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BY KATHLEEN DUVAL

Native Nations: A Millennium in North America

Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution

The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent

Interpreting a Continent: Voices from Colonial America (with John DuVal)

Give Me Liberty! (with Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr)

NATIVE NATIONS

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A Millennium in North America

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For my students
in American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill,
past and present

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Many Nations

In the fall of 2016, the road leading into the camp was lined with flags. Lakotas and Dakotas of Standing Rock had been protesting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline since early that year, and recently the growing crowd of protesters had spread to this new and larger camp across the Cannonball River. Flying over the trucks, cars, horses, tents, tipis, newly constructed buildings, and demonstrators were more than three hundred flags, among them the red, white, and black stripes of the Arapaho Nation, the Northern Cheyenne Morning Star, the purple Hiawatha Belt with four white squares and a tree of peace representing the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, and the sand-colored Navajo Nation flag, which shows the outlined shape of the Navajo reservation today between its four sacred mountains, under a rainbow representing its sovereignty. Some people brought American flags too, but the flagpoles flew the flags of Native nations.[1]

The flags and the people who gathered under them displayed not only the #NoDAPL protest's wide support among Native Americans but also the fact that Native nations are still here in North America, despite centuries of colonialism. Today, Indigenous North Americans are citizens of many hundreds of Native nations with sovereign rights within the United States, Canada, and Mexico. When Sharice Davids and Deb Haaland were elected to the U.S. Congress in 2018, they were described as the first Native American congresswomen but also as citizens of the Ho-Chunk Nation and Laguna Pueblo, respectively. Sierra Teller Ornelas, the first Native

#NoDAPL, 2016.
ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

American to be the showrunner of a television comedy series, introduces herself by naming her Navajo clans. Standing Rock tribal chairman Dave Archambault II explained during the #NoDAPL protests, "We're a nation, and we expect to be treated like a nation." The Standing Rock Sioux were demanding their sovereign rights as a recognized political entity with its own laws and land base. That land is Oceti Sakowin, Lakota for "Seven Council Fires," meaning the seven nations of that confederacy. Native supporters came to Oceti Sakowin not just as individuals but as citizens of Native nations.[2]

Yet the ways U.S. history has usually been told make it hard to understand how more than five hundred Native nations still exist within the United States today, from populous and well-known peoples such as the Navajo (Diné) and Cherokee nations to smaller ones, such as the Quapaw and Peoria nations. Until the late twentieth century, U.S. history books tended to portray precolonial Native peoples as being "so few in number and so little prepared to resist as to have relatively little effect upon the whites."[3] More recent U.S. history textbooks provide more coverage and rightly condemn the violence

of European and U.S. colonialism but tend to emphasize victimization and decline. Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* integrated Native history into American history but also taught generations of readers to see Native Americans as helpless victims, "naked, tawny, and full of wonder." Dee Brown's iconic 1970 *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* lamented that "the culture and civilization of the American Indian was destroyed." The geographer Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* erroneously claimed that European military technology and disease caused Native Americans to enter into an almost immediate, precipitous, nearly inevitable decline. Charles Mann, after brilliantly surveying precolonial Native North America in his book *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus,* succumbed to Zinn's and Diamond's mistakes in his next book. That book's title—*1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created*—sums up the flawed assumption that Europeans dominated North America virtually from the moment they arrived here.[4]

Books and classes about Native Americans have often portrayed them as people only of the past. Most states' social studies curricula include American Indians only in the pre-1900 period of history, and there mostly as generalized objects of U.S. colonization and westward migration with little or no differentiation, histories of their own, or connection to the modern world. Former New Mexico secretary of labor Conroy Chino, of Acoma Pueblo, reflects on the Native American history he got in school: Whether they were taught as savage enemies or victims, "it always served better to be white than to be Indian."[5]

In recent years, scholars of Indigenous studies have published articles and monographs stressing what Ojibwe professor Gerald Vizenor has termed "survivance," a combination of survival and resistance. As Vizenor explains, survivance implies "a sense of native presence over absence, nihility and victimry." Ojibwe historian David Treuer's 2019 *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* explains that Native American history did not end with tragedies such as the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee but continues through the present.[6]

. . .

This book contributes to that change in emphasis by showing how Native nations existed in North America long before Europeans, Africans, and Asians arrived and continue to the present day. Indigenous civilizations did not come to a halt when a few wandering explorers or hungry settlers arrived in their homelands, even when the strangers came well armed. Native Americans made up the majority of the North American population through the mid-1700s and controlled most of the land and resources of the continent for another century after that. Before and during European colonization, Native North Americans lived in diverse civilizations with complex economies and commercial and diplomatic networks that spanned the continent. They live in history, adapting to changes in the Americas for at least twenty thousand years—and counting.[7]

For more than three hundred years after Europeans' arrival, most Native people believed that these newcomers were insignificant wanderers and that the people who mattered were the diverse Native peoples of the continent—nations that had a history with one another, who had seen individual powers rise and fall over centuries. Theirs was an entire world as complicated as those of the kingdoms of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The decisions and actions of Native people affected and shaped European colonialism and, north of central Mexico, restricted European colonies to the coasts and a few river posts for more than two hundred years. And for most Native nations until the nineteenth century, their alliances and wars with one another took up much more of their collective time and attention and had a much bigger impact on their lives than anything Europeans did. For most Native nations, the impacts of Europeans, including land loss and attacks on their cultural and religious practices, were felt much later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And, contrary to the standard U.S. national narrative, nothing was inevitable about the rise of the United States.[8]

European colonizers generally had no choice but to recognize Native sovereignty; it was only nineteenth-century white Americans who came to believe their triumph was inevitable and who then rewrote the continent's history to fit their assumptions. In a process that scholars call "settler colonialism," nineteenth-century

Americans took Native land and claimed that it had never really belonged to Indigenous people. In the words of an 1854 history of Woodbury, Connecticut, "our pioneer forefathers" encountered a "desert waste" where "roamed the savage wild beasts, and untutored men more savage still than they." Many later scholars who were less blatantly racist still unquestioningly repeated myths of disappearance. As White Earth Ojibwe historian Jean O'Brien explains, these false histories "created a narrative of Indian extinction that has stubbornly remained in the consciousness and unconsciousness of Americans." Native history was pushed into archaeology and anthropology, where Indigenous people were portrayed as having "cultures" more than history, essential and timeless ways of being rather than, like all humanity, changing over time. Mohawk scholar Scott Manning Stevens points out that natural history museums used to put dinosaurs and early primates next to figures of Native Americans, implying that they were all relics of the past.[9]

To stress the survival of Native nations is not to suggest that colonists' intentions were benign or that Native people have not suffered from colonialism. Sometimes Europeans wanted to trade with Native people, sometimes they wanted to take their resources and labor without their consent, and sometimes they tried to get rid of them entirely, but in every case, one of the points of colonialism has been taking the resources of others. Among countless official and unofficial calls for genocide, here's just one example: In the 1750s, the British lieutenant governor of Massachusetts issued a proclamation urging "his Majesty's Subjects of this Province to embrace all opportunities of pursuing, captivating, killing, and destroying all" Penobscot Indians. Penobscots and their allies died in large numbers, and the survivors suffered terribly. Yet, more than 250 years later, you can read about this proclamation on the website of the Cultural and Historic Preservation Department of the Penobscot Nation. It is important to know that the British attempted genocide against the Penobscots. It is even more important to know that they did not succeed.[10]

Countless Native individuals, families, towns, and nations experienced terrible effects from colonialism. Some nations did not sur-

vive as independent sovereignties, and their people merged into other Native nations or colonial communities, as refugees or as captives and slaves. Indeed, the inclusive social and political structures of some Native nations allowed them to combine peoples and become some of the largest Native nations today. Telling Native American history for any time after 1492 requires balancing the seemingly contradictory themes of genocide and survival.

American Indians are still here, as individuals and as nations, and they have had a renaissance in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Even as Native communities continue to struggle with poverty, healthcare crises, and the weight of historical loss, they are reinvigorating language and traditions and exercising new political and cultural power. Western Shoshone historian Ned Blackhawk points out "the rising power of American Indians over the past two generations." David Treuer describes Native nations as "surging," and Mississippi Choctaw and Cherokee artist Jeffrey Gibson uses the word "thriving." Osage scholar Robert Warrior writes of this renaissance as "a burst of energy—revitalized languages, profitable business enterprises, the reclamation of lost land and resources." Yet, as these scholars warn, Native nations still are fighting a form of genocide today from people who think they would be better off if they would cease their claims of nationhood and land rights. States and municipalities repeatedly try to bring Native nations under their jurisdiction, attempts that Native nations have to fight in U.S. and state courts. Sovereignty was at the heart of *Haaland v. Brackeen,* the 2023 case in which the U.S. Supreme Court found constitutional the Indian Child Welfare Act, which declared that tribal governments have jurisdiction over the foster care and adoption placements of Native children. The 2016 book *The New Trail of Tears: How Washington Is Destroying American Indians* argued that ending Native sovereignty would be the best solution for American Indians. There is work for all of us to do in what U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland calls a "new era" of "truth, healing and growth."[11]

By spanning a millennium-long Native American history, this book connects the past and the present to illuminate both. Rather than give a comprehensive overview, it presents examples and trends

of Native North American sovereignty, politics, economics, diplomacy, and war by devoting entire chapters, in most cases, to a single Native nation. The book moves forward chronologically while touching down in different parts of the continent. For the most part, I have chosen not to focus on histories of Native nations when they were subject to overwhelming European or U.S. power. History books, classes, documentaries, and feature films tend to overemphasize the periods of catastrophe, so the history of Jamestown's defeat of Pocahontas's people and the Cherokee Trail of Tears get told again and again, with little attention paid to Cherokees in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or to twenty-first-century Pamunkeys—one of the nations that descends from Pocahontas's people and remains in Virginia. Histories of Native power are part of the large and complicated answer to the question of how Native nations survived to the present.

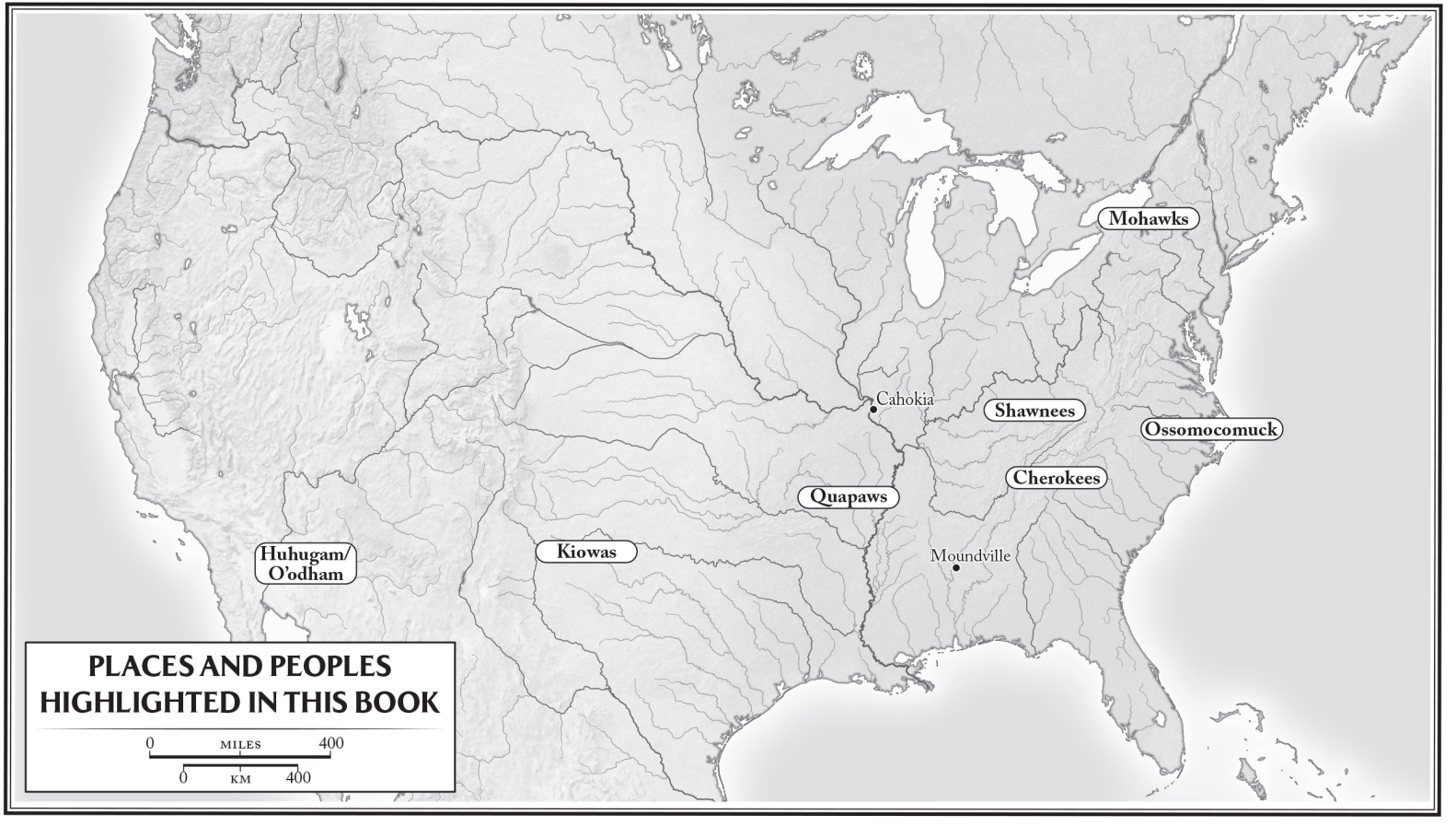
But as we move toward the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we will also see the damage that European empires and the United States have done to Native nations. The goals of colonialism were always exploitative, and colonists early on revealed what they might do when they had the numbers to overpower Indigenous people. Some Native nations faced this crisis sooner than others, and all eventually lost land, resources, and autonomy to colonialism. When the demographics were in their favor, Native Americans wielded great power in their relationships with colonizers and often benefited from trade and military alliances, in which they usually set the terms. It was in no way inevitable that Europeans and their descendants would have the chance to actually colonize the vast continents of the Americas. This book won't look away from the damage done by white settlers even as it uncovers the ways that Native nations shaped their own destinies and continue to do so today.

While the book's chapters focus on Native nations in periods of relative strength, their histories also reveal that the nature of Native power changed over this long period. At the start, Native nations had the raw strength of numbers. In the nineteenth century—and earlier for peoples who were locally outnumbered by colonists, mostly near British colonies on the Atlantic coast—as the European

American population grew, Native demographic and military power decreased. Indigenous people had to adjust to a world in which U.S. citizens and their state and federal governments often set the rules. Native Americans learned to use the political and judicial systems as well as the language of colonizers to survive. At the same time, as invasive polities became too powerful to control or ignore, good relations with other Indigenous people became more important, whether in the form of military alliances in the late-eighteenth-century Ohio Valley, nineteenth-century peace negotiations among eastern and western Native nations, the Society of American Indians and the Inter-American Indian Institute in the twentieth century, or the coordination of Indigenous peoples' representatives and institutions in the United Nations. Today, Native nations have rights based on treaties, the laws of the United States and other countries, and international law, as well as a moral and cultural power as the continent's first peoples, with the longest connection to this place.[12]

This book mostly takes place in what is now the United States but will also reveal connections across the hemisphere and around the world. Both in the past and today, Native conceptions of space have often crossed borders drawn by Europeans and their descendants, as the Mohawk and Tohono O'odham nations still do today across the U.S.–Canada and U.S.–Mexico borders, respectively. And although the Spanish established control over central Mexico and islands in the Caribbean in the sixteenth century, scholarship on Latin America has revealed similar continuing Native power for centuries in many parts of what the Spanish considered their empire—a startling contrast to the long assumption of near total Spanish conquest.[13]

One of the goals of this book is to reinsert Native American history into world history. In the centuries before 1492, the place that is now the United States, Canada, and northern Mexico had much in common with the grand changes of the rest of the world: global climate changes, agricultural revolutions, the rise of cities, continent-wide trade, workshop-style manufacturing, and civilizations growing in size. But because of the purposeful erasures that came later, too often people imagine Native Americans as historically more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primitive than Europeans of the same era. Cherokee women spinning and weaving fabric from mulberry bark and Makahs doing the same from cedar fibers can sound exotic or backward, until you remember that cotton and flax are plants, too. And we will see how that misconception of Native Americans as primitive resulted from Europeans' misunderstandings of the quite complex polities (egalitarian democracies, we might call them) that Native Americans had created to prevent the concentration of power and wealth after the fall of North America's medieval-era cities.

When my sons were young, they learned at summer camp that "Indians started fires with flint and stone." As the campers hunched over piles of dry grass under the North Carolina pines and oaks, striking flint against stone and desperately hoping a spark would catch the grass on fire, they pictured Native Americans as strange people of the past who had to work insanely hard, out in the woods, just to warm themselves or cook their food. The campers didn't realize that when Native Americans were cooking over fires, so was everyone else in the world, and, like everyone else, they kept coals smoldering in the hearth so they wouldn't have to start a new fire each time. People on the move, for war or hunting, might start a fire the hard way, but so did Europeans. Like everyone else, Native people stopped depending on premodern processes when other means became available. They adopted steel to use with flint in the sixteenth century, matches in the nineteenth century, and piped-in gas and electricity in the twentieth. Europeans came upon one version of Native peoples and took it as representative of their whole past and their whole future. A snapshot became eternity.[14]

Native Americans became part of the global economy in the early modern era at the same time that Europeans, Asians, and Africans did. Three centuries later, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Indigenous people around the world had to confront a new, more dangerous kind of nationalism based on a hardening sense of race—a new belief that certain races of people were fundamentally and permanently superior to others. Over time, some Indigenous people have developed a sense of global Indigene-

ity that is forged, in part, by their parallel experiences with colonialism, even as they have maintained their more local identities.[15]

Comparing Native American history with the rest of the world also modifies some of the biggest claims about the impact of "old-world" diseases on the Americas. Smallpox, measles, influenza, and many other diseases that developed in the eastern hemisphere were unknown in the Americas until Europeans crossed the Atlantic, and they were devastating. But some scholars have inadvertently perpetuated the victimization-and-decline model by implying that disease uniquely and universally destroyed Native communities and their way of life, even before Europeans had much population or military strength in the Americas. These scholars used very thin evidence to create the highest possible estimates for the 1491 population of the Americas—as much as 120 million—while understating later population numbers to reach a conclusion that, within 150 years, the Native population of the Americas fell by around 90 percent. Scholars who don't study Native America then have picked up on those estimates to make completely unfounded assertions such as this one from a 2021 book: "The Native population collapsed upon contact with the front edge of white settlements." This overgeneralizing gives the impression that Native Americans were quickly and completely, if sadly, destroyed.[16]

In recent years, scholars have revised these numbers and realized how weak the demographic evidence is. When Chief Powhatan told English captain John Smith, "I have seen the death of all my people thrice," high counters assumed he meant three huge epidemics, but archaeologists have found no evidence of mass burials. Powhatan probably meant he had seen three generations before him die, meaning he had lived a long time. Archaeologists have found no mass graves or other evidence of anything close to a 90 percent death rate anywhere. When a European explorer recorded fewer people in a place than the previous European had, scholars tended to assume that the population had declined from disease spread by the previous explorer, yet explorers' accounts are spotty and often confused. They frequently missed towns, and they seldom understood that

large numbers of people regularly left for extended periods of hunting, trading, gathering, or visiting family. And avoiding hungry and demanding Europeans was something Native people learned to do. Disease did spread from European settlements and through Native trading networks, and some of the new diseases killed in horrifying numbers in some times and places. Urban places such as the Aztec cities of central Mexico and the Inca cities of Peru were especially vulnerable. But comparative history reminds us that Europeans did not have much protection either. People everywhere died in huge numbers from diseases that today are prevented by vaccines or cured by antibiotics. The plague known as the Black Death killed perhaps a hundred million people in Europe and the Middle East in the 1300s. In the late eighteenth century, five thousand Philadelphians died of yellow fever in a single summer, some of them rushed to their graves by bloodletting and leeches. They were buried in mass graves in public parks. And, of course, in our own time millions of people—a number that kept rising as I wrote this book—around the world have died of Covid-19. Native Americans practiced quarantine and basic nursing (fluids and rest), which were the best defenses against disease in the past, and, as we learned in 2020, with new diseases even today. In 1793, when a Chickasaw delegation on its way to see President George Washington learned about the yellow fever outbreak in Philadelphia, they turned back.[17]

Relative to Europeans and Africans, North America's Native population did decrease dramatically, changing the balance of power on the continent. But this change happened over centuries, and the violence and dispossession of colonialism bears most of the blame. In places where Europeans settled in large numbers, pushing Native Americans from their land and resources, disrupting food and water supplies, and exposing them to multiple diseases year after year, Indigenous people were vulnerable to the worst effects of disease. And slave raids directly reduced the populations of some communities. Where Native people were still in their own communities, with good access to food, water, shelter, nursing care, and traditional quarantine methods, they died in smaller numbers and recovered

faster, and on their own terms. Slavery, dispossession, and colonialism were greater dangers to Native nations than germs alone.[18]

This book will cover a lot of ground as we move through the centuries, back and forth across the continent, into the histories of several Native nations as well as Native and non-Native neighboring populations, and occasionally around the globe for connections and comparisons. It is the culmination of my quarter-century career as a historian of early North America and draws on documents in Spanish, French, and English archives, as well as translations from Cherokee and Dutch. I have learned from the work of other historians and archaeologists, especially Native scholars, both in academic institutions and Native American governments and communities. Their work and their willingness to share and to collaborate on projects have transformed the fields of Native American and U.S. history and made this book possible. I have tried to live up to the call of Shawnee Tribe Chief Benjamin J. Barnes for scholars to "work *with* not *on* indigenous communities."[19]

This book begins with peoples who lived a millennium ago, a foundation for the long story of how we got to where we are today. Throughout the book, I'll discuss ways in which this history has been mistold and what kinds of sources we have, including written documents, archaeology, oral history-keeping traditions, visual art, and the languages and customs that Native Americans have today, whose roots stretch deep into the past. In each chapter, we'll also hear from descendants today who help with the central purpose of this book: connecting the Native past with the Native present. Most surveys of Native American history foreground war and violence, and there will be both in this book, but I have learned from the work of historians Brooke Bauer (Catawba), Brenda J. Child (Ojibwe), and Susan Sleeper-Smith how Native women were particularly essential to maintaining their peoples' identities, beliefs, and practices through changing times, so there will also be quite a bit on farming, crafts, town governance, and other realms of women.[20]

At the back of the book, I include a list of suggested readings, most of them written by Native scholars about their own nations. Tribal cultural centers and tribal museums are excellent places to learn about the past and present of particular nations—you can probably find one near you with a quick search on the internet. If you haven't visited the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., or New York City, I hope you will—these are evolving, living museums curated by Native Americans to tell their own stories. I draw on exhibits from the NMAI and tribal cultural centers throughout this book.

Before we get started, a few notes on language. There is no ideal term for the peoples native to the Americas. "Indians" reflects Christopher Columbus's geographic confusion, while both "American Indians" and "Native Americans" oddly include the first name of a minor Italian navigator as well as implying their incorporation into the United States of America (reinforcing the sense of inevitable U.S. dominance). I mostly use "Native," but also "American Indian," "Native American," and "Indigenous" when I need an overarching term. More important, I refer to specific peoples wherever possible. As historians Brooke Bauer (Catawba) and Elizabeth Ellis (Peoria) explain, in contrast to general terms like "Native American," "our identities as Peoria and Catawba are the product of our ongoing and historical relationships to our nations, our peoples' homelands, our cultural practices and ontologies, and the communities that claim and recognize us through citizenship and kinship." The inexactness in any catchall name is a good reminder that there is no single Native American history or culture.[21]

To be an American Indian (as opposed to having some Native American ancestry, which many more Americans do) is to be a citizen of a Native nation, someone who formally belongs to a Native community, meaning both that the Native community recognizes that person as belonging and that the person accepts the responsibilities as well as the rights that belonging to that particular community entails. Native Americans have long lived in nations, even as

definitions of that word have changed over time. Europeans called Native polities "nations" in English and French and "provincias" in Spanish—"tribes" is a word that comes later—because many of them fit pre-nineteenth-century European definitions of that kind of polity. A nation was "a people, or country," from the Latin for "to be born," the same root as in the word "native." Before the late eighteenth century, Europeans used "nation" to mean both a polity and a people who shared attributes that united them: language, history, religion, creation stories, geography, kinds of work they did and products they made, and various ways of doing things.[22]

Still, the term "nation" is originally a European one. There are many Native words to describe polities similar to but not quite the same as "nation," such as the Muscogean word "okla." And the nation has never been Native Americans' only identity. People have often identified more by family, band, clan, town, or language, or as the followers of particular leaders. But the term "nation" is useful for understanding what outsiders have often ignored: Native peoples have always organized themselves into sovereign, self-governing polities with their own political structures, laws, economic systems, and foreign policies. They are specific peoples with specific places that are their homelands, whether they still live on them or not. Despite stereotypes that Native Americans all shared the land or that their lands were only lightly used (and therefore available for others to take), Native nations had their own lands, often with clear borders between them. The ways in which Native people used and thought about land differed from one nation to another, and differed from the concepts of Europeans, and they changed over time, but certain places belonged to certain peoples.[23]

It is important to note that "nation" is a label and concept that many Native Americans today embrace as the English word that best embodies the political status of their communities. The Quapaw Nation and the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin are among many who in recent years have voted to change their official name from "Tribe" to "Nation." As Quapaw businesswoman and leader Barbara Collier wrote in an op-ed in the Quapaw newspaper during the election, the word "tribe" is associated with an "unsophisticated, and

unrefined condition," while "nation" connotes "a politically organized community of people possessing a more or less definite territory and government" and is compatible with Quapaw concepts of people, clan, family, and camp. I try to follow the nations' own naming practices, so you will see "Haudenosaunee" instead of "Iroquois Confederacy," "Muscogee" instead of "Creek," and "O'odham" instead of "Pima" and "Papago." And in each of the chapters, I introduce Native terms and concepts to aid in understanding. I am grateful to Native linguists for their translations and explanations.[24]

Understanding this deep past is essential for making sense of today's headlines, from protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock to cases before the U.S. Supreme Court to tribal governments' roles in Covid aid. At the heart of Native American struggles and triumphs today is national sovereignty, and that sovereignty exists because of this long history of Native women and men protecting and promoting it before and throughout the centuries in which people of European descent attempted to colonize the continent.

PART I

The Indigenous Peoples of North America, 1000s to 1750

Native north americans made history for tens of thousands of years before 1492. As the title of a history program on the Chickasaw Nation's television network puts it, "Our History Is World History." Because the ancient Romans and the ancient Chinese left written records, historians have traditionally found the details of their histories easier to access than those of Native Americans who lived at the same time, generally assuming that eras without written records are the realm of archaeologists. Yet writing is really the exception—most societies around the world did not write until the nineteenth century. Increasingly, historians are crossing disciplines and using archaeology, oral tradition, and evidence from descendants as sources to understand the histories of the distant past. With this broader evidence in hand, comparisons with other places in the world at the same time reveal that societies with written records did not have any more dynamic or exciting a history than those without them.[1]

In the very broadest terms, Native North Americans lived much like everyone else in the 1100s through 1500s. Most human beings kept their records orally, lived in kin groups, stayed close to home, shared buildings that had no heat or light except from fire and sunlight, and feared death from wounds and diseases that today would yield to modern medicine. Most people believed that the spiritual and physical worlds were not separate and that supernatural forces intervened in daily life, for good and for evil. Agriculture began in central Mexico and South America about ten thousand years ago,

around the same time as in Mesopotamia, and gradually spread throughout the Americas, as it did to the rest of the world. People built cities and established continent-wide trade networks to exchange food, textiles, pottery, art, jewelry, and raw materials. People everywhere saw the same stars and adapted to the same environmental changes as the planet warmed starting in the ninth century and cooled again four centuries later, as we shall see in chapters 1 and 2.[2]

While people in the Americas in this era were more like their contemporaries around the world than like us today, they were also highly diverse. They lived in thousands of independent polities and spoke hundreds of languages. They didn't think of themselves as one people or one race. Many were members of loosely affiliated nations or confederacies but also identified with smaller family groups or with one town or group of towns.

There were, of course, differences between North America and other parts of the world. People's beliefs, traditions, and languages were their own, forged in common experience and particular to them. And the history of the Americas before 1492 would shape how these peoples interacted with the rest of the world in the centuries to come. In some ways, they moved in parallel with the rest of the world, developing agriculture and building cities, while in others they diverged, creating relatively more egalitarian economies and polities than those of Europeans by the late 1400s. Europeans would overstate these distinctions and underestimate the complexity of Indigenous societies, mistakes that snowballed into histories full of similar assumptions.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, white Americans convinced themselves that the people here before Europeans had been merely scattered opposition, quickly overrun, but Europeans who came to North America in earlier centuries had no such illusions. They encountered powerful and populous Native nations everywhere they went, and even when they brought well-armed militaries, they fared better when they found Native allies than when they sought to dominate alone, as we shall see in chapters 3 through 6. And although Europeans were ethnocentric in the same way that

people all over the world were—believing they were more important, the center of history—they didn't yet assume they were innately and permanently superior to other races, as people would in later centuries. Indeed, the droughts, famines, and pandemics of the medieval era gave Europeans little room for illusions of superiority. In the Crusades, they battled Islamic states whose architecture, art, and learning would help to shape their own standards of civilization. They knew that China and India were ancient civilizations with many products far superior to anything made or grown in Europe. They adopted and responded to ideas from around the world, including North America, as they became less parochial and more cosmopolitan in the fifteenth century and beyond. Only in religion—being Christian—were Europeans sure they were in the right.[3]

Europeans did pose dangers to Native Americans. The fertile lands of North America could produce crops to feed Europe's growing population and make profits for monarchs and lords, and colonization attempts would change the history of North America forever. In some places, European numbers and technology allowed them to gain the upper hand quickly, but in most cases, for centuries after 1492, American Indians held more local knowledge and power. Europeans who wanted land or trade had to negotiate on Native terms, terms that had been shaped by the earlier history of North America. The chapters in this book's first part show the development of North American peoples before 1492 as they responded to local and global forces, and how they confronted and in many cases welcomed and made use of the newcomers who came to their shores in the following centuries.[4]

CHAPTER 1

Ancient Cities in Arizona, Illinois, and Alabama

It is rare that everyone in the world has the same thing on their minds at once, but we know one thing that everyone was talking about in the spring of 1006: the star. It had always been in the sky, but now it was sixteen times as bright as the planet we call Venus. In some places it was visible during the day for an entire month and startlingly bright at night for several years. Scientists today say it was the brightest supernova ever recorded. A chronicler in Baghdad recorded that "its rays on the earth were like those of the Moon." A Benedictine monk in Switzerland wrote that "a new star of unusual size appeared; it was glittering in appearance and dazzling the eyes, causing alarm." Alarm was a common reaction. Egyptian scholar Ali ibn Ridwan wrote about wars and famines that followed the star's appearance. Chinese astronomers worried about whether what they called "guest stars" were auspicious or, as the scholar Li Shunfeng put it, a sign that "presages military action, death, and countrywide famine." Court astronomers worked to assure Emperor Zhenzong that, despite recent invasions, "it presages great prosperity to the state over which it appears."[1]

In our age of electric lights, it is hard to grasp how important the stars were to everyone before the twentieth century. People all around the world used the sky to keep track of time. They could see countless more stars than we can today, and many cultures believed that a change in the sky meant something significant was happening. When another supernova appeared in 1054, less than fifty years later, some people believed the skies were telling them to make a