The Enduring Indians of Kansas

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INTRODUCTION

The forced migration and "Trail of Tears" of the Cherokees, Choc­taws, and other southern tribes during the 1830s and 1840s was the most dramatic result of President Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy. Less well known is that the tribes of the Old Northwest—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin—were also coerced into surrendering their lands and moving beyond the Mississippi River. Many of these tribes emigrated to a place that came to be called Kan­sas. During the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s more than ten thousand dis­placed Indians settled "permanently" along the wooded streams and rivers of eastern Kansas, at the edge of the western prairie. By the early 1870s, however, there remained only several hundred Kickapoos, Potawatomis, Chippewas, Munsees, Iowas, Sacs, and a few others.

These Indians were still in Kansas because they had managed to walk the fine line between their traditional ways and those of the whites. Although the Kickapoos, Potawatomis, and others had ac­culturated, they had not assimilated into the dominant American culture. They may have spoken English, farmed individual plots of land, donned overalls or calico dresses, and taken on other trappings of white society, but they never completely abandoned their traditional cus­toms, kinship networks, and religions and never forgot that they were Indians.

By outwardly adapting to Euro-American ways, they won the grudg­ing respect of whites, who accepted them as members of the larger Kansas farming community. Other tribes who had refused to make any accommodation had lost their lands and were forced to move to Ok­lahoma, then known as Indian Territory. Most of those who assimi­lated, accepting the individualistic and materialistic values that white society forced upon them, met the same fate.

This study defines the processes of acculturation and assimilation as
two separate concepts. The latter involves the complete absorption of a minority people—Indian tribe or immigrant group—into the traditional and cultural mainstream of a larger and more powerful society. Those who have assimilated into the dominant society (this includes, for example, most Irish and German Americans) have given up or forgotten most elements of their former cultural heritage and have lost their earlier identity. In contrast, acculturation is the intercultural borrowing that takes place when two or more diverse peoples come into close contact. Each adopts certain cultural traits of the other, resulting in new and blended forms; yet each retains a certain degree of cultural autonomy.

In the case of the Indians, of course, acculturation has been a largely one-sided process; they have adopted far more Euro-American cultural traits than vice versa. Nevertheless, the Indians who remained in Kansas acculturated on their own terms; to them, acculturation was a defense mechanism that proved crucial to their survival. Despite their acculturative concessions to the new ways, they avoided eviction from Kansas while remaining, at heart, Indians who identified with their respective tribes, bands, and clans. They resisted governmental demands that they abandon their tribes for uncertain lives as individual family farmers.

Their acculturation without assimilation was a lengthy process that began long before the tribes were moved to the West. As was true of the southern Indians, the traditional political, economic, and social practices of these tribes had already been altered by years of interaction with whites. Although most Indians benefited little by these changes, several bands of Kickapoos, Chippewas, Munsees, Iowas, Sacs, and Potawatomis had at least learned how to deal with whites. Members of these bands had developed creative strategies to cope with the problems caused by an influx of white settlers onto their new lands. They managed to forestall efforts to remove their people from Kansas. With few exceptions, their bands had leaders who effectively resisted efforts by Indian agents and missionaries to change their ways. These bands were able to remain in Kansas by adapting to the dominant society as necessary, but at their own pace and by passive, nonviolent resistance.

All of the emigrant tribes that settled in nineteenth-century Kansas faced a constant struggle to keep their possessions and to maintain their cultural integrity. Immediately after the first significant number
of émigrés began arriving in their new homes during the 1820s, Indian agents and other federal employees, traders, and missionaries appeared to minister to their needs. Although many of these whites had honest intentions, their efforts to help Indians were generally more harmful than beneficial.

Most whites, convinced that Indians must either abandon their "heathen" ways or perish, scorned tribal customs and religions. Indian agents, therefore, worked to remake their unwilling wards into yeoman farmers and to bring them "up to the standard of morals and intellectual and religious cultivation, that would gladen [sic] the hearts of all lovers of their country and its institutions." The whites believed that federal officials should furnish European-style clothing to the Indians, whose breechcloths, blankets, paints, bear-claw necklaces, ear-bobs, bracelets, and other jewelry reinforced "their ancient traditions, superstitions and customs, which has [sic] so long and so effectively interfered with their advancement in civilization." Few whites seemed to realize that that very fabric of custom and religion sustained the Indians in their bitter struggle to survive.

The leading advocates of change for Indians were the Protestant and Catholic missionaries, most of whom were sincere and interested primarily in winning Indian souls. Especially confident of success were the Jesuits, most of them recent arrivals from Belgium, France, and other European countries. The Jesuits worked among several Kansas tribes, including the Potawatomis and Kickapoos. They knew that they held several advantages over their Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Moravian counterparts. The Jesuit order's bureaucracy mobilized missionaries on a grand scale, and their well-rounded classical education gave the priests a facility with languages that Protestant ministers generally lacked. In addition, priests were unhindered by family affairs or financial worries, and many Indians appreciated their chastity, a practice many whites failed to observe.

Experience had taught the Jesuits, moreover, to make concessions to local customs and to begin serious proselytizing only after mastering the Indians' languages and understanding their folkways. While others may have condemned traditional dancing, games, and festivals, the "blackrobes" wisely tolerated these ceremonies. Rather than trying to eradicate existing Indian practices, they sought to adapt them to Catholicism. By giving Christian meaning to tribal ritual, as they did
with the Vermillion Kickapoos and others, the Jesuits sometimes inad vitently helped create a cultural blend dominated by the native contribution rather than the European.5

Regardless of their religious affiliation, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were firm believers in the American melting pot, and they were convinced that accepting Christ's teachings would radically improve the Indians' way of life. The preachers optimistically believed that conversions would come quickly and easily. But in 1837, when the Baptist missionary John G. Pratt first arrived at the Shawnee Mission near the mouth of the Kansas River, he was shocked by the Indians' indifference to his preaching. He wrote to a superior that it was "truly painful to notice the stupidity of these 'sons of the forest,' in the reception of religious instruction." He was sure, nevertheless, that the Indians, "wandering they know not where," would soon "embrace the same Savior, and become heirs, also, of the kingdom of Heaven." Pratt believed that God had directed him to this "land of darkness" and had blessed him with an "abundant opportunity" to save the souls of those "without the Gospel and destitute of its sanctifying influences."6

Expecting their charges to embrace the Gospel, to adopt white ways, to give up hunting for farming, and to reject polygamy, gambling, and alcohol, Pratt and other missionaries established missions and schools on tribal lands. Both the Protestants and the Catholics were, however, nearly always disappointed; for although Indians were willing to incorporate selected aspects of Christianity, they had practiced their traditional religions for centuries and were reluctant to reject the rites of their ancestors in favor of the beliefs of whites.

Even more distasteful, missionaries often found themselves competing unsuccessfully with traditional religious leaders for the hearts and minds of the people. The Methodist minister Jerome Berryman complained that Kenekuk, the Kickapoo prophet, had thwarted his conversion efforts. The Methodist insisted that such "impostors must be held in check by the counteracting influences of popular virtue, or they will in time barbarize the world."7

But as one Kickapoo man explained, the band's moral code had already approximated that of the preachers, and the Indians were satisfied that they had found the true path. The Kickapoos did not need to become Methodists or Catholics. "We are happier and more flourishing here. . . . It is only a few years since we learnt [God’s] will and commands" through the prophet Kenekuk, but if "[we] obey him, we
shall daily grow wiser and happier." The Kickapoos' devotion to their
own religious leader was unquestioning; the prophet's charismatic
hold over his band was something that Berryman and other mis-
missionaries could hardly understand, let alone appreciate.8

The Jesuit Christian Hoecken discovered that Indians generally
feared, "respected and revered" their own religious leaders, believing
that they could "kill or cure and make their patients suffer or pine
away."9 This reverence and fear proved a major obstacle to mission
work. "The superstitions of the Indians lie at the foundation of much
of their barbarity," wrote Charles F. Coffin, clerk for the Committee of
Friends (Quakers) on Indian Affairs. The tribespeople, Coffin asserted,
were under the spell of an Indian "priesthood whose spiritual knowl-
edge does not rise above the simplest arts of necromancy and soothsay-
ing, and we can well understand how capricious and unsatisfactory
must be the workings of a polity resting upon such a basis."10

Although they resisted conversion efforts, most tribes allowed the
missionaries to set up stations among them and preach. When the
eastern Indians arrived in Kansas, they hoped to quickly reestablish
their former way of life, and they shrewdly realized that missionaries
could be useful as intermediaries between themselves and a govern-
ment slow in providing promised treaty monies, food, clothing, and
farm implements. Missionaries could protect their charges from un-
scrupulous traders, and by witnessing contracts and other transactions
they could also counteract whites who attempted to usurp Indian
lands.

By the 1840s several religious groups had established missions in
Kansas. The Methodists worked among the Shawnees and other tribes,
while the Baptists preached to the Delawares and Ottawas; the
Catholics built St. Mary's Mission for the Potawatomis; the Moravians
proselytized among the Munsee Delawares; and the Presbyterians
spread the Gospel among the Iowas and Sacs. As advocates of the
government's civilization program, the preachers agreed that Indians
should assimilate, and they promoted educational and farming oppor-
tunities for their charges. At the Baptist Manual Labor School, for
example, Superintendent Johnston Lykins established a model farm to
help "Americanize the Indians, and attach them to our country and
institutions."11

Such attempts to Americanize Indians, however, were destined for
failure. Preferring their own ways, most tribespeople refused to be-
come assimilated. Racism on the part of settlers, businessmen, federal agents, and other whites, moreover, made it extremely difficult for whites and Indians to live as neighbors. This fact proved unfortunate for most of the Indians of Kansas. Although governmental officials had assured the tribes that the Kansas lands were theirs forever, by the late 1840s white settlement had reached the Missouri River and pressures mounted to move the Indians out of the way of progress. The Mexican War ended in 1848, opening California and other western territories to settlement.

As a result, Illinois Sen. Stephen A. Douglas and others argued that the Indian lands posed a barrier to United States expansion. "How are we to develop, cherish and protect our immense interests and possessions on the Pacific," Douglas proclaimed, "with a vast wilderness fifteen hundred miles in breadth, filled with hostile savages, and cutting off all direct communication. The Indian barrier must be removed." Politicians and businessmen pressured federal officials to open the lines of communication to California by creating a right-of-way through Indian country. In response, officials began plotting a new general Indian policy because the removal of Indians to isolated areas was no longer an option. For the sake of American progress and development, the reservation system became a necessity.

The emigrant Indians of Kansas would be among the first to feel the effects of the new reservation policy. They had lived under federal supervision within set geographical boundaries since they first arrived in the West; their lands were, in effect, already considered reservations. But businessmen and settlers in Missouri and other states were clamoring for access to Indian lands, and Senator Douglas was championing construction of the transcontinental railroad.

In 1853 Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny began negotiating with the Kansas bands to sell a portion of their lands. By the following year, he had convinced most of them that if they expected to remain in Kansas they would have to confine themselves within even narrower geographical boundaries. Manypenny believed that close federal supervision of the Indians on their reduced reservations would be to the tribes' benefit. He was certain that if Indians were assimilated into American society they would be able to live in peace with the settlers, and he accordingly strove to bring them the benefits of white civilization. To hasten the process, he sought to break up tribal cohesiveness and authority, to give individual Indians owner-
The locations of Indian tribes west of the Mississippi, including those in Kansas, as shown on Capt. Seth Eastman’s 1852 map. (Courtesy of the Wichita State University Library)

ship of farms, and to sell “surplus” reservation lands to businessmen and settlers. Manypenny thought that the reservations could adequately support the tribes as independent family farmers; to him, the reservation policy was only a temporary measure.

Unfortunately for the Indians, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 just after Manypenny and his subordinates had concluded treaty negotiations with the various tribes. This new law, introduced and promoted by Senator Douglas, had been enacted in response to overwhelming political and economic pressures to organize Kansas and Nebraska. Both territories were opened to white settlement, with no provision prohibiting the extension of slavery into either; southerners hoped to bring slavery to Kansas. When news of the act’s passage reached the West, settlers, speculators, railroad agents, and other opportunists rushed to stake claims in the new Kansas Territory. Within a short time, proslavery and abolitionist forces had turned the territory into a battleground and Bleeding Kansas gained national attention.

The future looked hopeless for the Kansas tribes. “Trespasses and
depredations of every conceivable kind have been committed on the Indians," Manypenny lamented. "They have been personally maltreated, their property stolen, their timber destroyed, their possessions encroached upon, and divers other wrongs and injuries done them." Thomas H. Gladstone, a correspondent reporting on Bleeding Kansas for the London Times, observed in 1856 that the rapid immigration of whites into the area would soon result in the dispossession of the Indians and "cause their transference once more to a district further West." Alarmed Indians throughout the region feared that whites were again "preparing to drive them ... away from the graves of their fathers, kindred and children." Hoping to bring order out of chaos, the Delawares and others sold railroad rights-of-way across their lands, trusting the railroad companies to reimburse them handsomely. The Indians were sadly mistaken.

In their book The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution, 1854–1871, H. Craig Miner and William E. Unrau describe the distressing events that followed. Throughout the late 1850s, increasing numbers of whites moved to Kansas Territory, and competition between settler organizations and railroad officials for control of tribal lands intensified. Loose coalitions called "Indian rings" formed to fight for corporate dominance. These Indian rings included various combinations of Washington bureaucrats, congressmen, businessmen, army officers, Indian agents, and even tribal "chiefs" who joined forces to dispossess the Indians. Under the banner of "popular sovereignty" (a catch phrase of the day, meaning let the people decide), businessmen also secured political and economic control of Kansas. Preoccupied first with slavery, then with the Civil War and Reconstruction, successive Washington administrations were unwilling or unable to protect the Indians from the forces arrayed against them.

Even some missionaries plotted against the Indians as Catholic and Protestant preachers fought for control over the various tribes. Once missions were established, the preachers set to work acquiring large blocks of valuable land from their neophytes. Touring Kansas and Nebraska just prior to the Civil War, ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan observed that "all of these missions look out well for themselves when a reservation is broken up and a band is moved to a new home." Morgan discovered that Methodist, Quaker, and Presbyterian missionaries had each procured several sections of land from the Indians. "How this was done," he wrote, "I do not know." Noting that the Indians re-
sented the preachers' actions, Morgan found it "painful to hear and see so many and such constant evidences of mistrust in the Indian mind, of white people and their motives."\textsuperscript{18}

Although arguments that they needed title to the lands in order to carry out mission work were usually based on honest intentions, some men of the cloth engaged in blatant fraud. Members of the Baptist Home Mission Society, for example, conspired with Agent Clinton C. Hutchinson to cheat the Ottawa Indians out of their Kansas lands. In 1860 Hutchinson and the Baptists arranged a deal with Ottawa leaders willing to accept bribes in exchange for tribal property. Two years later twenty thousand acres, a fourth of the reservation, were set aside to build a "university," ostensibly to benefit the Indians. But by 1864 white men were speculating freely in Ottawa University lands, and lots had been laid out to build a new town. Although federal officials later ruled that Hutchinson and his cohorts had acted improperly, by 1870 the swindle had taken its toll on the Indians. Overmatched by their enemies and torn by internal squabbles, most of the Ottawas had agreed to move to Indian Territory; very few ever attended the school built in their name.\textsuperscript{19}

Throughout this period, individual Indians played vital roles in the exploitation of the tribes.\textsuperscript{20} Indeed, without the cooperation of certain Indians, as Miner and Unrau point out, the businessmen and others would have had difficulty convincing eastern politicians or concerned humanitarians and philanthropists that their actions were justifiable.

But when legitimate tribal elders sought to defend the interests of their people against the chicanery, businessmen and missionaries persuaded Indian agents to replace these leaders with others who were more amenable. The Moravian minister Joseph Romig, for example, noted that Chippewa Chief Eshtonoquot's actions hindered conversion efforts because the people were afraid that the chief was "an old witch." Romig demanded that governmental officials punish Eshtonoquot, who was "very illiterate or ignorant, and a bigotted [sic] Catholic." A short time later, Agent Henry Martin ordered the tribe to dismiss the "old and childish, and totally unfit" chief. The new Chippewa leaders proved more receptive to financial inducements and other favors in return for their lands. Martin also dismissed the Sac leader Mokohoko from his band's government-recognized council, because the Indian refused to sell tribal lands and "bids defiance" to education and mission work. Even though most Sacs continued to
follow Mokohoko's advice, the agent ignored him and turned to Moses Keokuk, who was willing to comply with Martin's instructions.  

Similar instances occurred on almost every Kansas reservation. During the 1840s, for example, the Iowas had been divided into factions, one led by the traditionalist White Cloud, the other by the more flexible No Heart. Agents and missionaries praised No Heart as a "friend to the mission" who encouraged others to remain "sober and peacible [sic]" and "to stay at home and go to work."  

White Cloud, on the other hand, frequently incurred the wrath of Indian agents who failed to appreciate Iowa customs. In the spring of 1848, White Cloud led a war party seeking revenge against Pawnee horse thieves. When the returning warriors celebrated the taking of Pawnee scalps, an outraged agent, Alfred Vaughn, rejected their contention that they had as much right to fight their enemies as did the United States Army. Vaughn dismissed White Cloud as a government-recognized leader.  

Later that year the agent had White Cloud and two others arrested for harassing the missionaries. One of the accused had pulled a Presbyterian minister's hair during Sunday services; another allegedly killed mission cattle. Vaughn ordered White Cloud detained because of "his conduct towards the missionaries" and for "threats against myself & the whites generally. Besides his attempts to induce the children to leave the school, he is guilty of almost continual drunkenness."  

Among the Indians who incurred the most vehement wrath of federal agents was a Prairie Potawatomi leader named Wahquahboshkuk. During the late nineteenth century, Wahquahboshkuk helped the Potawatomis in resisting formal education, Christianity, and the allotment of their reservation into individual family farms—the major provisions of the federal civilization program. "This man is and has been for a number of years, in open declared opposition, not only against allotments, but all other reform . . . for the benefit of the Indians," wrote Agent J. A. Scott in 1893. "He has so persistently opposed law and regulation, has shown such an evil and malicious disposition, and is so clearly guilty of a purpose to create discord" that he should be expelled from the reservation.  

Under Wahquahboshkuk, the Prairie Potawatomis held together as a cohesive group despite the efforts to undermine their solidarity. Most bands, however, were unable to resist such constant pressures and resignedly agreed to leave Kansas. Weakened by intratribal factionalism, the Weas, Miamis, Delawares, Ottawas, Shawnees, and most others
abandoned Kansas during the nineteenth century. The actions of various federal officials, missionaries, and certain tribal leaders gave a fiction of legality to the great land dispossession that contributed to the virtual end of Indian Kansas.

In their book, Miner and Unrau emphasize the actions of whites who victimized Kansas tribes; the authors never intended to focus on the Indians' strategies to save their Kansas homes. Their "study of cultural revolution" is, therefore, more an analysis of unscrupulous business activities and the demographic changes that resulted than of cultural revolution among the Indians. After 1870 there remained in the state nearly one thousand stubborn Indians who still refused to give up their lands or to become imitation white farmers. Those steadfast Indians—groups of Kickapoos, Chippewas and Munsees, Iowas, Sacs, and Potawatomis—are the subjects of this study.

Although each of the surviving groups faced similar obstacles and had similar experiences, each of their stories is unique. Because of the complexities involved in meshing their stories together in a coherent fashion, a note on the organization of this study is in order. Chapter 2 describes the environment of Kansas, discusses the background to the Jacksonian Era Indian removal, and delves into the settlement of Kansas by Indians from the East.

Subsequent chapters focus individually on the Vermillion Kickapoos, who under the religious leadership of the prophet Kenekuk remained a unified people who resisted conversion to Christianity and individual land allotment; the Chippewas and Munsee Delawares, who also retained their Kansas homes but gave up their identity as Indians in the process; the Iowas and the Missouri Sacs, who followed a successful strategy of peaceful coexistence with their often hostile white neighbors; and the Prairie Potawatomis, who took the lead among Kansas Indians in resisting formal education, Christianity, and land allotment.

There is also a chapter on a group of Sac Indians—sometimes called the Mississippi Sacs and Foxes—under the leadership of Mokohoko. These Sacs failed in their efforts to remain in Kansas, but their story is one of courage and determination; their methods of passive resistance to governmental policies and their adherence to traditional ways appeared to be the correct prescriptions for success. Simple bad luck prevented them from achieving their goals.
Chapter One

The concluding chapter attempts to tie together the experiences of those intrepid Kickapoos, Chippewas, Munsees, Iowas, Sacs, and Potawatomi and brings their story up through to the present. The narrative that follows sheds light on their legacy of persistence—the Indians' enduring struggle to retain their Kansas lands and to hold on to their distinct and cherished tribal cultures.