



The idea of the Native American living in perfect harmony with nature is one of the most cherished contemporary myths. But how truthful is this larger-than-life image?

According to anthropologist Shepard Krech III, the first humans in North America demonstrated all of the intelligence, self-interest, flexibility, and ability to make mistakes of human beings anywhere. As Nicholas Lemann put it in *The New Yorker*, "Krech is more than just a conventional-wisdom overturner; he has a serious larger point to make. . . . Concepts like ecology, waste, preservation, and even the natural (as distinct from human) world are entirely anachronistic when applied to Indians in the days before the European settlement of North America."

"[Krech] offers us a more complex portrait of Native American peoples, one that rejects mythologies, even those that both European and Native Americans might wish to embrace."
—*Washington Post*

"Carefully argued . . . thoroughly fascinating."
—*Boston Globe*

Shepard Krech III is a professor of anthropology at Brown University. He lives in Providence, Rhode Island, and in Maine.

Cover painting: *Buffalo Chase with Bows and Lances* by George Catlin (detail), National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C./Art Resource, N.Y.

Cover design by Inguo Liu

 **W. W. NORTON**
NEW YORK • LONDON

ISBN 0-393-32100-2
9 780393 321005 5 1495
\$14.95 USA \$20.99 CAN.
www.wwnorton.com

The Ecological Indian

Shepard Krech III

"A good story and first-rate social science." —*New York Times Book Review*

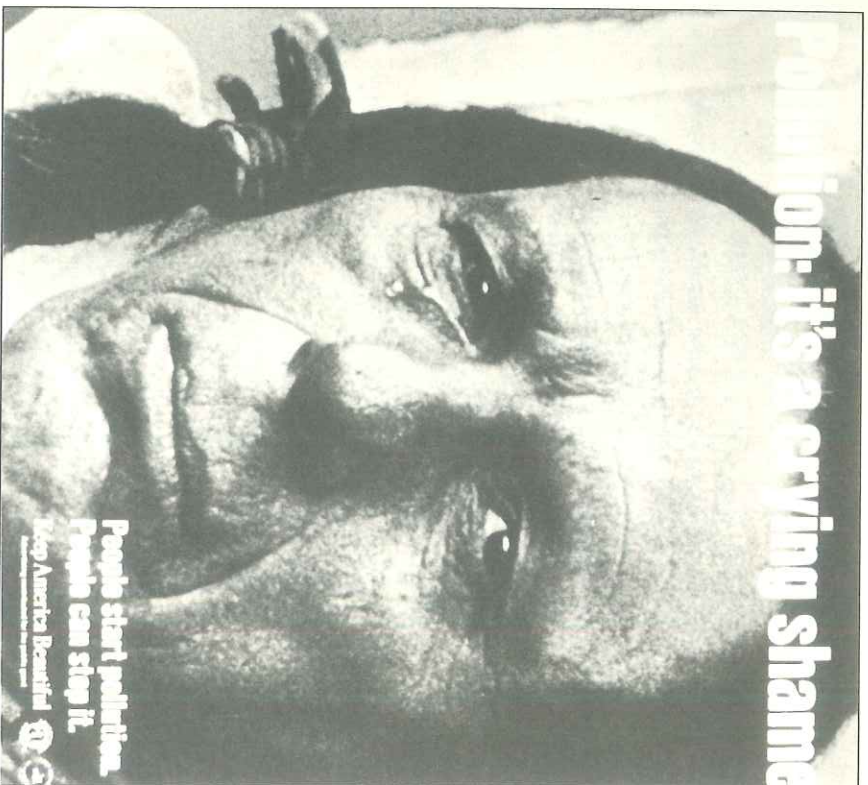
Myth and History

The Ecological Indian

Shepard Krech III



 **NORTON**



Iron Eyes Cody as the Crying Indian, 1971.
Reprinted by permission of Keep America Beautiful, Inc.

Introduction

FEW FORGET HIS FACE. Not just the mournful expression and braided hair, but his liquid, tear-filled eye, welling up and brimming over. Clearly an American Indian. Visibly, and unexpectedly, crying. His direct gaze rivets the viewer, and his message is simple: "Pollution: it's a crying shame. People start pollution. People can stop it."

Unveiled in 1971 by Keep America Beautiful, Inc., the Crying Indian, as he became known, appeared widely in print and on television. He instantly became the cornerstone of a campaign against litter. In the history of American environmentalism, the moment was auspicious. Just months before, between fifteen and twenty million people had assembled on Earth Day to create the groundswell for an environmental movement unprecedented in scale and zeal. For the first time, millions of Americans aggressively protested against the pollution of the environment and destruction of natural resources. They defined the 1970s as the Environmental Decade and led the attempt to convert America's attitudes toward the land and natural resources. In this context, Keep America Beautiful, whose goals were to halt pollution and clean up litter, flourished. Enlisting Iron Eyes Cody as the Crying Indian, this organization made the Cherokee actor's face one of the most recognizable in advertising over the next eight years, and his tear, which tumbled again and again down his cheek, perhaps the most famous visibly shed. Unsettling the viewer, his gaze—to use the language of advertising agencies—made fifteen billion people impressions. As a noble ecologist, the Crying Indian became iconic.¹

Through the Crying Indian, Keep America Beautiful cleverly manipulated ideas deeply engrained in the national consciousness. "Pollution: it's a crying shame" expressed the widely held perception, then and

now, that there are fundamental differences between the way Americans of European descent and Indians think about and relate to land and resources. In what amounted to a powerful indictment of white Americans, the Crying Indian unequivocally implicated white polluters; they, not Indians, were the people who start pollution. He shed a tear for land and resources, which, by implication, he and other Indians treated kindly and prudently (as conservators might) and understood ecologically. But after arriving in North America, Europeans and their descendants ruined its pristine, unspoiled nature.

A noble image speaking to ecological wisdom and prudent care for the land and its resources, the Crying Indian is the paramount example of what I call the Ecological Indian: the Native North American as ecologist and conservationist. How faithfully it reflects Native North American cultures and behavior through time is the subject of this book.

Even though an invention of Madison Avenue, the Crying Indian is an effective image and advocate because its assumptions are not new. From the moment they encountered the native people of North America and represented them in texts, prints, paintings, sculptures, performances—in all conceivable media—Europeans classified them in order to make them sensible. They made unfamiliar American Indians familiar by using customary taxonomic categories, but in the process often reduced them simplistically to one of two stereotypes or images, one noble and the other not. For a long time, the first has been known as the *Noble Savage* and the second as the *Ignoble Savage*.

The Noble Savage, the first of the two stereotypes or images, has drawn persistently on benign and increasingly romantic associations; the Ignoble Savage, the second, on a menacing malignancy. The first has emphasized the rationality, vigor, and morality of the nature-dwelling native; the second, the cannibalistic, bloodthirsty, inhuman aspects of savage life. Often elements from the two stereotypes have been combined in a single portrait.²

The label *savage*, which English-speaking people used for North American Indians (and their imagery) for centuries, presents problems today. With its derivation from *silvaticus* (Latin), cognates *sauvage* (French), *salvage* (Spanish), *selvaggio* (Italian), and the related forms *silva*, *selva*, and *sylian*—which have woodland, wooded, for-

est, and wild among principal meanings—*savage* connoted originally a state of nature.³ But in their theories of social evolution, nineteenth-century anthropologists and sociologists positioned savages on the earliest and lowest rungs of human society. Overwhelmingly derogatory connotations effaced the original woodland meanings of savage and even survived the now-discredited evolutionary schemes. Today, North American Indians frequently say that they are members of a particular tribal group or nation, or that they are Native Americans, American Indians, or (in particular) just Indians. They also refer to themselves as *native* or *indigenous people*, and sometimes as *aboriginal people*. For these reasons, the term *Noble Indian* (one manifestation of which is the Ecological Indian) is used here for the stereotype or image that others have called *Noble Savage*, and *Indian*, *native*, *indigenous*, and other terms are used for the people.⁴

There can be no doubt about the depth of ideas implicit in the image of the Noble Indian. Always present for more than five hundred years (even if overwhelmed by ignoble imagery), Noble Indians have, however, changed in attributes.⁵ In their earliest embodiment they were peaceful, carefree, unshackled, eloquent, wise people living innocent, naked lives in a golden world of nature. The origins of nature-dwelling nobles are deep in the ancient world. When Columbus speculated that he found the Islands of the Blessed and their natural residents, his readers were not surprised. They commonly linked several mythic places originating in pagan or Christian thought—notably the Islands of the Blessed, Arcadia, Elysium, the Earthly Paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the Golden Age (collectively ideas of earthly paradise, eternal spring, and innocent life removed in space or time). Allegorical for some but literal for others who located them in geographical space, these places were objects of fancy and search in the New World and elsewhere.

The potency of this imagery as a source of ennobling sentiment over two and one-half centuries simply cannot be overstated, as Europeans drew liberally on it to represent the New World and its inhabitants, in the context of a nostalgic longing for the past and a simpler life. Among many affected by Columbus was Peter Martyr, who compiled accounts of discovery and wrote of an American Indian golden world, and Martyr influenced in turn Amerigo Vespucci's famous

depictions of New World lives. For centuries, they and others invoked Tacitus and other ancients, and classical analogs like Scythians (stamped by many as simple, frugal, honest, natural folk) in order to make the indigenous people of the New World comprehensible to themselves and their audiences. In Virginia, they depicted Indians leading "gentle, loving, and faithful" lives "void of all guile and treason," exactly "after the manner of the Golden Age." Elsewhere they associated primitiveness with virtue in similar scenes.⁶

The French, seizing on liberty and equal access to basic resources as characteristic of "savage" life and important virtues to emulate, were without peer over two centuries in developing an imagery of noble indigeneness. Michel de Montaigne, Baron de Lahontan, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were especially influential in this process. Montaigne drew widely upon Tacitus, missionaries to the New World, and Tupinambas at the French court both to laud the naturalness of Brazilians and to condemn the French as corrupt, greedy, and vain. He used the New World, one historian remarked, "as a stick for beating the Old."⁷ Lahontan invented a natural, noble "Intelligent Savage" named Adario as a literary device to critique the European scene (including those who left him without property). Others copied Lahontan widely, and in the second half of the eighteenth century the Noble Indian ruled, especially in Rousseau's major works presenting "savage" life as simple, communal, happy, free, equal, and pure—as inherently good, and exemplified by America's indigenous people.

Like other synthesizers with perfect timing, Rousseau was a lightning rod for charged feelings opposed to his, and a touchstone for many who subsequently portrayed Indians as gentle, egalitarian, free people living in pure nature—and in sharp contrast to life in the city and in civilization. One train of influence runs toward and converges with the nature poetry of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and others, which located the Noble Indian's day in the past, and a nearly uninterrupted path runs from Wordsworth to James Fenimore Cooper, best-selling author from the early 1820s through the 1840s and arguably the most important nineteenth-century figure for development of the Noble Indian imagery. Cooper's heroes are all in and of nature. Nature herself, a heroine of unsurpassed dimensions, shares the stage with Leatherstocking, the protagonist of heroic proportions in Cooper's most famous novels. Every

manner of Indian can be found in Cooper's novels, Noble and Ignoble, each taking on and reproducing the character of their tribes, and Cooper's most famous Indian heroes are dignified, firm, faultless, wise, graceful, sympathetic, intelligent, and of beautiful bodily proportions reminiscent of classical sculpture.

By 1900, skill in nature, an important attribute of Cooper's Noble Indians, encapsulated noble indigeneness. It fit neatly with the day's effort to reform policy in natural resources (water, forests, wildlife, and lands and parks, from which came managed use in the progressive conservation movement), American Indian affairs, and America's youth.

The most important writers for Noble Indians from roughly 1875 through 1940 were Ernest Thompson Seton and—for the first time—an Indian: Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa), a Dakota or Sioux. Their influence was pervasive. With Captain Seth Eastman, the famous soldier-artist, as his maternal grandfather, Eastman took the white man's road to Dartmouth College and Boston University Medical School. After marriage—his wife was a self-described Yankee nonconformist, avowed romantic, and vivid and accomplished writer—Eastman wrote more than ten best-selling books that ennobled Indians both by resurrounding romantic visions of lives long past and by emphasizing skills in nature, or woodcraft. Eastman sometimes pointedly apposed an idyllic past with a demoralizing present (even if the present was a way station to a positive civilized future), and contrasted Indians who kill animals because they need them with whites who kill them wantonly. In perhaps his most famous work, *The Soul of the Indian*, Eastman first paid homage to Coleridge, and then painted his boyhood with his relatives as natural, altruistic, and reverent, and his current life as artificial, selfish, and materialistic.⁸

Both Cooper and Eastman influenced Ernest Thompson Seton, first Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts and charismatic naturalist, artist, author, public speaker, conservationist, and youth-movement activist who reached millions through his writings and activities. One of Seton's major goals was to instill manhood in boys through woodcraft or outdoor life exemplified by Cooper's "Ideal Indian." Eastman's talk of the need to form character through fishing, signaling, making fire, constructing canoes, forecasting weather, and other skills—what

re called the "School of Savagery" or the "natural way"⁹—dove-tailed with Seton's aims. And Seton's Ideal Indian was like Eastman's: He was kind, hospitable, cheerful, obedient, reverent, clean, chaste, brave, courteous, honest, sober, thrifty, and provident; he condemned accumulation, waste, and wanton slaughter; and he held land, animals, and all property in common, thereby curbing greed and closing the gulf between rich and poor.

The imagery of Noble Indians shifted again during the extraordinary era of 1963–73, known primarily for violent antiwar and civil rights movements, assassination, and societal upheaval, when bitter battles were also waged over pesticides, oil spills, flammable rivers, industrial and human waste, and related environmental issues. It was during this period that the Crying Indian came to the fore, reinforcing both practical and ideological slants present in the work of Seton, Eastman, and other predecessors.

New Ecological Indians exploded onto the scene. As critics linked many current global predicaments to industrial society, spoke openly of earlier less complex times as being more environmentally friendly, and castigated Christianity for anthropocentrism, they marshaled Ecological Indians (as deployment of the Crying Indian makes clear) to the support of environmental and antitechnocratic causes.¹⁰

Ecological Indians constituted fertile soil for those seeking alternative "countercultural" lives. In the back-to-nature movement, many sought communal life shot through with American Indian tribal metaphors and material culture, as well as native religion—or any religious tradition, in fact, perceived as more in tune with ecology and in harmony with nature. Greenpeace marked the convergence of ecology, environmentalism, critique of the social order, and images of American Indians as ecological prophets. More widely, environmentalists joined American Indians in their vision quests and struggles, and thought of themselves as "tribalists." In their conscious antitechnocratic critique of Western society, Rousseau was reborn.

American Indians embraced the new shift in perception and actively helped construct the new image of themselves. At occupied Alcatraz Island, they argued for social and political rights and advocated forming an Indian center of ecology. A new canon emerged: best-selling native texts in which nature and the environment figured

significantly, and that critiqued, implicitly or explicitly, white civilization. Several crossed over notably with the environmental movement, and the new canon's expressions of an animistic world have affected many. By far most influential was *Black Elk Speaks*, the nineteenth-century biographical, historical, and visionary reminiscences of a Lakota holy man as told to John G. Neihardt, a poet who believed that literature existed to show people how to "live together decently on this planet." Published in 1932 to no stir, this work was rediscovered in the late 1960s and propelled by events into a widely reprinted and translated instant classic.¹¹

Since those tumultuous days, Noble Indians have saturated public culture. They grace the covers of fiction and nonfiction best-sellers, and pervade children's literature. They leap from movies and television screens, fill canvases, take shape in sculptures, find expression in museum and gallery exhibitions, animate dance and other performances, and appear on T-shirts. Time and again the dominant image is of the Indian in nature who understands the systemic consequences of his actions, feels deep sympathy with all living forms, and takes steps to conserve so that earth's harmonies are never imbalanced and resources never in doubt.

This is the Ecological Indian. Exemplifying him, the Crying Indian brims over with ecological prescience and wisdom. On matters involving the environment, he is pure and white people are polluting. He cries because he feels a sense of loss, as (he silently proclaims) other American Indians do also. And if he could cry because he and others lived in nature without disturbing its harmonies (or throwing trash upon it), then he possessed authority to speak out against pollution.

The immediate forces that brought the Crying Indian into existence, as well as the long history of images of nobility preceding this one, have borne considerable fruit. The Ecological Indian has influenced humanitarians concerned about the global environment and health, so-called deep and spiritual ecologists, metaphysicians and new biologists interested in the Gaia hypothesis of an organic earth, ecofeminists, the Rainbow Family and other alternative groups, and self-help advocates.¹² Historians and other scholars have called Indians "the first" American environmentalists or ecologists to "respect" environmental limits and the "need to restrain human

impact," to possess "the secret of how to live in harmony with Mother Earth, to use what she offers without hurting her," and to "[preserve] a wilderness ecological balance wheel."¹³ Finally (and not least), in Hollywood, the Ecological Indian has become today's orthodoxy to reach millions, as the creators of the Lakotas in *Dances with Wolves* or of the animated Pocahontas, who talks to Grandmother Willow, the tree, and sings about herons and others who "are my friends" and the "hoop that never ends," play on their presumed closeness to nature, nobility, and ecological sainthood.

Few visual or textual representations of the Native North American have been as persistent over time as this one has, in one form or another, and few others are as embedded in native identity today. The Ecological Indian has embraced conservation, ecology, and environmentalism; has been premised on a spiritual, sacred attitude toward land and animals, not a practical utilitarian one; and has been applied in North America to all indigenous people.

Explicit at several notable moments in the history of Noble Indians (as in the eighteenth century and today), and in the gaze of the Crying Indian, is the fact that the image usually stands against, not alone. Habitually coupled with its opposite, the Nonecological White Man, the Ecological Indian proclaims both that the American Indian is a nonpolluting ecologist, conservationist, and environmentalist, and that the white man is not. "The Indian," Vine Deloria, Jr., a Lakota author and lawyer, has remarked, "lived with his land." In contrast, "*The white destroyed his land. He destroyed the planet earth.*"¹⁴

But what does it mean to say that Indians are ecologists or conservationists? Because they are the most consistent attributes of the image of the Ecological Indian, the concepts should be defined with care. Embedded in them are certain cultural premises about the meanings of humanity, nature, animate, inanimate, system, balance, and harmony, and their suitability for indigenous American Indian thought or behavior should not be taken as a given.

Ecology, to start with, which is concerned mainly with interactions or interrelations between organisms and the animate and inanimate environments in which they live, has a distinct disciplinary history in which systemic balance, stability, and harmony have been central to

ecological metaphors and premises. The idea of a well-regulated nature or of a balance in nature derives from antiquity, and through the centuries has been linked with different divine plans. In the seventeenth century, the balance was connected to God's harmony; and from that time until the late twentieth century, balance and harmony have remained central despite a major paradigmatic change from religion to science in comprehending the natural world. When George Perkins Marsh published *Man and Nature; Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, one of the most critical early works for the development of both conservation and ecology, in 1864, the title initially contemplated was *Man the Disturber of Nature's Harmonies*. For Marsh and many others, nature in the absence of man was self-regulating, in balance, or in equilibrium; and man if he were "imprudent" could "[disturb] harmonies," producing "exhausted regions."¹⁵

Over the last twenty-five years, ecology has been in ferment. For those who favor rigorous, quantitative methodologies and replicable results, proof that balance, stability, or harmony exists has been elusive. Ecologists have abandoned these and other long-held assumptions in favor of chaotic dynamics in systems, and long-term disequilibrium and flux. The ferment is due to the recognition that organisms are as likely to behave unpredictably as predictably; that in the absence of human interference (if that is possible), natural systems are not inherently balanced or harmonious; and that left alone, biological communities do not automatically undergo predictable succession toward some steady-state climax community, which is an illusion. Natural systems, today's ecologists emphasize, are open systems on which random external events like fire or tempest have unpredictable impacts. As the biologist Daniel Botkin emphasized, "Change now appears to be intrinsic and natural at many scales of time and place in the biosphere."¹⁶

The implications of this fundamental shift in thought for assumptions about the very people perceived as part of nature, the indigenous people of North America and elsewhere, are profound. In a balanced, harmonious, steady-state nature, indigenous people reproduced balance and harmony. In an open nature in which balance and climax are questionable, they become, like all people, dynamic forces whose impact, subtle or not, cannot be assumed.

Some who write about environmentalism use the term *ecology* where they mean "environmental"—as in ecology movement. This

unfortunate confusion unnecessarily conflates a scientific discipline with a moral and political cause, and muddies the definition of *ecology*. In this book the two terms are kept separate. *Environmentalism* has distinct meanings ranging from the belief that the environment and its components have basic rights to remain unmolesed, to the idea that technological change and sustainable growth are compatible with proper care for the environment. One of the most inclusive—and, because of its breadth, useful—definitions of environmentalism is “ideologies and practices which inform and flow from a concern for the environment.”¹⁷

When speaking of Native Americans as ecologists, we do not necessarily mean that they used mathematical or hypothetico-deductive techniques, but we should mean that they have understood and thought about the environment and its interrelating components in systemic ways (even if the system, all increasingly agree, is more metaphor than hard and bounded reality). When we speak of them as environmentalists, we presumably mean showing concern for the state of the environment and perhaps acting on that concern.¹⁸

Conservation, the second major attribute of the Ecological Indian, has also acquired different meanings through time, some of which (like the very general idea of “prudent husbanding”) have ancient roots. Moreover, as with ecology and environmentalism, *conservation* has often been conflated with *preservation*—as in conservation as “preservation from destructive influences, natural decay or waste.”¹⁹

Yet it makes sense to differentiate conservation from preservation. At the turn of the twentieth century, at least two separate camps debated conservation and preservation issues (the debates continue today). The most famous pitted Gifford Pinchot, widely regarded as the founder of contemporary conservationist policy in America, against John Muir, the preservationist. The two fought over the fate of Hetch Hetchy, a canyon in Yosemite National Park that thirsty urbanites wanted to make useful by a dam and lake. Pinchot and Muir battled heatedly; Muir’s preservation assuming the sacral pristineness of nature and Pinchot’s conservation privileging rational planning and efficient use: two very different approaches to environmental relations. Pinchot, who was Theodore Roosevelt’s forestry

chief, won the day even though Roosevelt had left office by the time Congress legislated damming Hetch Hetchy.²⁰

In 1910, Pinchot wrote that conservation’s “first principle” was “development, the use of the natural resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now.” The second was “the prevention of waste,” and the third that “natural resources must be developed and preserved for the benefit of the many, and not merely for the profit of a few.”²¹ Conservationists, as one observer noted in 1970, were “fairly united in attacking instances of apparent waste or unwise use.” Waste or unwise use included obtaining products in a manner that proved destructive to the environment when a nondestructive method would do, obtaining less than the maximum sustained yield from resources, ignoring useful by-products of extractive processes, and using energy resources inefficiently.²²

Today, conservation is defined in different ways. Some regard it as management “of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations.” Others emphasize that it means “all that man thinks and does to soften his impact upon his natural environment and to satisfy all his own true needs while enabling that environment to continue in healthy working order.”²³

Narrower definitions—by Bryan Norton and John Pasmore, respectively, both philosophers—focus on conservation as using a resource “wisely, with the goal of maintaining its future availability or productivity,” or as saving “natural resources for later consumption.” The conservationist promotes careful husbandry and sustainable development; if he opposes anything, it is waste. The emphasis in preservation is quite different, “a saving *from* rather than a saving *for*” as in conservation, according to Pasmore; specifically “the saving of species and wilderness from damage or destruction.” For Norton, preservation is protecting “an ecosystem or a species, to the extent possible, from the disruptions attendant upon it from human use.” The preservationist, in other words, seeks to keep habitats from further deterioration or use even for purposes of conservation.²⁴

If we describe a Native American as a conservationist, we do not mean that he calculates sustainable yield into the distant future or, in

a preservationist-like manner, leaves the environment in an undisturbed, pristine state, but rather that he does not waste or "despoil, exhaust, or extinguish," and that he does, with deliberation, leave the environment and resources like animal populations in a usable state for succeeding generations.²⁵

People everywhere creatively construct meaningful frameworks for understanding their past; they everywhere actively invent tradition. "History," as Greg Dening, a historian, reminded us, "is both a metaphor of the past and metonym of the present." No matter who their authors may be, narratives about the Native American past must be read in this light. As Edward Bruner, an anthropologist, underscored, narratives about Native North Americans are contingent on the times in which they were created. They mirror relations between Native Americans and people of European descent. They reflect not just changing national governmental policies toward indigenous people, but understandings of native people that vary from one moment to the next. Given that traditions are often fashioned creatively, it seems unwise to assume uncritically that the image of the Ecological Indian faithfully reflects North American Indian behavior at any time in the past.²⁶

Quite the reverse: For while this image may occasionally serve or have served useful polemical or political ends, images of noble and ignoble indigeness, including the Ecological Indian, are ultimately dehumanizing. They deny both variation within human groups and commonalities between them. As the historian Richard White remarked, the idea that Indians left no traces of themselves on the land "demeans Indians. It makes them seem simply like an animal species, and thus deprives them of culture."²⁷ In a related vein, Henry M. Brackenridge, a lawyer with archaeology as his avocation, remarked some 180 years ago on a voyage on the Missouri River how "mistaken" are those "who look for primitive innocence and simplicity in what they call the state of nature." As he traveled along the Missouri, Brackenridge mused on the "moral character" of Indians he encountered: "They have amongst them their poor, their envious, their slanderers, their mean and crouching, their haughty and overbearing, their unfeeling and cruel, their weak and vulgar, their dissipated and wicked; and they have also, their brave and wise, their gen-

erous and magnanimous, their rich and hospitable, their pious and virtuous, their frank, kind, and affectionate, and in fact, all the diversity of characters that exists amongst the most refined people." One need not believe that moral or emotional or psychological traits are universal (like most anthropologists today, I would assert that to be human is fundamentally to be a cultural being) to appreciate that no simple stereotype satisfied Brackenridge, who refused to reduce Indians to silhouetted nobility or ignobility.²⁸

Yet as its simplistic, seductive appeal works its charm, the Noble Indian persists long beyond memory of when or how it entered currency. At first a projection of Europeans and European-Americans, it eventually became a self-image. American Indians have taken on the Noble Indian/Ecological Indian stereotype, embedding it in their self-fashioning, just as other indigenous people around the world have done with similar primordial ecological and conservationist stereotypes.²⁹ Yet its relationship to native cultures and behavior is deeply problematic. The Noble Indian/Ecological Indian distorts culture. It masks cultural diversity. It occludes its actual connection to the behavior it purports to explain. Moreover, because it has entered the realm of common sense and as received wisdom is perceived as a fundamental truth, it serves to deflect any desire to fathom or confront the evidence for relationships between Indians and the environment.³⁰

To what degree does the image of the Ecological Indian faithfully reflect Native North American ideas through time? To what extent have Native North Americans been ecologists or conservationists? These are the major questions posed in *The Ecological Indian* and explored in chapters that range from the Pleistocene to the present. The intent is not to be encyclopedic but to select specific cases that have been hotly debated and deserve a fresh look. Were human hunters responsible for the extinctions of many large animals at the end of the Pleistocene in North America? Why did people like the Hohokam disappear prior to the arrival of Europeans? Was the human population in North America large enough to make any lasting difference on land and animals? What are the implications of the widespread use of fire in North America? Were Indians who hunted buffalo, white-tailed deer, and beaver—all hunted almost to extinction—interested in con-

servation as well as in subsistence or commodities? Are native people today ecologists or conservationists?

The Ecological Indian does not pretend to be exhaustive. It is not intended as, nor will it be, the last word on a subject that has attracted an enormous amount of attention over the years. The hope, rather, is that by revisiting and newly analyzing some of the most important and roundly argued cases pertaining to conservation and ecology in native North America, this book will rekindle debate on the fit between one of the most durable images of the American Indian and American Indian behavior, and that it will spawn detailed analyses of the myriad relationships between indigenous people and their environments in North America.

Chapter One

PLEISTOCENE EXTINCTIONS

BEGINNING 11,000 YEARS AGO, at the end of the period known as the Pleistocene, many animal species that had flourished just a short time before vanished from North America. Men and women had been in the New World for only a relatively short time, and scholars have hotly debated the coincidence of their arrival and the extinctions. Paul Martin, a palynologist and geochronologist, spurred the debate more than any other person. When he proclaimed in the late 1960s that "man, and man alone, was responsible" for the extinctions, he set off a firestorm that shows little sign of abating. Branding the ancient Indians—so-called Paleoindians—as super-predators, Martin likened their assault on Pleistocene animals to a *blitzkrieg*, evoking the aggressive, assaulting imagery of the Nazi war machine.¹

Martin could not have made a more apt word choice for grabbing the public imagination. Over the last three decades "American Blitzkrieg" and "Slaughter of Mastodons Caused Their Extinction" have defined headlines, and writers in popular magazines like *National Geographic* concluded confidently that scientists suspect "man the hunter" as the "villain" in Pleistocene extinctions.²

There is no room for the Ecological Indian here. As Martin himself wrote in 1967, "that business of the noble savage, a child of nature, living in an unspoiled Garden of Eden until the 'discovery' of the New World by Europeans is apparently untrue, since the destruction of fauna, if not of habitat, was far greater before Columbus than at any time since." For Martin, that realization is "provocative," "deeply disturbing," and "even revolutionary." To no surprise, Martin's findings fed the conservative press who argued that because of the (supposed) sins of their earliest ancestors, Native North Americans today

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, befitting 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 their 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."

On the other hand, at the buffalo jump, in the many uses of fire, in the commodity hunt for beaver pelts and deerskins, and in other ways,

many indigenous people were not conservationists. Yet their actions 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 Yupit 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 having "always done all things in a gentle manner."⁴ In *Native Wisdom*, Ed McGaa (Eagle Man), a Lakota, writes with feeling about

a "Natural Way" of balance and harmony to which indigenous people 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 befitting 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

Moreover, in several infamous cases, native people and their lands have indeed suffered terribly at the hands both of industry exploiting their resources and lacking environmental controls, and of inept and paternalistic governmental caretakers. In one of the most notorious cases that unfolded in the 1960s, a New York-based Reynolds Aluminum plant and General Motors industrial landfill (that later became a Superfund site) almost destroyed Akwesasne, the St. Regis Mohawk reserve straddling the St. Lawrence River, with mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and other pollutants. Dairy cattle, white pines, birds, bees, and fish died and a toxic cocktail of effluents imperiled Mohawk health. A quarter-century of regulation and decontamination has been necessary for fish again to be free of deformities and sores—although still unfit to eat—and for eagles, minks, and other animals to return to the land.⁹

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 rolled 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-

ed carcasses behind, and were accused by white hunters (who had acted in virtually identical fashion themselves) of placing the herds in jeopardy? Of the Wisconsin Chippewa, who reportedly let thousands of fish spoil in warm weather? Of Rosebud Sioux activists, who wanted to stop use of the reservation for off-reservation trash out of concern—as the tribal chairman remarked facetiously—for Mother Earth, yet had never protested Rosebud's existing open dumps? Of Crow Indians and Indians from Wind River, the joint Shoshone-Arapahoe reservation in Wyoming, who, in separate incidents, killed many elk and, to the horror of big-game hunters and biologists, reportedly took only choice cuts for themselves, or only meat or antlers for sale, leaving many animals to rot? Or of the Ute who want a dam and reservoir—over strong objections from the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund—probably to transport low-sulfur coal through a coal slurry pipeline to power plants at some future time?¹¹

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."¹²

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 Mur'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

(BIA). Over the last twenty-five years, many Indians have heatedly 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

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

divided over how many fish they should spear—some Chippewas 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

heart” of their religion, and that the land “is our church.” And Salish 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 Strands 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-

ment—including market lease bids discounted by over 90 percent—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 profitable 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

1991, with monetary support from Greenpeace, five hundred activists 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-

lems and a housing shortage. But the issue has split them internally, as 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

(or trees) have the same ethical rights or legal "standing" due human 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

old-growth forests in North America, including the celebrated seventeen-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

Admiralty Island angered the Angoon Tlingit living nearby—yet 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.