# A Note on Economic Depressions and Native American Opportunities

DAVID A. NICHOLS

ABSTRACT: Contrary to its portrayal in popular culture, the territorial expansion of the United States was an expensive and highly organized undertaking. Wealthy financiers worked together with land speculators, well-capitalized grain and cotton cultivators, railroad companies, and state and federal governments to expel Native Americans from their homes, sell off their lands, produce marketable commodities thereon, and transport these goods to market centers. The capitalist structure of American settler-colonialism allowed investors to sustain periods of rapid territorial and economic growth, but when they collectively lost confidence in their investments' profitability, both the financial markets and the demand for Native lands crashed. A closer look at the depressions following the Panics of 1819, 1837, 1857, and 1873 reveals that, in most cases, governmental pressure on Indigenous Americans slackened during these downturns, giving many Native communities the opportunity peacefully to resist federal troops and agents, or otherwise protect themselves from dispossession.

KEYWORDS: agriculture; Army; banking; California; Chickasaws; Congress, U.S.; Democrats; depressions; Native American education; Indian Removal; Indiana; internal

David A. Nichols is Donald F. Carmony Chair of History at Indiana University, Bloomington, and the twelfth editor of the *Indiana Magazine of History*. His most recent book is *Peoples of the Inland Sea: Native Americans and Newcomers in the Great Lakes Region, 1600–1870* (2018).

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improvements; Kansas; land policy; Miamis; Michigan; Samuel Milroy; Native Americans; panics; Plains Indians; Potawatomi; Simon Pokagon; William Polke; railroads; Republicans; slavery, African Americans; specie; treaties; John Tyler; War Department; Whigs

Dawn Bakken's observations in this issue concerning the collapse of the Second State Bank of Indiana and the consequent disbanding (for lack of funds) of the 1839 Potawatomi Removal party raise a significant general question: were economic disasters in nineteenth-century America actually good news for Native Americans? The inverse certainly seems to have been true: periods of sustained economic growth often accompanied the immiseration of Indigenous Americans. The American gross national product was in the nineteenth century driven by a rising world demand for American crops, the surveying of "new" lands for conversion to commercial agriculture, the capitalization of those lands through public land offices and chartered banks, and the construction of internal improvements to bring produce to world markets. When the overall American economy did well, this often resulted from the United States' recent seizure of Native American homelands and the expulsion of their original owners.[1]

The national economy did not, of course, always grow steadily. In the nineteenth century, white Americans experienced heady periods of economic growth and sustained bleak depressions—four of the latter in the first three quarters of the century, following financial panics in 1819, 1837, 1857, and 1873. During depressions agricultural prices fell, credit dried up, canal and railroad companies failed, expansion stopped. These were hard times (as contemporaries called them) for white and many free Black Americans. At the same time, by deflating demand for land and for transportation rights-of-way, these slowdowns provided Native Americans with much-needed respites from white colonialism. The evidence from the depression years of the early 1820s and 1840s, the late 1850s, and the mid-1870s suggests, however, that these periods of decreased pressure resulted from the interaction of economic with political forces. The Americans placing the most direct pressure on Native Americans were people like William Polke and Samuel Milroy, soldiers and officials and treaty commissioners, all employed by the American national government. To the extent

[1] Dawn Bakken, ed., "The Attempted Potawatomi Removal of 1839," *Indiana Magazine of History* 117 (September 2021), 169–207.

that panics and depressions aided Indigenous Americans who wanted to remain unmolested in their homes, they did so by changing the national government's priorities and limiting its resources. A new administration less interested than its predecessors in territorial expansion, or a Congress dedicated to austerity and cuts in military spending, created space for Indigenous Americans to reach accommodation with white settlers and local officials, to evade soldiers sent to expel or kill them, and to recover, at least for a time, more secure and independent lives.

When Indiana joined the Union in 1816, white Americans were busily taking advantage of Europe's distress. The latter continent's farmers had yet to recover from the Napoleonic Wars, and were suffering through the frigid temperatures and failed harvests of the "Year without a Summer." Much of Europe tottered on the edge of famine. White American farmers were eager to send relief and make a profit. In the next three years grain, cotton, and farmland prices soared, as did demand for land at the United States' public land offices. At Vincennes, for example, land registrar John Badollet remarked in late 1816 on the large "number of persons daily thronging in [my] office." Seeking to capitalize on this land hunger, the U. S. War Department and its commissioners bore down heavily on the Trans-Appalachian Indian nations, extracting tens of thousands of square miles in land cessions, including about one-third of the land in Indiana.[2]

European agriculture recovered by the end of 1818. The American economic bubble burst the next year, thanks in part to a contraction of credit by the Second Bank of the United States. A rapidly declining money supply set off a financial panic and a wave of bank failures, which turned downward-trending prices into a nationwide deflationary squeeze. Three years of feverish growth gave way to three years of frozen depression. Sales at federal land offices slowed to a halt—indeed, purchasers returned to the U. S. government a million acres of real estate bought on credit. Congress, unfamiliar with counter-cyclical fiscal policy, responded to the financial crisis with retrenchment, cutting the size of the Army and expenditures on the "Indian department" (agencies and treaties). The U. S. government obtained a few more Native American land cessions in the early 1820s,

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[2] Richard J. Evans, *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815–1914* (New York, 2016), 4–10; George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815–1828* (New York, 1965), 73–80; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789–1837* (Belmont, Calif., 1990), 106 (quote); David A. Nichols, *Peoples of the Inland Sea: Native Americans and Newcomers in the Great Lakes Region, 1600–1870* (Athens, Ohio, 2018), 155–56.

but the pressure of the post-War of 1812 years eased, as both demand for Indian land and the means of procuring it abated.[3]

The economic slowdown thus gave nations like the Potawatomi and Chickasaw a reprieve, and an opportunity to consolidate their own socio-economic position. Many diversified their economies by investing treaty annuities and other revenues in livestock, plows, and fenced fields, and procured basic Anglo-American schooling for their children, to help them acquire the English literacy they needed to do business with their white neighbors. They hoped they would thereby create a *modus vivendi* with white Americans, one that would allow them to remain and even enjoy modest prosperity in their old communities.[4]

Their hopes declined with the recovery of the American national economy in the mid-1820s, and were decisively dashed by the Jacksonian Democrats, who by 1830 had committed themselves to ethnic cleansing. Andrew Jackson and his partisans saw the continued expansion of export-oriented commercial farming, the growth of state-funded infrastructure projects like canals, and, in the Southeast, the expanded exploitation of enslaved African Americans as guarantors of continued national prosperity. The expulsion of Native peoples from the Southeast and Midwest Jacksonian officials considered the necessary preparation for these later expansions. The early years of the Indian Removal program, as officials and historians euphemistically labeled the campaign that drove 90,000 Native Americans from their homes and killed 15,000, coincided with and helped generate another dramatic expansion of the American national economy. Annual sales of formerly Native-owned lands rose to an unprecedented height, from 965,000 acres in 1828 to 20 million in 1836. Cotton production (and the market in enslaved African Americans) boomed, and land speculation flourished. Chickasaw notable James Colbert predicted that all his people's homeland would "go into the hands of capitalists." State governments in the Northeast and Midwest concurrently borrowed millions of dollars

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[3] Noble E. Cunningham, *The Presidency of James Monroe* (Lawrence, Kan., 1996), 83–84; Andrew H. Browning, *The Panic of 1819: The First Great Depression* (Columbia, Mo., 2019); C. Edward Skeen, "Calhoun, Crawford, and the Politics of Retrenchment," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 73 (July 1972), 141–55; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 112–15; Daniel Dupre, "Frontiers Knit Together and Unraveled: The Rhetoric of Land Relief in an Age of Boom and Bust," *Journal of the Early Republic* 40 (Winter 2020), 677–82.

[4] Jeffrey Washburn, "Directing Their Own Change: Chickasaw Economic Transformation and the Civilization Plan, 1750s–1830," *Native South* 13 (2020), 94–119; W. Ben Secunda, "To Cede or Seed? Risk and Identity among the Woodland Potawatomi during the Removal Period," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 31 (Spring 2006), 57–88.

to finance canals and other expensive internal improvements, creating additional state-level demand for the removal of Indigenous people (to clear the rights-of-way).[5]

The expansion proved something of a confidence game, insofar as it ultimately rested on Anglo-American businessmen's collective faith in one another: faith that land and crop prices would keep rising and that creditors and debtors would meet their obligations. Such confidence became harder to sustain when the federal government removed two crucial pieces of financial insurance: a federal lender of last resort, namely the Second Bank of the United States (one of Andrew Jackson's nemeses), and a market of last resort for paper money, which land offices ceased to provide when the Specie Circular mandated land payments in gold or silver. As individual merchants and financiers began to delay paying their bills or to default on their loans to one another, financial anxiety cascaded through the financial marketplaces in Britain and the United States. Aggregating defaults in the spring of 1837 caused several prominent banks to close or to suspend access to their specie reserves, and anxiety turned to panic. Financial confidence and the national economy recovered briefly in 1838, but another crash the following year, triggered by a fall in farm prices, pulled the United States into a four-year recession. Unemployment climbed in the new industrial centers of the Northeast, and eight state governments defaulted on their debts. Indiana's Mammoth Internal Improvement project, a ten-million-dollar system of canals and roads spanning the state, collapsed in 1841 with most of the planned improvements unfinished and the state itself bankrupted.[6]

Nationally, the depression led directly to the electoral defeat of President Martin Van Buren, who counseled frugality and patience and refused to support any federal relief measures. His successors, former Indiana territorial

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[5] Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (New Haven, Conn., 2019), 256, 263, 273–74, 286, 305–306, 310, 320–21; Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 177–98; Claudio Saunt, "Financing Dispossession: Stocks, Bonds, and the Deportation of Native Peoples in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of American History* 106 (September 2019), 315–37, quote 316; Ginette Aley, "Bringing about the Dawn: Agriculture, Internal Improvements, Indian Policy, and Euro-American Hegemony in the Old Northwest, 1800–1846," in Daniel Barr, ed., *The Boundaries between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontier of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750–1850* (Kent, Ohio, 2006), 196–218.

[6] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York, 2007), 502–505, 508; Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge, U. K., 2013); James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 2014), 82–85.

governor William Henry Harrison and (following Harrison's sickly one-month tenure in office) Virginia Whig John Tyler, were not known as strenuous advocates of Native American rights. Indian Removal nonetheless ranked low on their and the congressional Whigs' lists of priorities. Moreover, neither man wanted to start or sustain a war in the middle of a recession—instead, Tyler and Congress cut the Army's budget in half and reduced its size from 12,000 to 8,000 men. Early in his presidency Tyler declared victory in the United States' long, punishing war with the Seminoles, allowing five or six hundred surviving resisters to live in peace in Florida. The War Department also declined to pursue the 1,500 or so members of the Cherokee Nation who had evaded federal troops and taken refuge in the southern Appalachians, and it suspended the removal of the Odawas from southern Michigan, lest some seek protection from or even military intervention by their British friends in Canada.[7]

In the Great Lakes region, the Whigs and their Democratic successors undertook one Removal project in the mid-1840s, the expulsion of the Miamis from northern Indiana. This proved only a qualified success for Removal advocates, and only a partial defeat for the Miami people. During the previous two decades the commercially savvy Miami elite had obtained individual titles to the tracts on which they and their relations lived, and had forged strong economic ties with the white merchants who lived near them. The latter became a powerful interest group opposed to their customers' expulsion. Only in 1846 did Indiana officials and land speculators persuade the Polk administration to cut off the Miamis' annuities and send in federal troops, who forcibly moved 300 men, women, and children to Kansas. About half of the nation's people remained in their Indiana homeland. Many others returned to Indiana in subsequent decades.[8]

Miami removal occurred during a period of economic recovery following the deep recession of the early 1840s. American national economic growth accelerated dramatically at the end of that decade, following the end of the Mexican-American War and the discovery of gold in the newly

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[7] Norma Lois Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler* (Lawrence, Kan., 1989), 157; U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789–1970* (2 vols., Washington, D. C., 1976), 2:1115; Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, 283–84; John R. Finger, "The Abortive Second Cherokee Removal, 1841–1844," *Journal of Southern History* 47 (May 1981), 207–226; Nichols, *Peoples of the Inland Sea*, 182.

[8] Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, 296–97; John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman, Okla., 2016), 72–76; Bradley Birzer, "Jean Baptiste Richardville: Miami Métis," in R. David Edmunds, ed., *Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest* (Urbana, Ill., 2008), 94–108.

annexed territory of California. The national money supply increased, as steamships carried bullion from San Francisco to eastern cities—200 million dollars' worth by 1852, another 800 million in the following twenty years. Capital flowed into grain cultivation and flour milling as a new European conflict, the Crimean War (1853–56), created demand for American foodstuffs. Railroad investment grew apace, floated by expectations of federal investment, particularly in a railroad to California. White Americans, including a growing number of immigrants, surged into the agricultural territories of Minnesota and Oregon and the goldfields of California. Settler militias in California and Oregon conducted exterminatory raids on Native American communities, and violence, disease, famine, and virtual enslavement nearly destroyed California's Native American population, reducing it by eighty percent by 1870. Federal officials, meanwhile, attended to their colonialist duties, taking nearly all Indigenous lands in Oregon and Washington Territories through coerced treaties, and wringing additional land cessions from emigrant Indians—including the multiply displaced Delawares and Wyandots—in eastern Kansas.[9]

The crash that ended this period of expansion and displacement demonstrated how integrated and financialized the American national economy had become in just half a century. In the spring of 1857, as investors worried about a likely decline in white settlement in Kansas Territory, midwestern railroad bonds and Kansas land warrants lost value. The decline put pressure on midwestern and some northeastern banks, whose calls on New York bankers for specie (to cover their own depositors' demands) squeezed that financial center as well. By the fall, several major financial institutions, like the Ohio Life and Trust Company, had failed. This laid the groundwork for the panic that ignited when New York and other eastern cities' banks suspended specie payments. The new electric telegraph rapidly spread that panic throughout the American financial

[9] Leonard L. Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 2007), 132; Andrew Isenberg, "Industrial Empire: The American Conquest of the West, 1845–1900," in Jonathan Daniel Wells, ed., *The Routledge History of Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 2018), 333–45, esp. 337–39; Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846–1873* (Lincoln, Neb., 2012), population figures at 128; James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, La., 1987), 5–6, 34–35; Colin G. Calloway, *Pen & Ink Witchcraft: Treaties and Treaty-Making in American Indian History* (New York, 2013), 172–74, 177; John P. Bowes, *Exiles and Pioneers: Eastern Indians in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Cambridge, U. K., 2007), 189–90, 201–207.

sector. Dozens more banks failed, including nearly half of those chartered in the state of Indiana, and a new economic depression set in.[10]

As in the two previous national depressions, the federal government reacted to the economic downturn by cutting expenditures. In this case it did not have much choice: declining import tariffs (the source of most federal revenue) had left a ten-million-dollar budget shortfall, and strapped New York financiers were slow to float the Treasury Department a loan. Army expenditures declined, and the Interior Department, now the administrative home of the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, negotiated relatively few Indian land-purchase agreements in the next five years—fifteen treaties from 1857 to 1861, as compared with forty between 1854 and 1856. Commissioners of Indian Affairs James Denver, Charles Mix, and Albert Greenwood argued in favor of a more energetic federal Indian policy, centered on the concentration of Native peoples on smaller reserves and an increase in federal funding for Indian schools. None, however, won the ear of President James Buchanan or his partisans in Congress, for whom dispossessing and assimilating American Indians had become far less important than whether the white settlers who replaced them favored or opposed slavery.[11]

Congress had intensified voters' and lawmakers' interest in the territorial expansion of slavery by passing the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), which permitted slavery in that region if local white settlers chose to adopt it. The act led to a low-intensity war in Kansas Territory between anti- and pro-slavery settlers, and to the projected decline in Kansas (re)settlement that had touched off the 1857 Panic. The civil war in Kansas helped engender the organization and growing electoral strength of the Republican Party, whose 1860 election victories Southern slave owners considered an existential threat. The formation of the Confederacy and its bloody four-year war for independence soon followed. During that war, legislators and officials of the Republican Party developed a new set of policies toward the western United States and its Indigenous inhabitants: massive federal aid for railroad construction, free (or virtually free) public land for white settlers, and the intensified use of military force against

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[10] Charles Walomiris and Larry Schweikart, "The Panic of 1857: Origins, Transmission, and Containment," *Journal of Economic History* 51 (December 1991), 807–834; Johnny Fulfer, "Panic of 1857," The Economic Historian, July 6, 2020, online at https://economic-historian.com/2020/07/panic-of-1857/, accessed July 3, 2021.

[11] Huston, *The Panic of 1857*, 129–33, 137–38; Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Los Angeles, Calif., 1994), Appendix B (n. p.); Robert Kvasnicka and Herman Viola, eds., *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824–1977* (Lincoln, Neb., 1979), 69–87.

Native peoples who refused to relinquish their lands and settle on small reserves. The Republicans had risen to power with the promise to develop the Trans-Mississippi territories for free laborers. Now they intended to subjugate Indigenous nations who would resist their plan, just as Union armies had fought to break the resistance of slave owners who had a different vision for the West.[12]

The end of the American Civil War initiated a new economic boom, as investors shifted the capital they had mobilized for the war effort into mining, oil refining, food production, textiles, construction, and thousands of miles of new railroads. Profits from these new business ventures in the conquered West and South mainly returned to northeastern investors; when that small group of men lost confidence in the expansion, they rapidly withdrew their funds and started yet another depression. The panic that ended the postwar expansion began in Europe, where cheap American exports of canned meat, grain, and kerosene (this latter a replacement for fuel-grade canola oil) had squeezed Continental farm prices downwards. Nervous European capitalists curtailed their investments, including purchases of American corporate bonds and short-term loans to the railroads. Credit across the Atlantic became tighter. The collapse of the financial firm of Jay Cooke & Company triggered a massive securities sell-off in the United States, which took more than one hundred banks with it. Factories closed and unemployment rose in northern cities. The Republican Party, in the saddle of national politics since 1861, split into northeastern and midwestern factions over the issue of relief via currency reform. President Ulysses S. Grant's veto of a modest inflation bill alienated both midwestern leaders, like Indiana senator Oliver P. Morton, and midwestern voters, who helped deliver the U.S. House of Representatives to the Democrats in 1874.[13]

As one historian of the depression noted, "the long-term effects of the Panic of 1873 … were perverse." The downturn wrecked many lives and destroyed many small fortunes. Businessmen with cash on hand, however,

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[12] Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, Kan., 2004); Steven Hahn, "Slave Emancipation, Indian Peoples, and the Projects of a New American Nation-State," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (September 2013), 307–330.

[13] Natalie Ring, "The Paradox of the Business and Political Economy of the New South," in Wells, ed., *Routledge History of Nineteenth-Century America*, 307–320, esp. 310; Scott Nelson, "A Storm of Cheap Goods: New American Commodities and the Panic of 1873," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10 (October 2011), 447–53; Nicholas Berreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10 (October 2011), 403–423.

were able to buy up their failed competitors' assets or take over their markets. Farmers who failed, either through bankruptcy or environmental stress (the depression coincided with the Great Plains grasshopper plague of 1874–76), sold out to wealthier neighbors or to bonanza farming companies who could ride out the hard times. As it happened, the hard times lasted only a few years and were followed by booming agricultural markets. American wheat exports fell by about forty percent between 1874 and 1877, then nearly quadrupled (to 150 million bushels) by 1880. Commercial farmers' desire for Native American land and their ability to buy it, on the cheap terms offered by the 1862 Homestead Act, thus remained fairly constant during the 1870s.[14]

Moreover, the U.S. government did not turn, as it had during past recessions, from its policy of postwar territorial expansion to one of consolidation. The United States did not conclude any more giant land-cession treaties like those of Medicine Lodge and Fort Laramie (1867–68), but the War Department did undertake a long "pacification" campaign against Plains and Southwestern Indians who would not or could not move to their assigned reservations. During the depression years the Army cornered and defeated the independent Comanches and Kiowas (1874–75), destroyed "hostile" Lakota winter camps and harried the survivors into Canada, and hunted Chiricahua Apaches who had chosen armed resistance over starvation. The federal military campaigns against these and other Native nations were both expansive and expensive: from 1875 to 1877 the United States spent 116 million dollars on the Army, half again as much as it spent on the same branch during the Mexican-American War. The U. S. government of the 1870s was an order of magnitude larger than its prewar predecessors, and despite the depression its administrators could command enough revenue, supplies, and cavalrymen to complete a work of conquest beyond the capabilities of their predecessors.[15]

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[14] Nelson, "A Storm of Cheap Goods," 451; Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860–1897* (New York, 1945), 152–53, 157–60; *Monthly Summary of Commerce and Finance of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1900), 1900. The midwestern machine-breaking riots of the late 1870s were a response to this period of depression and to the concentration of rural wealth. See Peter H. Argersinger and Jo Ann E. Argersinger, "The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change in the Rural Midwest of the 1870s," *Agricultural History* 58 (July 1984), 393–410.

[15] Calloway, *Pen & Ink Witchcraft*, 201–204, 226–28; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, Conn., 2008), 336–41; Gary C. Anderson, *Sitting Bull and the Paradox of Lakota Nationhood* (New York, 1996), 100–108; Janne Lahti, *Wars for Empire: Apaches, the United States, and the Southwest Borderlands* (Norman, Okla., 2017), 182–93; *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 2: 1114.

After 1877 the U.S. government implemented more intrusive policies of social control and cultural genocide. The boarding-school system inaugurated by Richard Pratt eventually subjected more than 100,000 Native American children to a traumatic assault on their core identity. Reservation police forces and the Major Crimes Act (1885) ended Plains' Indians legal autonomy, and the Dawes Act (1887) instituted allotment-in-severalty, whereby the Interior Department divided up or sold off Indian nations' collectively held lands. These policies proved as damaging, in some ways, as the period of open warfare in the 1870s, and their cost-effectiveness allowed the U. S. government to pursue them through another depression (1893–97) and well into the twentieth century.[16]

Simon Pokagon, a Potawatomi leader whose ancestors evaded Removal in the 1830s and settled in southern Michigan, accepted late in his life an invitation to speak at the opening ceremonies of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. There he declined to extol the virtues and progress of white American civilization, choosing instead to explain what that progress had meant for Indigenous Americans. He recounted the vision of one of his forefathers, who foresaw early in the century "a vast spider web spread out over the land from the Atlantic Ocean toward the setting sun." The web's strands were "rods of iron," along which "rushed monstrous spiders … clad in brass" and breathing fire. The elderly prophet's vision became reality during Pokagon's lifetime, as white men covered the land in railroad tracks, cut down the forests, and drained the lakes and swamps.[17]

Popular phrases like "Manifest Destiny" and "Westward expansion," or Frederick Jackson Turner's slightly more sophisticated concept of the progressive frontier (first described by Turner at that same World's Fair), carry with them an unspoken assumption. American territorial expansion was presumably a natural process ordained by divine Providence, or merely the unplanned consequence of thousands of ordinary (white) families seeking free, self-sufficient lives for themselves, à la *Little House*

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[16] David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* (New York, 2019), 132–42; Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln, Neb., 1984). I use the term "cultural genocide" advisedly. Richard Pratt advocated exactly such a policy when he described his goal as "kill the Indian and save the man."

[17] Simon Pokagon, "The Red Man's Greeting," in Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston, Mass., 2001), 32–33; David R. M. Beck, *Unfair Labor?: American Indians and the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago* (Lincoln, Neb., 2019), 7. My thanks to Admiral S. Wieland for the latter reference.

*on the Prairie*. Pokagon's darker description of white American expansion accords more with modern historians' conclusions: that "a federally-sponsored industrial empire," a partnership of private companies and state and federal governments, worked together to exploit a continent. The characteristic machinery of that empire was not the covered wagon or the individual settler's axe and musket, but the locomotive, the combine harvester, and the Hotchkiss gun—not to mention the land warrant, the stock certificate, and the bank draft. These were all powerful tools, but they had their own weaknesses. In particular, the money that financed the American federal government—and financed the land, mining, and railroad companies allied with it—was a social construct, backed ultimately by the confidence of a small number of white capitalists. The machinery of expansion that their capital fueled could and did grind to a halt any time enough of these men lost confidence in their investments' profitability. Native Americans who wanted to retain their homelands and their identity in the face of American territorial and cultural imperialism faced a hard and often terrible struggle, but they were not fighting a relentless juggernaut. Through evasion, diplomacy, the selective adoption of white American lifeways, and alliance-building with local white settlers, they could at least delay their dispossession. Resist and delay long enough, wait for a change in administration or national economic circumstances, and Indigenous communities like Pokagon's could preserve at least some of their land and their culture in the face of a powerful empire.[18]

[18] Isenberg, "Industrial Empire," 334; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, 1987), 78–96; Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (New York, 2020), 112–16, 142.