CHAPTER Ag
American Indians

Editor: C. Matthew Snipp

Introduction

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The U.S. Census Bureau defines American Indians and Alaska Natives as people whose ancestry derives from any of the original peoples of North and South America, and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment. The Census presently counts as an Indian anyone who declares himself or herself to be an Indian. Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders are not considered "Indians" under U.S. law and are enumerated separately in the Census. See Chapter Aa on population characteristics and Chapter Ef on outlying areas for information on Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders.

From the perspective of historical ethnography, an Indian tribe is a body of people bound together by a common ancestry and continuity in culture and social organization. Tribal members occupied a defined territory and spoke a common language or dialect. Many precontact tribes have disappeared or were absorbed into other tribes. Today, there are more than 550 federally recognized tribes in the United States, including 223 village groups in Alaska.

"Federally recognized" means these tribes and groups have a special, legal relationship with the U.S. government. That special relationship is based on four principles:

1. Tribes are thought of as separate sovereign nations to be dealt with on a government-to-government basis.
2. As separate nations, the internal affairs of tribes are the responsibility of the tribal entity.
3. Relations with tribes are considered to be between two nations and are handled by the central government.
4. Indians are U.S. citizens but are also members of their respective tribes and thus have dual citizenship.

Relations with the tribes are codified in treaties ratified by Congress, judicial opinions, and by executive orders issued by the President and by the Secretary of the Interior. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is the principal agent of the United States in carrying out the government-to-government relationship that exists. It also acts as the principal agent of the U.S. government in carrying out the responsibilities the United States has as a trustee for property it holds for federally recognized tribes and individual American Indians. A number of Indian groups do not have a federally recognized status, although some are recognized by the states in which they are located. This means they have no relations with the BIA or the programs it operates. A special program at the BIA, however, works with groups seeking federal status. Of the 150 petitions for federal recognition the BIA has received since 1978, twelve groups have received acknowledgment through the BIA process, two had their status clarified by the Department of the Interior through other means, and seven were restored or recognized by Congress.

In 1924 Congress granted American citizenship to all Indians born in the territorial limits of the United States. Before that date, however, citizenship had been conferred upon approximately two thirds of the Indian population through treaty agreements, statutes, naturalization proceedings, and by service in the armed forces during World War I. No single federal or tribal criterion establishes a person's identity as an Indian. Tribes have varying eligibility criteria for membership.

In the essay that follows, C. Matthew Snipp uses – for editorial convenience – the term "American Indian" consistently in lieu of the more cumbersome "American Indian and Alaska Native," and in lieu of other equally appropriate nomenclature, such as "Native American."

American Indians

C. Matthew Snipp

American Indians occupy a position in American society that is unmatched by any other group. Legally, politically, and culturally, American Indians represent a unique segment of the American population. No other group, for example, is explicitly recognized in the Constitution of the United States. The so-called commerce clause in the American Constitution specifically recognizes American Indians and delegates to Congress the authority to oversee affairs with them. This recognition has evolved into a special kind of dual citizenship buttressed by a long and tangled history of treaties, court decisions, and legal agreements. The unique status of American Indians is further manifest in volume 25 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) devoted entirely to American Indian law, two Congressional committees – for the House and for the Senate – that oversee relations with American Indians, an agency within the executive branch responsible solely for American Indians (the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) within the Department of the Interior), and special "Indian Desks" too numerous to mention scattered throughout the federal bureaucracy.

In light of the long and extensive relationship that has existed between American Indians and the federal government, one might also assume that an equally extensive set of records would exist, charting and documenting in great detail the special circumstances

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of American Indians. Such an assumption would be greatly in error. To shorten a long and complex story, for decades the U.S. government has regarded American Indians as belonging to nations apart, and to some extent continues to do so today. As a result, in the early years of the country's history, the federal government made no more effort to systematically collect information about American Indians than it did for other foreign governments. To the extent this information exists, it reflects the activities of the federal bureaucracy in its dealings with various groups of American Indians.

Consequently, data that span the entire history of the United States for American Indians are virtually nonexistent. For example, the decennial census did not systematically enumerate American Indians until 1860, and devoted almost no attention to American Indian population characteristics until 1890.[1] The census, in particular, illustrates the peculiar status that American Indians have occupied throughout this country's history. In the first census that counted American Indians, a distinction was made between "Indians taxed" and "Indians not taxed." Indians taxed were individuals who had settled in or near Anglo communities, had adopted Anglo livelihoods and lifestyles, and had more or less assimilated themselves into Anglo-American society. They resembled Anglo-Americans enough to be considered "citizens" and they could be taxed. Indians not taxed were precisely the opposite. They were Indians who lived among their kinsmen in tribal communities and refused to adopt Euro-American customs, and from whom taxes were not collected because they were not citizens of the United States (Snipp 1989). This distinction between Indians taxed and those not taxed was eventually discarded as they were settled on reservations, and was officially abolished when in 1924 the Indian Citizenship Act made all American Indians eligible for taxation.

Sources of Historical Statistics on American Indians

As the tables in this chapter show, the disappointing lack of data for American Indians does not mean that such information is missing altogether. Indeed, the history of data for American Indians begins with a small number of sources, which slowly increases over time, to the present in which data for American Indians are available from a large number of sources within the federal government. For scholars interested in American Indians during the early years of this nation's history, there are three basic sources of statistical information: Congressional acts, especially appropriation bills; reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; and unofficial records such as diaries, letters, and other documents of priests, explorers, travelers, and others who had an opportunity to observe or have dealings with American Indians.

Unofficial records do not contribute much to the tables that accompany this essay, because the amount of usable statistical data in these records is usually small or nonexistent. Unofficial records such as letters, diaries, and business receipts, although often extensive in volume, are also difficult to access and, by definition, are unsystematic and unorganized. For statistical purposes, this material is not very useful and little else needs to be said about it. In comparison, much more useful data can be gleaned from federal sources. These data vary considerably with respect to their content, quality, and historical coverage.

Some of the earliest federal data detailing the federal government's dealings with American Indians can be found in a body of annual legislation generically known as the Indian Appropriation Acts. Each year, usually in the spring, Congress passed a bill authorizing the expenditure of federal funds for American Indians. This included money paid for a wide variety of goods and services, as well as payments made directly to American Indian tribes. These expenditures paid the salaries and expenses of Indian agents, doctors, teachers, and missionaries working in Indian communities, and also paid for food, clothing, blankets, tools, farm implements, and other items that were provided directly to American Indians. These goods and services were provided in exchange for land cessions and reservation settlement, to meet the terms of treaties, and for other agreements made with American Indians.

The types of data available in the Indian Appropriations Acts offer a glimpse of how the federal government managed its affairs with American Indians. In particular, these Acts itemize in detail the quantities and costs of goods and services allocated to various tribes, agencies, and reservations. It is important to understand, however, that corruption was widespread in the Indian Service throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, the goods and services appropriated by Congress were not necessarily equal to the goods and services received by Indians. Nonetheless, these data still offer useful insights into the nature of the financial transactions that took place between American Indians and the federal government, as well as the kinds of goods bargained for and consumed by American Indians.

Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs provide an even more detailed and comprehensive view of the federal government's dealings with American Indians. In the early years of the United States, the Secretary of War was responsible for overseeing Indian affairs. However, as these duties expanded in scope and complexity, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun established an Office of Indian Affairs in 1824. In 1832, Congress granted statutory authority to the Office of Indian Affairs, and in subsequent years the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was responsible for submitting an annual report of this agency's activities (Taylor 1984).

Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, though issued regularly, did not follow a consistent format, and their content varied from one year to the next. In some years, for example, there is detailed reporting about population counts, health conditions, and school attendance. Other years provide only cursory details about the activities of Indian agents and little else. Unfortunately, these reports represent the single largest source of federal information about American Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, two developments occurred that vastly increased the quality and quantity of statistical data for American Indians. One was the emergence and growing influence of modern social science, especially anthropology. Empirical observation, systematic record keeping, and comparability are the hallmarks of social scientific methods that gradually infiltrated federal recordkeeping systems.

The rise of modern anthropology was especially important for information about American Indians collected by the federal government in the late nineteenth century. Anthropologists of this era were convinced, as were many others, that American Indians were destined for extinction. Guided by this belief, anthropologists in the late nineteenth century set out to observe, document, and collect every conceivable detail connected with the lifestyles and

[1] In some states, American Indians were identified as such during the process of enumeration for censuses before 1860.

cultures of American Indians. This effort has come to be known as "salvage ethnography."

The federal government sponsored a great deal of the salvage ethnography undertaken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This work was overseen by the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). During the course of its existence, the BAE issued hundreds (perhaps thousands) of reports detailing the material and symbolic culture of American Indians. Although these reports are primarily qualitative in content, some statistical information can be gleaned from them. For example, in a 1910 BAE bulletin the anthropologist James Mooney reported the first systematic estimate of the precontact (circa 1600) American Indian population (Thornton 1987) (Table Ag1–16).

The growing professionalization of the Census Bureau in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was the second development to enhance federal statistics for American Indians. The Census Bureau issued its first major report devoted to American Indians in 1894, as part of the eleventh decennial census in 1890. The report, titled *Report on Indians Taxed and Not Taxed in the United States, Except Alaska* (volume 17), was a remarkable document for at least two reasons. One is that it was the Census Bureau's first significant effort to enumerate and collect data on the characteristics of American Indians. The other is that this document was clearly an exercise in salvage ethnography. As such, this report also includes maps, drawings, photographs, and narrative accounts of tribal culture in addition to statistical data. Never before and never since has the Census Bureau produced a document such as this 1894 report.

In 1902, Congress established the Census Bureau as a permanent agency with duties that extended beyond conducting the decennial census (Anderson 1988). The creation of the bureau as a permanent entity rapidly propelled it toward becoming the nation's principal repository of statistical data. It also immeasurably improved census procedures in the collection and tabulation of statistical data, in ways consonant with scientific standards. The presence of statisticians and social scientists in the Census Bureau had a tremendous impact on federal data for American Indians, making the designation of "American Indian" a more or less regular feature in federal statistical systems, most notably the decennial census.

Historical Statistics for American Indians in the Twentieth Century

The permanent establishment of the Census Bureau reflects the burgeoning federal statistical system that grew rapidly throughout the twentieth century. Not surprisingly, data for American Indians also grew more detailed and systematic through the century. However, it is not true that it became more accessible during this time. In fact, there is a great deal of data available for American Indians at the century's end, somewhat less at the beginning of the century, and precious little for the midcentury decades. The reasons for this midcentury lapse and late-century recovery are extraordinarily complex and far beyond the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say that popular opinion, public policy, and political considerations have had a profound impact on how American Indians are embedded within federal data collection efforts.

In the twentieth century the Census Bureau became the federal government's preeminent source of information about the American Indian population. No other source contains as much information for the American Indian population in its entirety – urban and reservation – for so many different characteristics. In the early part of the century, the Census Bureau published two special reports devoted to American Indians – one in 1915 and another in 1937, based on the 1910 and 1930 decennial Censuses, respectively. These reports also contained a small amount of information about Alaska Natives.

In 1940, American Indians were enumerated in the census but virtually disappeared in most Census Bureau publications, subsumed within the "other races" category of the bureau's racial classification.[2] Data for American Indians did not appear in the main publications for states and other localities. During these decades, data for American Indians appeared in special reports for the "nonwhite population" published in 1943, 1953, and 1963, derived from the 1940, 1950, and 1960 Censuses.

Likewise, American Indians were missing from most of the reports produced from the 1970 Census. However, the Census Bureau produced a special report devoted exclusively to American Indians and, to a lesser extent, Alaska Natives. The publications from the 1980 Census were the first to include American Indians and Alaska Natives throughout its data for racial characteristics. In 1983 the Census Bureau also produced a special subject report for American Indians and Alaska Natives, resembling the 1970 special report, though containing much more detail. In addition to the regular census, a special supplementary questionnaire was distributed to reservation households. The results of this survey were published in yet another special report. The Census Bureau did not sponsor a special reservation survey in the 1990 Census. However, it did publish two special reports, one tabulated for reservations and another tabulated for tribes and languages, in addition to including American Indians in all of its tabulations for racial characteristics.

For the first time, the Census of 2000 gave respondents the opportunity to select one or more categories for their racial heritage. Preliminary reports indicate that 4.1 million people, or 1.5 percent of the population, reported themselves as "American Indian or Alaska Native" either alone or in combination with other races. 2.5 million people, or 0.9 percent of the population, reported their race only as American Indian or Alaska Native. Among those who reported American Indian in combination with another race, the most common admixture was American Indian or Alaska Native and white, followed by American Indian or Alaska Native and black (Crieco and Cassidy 2000, Table 6).

The Census Bureau is not the only source of data for American Indians in the twentieth century. The BIA produces a copious amount of information in the course of carrying out its duties. Its information is more limited because the scope of BIA activities does not ordinarily include urban American Indians (now about half of the total Indian population). Nonetheless, statistics available from the BIA range in topic from natural resources on reservation lands, to enrollments at BIA-administered schools, to estimates of unemployment and labor force participation on reservations.

It is fair to say that unlike the Census Bureau, the BIA's principal mission is not data collection and distribution. This may explain why the quality of BIA data is more variable than that of Census Bureau data. For some purposes, BIA data can be highly accurate, or at least bear the appearance of accuracy. For example, the amount of land under its jurisdiction is reported in one-hundredths of acres. In contrast, the BIA regularly disclaims the accuracy of its

[2] One likely reason is that the onset of World War II in 1941 curtailed the Census Bureau's publication program.

estimates of reservation labor force participation and unemployment. These data are based on "guesstimates." They are reasonably accurate for small reservations with concentrated settlements, where the employment status of local residents is easy to observe. By the same token, they are very poor for large reservations with dispersed populations.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) is another important source of information about American Indians. In 1955, IHS was placed in the Public Health Service (PHS) agency in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (now the Department of Health and Human Services). This move was accompanied by heightened efforts to observe and monitor the health status of American Indians, especially those living in areas served by the IHS. As a result of these efforts, the data and publications produced by the IHS represent the single largest source of information about American Indian health conditions: morbidity, mortality, leading causes of death, incidence and prevalence of certain diseases, as well as operational data from IHS clinics and hospitals (for example, expenditures and numbers of patients treated).

The most significant limitation of IHS data is that in most instances they are based on populations residing within IHS service areas. IHS service areas roughly correspond to geographic regions on and around reservations with access to an IHS hospital or clinic. American Indians living outside these areas, especially in cities, are not incorporated into most IHS data systems. However, some data produced for IHS by other agencies employ national record systems and cover the entire American Indian population. Users of these data should pay close attention to the geography from which this information is obtained.

There are numerous sources of data for American Indians other than the Census, the BIA, and the IHS. For example, the Senate and House committees that deal with American Indian issues occasionally commission studies that require the collection of statistical data. However, these studies are highly topical and reflect congressional preoccupations more than anything else. Furthermore, they are not well publicized and to access them, one must know of the existence of a particular study and more or less the date of its publication as a congressional report.

Since the 1960s the amount of information about American Indians produced by a variety of federal agencies has increased dramatically. Few of these agencies produce data in serial format as the IHS does; however, they do produce special reports devoted to American Indians. For example, the Department of Education periodically produces a report about American Indians in higher education. Similarly, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has produced reports about the conditions of the housing in which American Indians reside. In fact, most agencies that serve American Indians in one capacity or another – including the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Small Business Administration, to name only a few – have produced reports for American Indians or include them in their recordkeeping systems. Although these data and reports now have limited utility as "historical" documents, if these practices continue there is no doubt they will be valuable to future generations of historians.

Statistical Overview

The tables that follow this essay are necessarily a small sampling of the kinds of data that are available for American Indians. The content areas are also not exhaustive of the subject matter that is available for American Indians. There are other, much more voluminous sources of information that interested readers can consult (see Stuart 1987; Reddy 1995). However, these tables and the subject matter they represent were chosen for the purpose of charting the position of American Indians within the larger context of American society at the turn of the millennium.

In particular, they begin with a presentation of data for American Indians that predate or roughly coincide with the arrival of Europeans. This is followed by more recent population statistics. Health and labor statistics reflect the well-being, and lack thereof, for American Indians. The remaining topics focus on the natural resources still held by American Indians, and the government relations that characterize the special status of American Indians.

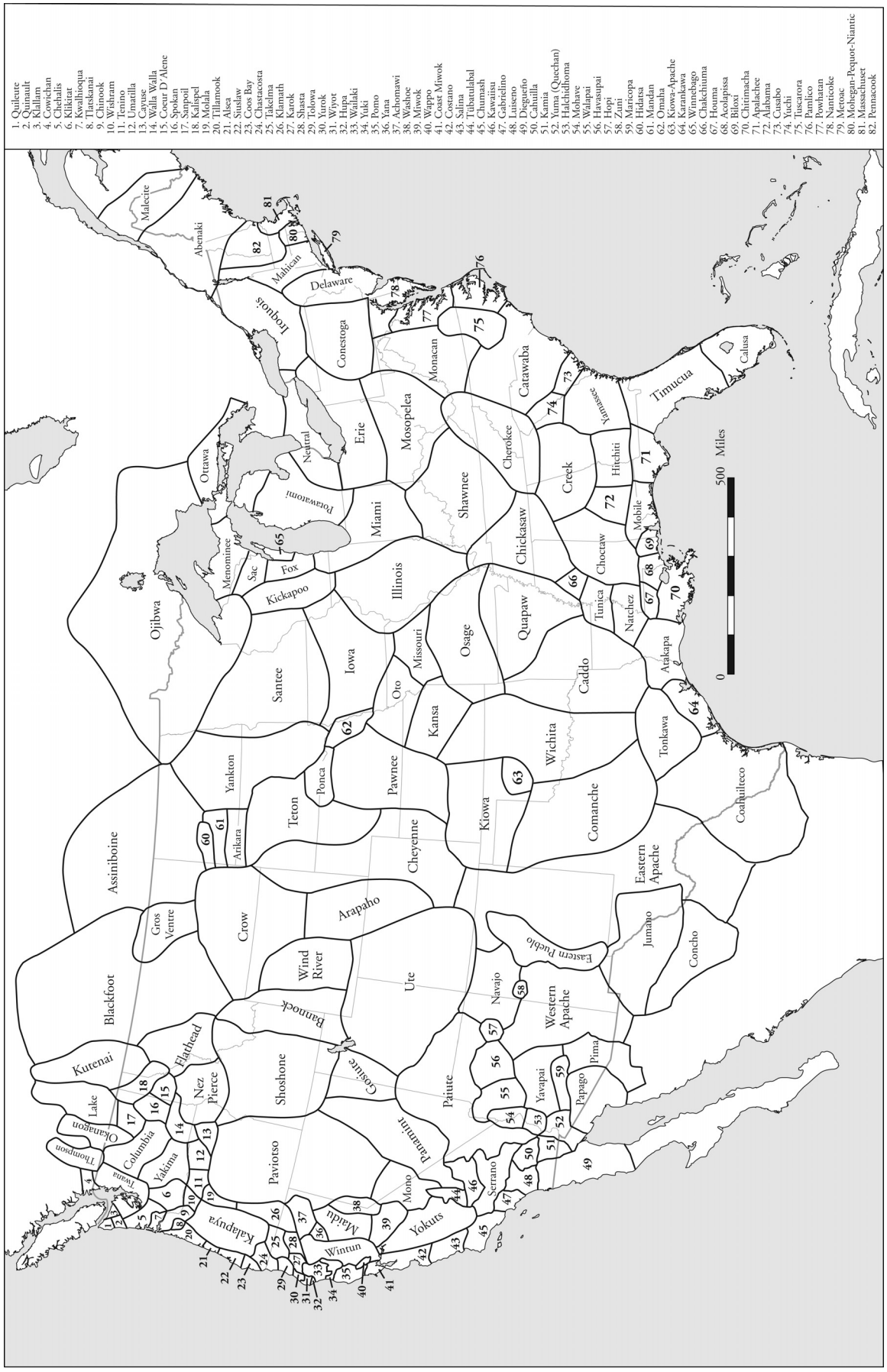
Early Population History

James Mooney was an anthropologist employed by the Smithsonian Institution in the early years of the twentieth century. As mentioned, he was responsible for pioneering work estimating the size of American Indian populations at the time of contact with Europeans. He painstakingly assembled the records of explorers, traders, priests, and other visitors to Native America, and determined dates of contact that varied through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for different groups of American Indians. He also used this information to determine the likely population size for each tribe that he could identify. His approach to this work was largely educated guesswork and, for this reason, his method has been described as "dead reckoning" (Thornton 1987). The results of Mooney's efforts are shown in Tables Ag17–264.

In a brief 1910 article Mooney estimated that the North American indigenous population numbered around 1.15 million roughly at the time of contact with Europeans, 1600 and later (Snipp 1989). Map Ag-A shows the geographic distribution of American Indian tribes around 1600. Mooney's number proved to be enormously influential and stood for decades as the benchmark for the pre-Columbian population of North America. It suggested that Native North Americans lived in small and relatively primitive societies. However, this image was not entirely consistent with a growing body of archaeological knowledge. Furthermore, critics of this number pointed out that Mooney had failed to take into account the devastating epidemics that swept through the continent after Europeans arrived. Smallpox was an especially deadly disease for American Indians lacking immunity to this newly imported pathogen (Tables Ag493–495).

Others pointed out that the arrival of Europeans also created massive cultural change, disrupted or destroyed food resources (Table Ag685), and proved to be a demographic disaster likely unprecedented in human history (Thornton 1987). The outcome of this catastrophe was the wholesale destruction of entire cultures throughout the Americas, shown in Table Ag1–16. Those tribes occupying what is now the eastern half of the United States were virtually annihilated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The realization that Mooney had seriously underestimated the size of the North American Native population sparked a debate in the mid-1960s that has continued unresolved up to the present: how many people were present in North America when Columbus sailed into what is now known as the Caribbean Sea? There is no agreement about an exact number, and indeed it seems doubtful that one will ever be known, but it was probably at least 3 million,



MAP Ag-A American Indian tribes: circa 1600

Sources

C. Matthew Snipp, *American Indians: The First of This Land* (Russell Sage, 1989), Map 2.2, insert following p. 36. Adapted and corrected by Matthew Snipp from George Peter Murdock and Timothy J. O'Leary, *Ethnographic Bibliography of North America*, 4th edition (Human Relations Area Press, 1975). Also see Stephan Thernstrom, editor, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Harvard University Press, 1980).

Documentation

These boundaries are in most cases approximate. The actual boundaries between tribes circa 1600 are only imperfectly known and even at the time were rarely sharp lines. Border regions often contained uninhabited "no-man's land." Murdock and O'Leary's work was based on and extends John Reed Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnography, Bulletin 145 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952). The Smithsonian book was the culmination of nearly fifty years of work by anthropologists at the museum to systematically document the size and location of American Indians in the United States (the title is a misnomer) circa 1600.

perhaps 5–7 million, possibly (but unlikely) as many as 12 million or more. Most experts have given up trying to find a single number and have instead focused their attention on the processes that decimated the American Indian population from the time of European arrival to the late nineteenth century.

Population Statistics

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, it was widely believed that American Indians would become extinct, joining the buffalo and passenger pigeon as casualties of Western "progress." This expectation was, in fact, well grounded in empirical experience. The American Indian population had spiraled downward in size from the time that Europeans had first arrived. By 1890, barely 228,000 American Indians were alive (Thornton 1987). To observers, this small number coupled with past trends seemed to predestine American Indians for extinction. The American Indian population would dwindle and then disappear altogether sometime, possibly in the early years of the coming twentieth century.

Tables Ag265–492 and Ag700–703 show the size and distribution of the American Indian population since 1890. These tables make it abundantly clear that, contrary to most expectations, the American Indian population grew steadily throughout the twentieth century. From barely a quarter million at the beginning of the century, the American Indian population numbered nearly two million by the century's end. By 1990, the number of American Indians was greater than at any time in the preceding 150 years. A number of factors contributed to this remarkable comeback.

One factor is that by 1890, hostilities ceased between the United States and various Indian tribes. The twentieth century was a period in which American Indians were allowed to live relatively undisturbed, albeit in desperate poverty. Another factor is that public health measures and sanitation improved on reservations, as did access to health care provided by the IHS. The third factor is that American Indians adapted to the changing world around them, learning new skills and modifying their cultures to confront the new realities of living in an industrialized world.

For the first half of the twentieth century, population growth was relatively slow. In fact, there was a slight decline between 1910 and 1920, followed by another recovery in 1930. A massive influenza epidemic may account for this decline. However, there were also special reports for American Indians in the 1910 and 1930 Censuses, which may have led to better enumeration coverage in these years than in 1920.

The largest amount of growth in the American Indian population took place after 1950. In 1960, the Census Bureau altered its enumeration procedures and allowed respondents to report their race. In earlier censuses, it was the job of enumerators to observe and report the racial characteristics of a household. Undoubtedly, there were many American Indians whose race had been misclassified in earlier censuses. This change was a significant improvement over past practices.

In the decades after 1960, the American Indian population grew at a spectacular and unprecedented rate. Many factors contributed to this growth. Some of it is due to birth rates that are higher than death rates. However, most of this growth is attributable to persons who had been counted as white, black, or some other race in an earlier census switching their identity to American Indian in a subsequent census. Not much is known about "ethnic switching" behavior, but some of it may be due to declining levels of stigma attached to nonwhite racial ancestries and to the ethnic pride associated with being an American Indian.

In addition to the massive growth of the American Indian population, the other major development that took place during the twentieth century was the urbanization of American Indians. Historically, American Indians were moved to reservations and other places far from the mainstream of American society. In 1930, barely 10 percent of the American Indian population could be found in cities. At this time about half of all Americans lived in urban areas. However, by 1970 nearly half of the American Indian population was living in metropolitan locations.

There are many reasons why the American Indian population urbanized so rapidly. World War II was an important influence. After American Indians were discharged from military service, many settled in places like Los Angeles or New York. The GI Bill of Rights provided money for mortgages and college scholarships, and this induced many to leave their reservation homes, where they could find jobs and buy houses. The BIA also was an influence. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the BIA actively encouraged American Indians to move to cities by offering relocation assistance, job training, and other inducements. Finally, as all of America urbanized after World War II, American Indians also were not immune to the complex social conditions driving the growth of cities around the nation.

Health

The data in Tables Ag496–541 pertain to the mortality and morbidity of the American Indian population. These statistics are taken from regularly published series produced by the IHS. As noted, the IHS was placed under the administration of the PHS in 1955. The PHS has been credited with improving the quality of health care offered by the IHS. In particular, the PHS instituted policies and practices consistent with the standards of scientific medicine. Among those practices was the collection of statistical data to monitor the health status of American Indians. This resulted in a long series of statistical reports about American Indian health. Similarly, this is why almost no data exist for American Indian health in the years prior to 1955.

The IHS is not beyond reproach, but its existence certainly has coincided with major improvements in the health of American Indians. One important measure of these improvements can be seen in the numbers for infant mortality, shown in Table Ag496–497. Before the advent of the modern IHS, infant mortality was more than three times higher for American Indians than for other Americans. By 1960, infant mortality had declined by nearly 65 percent. However, it was still nearly twice as high as infant mortality in the rest of the nation. In subsequent years, American Indians have continued to lag behind the rest of the nation in terms of reducing infant mortality rates, but the gap has narrowed significantly.

The IHS cannot be credited with all of these improvements. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly played a role in uncoupling the historic and well-documented connection between socioeconomic status and infant mortality. American Indians have continued to be one of the poorest groups in American society, yet they have enjoyed unprecedented reductions in infant mortality. Other groups of poor Americans cannot report a parallel experience.

It is well known that infant survival rates can be improved with public health measures such as sanitation, safe drinking water, improved nutrition, prenatal care, and so forth. Other diseases are

less amenable to this kind of intervention and this is reflected in the major causes of death for American Indians, shown in Table Ag498–538. Heart disease and accidents are the most typical causes of death for American Indians, as they are for other Americans. However, American Indians differ from the rest of American society in their susceptibility to diabetes and suicide-related deaths (Young 1994). In spite of these health problems, and higher than average mortality rates, American Indians have enjoyed significant improvements in their longevity and especially in their life expectancy at birth, shown in Table Ag539–541. Owing largely to improvements in infant survival rates, life expectancy at birth for American Indians has increased by nearly twenty years.

Labor

Increases in American Indian life expectancy also reflect gradual improvements in the material living conditions of American Indians. The statistics in Tables Ag726–1113 show the extent to which American Indians have become attached to and integrated into the national economy. For decades the federal government has enacted a variety of policies aimed at assimilating American Indians into the mainstream of American society – first through the adoption of Euro-American agriculture and later through urban relocation. For a variety of complicated reasons, these programs worked poorly, yielding few benefits and arguably doing more harm than good. As the data in these tables show, American Indians have not been fully embraced by the mainstream economy. Similarly, American Indians are among the poorest groups in American society.

These data reflect a long-standing deficit of human capital that is no doubt connected to the historic socioeconomic disadvantages that have plagued American Indians throughout the twentieth century. Although these data are fairly unambiguous about the disadvantaged position of American Indians, they are also somewhat difficult to interpret. This is because over time, definitions of labor force participation, and especially industrial and occupational classifications, have changed significantly. When examining these tables, readers should pay close attention to the table documentation indicating changes over time that would affect comparability.

One reason why American Indians are heavily disadvantaged in the labor market is their historic low levels of education. It is ironic that the federal government invested heavily in education for American Indians during the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century. However, education was offered mainly in the confines of boarding schools, with curriculums designed less for education and much more for cultural indoctrination. Education was an instrument of cultural repression and a means of persecuting the personal identities of schoolchildren. Ultimately, the experiences of these children with federal boarding schools evolved into lasting misgivings about the value of education that persists into the present in some communities. Table Ag915–1097 shows that school attendance was a common experience for most children in most parts of the country. However, it continues to be the case that American Indians are one of the least educated groups in modern society.

Low levels of schooling have not been an insurmountable barrier to employment for American Indians. Limited schooling notwithstanding, it might be a surprise to some that American Indians, even in the early decades of this century, were accustomed to working for a living. This is perhaps contrary to the popular stereotypes of American Indians as hunters and gatherers. However, by the twentieth century, the reservation system was well established and American Indians were more or less regular participants in the cash economy of the United States. Between 1900 and 1930, 60–65 percent of American Indian men were "gainfully employed."

The special report published by the Census Bureau in 1915 suggests that in the 1910 Census the true number of gainfully employed American Indians was smaller than reported, but it offers no clear explanation why this should be the case. Overstated or not, it is doubtful that these workers were paid much for their labor. There is very little information published before 1970 about the monetary incomes American Indians received. So, unfortunately, we can only speculate about how much or how little American Indians actually earned.

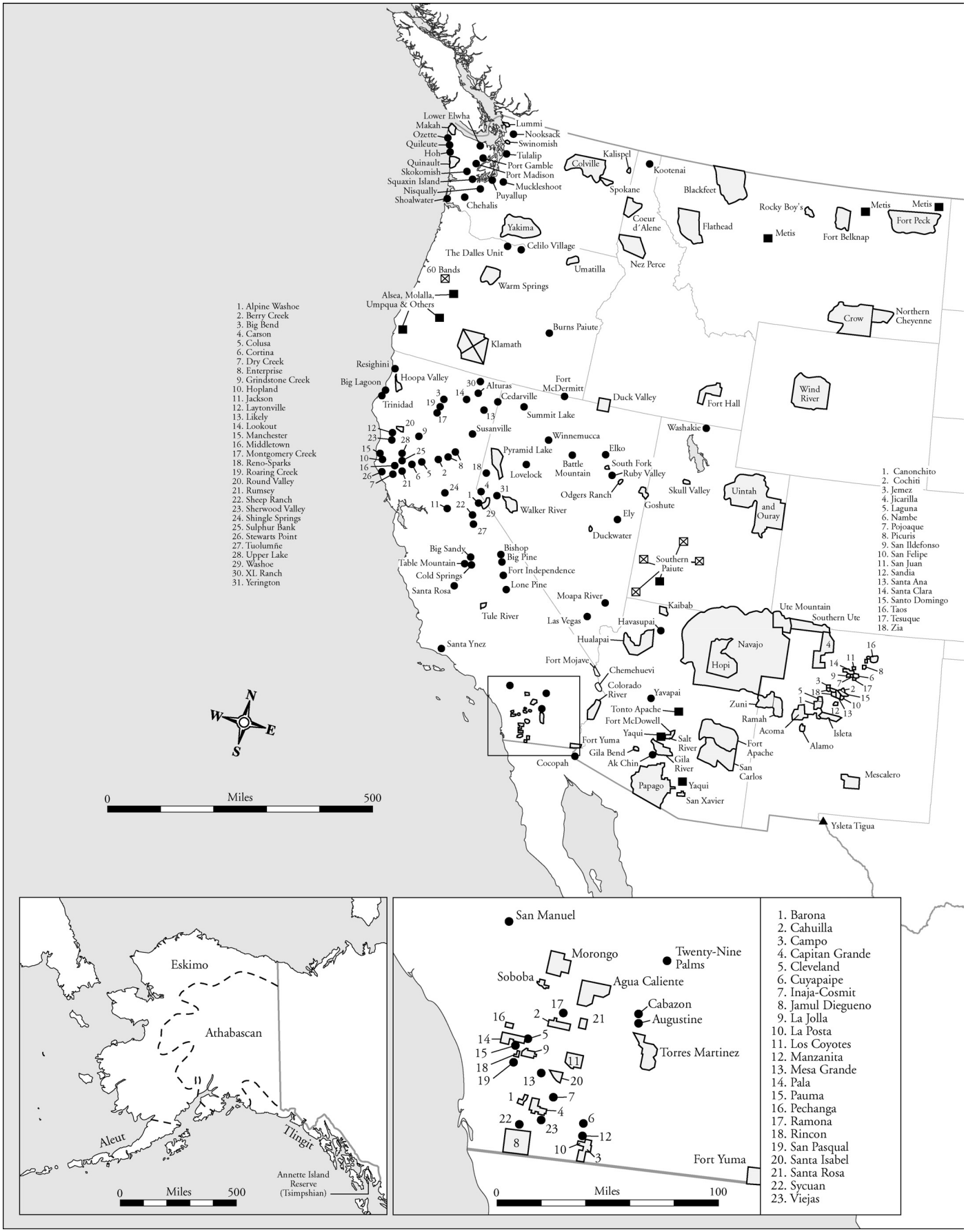
Nevertheless, agricultural labor provided many jobs for American Indians, especially before the introduction of mechanized farming. For example, in the early decades of the twentieth century, about two thirds of American Indian men were employed in agriculture, either as farmers or as laborers. By 1990, this figure was about 10 percent. There can be little doubt that the slow decline of agriculture in the American economy, and the rise of mechanized farming, contribute to the extraordinarily high levels of unemployment that plague reservations.

Natural Resources

The economic hardships many American Indians face today are ironic considering that American Indians once claimed possession of all of the territory that is now the United States. In the wake of a long, complex history, by the late twentieth century American Indians possessed a little over 45 million acres of land. The title to this land is held in trust by the federal government, under the administration of the BIA (see Tables Ag547–684). The amount of land owned by American Indians reached a low point in the early 1930s, about 33 million acres. Since then, tribes have used land claims, court cases (see Table Ag544–546), and in some instances purchases in the open market to increase their holdings.

Land ownership is especially complicated for American Indians. Some land is held in trust by the federal government and collectively owned by the membership of a federally recognized tribe. In the late nineteenth century, the federal government assigned ("allotted") reservation lands to individuals and families. A great deal of this land passed into the private market, but land that was not sold is also held in trust. In some cases this land was not sold into the private market because the individuals or families who owned it did not want it sold. In other cases, this land cannot be sold because of unresolved heirship claims. Finally, on many if not most reservations, there is some amount of privately owned land often described as "fee land," an abbreviated term for fee simple title. This is privately owned land that may or may not belong to American Indians. The federal government does not monitor or have responsibility for this land, so statistics about it are not readily available.

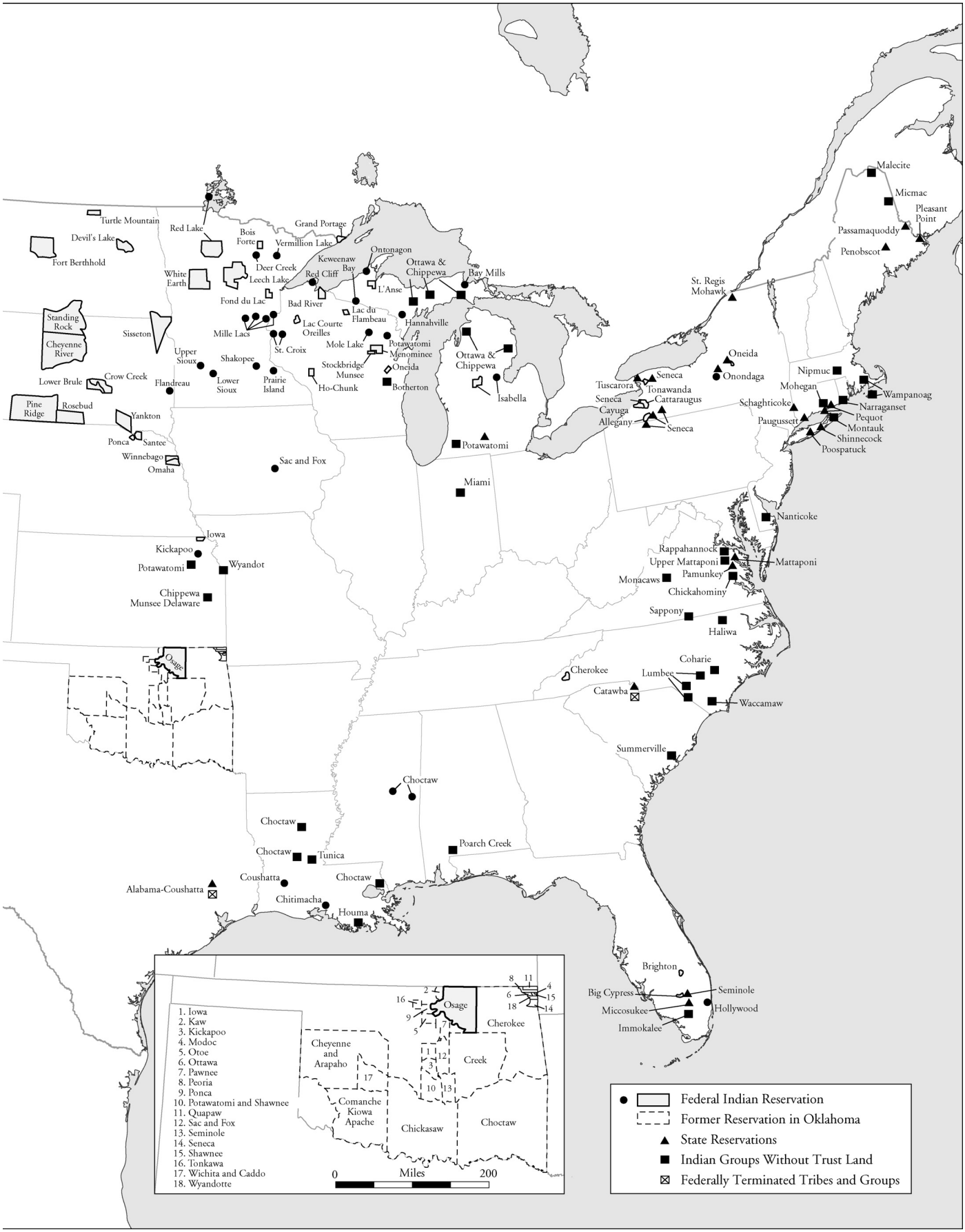
Reservations are extremely varied in size, geography, location, and the resources found on them. Some reservations are blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Others are arid, barren places. Farmland, water, fisheries, timber, and minerals are among the natural resources reservations possess. Few, if any, can claim an abundance of all of these resources; most have some of these commodities, and a sizable number have virtually nothing because their reservation is too small or is in a barren location. Map Ag-B shows the present-day location of these reservations.



MAP Ag-B Indian lands and communities: 1995

Source

C. Matthew Snipp, *American Indians: The First of This Land* (Russell Sage, 1989), Map 3.2, insert following p. 36, using unpublished information supplied by the Council of Energy Resource Tribes, with subsequent corrections and updates based on Veronica E. Velarde Tiller, *American Indian Reservations and Indian Trust Areas* (U.S. Economic Development Administration, October 1995). For



the spelling of tribal names see U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1, at the Census Internet site.

Documentation

Alaska has more than 200 Native communities. Shown here are only the general locations of the Eskimos, the Aleuts, and the Athabascan and Tlingit Indians. There are also many small groups in the contiguous forty-eight states that are not shown. Oklahoma, in particular, has many small communities that are remnants of former reservations.

The BIA is responsible for managing, or helping manage, the natural resources on reservation lands. It is responsible, for example, for overseeing leases of timber lands and oil or natural gas reserves. It is required to enforce the terms of lease agreements and to ensure that market prices are being paid for these resources. Over the years the BIA has been harshly criticized for being inept and occasionally fraudulent in the management of these leases. Increasingly, these arrangements are being handled by the tribes themselves, with the assistance of BIA staff. However, a class action suit filed in 1997 as *Cobell v. Babbitt* and subsequently as *Cobell v. Norton* has accused the BIA and the Department of the Interior of gross negligence in the management of hundreds of millions, possibly billions, of dollars belonging to more than 500,000 American Indians. The department's inability to rectify this situation has led the federal judge hearing this case, Royce C. Lamberth, to find Secretaries of the Interior Bruce Babbitt (Clinton administration) and Gale Norton (George W. Bush administration) guilty of fraud and litigation misconduct, and to cite them for civil contempt in September 2002.

Timber and mineral resources are two especially valuable resources found on reservations. According to one source, reservations in the 1970s possessed 40 percent of all uranium and 30 percent of all strippable coal (Jorgensen, Clemmer, et al. 1978). Tables Ag686–694 show the economic value of these resources. Despite the seemingly large value of these commodities, it is not true that they have made American Indians wealthy. On the contrary, even tribes with relatively large amounts of these resources remain relatively poor. One possible reason is that the cost of managing these leases is relatively high, diluting the funds actually received by tribes. Another more plausible reason is that on a per capita basis, they do not represent vast amounts of money. Indeed, there are many explanations for the persistent poverty of reservations.

Government Relations

In addition to managing the land and natural resources, the BIA is responsible for a variety of other obligations involving American Indians. And the BIA is not the only federal agency with a special interest in American Indians. The federal government has, in recent years, affirmed its commitment to conducting what amounts to a "government-to-government" relationship with federally recognized tribes – under the rubric of self-determination. In practice, this means that the federal government acknowledges the limited rights of self-government granted by the legal doctrine of tribal sovereignty. Prior to the inception of this doctrine in the early 1970s, the federal government was involved in the everyday lives of American Indians in almost every conceivable way, ranging from child rearing to road maintenance.

Tables Ag542–543, Ag695–699, Ag704–717, and Ag721–725 touch upon several different domains in which there has been an historic connection between American Indians and the federal government. First and foremost, American Indians were the original occupants of North America. In the early years of the United States, the federal government sought to purchase land (see Table Ag542–543) for settlement before adopting a much more aggressive (and hostile) program under the guise of "manifest destiny." Ultimately, this policy led to the creation of the reservation system, under the administration of the BIA (see Tables Ag695–699 and Ag721).

As mentioned, it was widely believed that American Indians would eventually disappear from American society and the so-called Indian problem would simply take care of itself by vanishing from sight. This belief persisted into the early years of the twentieth century, and it would cause the noted anthropologist Evon Vogt (1957, p. 137) to observe, "By the mid-twentieth century, it has become apparent to social scientists studying the American Indian . . . [the population] is markedly increasing and . . . the rate of basic acculturation to white American ways of life is incredibly slower than our earlier assumptions led us to believe."

By midcentury, the tenacity of American Indians made it obvious to most observers that the "Indian problem" was not going to solve itself. In response, shortly after World War II, the federal government initiated a policy known as "termination and relocation" that was intended to unilaterally dissolve reservation boundaries. In doing so, it would end the historic relationship that it had established with American Indians throughout U.S. history. This policy was enacted over the vigorous objections of American Indians and their supporters. It was finally reversed by the policy of self-determination articulated by the Nixon administration in 1970. In the years after 1970, beginning with the Menominee reservation in Wisconsin, terminated reservations slowly regained their federal recognition (see Table Ag722–725).

Today, Public Law 93-638, also known as the American Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, mandates federal authorities to work closely with tribal leaders in making decisions that affect Indian communities. This law affects a wide range of issues, including law enforcement, conservation, and social services. Initially, it did not include the IHS but it was subsequently amended to include these services. As the population of persons receiving health care has increased in recent years (see Table Ag704–717), the number of tribally operated clinics funded by the IHS has also grown.

Conclusion

The ancestors of today's American Indians reached North America sometime around 15,000 to 25,000 years ago. Experts disagree about this date, but there can be no disagreement that the descendants of these people continue to be a vital and dynamic part of modern American society. Once the "Vanishing American," today's American Indian population is larger and more heterogeneous than at any time in the past.

It is fitting that American Indians are represented in a document devoted to statistics for the United States. American Indians have been an enduring presence in American society, predating the founding of this nation. Historical documents bridge the past with the future. And just as American Indians have been an integral part of this nation's past, it seems certain that they will also be a part of its future.

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