

Note from the Editor

This issue's group of articles on Native Americans and Indian policy differs from most such features in that it came together partly by accident. Several independent submissions created an opportunity for the reflections on possible directions of research and interpretation graciously provided by Sherry Smith. If the three articles in this issue are representative, Professor Smith notes, then historical writing about Native Americans in the Progressive Era pretty much reflects present-day intellectual and popular currents related to race and ethnicity in American society generally. The authors in this issue all attempt to avoid excessive generalization about the culture, circumstances, and agendas of the different Native peoples studied, as well as the romanticization that has often interfered with discussing Native people as people. In keeping with the theme of "agency" in recent ethnic studies, the essays try to show different Native people's points of view as they attempted to identify what about their own cultures and social relations they hoped to preserve or rebuild and how they might adapt or accommodate features of Euro-American culture and institutions to those ends. Beyond these general observations, Professor Smith emphasizes a particular historiographic point, which is that the retribalization and autonomy movements that gained articulation and momentum by the 1930s were already present as undercurrents during the dreariest days of detribalization and forced Americanization.

While revealing as a group, each of the essays stands on its own. As Michelle Wick Patterson explains, musicologist Natalie Curtis and her informants struggled to use the conventions of early-twentieth-century folklore—which easily slid into simplistic, condescending models of authentic folk cultures—to turn *The Indians' Book* into a vehicle for explaining how complex expressive traditions interacted with present circumstances and present politics. Katherine Osburn traces how frequent intermarriage with African Americans and a legacy of slavery forced the Choctaw Nation into legal and political maneuvering to ensure that its laws and traditions regarding race and citizenship were not overwhelmed by the more rigid set of assumptions about race that shaped the federal government's handling of the allotment of Choctaw lands under the Dawes Act. Osburn's article makes effective use of records and testimony from the Dawes Commission and congressional hearings. Angela Firkus's article on Wisconsin Indians and that state's agricultural-extension program is a well-structured and systematic study of policy implementation at the crucial, neglected level of state government. The policy of the Wisconsin Agricultural Extension Service was consistent with the Wisconsin Idea of science and expertise as tools of popular progress. But the effect on Wisconsin's native people varied with their circumstances and with their own priorities.

Mark Benbow's analysis of the origins and career of Woodrow Wilson's alleged remarks about *The Birth of a Nation* offers a memorable case study of how out-of-context or dubious quotations gain a foothold and diffuse to the point where their eradication becomes nearly impossible. The Gilded Age and Progressive Era are rife with questionable or half-true but ceaselessly reiterated attributions, beginning with the notion that Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner named the Gilded Age. They didn't—early-twentieth-century culture critics appropriated the title of Twain and Warner's popular satire for the purpose. As these examples—and other favorites such as the expansionists' alleged insistence on calling naval imperialism the "Large Policy" (a phrase used in passing by Henry Cabot Lodge in a letter to Theodore Roosevelt that historian Julius Pratt lifted in the 1930s and generalized) or McKinley's supposed late-night praying to reach a decision on the annexation of the Philippines—suggest the most persistent and pernicious questionable attributions fall into the category of things that are believable because they fit our knowledge and preconceptions about the people involved. It is well-documented that Wilson wrote and said many things consistent with the famous but dubious quotation. He probably said something along the lines of the first half of the quotation in private to director D. W. Griffith. But reliable evidence for the familiar, full version does not exist. I have at times willed myself to believe a dubious anecdote because it was perfect at an important moment in a survey lecture, but one tries not to do so consciously.

Alan Lessoff