

The

ECOLOGICAL INDIAN

Myth and History

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ALSO BY SHEPARD KRECH III

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
New York • London

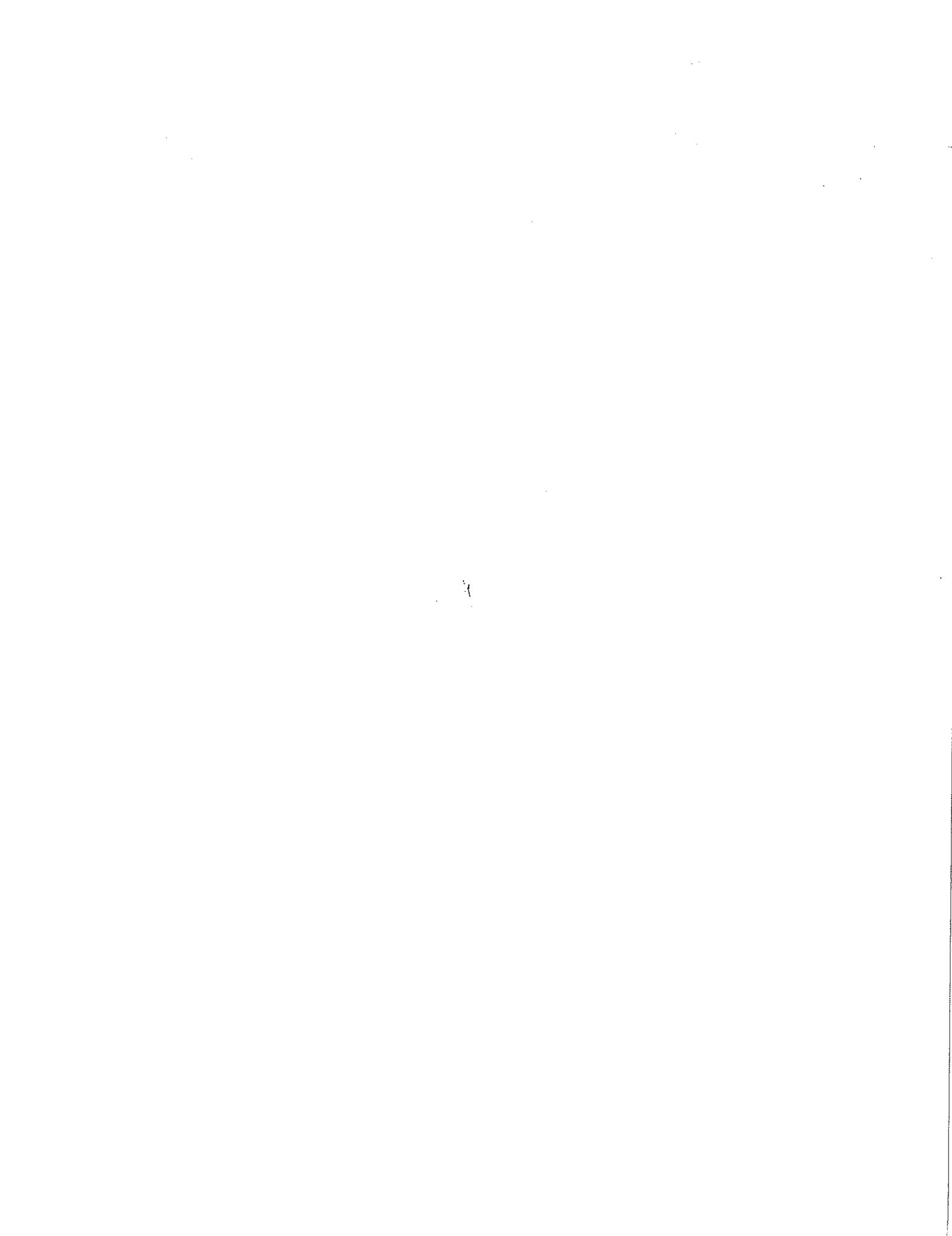


Epilogue

NATIVE NORTH AMERICANS were close to the environment in ways that seem foreign today to urban dwellers and nonindigenous Westerners. Their origin stories and histories tell about long-ago eras when significant boundaries between humans and animals were absent. Animal-human beings like raven, coyote, and rabbit created them and other things, and then tricked them. People modeled relationships with sentient other-than-human beings on human relationships, and toward many acted with respect (culturally defined) and in expectation of reciprocity; or expressed kinship or alliance with them in narratives, songs, poems, parables, performances, rituals, and material objects.

While native people formerly held widely to such ideas, and some believed that for the world as they knew it to continue, they were required to maintain balance with other living things, all aspects of their lives have changed greatly over the centuries. If they express traditional closeness to "nature" today—and many do—they are likely to emphasize a generalized reverence for sacred lands and sites where important historical events unfolded, a special "sense of place," and respect for other living beings.

American Indians were also close to the land in a physical sense, benefiting dependence on it. To guarantee sustenance, shelter, and security, they killed animals, cut trees, and cleared and farmed lands to support populations that grew with the domestication of crops. They deployed fire to render seeds palatable, make habitats attractive to animals on which they liked to dine, ready lands for domesticated seeds, or for ends related to communication or their enemies. To obtain desired products, they "managed" resources, whether seeds, nuts, rabbits, deer, buffalo, water, farmlands, or entire habitats like



ponderosa pine or chaparral, even though were populations were low relative to populations in Europe and elsewhere, and disease damped them further, their demands for wood, water, and other basic resources were evidently at times too great to sustain. Like preindustrial people on other continents, some of them deforested landscapes, and might have brought too many salts onto arable but arid lands or helped place animal populations on the brink of extinction. Not fully understanding the long-term systemic consequences of their actions, or unable or unwilling to take corrective action in time to forestall environmental degradation, people moved where resources were more promising, or disappeared.

One major purpose of this book is to determine the extent to which Indians were ecologists and conservationists (as is commonly understood today). Native people clearly possessed vast knowledge of their environment. They understood relationships among living things in the environment, and to this extent their knowledge was "ecological." But knowledge is cultural, and each group in its own way made the environment and its relationships cultural. Their ecologies were premised on theories of animal behavior and animal population dynamics unfamiliar to Western science, beginning, for some, with the belief in reincarnation. And their ecological systems embraced components like underground prairies, which were absent from the ecological systems of Western scientists. Their actions, while perfectly reasonable in light of their beliefs and larger goals, were not necessarily rational according to the premises of Western ecological conservation.

Prior to the twentieth century, the evidence for Western-style conservation in the absence of Western influence is mixed. On one hand, native people understood full well that certain actions would have certain results; for example, if they set fire to grasslands at certain times, they would produce excellent habitat for buffaloes one season or one year later. Acting on their knowledge, they knowingly promoted the perpetuation of plant and animal species favored in the diet. Inasmuch as they left available, through these actions, species of plants and animals, habitats, or ecosystems for others who came after them, Indians were "conservationists." *Managems more than Conservationists*, having "always done all things in a gentle manner."¹⁴ In *Native Wisdom*, Ed McGaa (Eagle Man), a Lakota, writes with feeling about

probably made little difference for the perpetuation of species (the Pleistocene extinctions being too distant and contingent on climate to implicate Indians alone) until Europeans, with their far greater numbers, commodified skins, pelts, and other animal and plant products. The Indians whose lives were examined here were motivated to obtain the necessary resources and desired goods in proper ways. Many believed that animals returned to be killed, sometimes in virtually infinite numbers, as long as hunters demonstrated proper respect. Waste and overkill (as defined by Western conservationists) were apparently largely foreign concepts based in Western science and practice. Indians embraced them as alternative ways of explaining the decline of deer, beaver, and other animals as a result of Western commodification. And by avoiding waste and overkill, they adopted alternative ways of righting depleted animal populations.

Evidently conservation was largely an artifact of Western ideology and practice for other native people also. The Yupiit of southwestern Alaska, for example, thought that the more meat they consumed and shared, the more they would have; that animals would regenerate infinitely as long as they received proper respect from men; and that animal populations declined from lack of respect not overhunting. Beliefs about human rebirth were widespread in North America; perhaps those of animal reincarnation were also.¹

What are the implications of this analysis for contemporary resource issues in Indian Country? Since 1970, Indians themselves have set expectations for their behavior consistent with, and helping to enforce, the image of the Ecological Indian thriving in public culture. Many write of Indians as ecologists and conservationists who have never wasted and have always led harmonious lives in balance with nature.² Important to their identity as Indians, the Ecological Indian finds reinforcement in popular books flooding the mass market, like *Earth Prayers*, in which indigenous people timelessly chant, pray, and sing for the earth.³ Writers and poets speak of an animistic natural world and—as Chief Dan George, widely known to the public through his movie and television roles, said—of "deep respect" for nature and of

have privileged access. Sun Bear, a White Earth Chippewa, speaks of spirits that work "to keep the Earth in harmony and balance" and of wisdom flowing from that state. Entire Indian tribes or nations may feel, as the Iroquois stated, that "our philosophy teaches us to treat the natural world with great care. Our institutions, practices, and technologies were developed with a careful eye to their potential for disturbing the delicate balance we live in."⁵ The image is resilient even in texts whose authenticity is in question—the paramount example being Chief Seattle's speech, a version of which has been a best-selling text for the environmental movement over the last 30 years. However, that version was written in 1970 by a freelance speechwriter for the American Baptist Convention and its anachronisms and pointed contrasts between Indian and white attitudes toward the environment were his words, not Seattle's.⁶

Yet throughout the five-hundred-year history of imagery of indigenous nobility is a rich tradition whereby the Noble Indian—including today's Ecological Indian—is a foil for critiques of European or American society. As Vine Deloria, Jr., the Lakota activist, remarked, white people "*destroyed planet earth*." Writing as heatedly many since 1970 have excoriated American society for all the environmental damage in Indian Country, and pointedly charged white people of environmental racism and "radioactive colonialism."⁷

At first glance, native people have in recent years acted in ways benefiting their image as respectful stewards of the earth and its resources—as Ecological Indians. In Minnesota, they have improved common tern nesting sites, counted breeding birds, restored wetlands, and developed programs to teach young people about caring for the land. In Nevada and Idaho, they have joined with conservation organizations or governmental agencies to bring back trout and wolves. In Rhode Island, they rejected a hazardous-waste incinerator as inappropriate for Indian enterprise. In California, native people purchased land that had been heavily logged and plan to remove logging roads, stabilize eroded stream banks, and establish a native-plant nursery. And in the West, Indians plead that buffaloes leaving the boundaries of Yellowstone not be killed (to prevent the spread of the disease brucellosis) but signed over to the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative.⁸

Another even more notorious case unfolded after Navajo and Hopi tribal councils agreed in the 1960s to allow Peabody Coal Company to strip-mine coal from their lands, with which utility companies generated approximately 2 percent of the nation's electricity—for American cities, not native people. Pollution cut sunlight by 15 percent downwind in Flagstaff, Arizona. At the source—the arid reservations—deeply scarred, stripped lands will take centuries to recover. Uranium mining simultaneously affected the Navajo with active tailings, one large spill, ground and animal contamination, and irradiated workers. For years these huge projects have roiled Navajo and Hopi politics, exacerbating splits between antidevelopment traditionalists (to whom environmentalist outsiders have been drawn) and prodevelopment progressives; they also led to demands for indigenous control over—if not a halt to—the extraction of resources.¹⁰

But what should be made of the differences of opinion among the Navajo? Of Hopi Indians who favor strip-mining, arguing that the most important part of their guiding philosophy and prophecy is to know "how to use the gifts of Mother Earth"? Of Miccosukee Indians, who proposed building sixty-five houses in Everglades National Park against the objections of the Park Service and environmentalists whispering that they are poor stewards of the land and therefore undeserving of special rights as Indians? Of the Alaskan Inupiat, who killed hundreds of caribou in the 1970s, used only part of the kill, left bloated

debated the legitimacy of tribal governments and the BIA, both of which decide natural resource policy. Many have accused the BIA of cutting deals on water, air, coal, uranium, and timber, favoring industry over tribes. Some have accused tribal leaders of making decisions of which many tribal members—in particular those who choose not to participate in tribal governments—are unaware and from which leaders often benefit. Others blame outside agitators of all stripes, including environmentalists, of unduly influencing tribal members. The scene does not yield readily to generalizations.

Native people have indeed often fought economic development when it is controlled by others and threatens their livelihood, and have taken firm stands for conservation. For example, since 1975, the Sokaogon Chippewa have fought Exxon's attempt to extract large copper-zinc deposits in northern Wisconsin. The Sokaogon fear that sulfuric acid, acid rain, wastes, and tailings will destroy the lakes they depend on for fish and wild rice, resources at the core of their identity as well as important for their subsistence. They reason that once Exxon gets a toehold, other companies will seek to mine uranium deposits. Despite great pressure from industry and the state, the Sokaogon, backed by environmentalists and sport fishermen, refuse to grant Exxon the right to mine. Local opposition to Exxon is growing but the company has powerful allies in the governor's office; this issue is far from settled.¹³

For the sake of a simple narrative, critics who excoriate the larger society as they absolve Indians of all blame sacrifice evidence that in recent years, Indian people have had a mixed relationship to the environment. They victimize Indians when they strip them of all agency in their lives except when their actions fit the image of the Ecological Indian. Frozen in this image, native people should take only what they need and use all that they take, and if they must participate in larger markets, far better it be to profit from hydroponic vegetables, fish, or other "traditional" products than from oil, coal, trash, and like commodities. As one journalist remarked, "native people are supposed to be keepers of the earth, not protectors of its poisons."¹⁴

The connections between Indians and nature have been so tightly drawn over five hundred years, and especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century, that many non-Indians expect indigenous people to walk softly in their moccasins as conservationists and even (in Muir's sense) preservationists. When they have not, they have at times eagerly been condemned, accused of not acting as Indians should, and held to standards that they and their accusers have seldom met.

Resource use issues in Indian Country have historically been complicated by the tribal status of Indians and by their relationship with the federal government, especially the Bureau of Indian Affairs

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Today's alliance between the Sokaogon and sport fishermen is astounding, because in ugly scenes just a few years ago, sport fishermen violently confronted the Wisconsin Chippewa, who were asserting treaty rights to spear spawning walleyes and muskellunge. As "Save a Walleye, Spear an Indian" bumper stickers proliferated, sport fishermen branded Chippewas abortionists because they speared females swollen with eggs. Ultimately, however, the Chippewa prevailed. As the number of fish speared increased tenfold, Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources predicted that sport bag limits would be introduced, but the Chippewa took only part of their allowable harvest (and a small fraction of the total harvest), and placed eggs from speared females in hatcheries. They themselves were also

accused others of being overly greedy—but on balance have been interested in maintaining a healthy population of fish.¹⁴

In the 1990s many American Indians have taken action usually associated with environmentalists—protesting timber cutting, for example, as the Navajo and others have done. The actions have often stemmed from the desire to protect animals and the land. For example, from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai of western Montana decided that they would rather protect the environment than grow as an industrial force. The tribe derived revenues from fifty-year-old dam and timber deals, as well as a new contract with Montana Power Company for a 180-megawatt power plant on reservation lands. But it resisted other projects that might threaten the environment after sewage, fertilizer algal blooms, and wood stove and automobile emission pollution became pressing contemporary problems. Instead the tribe began a concerted effort to protect grizzly bears and other wildlife, minimize air pollution, and ensure that undeveloped lands remained undeveloped. It also refused to allow the transportation of radioactive materials through the reservation. One tribal leader, who described himself as “a no-growth advocate,” clearly privileged an environmental ethic converging with that held by many non-Indian environmentalists. Other leaders have followed suit. “Progress,” one tribal environmental advocate said to tribal members interested in economic development, “is your death.”¹⁵

At times, native people have based their opposition to land and resource projects on religious grounds. When the BIA planned to place a high-voltage power line through New Mexico’s Jemez Mountains in the late 1980s, four Pueblo governments and the All Indian Pueblo Council objected on First Amendment grounds that it would intrude on sacred lands and infringe on their right to practice their religion. Environmental groups concerned about a loss of habitat for endangered species, including the bald eagle and peregrine falcon, joined them. Around the same time, the Blackfeet argued that the Forest Service’s plans to allow Chevron and Petrofina to drill exploratory wells in a 100,000-acre roadless area of Montana south of Glacier National Park amounted to a violation of First Amendment religious rights. Traditionalists argued that it would “cut out the

Indians, one of whose traditional leaders echoed John Muir when he said that “the forest is our temple,” joined with the Sierra Club and others to block construction of a logging road on lands of continuing importance to the exercise of their traditional religion.¹⁶

Yet native people have often favored the extraction of resources, storage of waste, and other development projects—even those with a serious potential environmental impact—if they can gain control over them. They have debated these issues heatedly. In the 1970s to 1980s, the arguments unfolded many times in the context of coal and energy development. For example, Crow Indians sought to gain control over the lease of their lands for strip-mining—not because they were opposed to stripping coal but because the leases negotiated for them by the BIA shortchanged them.¹⁷ The Northern Cheyenne sued to break BIA-negotiated leases. Like the Crow, they wanted to develop coal reserves themselves—but they were also interested in controlling the ravages of strip-mining and energy production on their lands.¹⁸ Their strong interest in halting environmental degradation put them on a collision course with the Crow. When the Northern Cheyenne tried to use recently established Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules on air quality to block coal gasification plants, Patrick Stands Over Bull, the Crow tribal chairman, asked the EPA to delay the ruling for fear it might imperil coal development on the Crow reservation. The Northern Cheyenne retorted that they preferred development in renewable resources like timber and agriculture, which represented “the cores of our value systems as people,” rather than extraction of nonrenewable resources like coal, which did not.¹⁹

Other Indians have behaved more like the Crow than the Northern Cheyenne, favoring development over alternatives. In 1980 the chief of the Osage Indians of Oklahoma tried to kill outright a bill to create a Tallgrass Prairie National Park on oil- and gas-producing Osage lands. Having endured several boom-and-bust cycles since the turn of the century, the Osage were not about to jeopardize the revenues from almost ten thousand pumping wells making them (at the dawn of the casino era) the wealthiest Indians in the United States.²⁰ Two years later, the Oklahoma Cherokee, fed up with BIA mismanage-

took oil and gas development into their own hands. They founded their own Energy Resource Company, attracted Japanese investors interested in tax breaks due Indian-owned enterprises, and sought lease bids themselves.²¹ Sometimes Indians have sought to reconcile development with greater environmental protection than had existed before. In the 1980s, the Passamaquoddy Indians of Maine (with land claims settled) purchased a cement plant that had been a money-losing polluter and in seven years both turned it into a profitiable enterprise and patented a pollution-control system lowering the acidic content of emissions.²²

In recent years the debate over resource issues has shifted from oil and gas development to dumps for the disposal of over three hundred billion pounds of garbage that Americans produce annually and other forms of trash and waste—including nuclear. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, waste companies have increasingly approached Indian tribes to store trash and toxic waste.²³

Some tribes responded positively. Several even took the initiative, offering their lands to waste-disposal companies for dumps. Seventy miles from San Diego, the Campo Band of Mission Indians invited San Diego County to use their small reservation for a dump for the next two decades. Their non-Indian neighbors were livid over potential groundwater pollution and urged the state authorities to intervene (states lack jurisdiction over reservations but traditionally attempt to ensnarl action in the courts and legislature at all levels). The Campo Indians argued that managing the dump could help solve high unemployment problems and that their solid waste codes would be stronger than California's. Indians have even been willing to store radioactive waste. Over the objections of all their neighbors and other Indians, for instance, the Tonkawa Indian tribe of Oklahoma expressed strong interest in storing radioactive waste on its reservation. The Yakima in Washington, Mescalero Apache in New Mexico, and Chickasaw and the Sac and Fox Nation in Oklahoma also expressed interest.²⁴

But voices opposed to landfills and nuclear waste have risen strongly. Aided by environmentalists, tribes have fought landfills and the transportation and storage of spent nuclear fuel and other wastes. In

from almost fifty tribes assembled in the Protecting Mother Earth Conference determined to fight the storage of all types of trash and what a Greenpeace organizer called the “dirty industry” of nuclear power. The Council of Energy Resources Tribes, an Indian consortium promoting energy development, thought that tribes could strike resource deals preserving tribal control and sovereignty and bringing needed income. But the Conference resolved to combat what it (and others) saw clearly as environmental racism and never to strike deals with polluters.²⁵

Landfill and waste storage issues have split Indian communities. Both the Mississippi Choctaw and the Rosebud Lakota of South Dakota argued heatedly over landfills favored by tribal councils but opposed by tribal members skeptical of the economic benefits and concerned about the environmental impact. In the Choctaw case, tribal opponents of a hazardous-waste dump persevered against all odds over their prodevelopment, highly successful, and powerful chief, Phillip Martin.²⁶

Many tribes have rebuffed nuclear waste. In the early 1990s, the Cherokee helped close a nuclear processing plant in Oklahoma, and the Yankton Sioux formally resolved to ban all waste storage on their reservation in South Dakota. The Yakima protested potential environmental contamination at the federal nuclear weapons plant at Hanford, Washington. In Minnesota, the Mdewakanton Sioux joined forces with environmentalists to combat Northern States Power's plan to store nuclear waste at a nuclear power plant it had constructed just off their Prairie Island reservation. A number of groups have threatened action against nuclear waste transportation and fought companies eyeing new uranium mines; in Idaho, the Shoshone-Bannock halted a truck carrying spent nuclear fuel attempting to cross their reservation lands.²⁷

The most visible case involving spent nuclear fuel has concerned the Mescalero Apache of New Mexico. In the early 1990s, the Mescalero expressed strong interest in storing nuclear waste from some thirty utility companies on their reservation for up to forty years. This tribe has had a strong prodevelopment record and successfully built a casino, ski and hotel resort, and artificial lake. The Mescalero saw nuclear storage as a way to solve continuing unemployment prob-

several votes have made clear. As in other tribes, opinion ranges from a prodevelopment tribal council to a silent minority emphasizing the importance and sacrality of tribal lands yet participating little in tribal affairs. Swayed by arguments about the sacred nature of their lands and by apocalyptic dreams of iridescent leaks, and upon the urging of environmentalists and New Mexico's governor, legislature, and senators and congressmen, tribal members voted in 1995 against nuclear waste storage. Within two months, following an intense lobbying effort reputedly by people who controlled access to reservation housing and jobs, and after contemplating as much as \$1 billion over 40 years, the voters reversed themselves. Some descendants of Geronimo and Cochise, the nineteenth-century warriors, were angry with environmentalists and other outsiders who accused them of selling out their tribe. One said, "These outsiders are ignorant. . . . How dare they tell us how to live and what is good for us?"²⁸

American Indians and environmentalists have opposed each other not just on waste, energy, and water but on hunting and trapping. Debates over whaling have embroiled conservation and native organizations struggling to find acceptable exceptions for indigenous people to international bans on hunting endangered whales. The Alaskan Inupiat, for example, traditionally hunted bowhead whales not merely for subsistence but to fulfill a range of spiritual and cultural desires; in many ways the bowhead was—and is, they argue—at the center of Inupiat identity and culture. In the late 1970s, the Inupiat put to sea with more boats than ever before, and struck and lost many endangered bowheads. The International Whaling Commission (IWC), swayed perhaps by the argument that the Inupiat, who participate in today's modern world with modern technology, are no different from other people, and hence deserve no special status, banned the hunt. Angered deeply, the Inupiat took court action and struck a deal wherein they were allowed to kill one and one-half dozen bowheads annually. In years since, local whaling captains and scientific and governmental entities have together determined the yearly limit, which has increased gradually.²⁹

When three gray whales were trapped in the ice of the Bering Strait in the fall of 1988, animal rights advocates for whom whales

beings were surprised to find that the Inupiat did not seem to share their concern. Greenpeace was involved almost from the start in the rescue effort, the whales were humanized with names (ironically, Inupiat ones). President Reagan called out the Alaska National Guard, and governments spent more than \$1 million freeing the two whales that made it, thanks to a Soviet icebreaker. Meanwhile, some Inupiat with gustatory thoughts wanted to kill the whales, except that gray whales were far less esteemed than bowheads as food—and under the circumstances, shooting them would not have been popular. Others wondered why the Guard was called out to free whales but not hunters lost on ice the year before (who died). Still others saw irony in, as one resident said, "making a big deal out of nature's way of feeding other animals."³⁰

In 1997, the IWC gave the Makah Indians of Washington's Olympic Peninsula permission to revive the hunt for gray whales for subsistence, spiritual, and cultural reasons. The tribe's head of natural resources argued that overfishing had depleted salmon stocks, the Makah had clear-cut their heavily forested lands, and El Niño had completed what was not already devastated. The Makah, he said, needed the whales. He also guaranteed that they would use harpoons that explode on impact, which was the most humane way of killing whales (but they have settled on a .50-caliber rifle that will kill quickly and safely). Makah elders complained that the hunt wasn't necessary and no one really knew how to conduct it since the last one had taken place more than seventy years ago—in 1926! It was clear that no one knew how to butcher a whale and that its meat would have to become an acquired taste. Greenpeace took no stand on this indigenous hunt. But Humane Society International threatened a lawsuit. And Paul Watson, head of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, complained that the Makah were clearly not dependent on whales for subsistence but thoroughly involved with marina, retail, and other modern operations; that they had no idea how to hunt; and that he would put the Society's ninety-five-foot boat between them and their prey or seek to keep whales beyond their range.³¹

The Pacific Northwest has been an environmental battleground on land as well as sea. This region boasts the last remaining significant

teen-million-acre Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska's panhandle. With its two-hundred-foot-tall spruce and hemlock and eagles, bears, salmon, and nesting marbled murrelets, this temperate rain forest, environmentalists agree, is one of the most important North American ecosystems to preserve in the face of relentless exploitation by timber and paper interests.

All Northwest Coast forests are gravely threatened. In British Columbia, native people have been steadfastly opposed to logging, especially where it threatens the traditional harvest and marketing of salmon, herring, and kelp. In Alaska, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) established native corporations to manage resources including forty-four million acres of land. Under its provisions, native people could swap development rights on their own lands for development rights elsewhere. They have pursued this strategy in southeast Alaska, where some Indians might not have wanted to cut timber in their backyards but were not at all averse to profiting from timber cutting on other lands. With the help of a three-year congressional legislation rewarding them for losing money, native corporations encouraged clear-cutting and environmental destruction.

Environmentalists have fought hard to preserve the Tongass National Forest over the last thirty years, and in the process have faced off against native corporations, which hold rights to over 500,000 acres of timber. Sealaska, the regional native corporation whose membership is predominantly Tlingit, has developed substantial investments not just in canneries, construction, and oil and gas but in timber, and with local native corporations has clear-cut forests to beach edges and stream banks. The resultant environmental damage angered some Sealaska shareholders who branded the corporation's annual per capita distributions "hush money." "Compared to the native corporations," one resident of southeast Alaska remarked, "the Forest Service are saints."

This was not an isolated incident. In the mid-1980s, Klukwan Inc., the village of Klukwan's corporation, logged twenty-three thousand acres and was reluctant to sign on to a pact to protect eagles if it jeopardized its claim on millions of acres in the Chilkat Valley. Native corporations in Sitka and Juneau wanting to log the west side of

these Tlingit saw nothing wrong in wanting to exchange their own timber rights close to home for logging rights somewhere else in southeastern Alaska. Driven by not-in-my-backyard sentiment, Alaska's native corporations were no different from many other communities. When Chugach Alaska Corporation clear-cut spruce and hemlock along Icy Bay in the northeastern Gulf of Alaska in the mid-1990s, it emulated not just other native corporations but the state, which had clear-cut lands west of the bay in the previous decades. Chugach also intended to leave nesting trees for eagles and buffer zones protecting rivers—to follow new laws, which, critics argue, are inadequate—but did not promise to go further. One official with the state's Department of Fish and Game commented ruefully that "people have a right to make money on" private lands, that "This is America."³²

Native people have thus often been at loggerheads with environmentalists, whose pursuit of preservation in the spirit of John Muir has pitted them on innumerable occasions against Indians whose everyday realities do not afford them the same luxuries. Like people in communities elsewhere, they are also at odds with each other. In some parts of the country they squabble over federal recognition because of the implications for casino revenues. In others they fight over environmental and resource-related issues.

For example, the Aleut of King Cove, Alaska, who have the misfortune of living in a town where the winds are so fierce that they close the airport two-thirds of the year and make travel to the open airport across Cold Bay perilous, have proposed building a road to connect them with secure services across the bay. The Audubon Society and twenty other national environmental groups (and Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior) oppose them, arguing that the road would cross a National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness area and do untold damage to sensitive nesting and migrating birds and other animals. Native Alaskans from over fifty villages in western Alaska are against the plan for monetary reasons; they claim that the King Cove Aleut just want to transport fish by truck and gain an economic advantage over them.³³

But perhaps the most famous case over the last decade has pitted the Inupiat against the Gwich'in, environmentalists, and the U.S.

in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), which is the second largest wildlife refuge in the nation, the calving and summer grazing ground for 180,000 caribou—and the site of possibly significant petroleum reserves. The Gwich'in, for whom caribou represent a significant source of protein and identity, and whose chiefs proclaimed in a gathering that the herd “is essential to meet the nutritional, cultural, and spiritual needs of our people,” are staunchly anti-oil. The residents of Arctic Village (the nearest Gwich'in town) have not been totally averse to development—in fact, they invited Exxon and other companies to prospect for oil and gas on their 1.7 million acres of land where caribou wintered—but they steadfastly remained against development in the Refuge where caribou calved. In 1991, they mounted an intensive advertising campaign with full-page ads in the *New York Times* and elsewhere asking, “Must we now die for six months of oil,” after enduring for thousands of years?

Allied with the Gwich'in were the Wilderness Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, Audubon Society, and other environmental and conservation organizations. But opposed to them were the Inupiat who live in the small coastal village of Kaktovik, are oriented to the sea, and are dependent on revenues from ANCSA and oil development. They argue that when the Gwich'in chose not to be part of ANCSA they gave up rights over territory outside their own. Proclaiming “thumbs up for development” and “oil is the future,” Inupiat say that they do not want to and cannot return to the past. Some are admittedly ambivalent and others outright opposed to further drilling—especially in the ocean where it might affect seals and bowhead whales—but most do not want to lose health, education, and other benefits from North Slope oil and feel that they should get something from what they sense is inevitable.

But in 1991, the U.S. Senate voted against an energy bill that would have opened the coastal plain to oil exploration. In 1995 Alaska's senators inserted a line item in the budget bill to open up the Refuge, but this and other attempts to open ANWR for drilling were vetoed, and the attention of the oil industry shifted to a parcel of land to the west, in the National Petroleum Reserve. This round has gone to the Gwich'in, the caribou, and their allies.³⁴

been of one mind on resource issues. They probably never have been. Some people are self-proclaimed traditionalists and others are progressives, some are antidevelopment and others are prodevelopment, some favor the old ways and others are eager for new jobs. Some wish to preserve the environment at all costs and to take actions premised on a religious relationship with an animated natural world, and on the landscape as a repository of sacredness and history. In contrast, others want to develop land and resources, which represent jobs, household income, and economic security; they have a more narrowly utilitarian relationship with resources as commodities. Few like the impact of strip-mining on landscapes, the contamination of groundwater, and air pollution, but many would like to be employed. For every story about Indians being at the receiving end of environmental racism or taking actions usually associated with conservation or environmentalism is a conflicting story about them exploiting resources or endangering lands—and inevitably disappointing non-Indian environmentalists and conservationists. In Indian Country as in the larger society, conservation is often sacrificed for economic security.

The issues surrounding the Ecological Indian have attracted uncomprising and sweeping statements on both sides. Those who despair at the pace and extent of environmental change at the end of the millennium, are blind to the environmental impacts of preindustrial societies, and adhere to the notion that native or indigenous people have always represented a kinder, gentler way of relating to the environment will no doubt be disturbed by this book's conclusions—despite the pains taken to acknowledge their ambiguities and limitations. Since 1970, many have looked for less destructive ways of relating to nature than the often shortsighted pursuits of convenience and economic gain; many are themselves American Indians. Some look toward an alternative “ecological” Christianity that would reconcile this religion with environmental care. Others believe that Taoism or Buddhism provides a better model for ideal attitudes toward nature. Still others turn to Native America and to indigenous thought about the world and living beings. Many native people themselves draw on a tradition of texts promulgating noble imagery that has generally had deeper roots in European self-criticism than in indigenous realities.

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by people of European descent, one can understand and be sympathetic with the reasons for the emergence and persistence of the “purified” image of native people used as a counterweight.

In the winter of 1996, Dennis Martinez, who is of O’odham and Chicano heritage, wrote in a special issue of *Sierra* devoted to Native Americans and the environment of the need to listen to native people who have “taken care of the landscape for thousands of years.” They are “wise environmental managers,” Martinez remarked, who understand “ecology and land stewardship.” Several years before, Winona LaDuke, an Anishinaabe from White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, contrasted what she called the industrial way of thinking from the indigenous way. There is no question what she values: the indigenous way, characterized by ecological thinking and “natural law” in which conservation, sustainability, cyclicity, respect, and balance all figure. In 1995, *Time*, citing LaDuke for her work on environmental issues selected her as one of fifty promising national leaders under the age of forty.³⁵

Voice like LaDuke’s and Martinez’s will undoubtedly remain undiminished in future land and natural resource issues in Indian Country. But (as should now be obvious) they will not be the only ones. In the late 1980s, David Lester, executive director of the Council of Energy Resources Tribes—a forty-three member tribal consortium—remarked that “the debate” over significant natural resource holdings “is pretty much over as to whether we should engage in economic development.” As far as he and many others are concerned, such development is the only course for the future.³⁶

Yet most underscore the complexities involved in the decisions on natural resource and land issues. Many people in Indian Country desire the trappings of middle-class American life—cars, televisions, stereos, jobs, money—but do not want to lose their Indianness or sense of belonging to place. As one Choctaw (who reminded his non-Indian interviewer that he did not want “to be you”) remarked, “I like living in this community, and I like being Choctaw, but that’s all there is to it. Just because I don’t want to be a white man doesn’t mean I want to be some kind of mystical Indian either. Just a real human being.”³⁷

fifty “greatest commercials of all time” and in April 1998, Keep America Beautiful brought it back “by popular neglect” as an advertisement about an advertisement. At first the pro bono agency helping Keep America Beautiful was wary. An agency copywriter remarked, “You’re sure you want to do that? It’s an incredibly different world; people are a lot more cynical and savvy.” It was decided in the end to produce a spot for local and national broadcast on cable and network television, showing a poster of the original Iron Eyes, iconic tear on iconic cheek, at a bus shelter. People wait for the bus and litter the ground, the bus arrives and they board, and a living, flowing, wet tear tumbles down Iron Eye’s cheek.³⁸