord who had been pattering around the porch where we were talking. He climbed up the steps to describe what he learned by visiting Ireland and to ask her expert opinion on a topic in her field. He asserted that Irish colonialism was similar to the colonial experience of Indians in the Americas, that is, except for disease, which wiped out 90 percent of Indians. Unlike in Ireland, here in North America, he said, conquest was more successful and complete. Dr. Palmer acknowledged his interest in the topic but expressed her disagreement with his conclusion. She explained that epidemiology teaches us that populations recover from disease unless there is another factor that impedes that recovery, in this case, the genocidal policies of colonialism. She challenged his conclusion that conquest was complete, explaining that Indigenous nations were and continue to be a force, which is acknowledged by the treaties the U.S. government has made with them.

The landlord left. I wondered whether he had integrated any new information through Dr. Palmer's generosity and patience. As I sat across from Dr. Palmer on her porch, I wondered what she was feeling. When I asked later, she described feeling sadness, frustration, and exhaustion. I realized that no college lecture could better illustrate the concept of White false familiarity about Native people.

Most of all, she explained, the fundamental problem and irony was that this man was *her* landlord. I remembered that Dr. Palmer had recommended the Native stand-up comedian Charlie Hill who joked about the removal of his people, the Oneida, from New York to Wisconsin as a real estate problem. I said, “I guess there’s a little real estate problem here.” She laughed, maybe noticing the effort I was making to remember our prior conversations. Beyond the realm of ideas, this brief exchange showed me that no matter how much White people bemoan and apologize for their ancestors stealing Native land, these apologies do not undo the material reality that we all still live on stolen Native land.

Indeed, as Deloria and Palmer explain, non-Indigenous people raised in the United States often feel falsely familiar with Native people, despite their profound ignorance about Native American nations, cultures, and society. Native Americans are staple characters in literature, though like the Thanksgiving story, the emphasis, character, and conclusions are often false and misleading. Stories about Native Americans are so commonplace and pervasive that a feeling of false familiarity is widespread. Dr. Palmer reminded me that this false familiarity harms Indigenous people, but for anyone schooled in the United States, especially White people, it also contributes to a false sense of complacency, a false sense of self, and a false national narrative about the justice of American democracy. Cultural messages about Indigenous people, often based on a series of myths, are reinforced by pseudoscience.

One overarching myth is that of the disappearance of Native people and cultures. In preschools and kindergartens across the United States, children have often learned a song called “Ten Little Indians” that goes like this:

*One little, two little, three little Indians
Four little, five little, six little Indians
Seven little, eight little, nine little Indians
Ten little Indian boys.*

As they sing, children are taught to count the “Indians” on their fingers, developing manual dexterity along with early math skills. Such a counting song might seem cheerful and benign. Yet few of us were ever encouraged to ask who counted Native Americans, or why, nor were we taught to question the song’s gruesome ending:

*Ten little, nine little, eight little Indians
Seven little, six little, five little Indians
Four little, three little, two little Indians
One little Indian boy.*

The counting down describes a decreasing population of Native Americans, that is, genocide. This children’s song is one of many elements of popular culture that reinforces the narrative of the normalcy of genocide and the false trope of the “disappearing Indian” so deeply permeated into the socialization of U.S. society.

The myth is not entirely false. Indigenous populations were dramatically reduced as a result of initial colonial invasion, capture of their territories, forced removal and disruption of their social structures, and ongoing wars of attempted annihilation. But the myth makes it hard to see and respect the ongoing existence of Native American nations, resistance, survival, and resilience. In the culturally dominant pseudologic, subsequent myths add justification or explanation about why Native Americans supposedly disappear. Together, these myths naturalize Eurocentric self-justification, an imperial story of history and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

European-based societies have developed many myths to justify their theft and appropriation of the resources of the rest of the world. One powerful ideological weapon of the settler-colonial project has been the Bible, beginning with God's commissioning of Adam and Eve to ". . . subdue [the earth] and have dominion over . . . every living thing" (Genesis 1:28, KJV). Spanish Catholics and English Protestants alike justified the subjugation and dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the Americas by arguing that Native people did not have souls and therefore no right to liberty, property, or even life. Others claimed that people of non-European descent were "childlike" and required saving via Christianization and Europeanization. These characterizations of Indigenous peoples have long been debunked. The mythmakers willfully ignored Indigenous peoples' advanced systems of governance and diplomacy, farming, plant and animal domestication, as well as highly developed traditions in art, philosophy, religion, and astronomy at the time of European invasion. These tropes spread to justify the violence of colonization were based in the lie of European racial superiority.

Jared Diamond's widely read *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997) and subsequent television series debunked racial superiority myths while propagating others. Diamond's thesis is that geography, climate, and the environment favored the development of agricultural societies with organized states that could dominate others. That is, the luck of geography, not superior genetics, intelligence, or resourcefulness, propelled certain societies toward dominance.

Because of the broad appeal and diffusion of Diamond's argument, other scholars have found it important to subject his evidence and assumptions to scrutiny. Critics note that Diamond's conclusions imply an inevitability of European conquest and subjugation. Explaining European domination through favorable geographical latitudes and collective immunity to certain illnesses, instead of violent decisions and policies, "lets the West off the hook" (Jaschik, 2005). Here we will present other scholars' responses to two of Diamond's explanations for European conquest: guns and germs.

Historian Joyce E. Chaplin provides ample evidence to counter the myth that superior military technology—guns—was a major factor in European dominance in North America (2001). First, settlers' journals reveal that in early clashes bows and arrows were often more effective than clumsy firearms, both in the hands of Indigenous fighters and bowmen from England, where the longbow had been the war weapon of choice for centuries. Second, early colonies were a "rickety enterprise," underfunded and regularly lacking firearms and gunpowder even to defend themselves, to say nothing of conquest (Chaplin, 2001, p. 106). Third, English colonists could not control the sale and trade of firearms to Indigenous nations when they did become more readily available. As firearms technology improved in the 17th century, Indigenous men gained access and became skilled in their use. For a time, English and Indigenous fighters would carry both bows and guns, and then both war strategies came to be based on firearms.

Another persistent myth claims that European diseases—germs—caused a permanent decline in Native populations. Europeans brought diseases such as measles and smallpox which Native Americans had not yet experienced and to which they had not developed immunity. Epidemics certainly occurred, such as the 1633 smallpox epidemic that reduced the Mohegan and Pequot populations from 16,000 to 3,000 and spread to the Haudenosaunee in New York. European colonists did introduce smallpox and other infectious diseases on the American continent, at first by accident and later on purpose. Yet, as Palmer explained to her landlord and to me, biology and disease by themselves do

not account for the long-term depression of Native populations in North America. As in the case of the Black Plague in feudal Europe, even if a population is decimated by disease, it will return to former levels unless it is simultaneously suffering from other threats. Persistent attacks and attempts at removal from hunting, fishing, and agricultural lands by colonists compounded the stress that new diseases inflicted on Indigenous nations, as well as colonists' refusal to aid communities wracked by epidemic (Chaplin, 2001).

A more historically accurate telling of European and subsequently U.S. conquest of Indigenous nations in the Americas is that their dominance was not inevitable, biological or technological. Rather, colonialism was—and is—the result of choices that real people made to establish a system of domination within an emerging global system of capitalism. As we saw in Chapter 1, **colonialism** is the attempt by a section of a society to control another nation, culture, or people, using military, political, and psychological tactics. It entailed—and still entails—the choice to treat land as resources rather than as mother and source of all life, and the choice to treat people as exploitable labor. The character of colonial powers has changed over time, depending on relationships to global and historical relations of production. This chapter examines the choices of colonizers and the institutions they set up as they attempted to colonize Turtle Island; in so doing, it challenges geographical, technological, and biological explanations for European conquest. Learning the truth about our collective past is not just about the past: it can help us to identify and combat ways colonization continues today.

ONGOING ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL TURTLE ISLAND

As we saw in the last chapter, England was a harsh place to try to make a living for everyone except lords and a small class of merchants. Elites sought new lands to which to send dispossessed peasants to ease social tensions at home (Veracini, 2021). The abundant expanse of America provided a chance to unburden British society of its unseemly surplus population with its revolutionary tendencies. Just as important, the “New World” also represented opportunities to make money. British settler colonies in North America began as commercial land grants established to generate profits for the British Crown and colonist landowners. According to Indigenous historian Dunbar-Ortiz (2014), the United States is a colonialist settler state, and without this understanding, “not much in U.S. history makes sense” (p. 7). In other words, the origin of the United States as a loose grouping of for-profit settler colonies must be a central part of our national story, including how settlers invaded Indigenous territories, stole land and natural resources, treated them as commodities, and turned them into real estate for the production of cash crops.

Constructing the United States as “one nation, under God, indivisible” has everything to do with a philosophy of Manifest Destiny and a progress narrative made possible through genocidal practices against Indigenous peoples. Though the term genocide did not come into use until the mid-20th century, it is an apt characterization of U.S. government policy toward Indigenous nations since the nation's founding. Military aggression and wars of extermination, the burning of villages, murder of women and children, destruction of food stores, and the indoctrination and removal of children to boarding schools and non-Native families are all part of genocide, in this case to make Indigenous land available to settlers.

The U.S. genocidal project has been protracted and fraught and is arguably incomplete. For more than two centuries, from the early New England and Virginia colonies of the 1600s to the Seminole Wars in Florida in the leadup to the Civil War, the eastern seaboard was continuously contested territory. The region was geopolitically complicated

for several reasons, among them wars among European powers, shifting alliances with Indigenous nations and confederacies, uprisings of enslaved and bonded workers, conflicts among different settler interests, and finally, the calls by a section of the colonial elites for a revolution against the King. The resulting formation of the United States of America was neither preordained nor a foregone conclusion, and neither was the intensifying subjugation and removal of Native Americans over the next century.

Owning-Class Colonists Enlist Poor Whites as Grunts and Shock Troops

The primary intellectual authors of crimes and abuses against Indigenous peoples in North America in this period were the **colonial bourgeoisie**, the emerging owning class of landowning planters and merchant land speculators. But they did not often do their own dirty work. The grunts who carried out the raids and massacres, cleared and worked the land, and defended the stolen property of the colonist landowners were poor European immigrants and their descendants.

Immigrant laborers were disciplined through generations of physical and psychological violence to become the shock troops carrying out genocide on the colonial frontier. As we saw in Chapter 1, with the enclosure of common lands and removal of peasants from traditional territories and feudal estates, there emerged in Europe a new criminalized class of vagrant paupers.

The British Empire would grow to include holdings, outposts, and profit-making operations across the globe, but first it operated as a colonial appropriator of territory much closer to home. In the 1600s, Britain invaded and conquered Ireland, exterminating whole clans to make land available for settlers, while simultaneously outlawing ancient Irish languages and traditions. The British terrorized the local resistance by paying bounties for the heads of Irish people and displaying them publicly (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Later, only an Irish scalp was required to collect payment. This practice was later introduced in the Americas, and Native Americans were the first victims of *scalping*. By the time the British established colonies on Turtle Island, they had ample experience with the *clearing of estates*—that is, sweeping them clean of people. The royal army violently removed clans of the Scottish Highlands from their ancestral homes and replaced the property with sheep pastures and deer preserves for the rich (Marx, 1992[1867]). The propertyless descendants of the Scots and Irish, brutalized through this process of dispossession, would be recruited as irregular Indian fighters on the American colonial frontier, bribed with the promise of cheap land. Their willingness to wage total war on combatants and noncombatants alike was likely only possible after generations of similar violence had been inflicted on their people prior to migration to a new continent.

In Europe, peasants displaced from their own homelands were forced into exploited wage labor in the industrializing cities or became vagabonds and thieves. They often found themselves in the situation of *Les Misérables* hero Jean Valjean, who served 19 years in jail and as a French galley slave for stealing bread for his family. Some, like the fictitious Valjean, paid for the crime of poverty with hard labor in Europe and at sea. Others, to work off their debts or prison sentences, were shipped to America as indentured servants to tobacco plantations such as those operated by the Virginia Company. Their indenture was not usually permanent but was often extended by years by conniving masters. Poor English women were sold as *wives*, another form of unfree labor in the colonies. Mass impoverishment and political upheaval caused by the process of primitive accumulation in Europe shaped the early years of the colonies.

At first, English and African bonded laborers worked side by side under similar arrangements of indenture, and their resentments against the colonial elites regularly bubbled up. One watershed uprising in the Virginia colony was what became known as Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. Nathaniel Bacon, a European landowner, became frustrated that the authorities would not provide more men and resources for his Indian raids. Bacon rallied English and African servants and laborers who were ripe for rebellion. Together, they burned the colony's capital, Jamestown. The uprising caused such a panic among the rulers that King Charles II of England sent a thousand soldiers to the colony to restore order. The uprising was put down and many of the conspirators were hanged.

Lessons from Bacon's Rebellion are neither to be romanticized because of the momentary cross-racial unity exhibited, nor discarded because of its violent anti-*Native* character. What the ruling class learned from these events is paramount. The danger they saw was the ability of the poor to overwhelm the power structure when they with their large numbers were united against the ruling minority. When the ashes settled in Jamestown, beleaguered Virginia Governor William Berkeley put it simply: "How miserable that man is that Governs a People when six parts of Seaven at least are Poor Endebted Discontented and Armed" (Zinn, 2010[1980], p. 40).

Elites exploited differences of ethnicity and origin to further the Indigenous genocide necessary for expanding the plantation system. Because cash crops such as tobacco—and later cotton—quickly depleted the soils, there was a powerful incentive to continuously clear new land and thus to displace the *Native* people. Landowners and local authorities used propertyless European immigrants on the frontier as settlers, soldiers, and mercenaries, enticing them by paying for scalps and promising cheap farmland.

The American Rebellion Over the Right to Profit From Indian Land

The American Revolution has been told as a story of freedom seekers throwing off the yoke of English tyranny, the end of foreign rule and the birth of democracy. Yet recent scholars, especially Thomas Curtis (2014), have revealed the colonists' uprising as a fight over who would have the right to control, divide up and sell Indigenous land.

The stability of the American colonies had been maintained to a large degree by the British Crown's support among large landowners in the colonies. The monarchs themselves did not invest directly in colonial production, but rather granted royal charters for ownership and exploitation of territory to individuals or joint-stock companies dealing in land, thus securing the allegiance of local elites. Landowners and speculators enjoyed great freedom in appropriating Indigenous land, dividing it into tracts and selling it.

Britain's terms of victory in the French and Indian War included the acquisition of French claims on territory west of the Appalachian Mountains, and settlers took that as an invitation to move in. When Indigenous forces fought back, such as in Pontiac's Rebellion, Britain responded with the Proclamation Line of 1763 to prohibit the settlement of the Ohio River Valley and preempt further Indigenous attacks on the frontier. Though the British decree could not stop individual settlers from crossing the Appalachians and settling in Ohio territory, it represented a major obstacle for wealthy Virginia land speculators like George Washington. Washington and his ilk could not secure official titles for the millions of acres of land they had claimed initially in the 1740s.

This abrupt change in Britain's land policy was the beginning of its transition from mercantilist to imperialist power (Curtis, 2014), and it required a response from the colonial elites. Landowning planters and merchant land speculators were the rising bourgeoisie in the

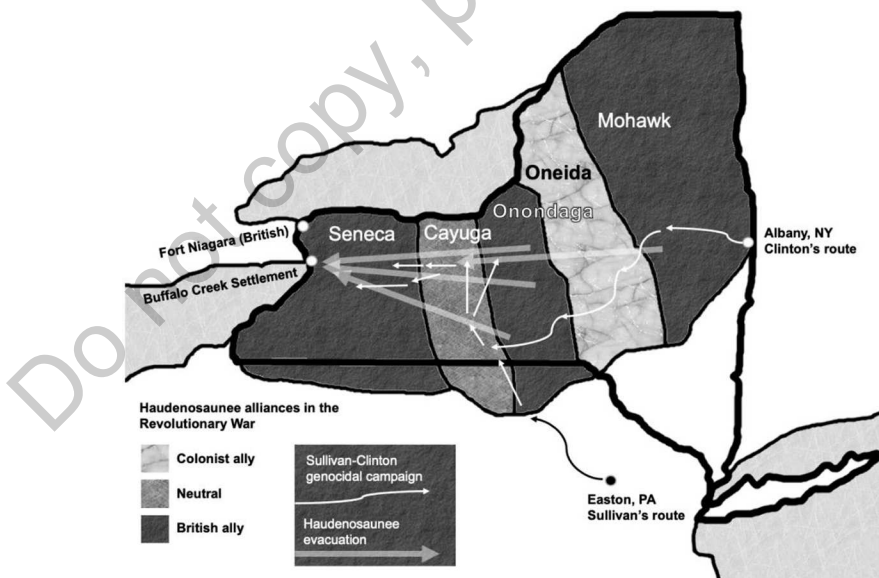
colonies. They stood to lose the most from Britain's restrictions on settlement and gain most from independence. More than the tea tax or a desire for democracy, it was the land question that allowed the likes of Washington and Jefferson to unify backwoods squatters and farmers, fur interests and frontiersmen against the Crown (Curtis, 2014). When independence was won, the way was opened for landowners and speculators to resume making fortunes by stealing and selling Indigenous land, now using the army and other state institutions to assist them.

The Sullivan-Clinton Campaign of Village Burning

As the Revolutionary War raged in the Northeast, the colonist army embarked on the **Sullivan-Clinton Campaign**, a scorched-earth genocidal campaign against the Haudenosaunee Confederacy³ in what are today the states of New York and Pennsylvania (see Figure 2.2). Washington, who had earned the nickname of “Town Destroyer” from the Senecas already in the 1750s, gave orders for this military operation.

John Sullivan and James Clinton set off in the summer of 1779 with 4,000 soldiers to destroy the Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas who had allied themselves with the British, as well as the Cayugas, who had maintained neutrality. Sullivan (1887) wrote that he aimed to carry out “the destruction and total ruin of the Indian territories by this truly noble resolution of the army” (p. 297). Though some battles and skirmishes took place, most Haudenosaunee people fled westward ahead of the invasion. During a five-month rampage, American troops burned 40 villages and hamlets, as well as fields of vegetables, fruit orchards, and 160,000 bushels of corn (Graymount, 1972). Sullivan (1887) later reported to Congress:

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Sullivan-Clinton Campaign and Haudenosaunee Evacuation, 1779



Source: Spielgelman, 2023.

³The Haudenosaunee, the people of the longhouse, are a Confederation of Six Nations: the Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Tuscarora. They are also referred to as the Iroquois, the name given them by the French.

I flatter myself that the orders with which I was entrusted are fully executed, as we have not left a single settlement or field of corn in the country of the Five Nations, nor is there even the appearance of an Indian on this side of Niagara. (p. 305)

Since that time, the Haudenosaunee have referred to all U.S. presidents as town destroyers. The style of total war carried out in the Sullivan–Clinton Campaign became the model for war against all other Indigenous nations in the new United States of America. In addition, military strategist John Grenier (2005) argues that this sort of war should be considered as a core part of the U.S. military tradition and not left out of current military strategy, as abhorrent as the practices may seem to modern professional soldiers.

Like Washington, many of the new U.S. ruling elites were land speculators who stood to increase their fortunes through the sale of Indigenous territories to European-American settlers. Once these colonial elites expelled the British and established their own state, logic followed that they would use the resources of that state—the army and later, the courts—to intensify the project of Indigenous annihilation that they estimated was required to further their wealth and power. In addition, in its early decades the U.S. state relied primarily on revenues generated through the sale of confiscated land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). This evidence suggests that attempts at Indigenous extermination were not incidental but rather central to the U.S. project from its founding.

The Marshall Court Cases Void Indigenous Sovereignty and Rights

The new U.S. owning class required a legal framework that would codify and formalize federal domination and control over the land and resources of Indigenous nations as military operations continued. Chief Justice John Marshall was a primary author of the Supreme Court decisions known as the **Marshall Trilogy** (see Figure 2.3).

FIGURE 2.3 ■ **Owning-Class Strategy: Marshall Court Cases Seek to Void Indigenous Sovereignty**

Johnson v. McIntosh (1823)

Ownership of land derives from its “discovery,” not occupation or use.

Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831)

“Indian tribes” are defined as “domestic dependent nations” subject to the jurisdiction and guardianship of the U.S. government.

Worcester v. Georgia (1832)

Federal not state laws govern Indian tribes as proprietor of land inside its borders.

Cases draw precedent from the *Doctrine of Discovery (1452, 1493)*, papal documents declaring all lands in the Americas eligible for claim by the European Christian Crown that “discovers” them.

Source: Based on data from Spielgelman, Robert. “Sullivan–Clinton Campaign.” Website, 2023. <https://www.sullivanclinton.com/mapset/>. Accessed: January 10, 2023., 2023.

In a land dispute, *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823), Marshall ruled against Johnson, who had bought land from the Piankeshaw nation, arguing that ownership of land derives from the discovery of that land, not from its occupation or use. As precedent, he cited the **Doctrine of Discovery**, a series of documents by popes of the 1400s declaring that all lands in the Americas could be claimed by the European Christian Crown that “discovered” them, no matter the Indigenous people already living there. This decision subordinated Indigenous nations to the power of U.S. law. Lenape scholar Joanne Barker (2005) argues that Marshall’s ruling provided “the legal precedence . . . needed to justify its colonization of North America and the Pacific” (p. 6).

In 1831, Marshall ruled in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* that the state laws and land seizure imposed on the Cherokee were valid. Marshall defined Indigenous nations not as foreign powers to be related to through treaties and international law, but as “Indian tribes” that were “domestic dependent nations” and therefore subject to the jurisdiction and guardianship of the U.S. government (Barker, 2005, pp. 10–11). Finally, in 1832, Marshall ruled in *Worcester v. Georgia* that state laws were invalid in dealing with Indian tribes, that this responsibility belonged rather to the federal government as proprietor of land inside its borders. The Marshall Trilogy, according to Barker, “reinvented a sovereignty for Indigenous peoples that was void of any of the associated rights to self-government, territorial integrity, and cultural autonomy that would have been affiliated with it in international law at the time” (Barker, 2005, p. 14). Meanwhile, the “hard power” of the army and irregular militias continued to make incursions into already reduced Indigenous territories in the Southeast and Midwest.

INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND SELF-DEFENSE AFTER U.S. INDEPENDENCE

When the settler-colonist landowning class expelled the British from North America and asserted its independence in the early 1780s, dynamics of war, land control, and international diplomacy changed quickly in Indian territory. Native nations, accustomed to generations-old agreements and complicated and shifting alliances with European powers, would now have to deal exclusively with a new government committed explicitly to conquest. They would have to recalibrate their resistance to an aggressive expansionist foe. Tuscarora scholar Alyssa Mt. Pleasant (2014) characterizes the multiple forms of Indigenous resistance and defense of territories and sovereignty in the years and decades following the founding of the United States:

Indian people . . . pursued a variety of strategies that included large-scale confrontations with US forces, raiding and retaliation in backcountry settlements, diplomatic negotiations, individual and small group actions, mobilization of [I]ndigenous political philosophies in support of coordinated actions, as well as spiritually motivated or defined resistance movements. (p. 117)

In this section, we highlight three case studies in which Indigenous groupings reached beyond the traditional boundaries of tribe or nation seeking strategic unity for common defense against U.S. expansionist policy and practice. These are: Haudenosaunee resilience and resistance at the multinational Buffalo Creek settlement, Shawnee leadership

in a pan-Indian military and diplomatic alliance in Ohio Country, and the Black-Native alliances in the Seminole Wars in Florida.

Haudenosaunee Resilience and Resistance at Buffalo Creek

As the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign systematically destroyed villages in 1779, displaced Haudenosaunee and non-Haudenosaunee people walked west to Lake Erie. During the next very harsh winter, many relied on hunting and camped near the British-controlled Fort Niagara in hopes of receiving provisions. British troops stationed there suffered along with them (Mt. Pleasant, 2007). After the spring thaw, they rebuilt homes and communities and resumed farming and fishing.

In the 1950s, '60s and '70s, scholars frequently described the *decline* of the Iroquois as a result of the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign. According to these accounts, the Iroquois, “dispirited by the scorched earth policy,” abandoned farming, relied on British rations at Fort Niagara and lived as refugees in “slums in the wilderness” (Fenton, 1956, p. 573; Wallace and Steen, 1970, p. 111, 184; Mt. Pleasant, 2007). Yet while it is critical to acknowledge how devastating the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign was, emphasizing Haudenosaunee social and economic degeneration and dependency obscures Indigenous survival, intelligence, and strategic action.

Mt. Pleasant (2007) describes the building of a “Haudenosaunee place” at Buffalo Creek, south of current-day Buffalo, New York, challenging narratives of Haudenosaunee decline. Buffalo Creek was a safe place with new resources where the Haudenosaunee recovered, adapted, and sustained their communities in a new multinational configuration for more than six decades. Mt. Pleasant disputes prior conclusions of Haudenosaunee dependency on the British at Fort Niagara. Pointing to evidence of corn surpluses, she explains that it is a misunderstanding to say that maize cultivation declined. Rather, subsistence practices of hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming have always been seasonal (Cronon, 2003[1983]).

As spring came, Native Americans began to move away from Fort Niagara and build homes along Buffalo Creek. Although there are accounts that they received corn from the British fort, some may have stored their own grain at the fort so as to ensure that they would not lose their means of survival given the threats they faced (Mt. Pleasant, 2007). Native women cultivated the Three Sisters, corn, beans, and squash, which complemented each other ecologically as plants and nutritionally provided a complementary protein (Mt. Pleasant, 1989). In 1795, a French traveler observed fertile soils, abundant corn, potatoes, fish, game, and dairy (Mt. Pleasant, 2007).

The population at Buffalo Creek was multinational. A census by the British in 1781 documented Cayugas, Delawares, Mahicans, Nanticokes, Oneidas, Onondagas, Shawnees, Tuscaroras, and Tutelos living there, as well as Senecas whose territory it was originally (Mt. Pleasant, 2007).

Far from being passive and assimilating, residents at Buffalo Creek discussed and debated ways to maintain Haudenosaunee culture. Buffalo Creek became a center for diplomacy where U.S. and New York State officials as well as other Indigenous leaders came to engage with Haudenosaunee leaders. As the village grew and violence increased, the Haudenosaunee negotiated with and challenged New York State and U.S. attempts to limit their sovereign decisions about crimes and transgressions.

Internally, the Haudenosaunee debated the place of Christianity at Buffalo Creek. When the New York Missionary Society proposed to build a school and church, after long deliberations, Seneca orator Red Jacket explained that the community would “gradually comply.” This response indicated a compromise after considering concerns about deception and threats to their beliefs, and the hope that formal education and literacy would help them interpret important documents such as leases and treaties (Mt. Pleasant, p. 141).

Outside pressures on the community continued to mount. Indigenous removal became a frequent prescription of the rising class of transportation advocates, canal interests, land speculators, and politicians in New York State and in the country as a whole. During the War of 1812, Euro-American leaders of New York State called for the Haudenosaunee to “sacrifice” their lands in order to defend the country from Britain and develop modern transportation routes (Hauptman, 1999). New York State Governor DeWitt Clinton stated to the New York Historical Society in 1811 that the “minister of destruction is hovering over them [the Iroquois], and before the passing away of the present generation, not a single Iroquois will be seen in this state [New York]” (Hauptman, 1999, p. 18). Former congressman David A. Ogden, land attorney and founder of the Ogden Land Company, advocated for concentrating Indigenous populations or removing them. He was specifically concerned about Buffalo where, according to him, 2,000 Indians at Buffalo Creek prevented this important place from growing.

Buffalo Creek represents Haudenosaunee survival and collective resistance, even in the face of genocide. It was a place where practices of agriculture, sovereignty, justice, and religion were sustained. The settlement flourished decades after the point when most other Indigenous groups east of the Mississippi River had been violently displaced from their lands. Finally, in the mid-1840s, residents accepted payments for improvements to the land, based on disputed treaties of 1838 and 1842, and moved to reservations in the United States and Canada (Mt. Pleasant, 2007). Some descendants of those displaced have made their way back to these territories.

Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa’s Pan-Indigenous Alliance

At the turn of the 19th century, the Indigenous lands of the Northwest Territory—the current U.S. Midwest—were under assault. Encroachment by squatter-settlers had increased after the Revolutionary War, when Britain’s Proclamation Line of 1763 was no longer in force. The Army and irregular forces followed closely on their heels, implementing the scorched-earth methods of war learned from the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign. The dubiously negotiated 1795 Treaty of Greenville ceded much of present-day Ohio to the United States. Yet many Indigenous leaders who were not present at Greenville denounced it as illegitimate and unrepresentative of the wishes of the diversity of nations involved.

Euro-American squatters and raiding parties increasingly threatened remaining Native territory in Ohio Country. U.S. and Indigenous diplomatic delegations made attempts at agreements, even traveling as far as Haudenosaunee territory in the east to enlist help in negotiations, as both sides understood the significance of the lands in question. Yet squatters’ continuing incursions and violence made it necessary for the Indigenous leadership to prepare broad alliances in case of larger-scale war.

Around 1806, Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, emerged as the leader of a significant multinational Indigenous resistance that would come to involve nearly 30 nations

(Calloway, 2007). Soon after, Tenskwatawa's brother Tecumseh began to appear in the historical record. Tecumseh has been characterized as the warrior and political strategist and Tenskwatawa as the spiritual leader. However, this division of labor seems to have been imposed by history, as political, religious, and mystical elements of discourse and action were wielded expertly by both brothers (Dowd, 1992).

Their program was radical and took direct aim at the interests of the powerful: they called for an end to sale or cession of all Indigenous lands to Whites. The brothers traveled extensively, denouncing assimilationist customs, the consumption of alcohol, polygamy, and the accumulation of capital (Edmunds, 1984; Buff, 1995). Indigenous audiences would have understood their calls for a return to traditional ways and religion as having clear political implications. Further, the brothers' agitation was an invitation to align with an understanding of the intractable conflict between "White people" and "red people," as Tenskwatawa described the distinction to Indiana's territorial governor William Henry Harrison (Klinck, 1961, p. 51). The brothers drew on the resistance tradition of Pontiac's Rebellion of 1763, when diverse Indigenous nations came together to attack British forts and squatter settlements after the less intrusive French relinquished their claims to Ohio Country. They also built on the legacy of a 1786 multinational council called the United Indian Nations, which pledged to defend the lands bequeathed to them by their ancestors (Mt. Pleasant, 2014). Armed with a knowledge of history and deeply rooted in spiritual practice, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa worked to develop a pan-Indigenous unity in the face of a common enemy.

Tenskwatawa established Prophet's Town in Miami territory, in present-day Indiana, in 1808 as a multinational political and spiritual hub for resisting colonial domination. There, at the joining of the Wabash and Tippecanoe Rivers, members of nations from the Northeast, West, Great Lakes, and the South gathered to share information, deepen relationships and alliances, and take part in religious ceremonies. Rachel Buff (2005) notes that in addition to the Shawnee, representatives of the Potawatomi, Miami, Wyandot, Sauk and Fox, Winnebago, Mingo, Delaware, Creek, Osage, Kickapoo, Haudenosaunee, Iowa, Dakota, Choctaw, Seminole, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Ottawa, and Ojibwa nations spent time at Prophet's Town building and were part of honing a common strategy.

Indian unity to defend land and culture was put forward as the only viable counter strategy to the U.S. government's imperialist project with its divide-and-conquer tactic. Harrison received intelligence reports as early as 1807 that the Shawnees had initiated calls for a far-reaching Indigenous military alliance stretching from Florida to the Great Lakes (Dowd, 1992). Indeed, Tecumseh and his Shawnee warrior-diplomats traveled far and wide, seeking support for the pan-Indigenous resistance. Harrison identified Indian unity as his greatest obstacle and made its intellectual and spiritual leadership his primary target.

While Tecumseh was away in the South in the fall of 1811, a thousand soldiers under Harrison's command advanced on Prophet's Town. Harrison reasoned that he could destroy the powerful confederacy by striking its head. Tenskwatawa tried to preempt an American attack by leading his own predawn assault despite his brother's warnings to stay out of a fight until the alliance was fully prepared. The Native Americans were overpowered, and U.S. troops burned Prophet's Town, destroyed food stores, and even dug up graves and mutilated corpses (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). The fictionalized retelling of the

Battle of Tippecanoe made Harrison a hero, and his reputation as an Indian killer propelled him to the presidency in 1840.

Recent scholars have corrected the narrative that the battle was the decisive blow to Indigenous resistance in the region. Native fighters regrouped and rebuilt Prophet's Town, and Tenskwatawa continued his political and spiritual leadership. Tecumseh was an effective and savvy general fighting alongside the British in the War of 1812 until falling in battle in 1813. Yet the confederacy died with Tecumseh, and by the mid-1820s, most Shawnees were removed west to Kansas and Oklahoma.

The stories of Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa have been retold over the last two centuries with a broad range of aims. Our aim must be neither to romanticize their struggles, nor to narrate the defeat of their initiative as part of a justification for the disappearance of Indigenous peoples. Rather, we highlight elements of the two Shawnee brothers' leadership: clarity of vision, the capacity to unite diverse nations with long histories of conflict against a common enemy, and an ability to lead grounded in a deep connectedness to their people and their histories and spiritualities. In addition, lessons from this episode of history include the need to take ruling-class strategy and tactics seriously. Harrison, as a representative of Euro-American land speculators and squatters, correctly identified Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa's pan-Indigenous unity program as the significant impediment to land appropriation and profit making, and he moved to neutralize them.

Seminole Black and Native Alliances in the Southeast

In the Southeast, alliances of Black people seeking freedom from slavery and Native Americans attempting to hold onto their territory resisted imperial expansion. Indigenous peoples who lived in towns throughout what is today Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida faced Spanish, British, and later U.S. genocidal policies. In what would become Florida, Black people and Native Americans, both dispossessed, developed significant connections and alliances.

Starting in the late 1600s, Black people gained their freedom by crossing from slavery in the Carolinas or Georgia into the Spanish colony of what is today Florida (Mulroy, 1993). Self-emancipated Blacks, sometimes called maroons, created independent communities. In the Spanish colony, Blacks who took up arms against the British could leave plantation life, own property, travel, and choose their own leaders. Logically, Native Americans and Blacks formed alliances for trade and defense. Sometimes Native Americans took captives or enslaved Black people. By the early 19th century, Seminole Indians and Seminole Blacks were culturally intertwined and shared a refuge in the swampy territory of the Everglades. The emergence of the Seminole Nation as an "unconquered people" exemplifies "ethnogenesis [or the creation of a culture] as resistance" to imperial expansion (Weisman, 2014, p. 392). The United States waged war against the Seminole Nation in three main episodes from 1817 to 1858.

Andrew Jackson was one of the men charged with putting down Seminole resistance because of his recognized leadership in colonization and genocide in the South. Orphaned by thirteen, he studied law and began to speculate on and acquire Chickasaw land in present-day Tennessee, including a plantation and 150 enslaved Black workers. He was elected U.S. Senator from Tennessee, then became a state Supreme Court judge, and then a commander in the militia (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

Jackson rose in the military ranks by leading the war to annihilate the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in 1813 and 1814.

Jackson ordered one of the deadliest massacres in American history at Negro Fort in Spanish Florida on July 27, 1816. Jackson had deliberately built support for an invasion of West Florida, justifying the need to eliminate Native Americans and re-enslave Blacks. He alleged that these fugitives had established the fort for “rapine and plunder,” and “carrying on a cruel and unprovoked war against the citizens of the United States” (Allman, 2013, pp. 85, 89). In fact, the Black, Choctaw, and mixed-race residents of the Apalachicola River valley were more interested in farming in self-governing communities near the abandoned British fort. Upon hearing of the U.S. army and navy’s advances, some 300 people, the majority women and children, crowded into the fort seeking safety. Most were unarmed and even so were murdered indiscriminately. Commanding officer Colonel Duncan Clinch admitted that he had paid “friendly Indians” to aid his men in the gruesome murders of the noncombatants (Allman, 2013, p. 86). The massacre at Negro Fort expressed the complexity of race relations in that period. In addition, it foreshadowed the attempted genocide of the Black, Indian, and mixed-race Seminoles over the next half century. Though the official U.S. narrative was that Seminoles were *belligerent*, the real threat was that there could be Blacks and Native Americans existing and thriving outside of the fatherly protection of Whites and the slave economy.

The first Seminole War was a U.S. invasion of Spanish Florida. In 1817, President James Monroe ordered Jackson and his men to enter the territory to recover human *property*, or self-liberated Black people. In response, the Seminoles moved further South and established dozens of mixed-race farming and fishing communities. The U.S. annexed Florida in 1819 at the behest of Southern slaveowners who wanted access to new lands for plantations and a more direct way to recover fugitives. Jackson was appointed territorial governor of the Florida territory in 1821 to carry out Native removal.

By 1828, Jackson had parlayed his reported successes as an Indian killer into a successful presidential run. His campaign centered on the forced removal of all Native Americans east of the Mississippi and the destruction of their towns. Once in the White House, Jackson made public his intent to forcibly remove the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muskogee, and Seminole nations. After Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the U.S. government could expel Native Americans from their lands in exchange for land in what then was called “Indian Territory” or Oklahoma. Seventy thousand people were forced off their lands on the months-long Trail of Tears (Allman, 2013), and thousands died of disease and mistreatment.

To attempt to hold onto their territory, the Seminoles employed a strategy that included alignment with self-liberated Black people, complex systems of reconnaissance, guerrilla warfare, ambush, and the leadership of Seminole women. The second Seminole War began in 1835 when 180 Seminoles ambushed two companies of 110 U.S. soldiers, killing all but three. The Seminoles faced army detachments and militias whose objective was not just to defeat warriors, but to forcibly remove their entire society. Although they had a numerical disadvantage, the Seminoles used local and ecological knowledge to their advantage. Their style of guerrilla warfare was called “unchivalrous” by an ineffective U.S. commander (Allman, 2013, p. 157). Even so, after being routed by elusive forces, army officers consistently claimed glorious victories that were written up in newspapers and submitted in reports to Congress.

Seminole women were involved in many aspects of the resistance. They used their bodies and voices against the army's incursions. They engineered escapes, fed and clothed warriors, gathered ammunition, shared information, spread misinformation, lured enemies into attacks, and advised and provided diplomatic expertise (Meberg, 2022). Despite this, the U.S. army systematically misrepresented Seminole women as noncombatants, allowing them to maintain the narrative that the army was dedicated to protecting women, but also possibly reducing the campaign's effectiveness.

By 1836, General Thomas Sidney Jesup was assigned to command. Frustrated by attempts to pursue Seminole leaders through the territory, Jesup changed tactics to attempt to capture and destroy Seminole farms, homes, and supplies to starve them out. Jesup also used a false truce flag to lure Seminole leaders Osceola and Micanopy into capture.

No longer president, Jackson criticized the campaign, revealing his belief that military success required specifically targeting Seminole women. Making a racist comparison of Seminoles to animals, he wrote, "without knowing where the Indian women were, was like a combined operation to encompass a wolf in the hammocks without knowing first where her den and whelps were" (Bassett, 1931; Meberg, 2022, p. 145). This war lasted until 1842, making it the longest, most expensive and among the deadliest of the wars on Native Americans (Meberg, 2022) and America's first significant war of counterinsurgency (Allman, 2013). And yet, even in 1842, about 400 Seminoles remained in the uncharted swamps of Florida.

The third Seminole war encompassed conflicts between 1855 and 1858. By 1858, most of the remaining Seminoles surrendered and were removed to Indian Territory. Nevertheless, some 200 to 500 remained on tree islands in the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp and refused to leave. Their descendants today are federally recognized as the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians (Weisman, 2014).

SURVIVING THE WARS ON NATIVE AMERICANS

The United States was built on attempted genocide. In contrast with the dominant national narrative and pervasive myths, Euro-American superiority was not inevitable. Rather, experiences in the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest demonstrate that the project was promoted by an owning class of landowners and speculators who emerged as the political and military leadership; the dirty work was then carried out by poor White people. It is not surprising that many who joined the forces of killers were descended from Scots and Irish who themselves had experienced the brutal violence of British colonial dispossession.

In the first two centuries of European invasion and settlement of Turtle Island, conceptualizations of race and rights were very much in flux. Definitions of *whiteness* and *blackness* were codified in custom and law. A cross-class, all-White unity was encouraged in order to preserve and defend the institution of perpetual enslavement of Blacks for the primary benefit of rich Whites. Even though we address the interlocking processes of Indigenous genocide (Chapter 2) and enslavement of Africans (Chapter 3) in different chapters in this text, it is important to understand that they took place simultaneously and on much of the same terrain.

The ideology that justified North American genocide had its origins in the Doctrine of Discovery. European imperial powers and subsequently the American colonists made treaties with Indigenous nations. Political and military leaders at the state and federal levels systematically broke those treaties, and the Supreme Court set up a legal framework to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and diminish Native territory. By 1831, Native American nations were reduced to wards of the state, expected to be dependent on the federal government and eventually become *civilized*.

Everyday practices of settler colonialism that undid sovereignty and appropriated territory were carried out by the highest officials and by the lowliest of the poor. While history books describe the period from the late 1700s to the late 1800s as the Indian Wars, it is more accurate to acknowledge that the United States is built on ongoing **Wars on Native Americans**. Making war on Native Americans was a common ladder for political careers, including for three presidents. Jackson's career and presidency epitomizes this but is not unique. Jackson's policy of annihilation and removal of Native Americans on behalf of leading owning-class interests set the blueprint for U.S. foreign policy. Despite dissent, removal continues to undergird present-day policies, as evidenced by federal support for the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation and federal concessions for copper mining on sacred Apache land at Oak Flat. There are many other examples.

Leading imperialists consistently employed strategies of divide and conquer. State representatives would strive to convince a part of a nation to negotiate or sign away the nation's territories, then recognize those people as the official representatives of that nation. This tactic continues into the present. Conflicts among imperial powers resulted in divisions, too. Under pressure from the British and the Americans during the Revolutionary War, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy struggled to maintain unity according to the **Great Law of Peace**, *Gayaneshagowa*, that predated European arrival, on which the confederacy was founded (Mt. Pleasant, 2014). The Oneida and Tuscarora supported the Americans, but the scorched-earth Sullivan-Clinton Campaign and the 1784 Stanwix Treaty meant no victory for any of the Six Nations. In the period following U.S. independence, U.S. agent Benjamin Hawkins divided the Muskogee Nation into the Upper Creeks and Lower Creeks. Andrew Jackson then mobilized some of the Upper Creeks in a campaign of extermination to drive all the Muskogee out of their homeland. Internal division was a necessary precursor to removal, and cultural losses in that period were significant, including loss of Native languages, spiritual practices, and ancestral knowledge.

Before and after removal attempts, however, resistance to U.S. genocidal policy was constant; Native nations and peoples have continued to exist and thrive. The Haudenosaunee experience at Buffalo Creek exemplifies their centuries-long practice of diplomacy, and the creation of a multinational community also demonstrates resilience. In Ohio Country, Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa developed a model for a pan-Indian alliance that showed clarity of vision and would be drawn upon a century and a half later during the rise of the American Indian Movement. In the swamps of Florida, Seminoles and Blacks developed a fusion culture and identity based in resistance that helped them evade enslavement and removal for two centuries.

Indigenous cultural survival, adaptation, and in many cases, return to their ancestral territories, demonstrates the incompleteness of the genocidal settler colonial and imperial

project. Despite military victories, removal and termination have failed to extinguish Indigenous lives and cultures.

Though this chapter has focused on Native American resistance east of the Mississippi River, the wars on Native Americans continued in the West. The conquest of northern Mexico was underway in the 1830s and 1840s, affecting not only Spanish-speaking settlements but also the many Indigenous nations that lived in what are now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Private military forces like the Texas Rangers backed by the army destroyed Indigenous nations and engaged in genocide to make the region suitable for the slave economy.

When gold was discovered in northern California in 1848, prospectors “brought death, torture, rape, starvation and disease to the Indigenous peoples whose ancestral territories included the sought-after goldfields north and east of San Francisco” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 129). This invasion and settlement, backed up initially by officer John C. Frémont’s troops, was the cause of 100,000 Indigenous deaths in California in one generation. Frémont exemplified the contradictions of the period: he was a *free soiler* who denounced the violence of slavery yet made his military and political career killing Native Americans. In the Jacksonian tradition, the wealth and notoriety Frémont gained among White gold seekers in California for leading massacres propelled him to election as a Senator in 1850 and candidacy for President in 1856.

Just before the Civil War, most of the U.S. Army was in the Western territories driving Indigenous peoples off their land. During the war, with little federal oversight, army officers and settler volunteers carried out with impunity the Sand Creek Massacre of Arapahos and Cheyennes in Colorado, search-and-destroy raids and removal of the Navajos in the Southwest, and untold other attacks (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Also, during the war, President Lincoln ordered the largest mass execution in U.S. history when the Army hanged 38 Dakota people. After the Confederate surrender, the Army refocused on Indigenous extermination as settlers pushed west to take advantage of free land opened up to settlement by Lincoln’s Homestead Act. In addition to army raids and massacres, *buffalo soldiers*—many of them Black war veterans—were sent West to destroy the Great Plains nations’ means of survival by decimating the buffalo herds.

As everywhere, resistance in the West was consistent. The Apache fought military and settler encroachment in the Southwest from 1850–1886. Led by Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, the Sioux and Cheyenne defeated notorious Native American hunter George Armstrong Custer and his cavalry at Little Bighorn in 1876 in Montana. The U.S. Army would continue pursuing annihilation in the West, with the most horrific example being the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation on December 29, 1890. It was there that U.S. soldiers opened fire with machine guns on freezing, starving Lakota and Sioux men, women, and children who were trying to surrender, killing 300.

In the late 1800s, as wars on Native Americans became prohibitively expensive, the federal government began attempts at assimilation. Government and church authorities founded notorious boarding schools, in which Native children were stolen from their communities, had Christianity and Western values imposed upon them, and suffered persistent physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (see Photo 2.1).



PHOTO 2.1 Native American women in a debating class in 1901 at the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle Pennsylvania, a boarding school founded in 1879 under the authority of the United States government. The motto 'Labor conquers all things,' refers to the false assumption that Native people were lazy and would be reformed if they learned how to work like White Christians.

Source: Heritage Art/Heritage Images via Getty Images

At the same time, the U.S. imperial gaze turned toward the rest of the world. The armed forces mobilized for land and resources abroad, intervening in Cuba (1898), invading the Philippines (1899), and pressuring for favorable agreements in Panama (1902).

The continued existence of 3 million Indigenous people from nearly 600 federally recognized nations, many of which have current outstanding claims to their ancestral homelands, suggests that the colonialist-settler project has been only a partial success. The incompleteness of the colonial project does not reduce its centrality for the United States. Challenging the falsehoods that the United States is built on—the Thanksgiving myth, the myth of the disappearing Indian—requires unearthing truths in the country's history. It is a serious, collective responsibility to reckon with the country's history of genocide and to end colonialism.

Individuals can begin this process, says Comanche author Paul Chaat Smith (2009), "by looking for the Indian history beneath your own feet" (p. 12), as well as "deal[ing] with us just as plain folks living in the present and not the past" (p. 18). The process requires education, consciousness, and healing.

For Native American and Indigenous people, healing from the legacy of boarding schools, systematic disruption of families, assimilation, and centuries of Wars on Native Americans may take time. Author Marcie Rendon (*White Earth Nation*) emphasizes the healing power of art and self-expression, such as singing, painting, writing, and performing, for Native people whose voices have been systematically silenced. Such healing may also include humor, such as that seen in the stand-up comedy of Charlie Hill and the work of the 1491s, a Native American sketch comedy group who explore Native and European-American traumas, history, tribal politics, stereotypes, and racism through satire. Healing

from past hurts may provide clarity, strength, and vision for challenging the ongoing project of settler colonialism.

For European-Americans, reckoning with genocide may require working for institutional change. The assumptions and realities of settler colonialism—the prescription that Native Americans should be killed, removed, and disappeared, and the history and realities of that genocide—pervade the institutional structure and culture of the United States. Reckoning with settler colonialism means reconfiguring the relationship of the United States with Indigenous nations. According to Indigenous peoples, a “life after empire” requires addressing crimes of colonialism and treating Indigenous nations as nations rather than treating people as individuals (Dunbar Ortiz, 2014). As Dunbar-Ortiz explains,

That process rightfully starts by honoring the treaties the United States made with Indigenous nations, by restoring all sacred sites, starting with the Black Hills and including most federally held parks and land and all stolen sacred items and body parts, and by payment of sufficient reparations for the reconstruction and expansion of Native nations. In the process, the continent will be radically reconfigured, physically and psychologically. (pp. 235–236)

In other words, reckoning with and ultimately addressing the history and reality of genocide includes individual actions as well as actions that are collective, material, and institutional. It requires significant territorial and economic changes, changes in structures, policies, and laws, as well as changes in cultural attitudes, behaviors, and relationships.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Sullivan, John. (1887) Major Gen. John Sullivan’s official report. In Cook, Frederick (Ed.), *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779 with Records of Centennial Celebrations* (pp. 296–305). Knapp, Peck & Thompson Printers.
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). “The Gift of Strawberries” and “Allegiance to Gratitude” in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.

KEY TERMS

Colonial bourgeoisie
Colonial settler state
Colonialism
Doctrine of Discovery
Genocide

Great Law of Peace or *Gayaneshagowa*
Marshall Trilogy
Sullivan-Clinton Campaign
Thanksgiving Address
Wars on Native Americans

Do not copy, post, or distribute