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# Introduction

**CASTLE MCLAUGHLIN AND TRACY J. ANDREWS**

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The papers that follow developed from those presented in a conference session held during the 1993 American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings, titled "The Role of Agriculture in the Colonization of Native North America." The authors of the manuscripts were all participants in that session, for which Joseph Jorgensen served as the discussant. An invited representative of the Intertribal Agricultural Council (IAC) was unable to attend the meetings, but Greg Smitman, IAC's executive director, has contributed an essay on that organization in the "Commentary" section.

The AAA conference session was built around the premise that, as Frieda Knobloch later wrote, "Colonization is an agricultural act. It is also an agricultural idea."<sup>1</sup> Agriculture, which Knobloch reminds us is a social enterprise implying "a whole system of domestication ... that is as much about structuring social and political life as it is about raising cattle or wheat,"<sup>2</sup> has been fundamental to western colonial and neocolonial expansion since the fifteenth century. The subsequent "agriculturalization" of North America and much of the rest of the world has been a social process by which institutionalized forms of knowledge and power have reconfigured natural biota into commodities produced and distributed by an increasingly small set of state and private interests. Alfred

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Crosby has delineated the biological colonization of the Western Hemisphere, whereby European microorganisms, plants, and animals displaced indigenous life forms, transforming social and environmental worlds and laying the foundation for today's global, industrialized agriculture.<sup>3</sup> In organizing the AAA session, we hoped to locate researchers who had considered how the agrarian "civilizing" of North America, particularly as it was shaped by political economic forces, became intertwined with Indian histories, social formations, cultures, and local ecologies. These questions are not merely of considerable historical interest, but have relevance for the many contemporary Indian communities where diverse types of farming and livestock raising have economic, cultural, and political significance. Agrarian ideals still resonate strongly for both Indian and non-Indian Americans, although they have come into increasing conflict with the structures and constraints of capital market forces, including the intensifying genetic and economic control of plant and animal reproduction by biotechnology firms.

Transforming the Native peoples of North America into sedentary agriculturists remained a consistent goal of U.S. Indian policy from George Washington's administration until the demise of FDR's New Deal. Ideologically, this process was motivated by a set of epistemological principles and political, social, and religious values that lie at the very heart of Anglo-European culture, as manifested by the agrarian idealism that inspired the nation's architects and that were intellectually codified into the "progressive" evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century. In colonial America, as elsewhere in what Crosby has referred to as the "Neo Europes," the well-established association between the ideas of "domestication," "cul-



*PHOTO 1: James Buchanan Medal, 1858, by Joseph Willson and Salathiel Ellis. Intended to depict the transformation of Indian peoples from "savagery" to "civilization" through farming, this image was controversial even at the time that it was designed. Courtesy Jefferson National Expansion Memorial/National Park Service.*

ture," and "civilization" was coupled with notions of "progress" in order to effect the "improvement" of plants, animals, and people. The guiding Lockean notion of an agrarian society undergirded by private property relations as the basis for civil society rationalized both the appropriation of Indian lands and accompanying assimilation programs designed according to the practical ideals of farming and husbandry.<sup>4</sup> When undertaken on individual lands, such occupations were thought to prepare individuals for citizenship, to provide security, to contribute to productively "civilizing" the continent, and to foster forethought, industry, and thrift. In contrast, hunting and collecting wild resources were considered land-extensive endeavors indulgent of base instincts; moreover, they impeded the profitable expansion of non-Indian yeoman farmers. The material and ideological dualism of this agenda was succinctly expressed by Thomas Jefferson when in 1803 he urged the Creek agent to develop agriculture among the Indians because

This will enable them to live on much smaller portions of land.... While they are learning to do better with less land, our increasing numbers will be calling for more land, and thus a coincidence of interests will be produced between those who have lands to spare, and want other necessities, and those who have such necessities to spare, and want lands.<sup>5</sup>

Consonant with the U.S. government's evolving assimilation policy towards Indian peoples, the Trade and Intercourse law of 1793 inaugurated the congressional practice of appropriating funds for the purchase of seeds, agricultural implements, and livestock and the hiring of personnel to instruct Indians in the agricultural and domestic arts. Henceforth, both laws and treaties often contained provisions for provisioning individuals and tribes with agricultural training and supplies, generally as part of the "civilization" package proffered in exchange for land cessions (the following papers by Tracy Andrews and Castle McLaughlin note the implementation of such agreements among the Navajo and the Three Affiliated Tribes, respectively). For example, in an 1865 treaty with the Lower Brule aimed at quelling Lakota depredations against "the Government of the United States or its people" as well as against other tribes, the United States agreed to establish a

fund "to be expended in stock, agricultural and other implements and general improvements" if the Brule would occupy the land and engage permanently "in agricultural and other kindred pursuits."<sup>6</sup> Tribal funds from land sales and leases also were often utilized for the purchase of livestock and equipment and for the establishment of "model" farms on reservations.

Efforts to encourage farming among Indian peoples began early in the East, often in tandem with missionization efforts, and proceeded west of the Mississippi River after forced settlement, land adjudications, and the institutionalization of the reservation system had been effected. The pressure for Indian lands by non-Indians and a growing conviction that the "Indian problem" could be ameliorated by "reforming" Indian land-tenure systems through the introduction of private property rights and self-sustaining agrarian economies culminated in the allotment movement between the 1860s and 1934. The allotment of tribal lands to tribal members, which was made compulsory under the 1887 Dawes or General Allotment Act, entailed not only the transfer of property, but the dismantling of tribal organizations and the enfranchisement of allottees as U.S. citizens. As an inducement to agriculture it was a failure. While a number of reservation communities had achieved notable success at raising crops and livestock by the early twentieth century (see the papers by Andrews, McLaughlin, and Richard Sattler in this volume), fewer Indians farmed in 1930 than in 1900.<sup>7</sup> Since this was also true of the non-Indian farming population, structural factors such as capital intensification must be considered in any evaluation of how agriculture has impacted reservation economies and histories. At the same time, as McLaughlin's paper, "Nation, Tribe and Class: The Dynamics of Agrarian Transformation on the Fort Berthold Reservation" demonstrates, allotment and the administrative land-tenure system established by the BIA continues to shape agrarian enterprises on Plains reservations, threatening the social sustainability of resulting patterns of land and resource use.

Community self-sufficiency through the "rational" development and conservation of reservation resources was fundamental to Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier's "Indian New Deal" (1933-1945), an era during which "the Indian problem" came to be seen in part as an economic one. Ironically, given that America's rural to urban diaspora was cresting, Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) support for Indian

farming and ranching reached its apex during the 1930s and 1940s. Collier's agrarian strategy was to link Indian programs to the larger New Deal mission of "rural rehabilitation," a discordant sounding term when applied to Indian communities, but one suggestive of a project to position Indian peoples in the economic, geographic, and temporal spaces being vacated by small-scale family and tenant farmers. In this sense, and despite Collier's ideology of cultural pluralism and efforts to restore limited self-government and self-determination, his administration recapitulated the strategy of employing agriculture as a rural rite of passage to national enfranchisement for Indian people.

During Collier's administration, allotment was halted, cooperative agreements were reached between the OIA and a host of other agencies in the Departments of Interior and Agriculture (the Soil Conservation Service, Bureau of Animal Husbandry, etc.), and the OIA expanded its ranks to include professionals in the nascent disciplines of resource management, who were charged with systematically applying modern, scientific methods of land and water management, crop and livestock production, forestry, and conservation in Indian communities. Many of these initiatives were indicated in the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which was designed in part to "conserve and develop Indian lands and resources" and empowered the secretary of Interior to "promulgate such ... rules and regulations as may be necessary to protect the range from deterioration, to prevent soil erosion, to assure full protection of the range, and like purposes."<sup>8</sup> The OIA itself established a Rehabilitation Division and formed a division of Extension and Industries patterned after the Cooperative Extension Service. Extension and Industries personnel provided technical agricultural and home economics training and supervised newly created revolving loan programs designed to fund the acquisition of livestock, equipment, seeds, and other means of production. In order to reinstall community organization and counter what Collier called "planless individualism," many loan and work programs were structured as cooperative ventures.<sup>9</sup>

The many New Deal programs that had an impact on reservation agriculture, from irrigation and soil-erosion projects to home gardening and canning, were crafted to facilitate both subsistence production and eventual participation in capital markets. OIA personnel were often ambiguous about these objectives, particularly as they conflicted with wage labor pro-

grams introduced in cooperation with the Civilian Conservation Corps and other work relief initiatives. This ambivalence reflected larger New Deal tensions between the local/specific/cultural and the national, and between individualism and government. The Indian New Deal was primarily a "reflective" policy, a spinoff of an integrative, nation-building initiative that was undertaken by increasing federal regulatory controls over Indian peoples and resources (in part by expanding the definition of "trust responsibility") just as federal regulatory authority over public lands and farming was strengthened. Integrated, standardized land and productive policies were fundamental to New Deal reform objectives, and the forging of linkages between federal agencies to address reservation infrastructures was viewed as critical for coordinating local and national development.

Not infrequently, the imperatives of the nation-state were invoked to stimulate the support of Indian communities for New Deal initiatives, such as when one OIA soil scientist warned in the pages of *Indians at Work*, Collier's in-house publication, that unless erosion on the Navajo reservation was halted, "the existence of the United States itself as a permanent nation is at stake."<sup>10</sup> More specifically, in this volume Andrews notes that concerns to ensure adequate water supplies for the developing metropole of Southern California influenced the erosion-control programs on the Navajo reservation, and she discusses some implications of these policies in local Navajo communities.

In short, the New Deal represents the moment when what David Cleveland (in this volume) calls "the conventional model of agriculture used by the dominant culture and government" was formally incorporated into the OIC (later BIA). Although Collier was given to lauding Indian peoples as the continent's "first farmers" and often voiced the hope that Indian farmers and ranchers would restore rural prosperity by example, the New Deal "rehabilitation" apparatus was predicated on nascent formulations of modernization theory and notions of "development" that were decidedly Eurocentric. In both theory and practice, the Indian New Deal was essentially transformative with regard to agriculture; new crops, practices, and technologies were introduced with little appreciative consideration given to existing complexes of resource collection and use, farming, husbandry, and land tenure. New Deal extension programs were well received in many Indian com-

munities, particularly those with an agrarian heritage, because in the short term they afforded people the opportunity to better provision their families with some semblance of independence. In the long term, they contributed to the loss of indigenous crop and livestock varieties and associated knowledge. On the upper Missouri River, for example, where the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara had practiced flood plain horticulture for a millennium, traditional varieties of corn, beans, and squash were usurped by an expanding repertoire of introduced vegetables, even as indigenous strains of corn were being appropriated by horticulturists to produce commercially viable hybrids (photo 2).<sup>11</sup>

Since the termination era of the 1950s, federal support for Indian agriculture has waned with the general farming economy, and reservation farming and ranching have lost ground to emergent economic development strategies such as gaming (see Jorgensen, this volume). Nevertheless, a considerable number of Indian people remain committed to making an array of agrarian pursuits both economically and culturally viable. As Cleveland notes in his essay, "Indian Agriculture, United States Agriculture, and Sustainable Agriculture: Science and Advocacy," although discursive terms have shifted, the epistemology of current federal legislation regarding Indian agriculture has changed little since the New Deal. His paper underscores the importance of clarifying the naturalized, value-laden assumptions that underlie the concepts of "conventional" and "indigenous" agriculture, and suggests that the perspectives of both scientists and advocates must contribute to

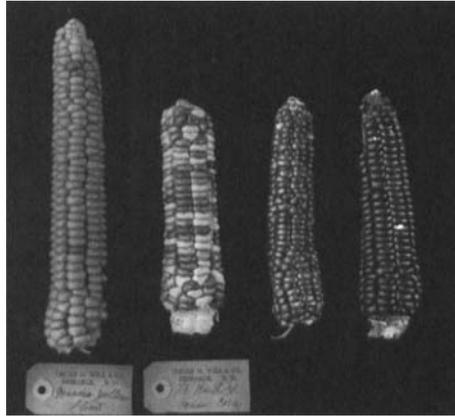


PHOTO 2: Indigenous corn varieties collected on the Fort Berthold reservation and donated to the Peabody Museum by George F. Will, 1914-1917: Mandan yellow flint; Arikara mixed flint; Mandan blue; Mandan soft red flour. Mandan and Arikara corn varieties, originally curated by bundle owners and clans, were used to create commercial hybrids that could withstand the Northern Plains environment. Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Photograph by Hillel Burger.

the development of a sustainable agrarian future in Native North America.

Cleveland also cautions that while the myriad interrelationships between colonialism and agriculture must be unwrapped to move forward in a meaningful way, it is important not to essentialize and idealize an abstract notion of a past "indigenous agriculture." Hegemony is never complete, and as all of the following essays underscore, Indian people have managed to exercise selection and agency in shaping their own agrarian experiences during the twentieth century, accepting those innovations and priorities that they find meaningful and empowering while disregarding others. In his ethnohistorical analysis, "Cowboys and Indians: Creek and Seminole Stock Raising, 1700-1900," Sattler points out that stockraising among the Lower Creeks and Seminoles was indigenously initiated, and was adopted from other Indian peoples rather than from non-Indian assimilationists. He also describes how cattle raising reinforced some aspects of the existing social order while changing others. Contemporary Indian peoples have grown up in an environment characterized by a mixture of Indian and non-Indian influences and experiences, and many elements of what might be considered "mainstream agriculture" have come to be valued as "traditional" lifeways or as pragmatic tools that allow individuals to raise families in their home communities.

Relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the complex and diverse legacies that federal programs and associated ideologies have bequeathed to contemporary Indian communities, or to the meanings that both traditional and adopted agrarian enterprises continue to hold for Indian people, many of whom struggle both individually and collectively to preserve them. While a growing interest in the role that farming and ranching have played in twentieth-century Indian communities is apparent in the recent literature, few such publications have been informed by sustained fieldwork experiences or diachronic analyses of particular communities.<sup>12</sup>

We believe that such methodological strategies are important because they can mitigate against tendencies towards overgeneralization and the uncritical acceptance of representations made by people and in written documents. While federal Indian policies and macro-level structural factors may be seen as relatively uniform, the strongest connective theme in this set of papers is their shared attention to linking such factors to locally specific

socioeconomic, environmental, and diachronic variability. As Andrews demonstrates in her paper, "Crops, Cattle and Capital: Agrarian Political Ecology in Canyons de Chelly and del Muerto," attention to micro-level differences in ecological and economic factors, combined with a historical perspective utilizing diachronic data, makes apparent patterns that would otherwise be obscured. She also emphasizes cultural perspectives regarding land use as important variables carrying meanings and valuation priorities that may differ significantly from those of agricultural "development" programs focused on intensifying crop production. In this regard, Andrews and Cleveland both encourage recognition of the potential for variability in cultural and ritual landscapes—between and within Native groups—as they intersect with environmental and economic factors in temporally dynamic contexts.

The importance of recognizing sociocultural variability and change *within* communities is stressed by all of the authors who have contributed to this collection. As Sattler notes in his essay, historic differences between the Creek and the Seminole in livestock ownership reflected variable ecological and economic conditions as well as diverse social strategies. As early as the 1700s, regional markets for beef, cattle, and deer hides varied and continued to differentially influence patterns of livestock production over time. Andrews, McLaughlin, and Sattler find the raising of beef cattle associated with internal social differentiation in four diverse cultural contexts, a relationship that has heretofore received little mention in the North American literature, although it has been well recognized in other parts of the world. While they utilize the concept differently, both Sattler and McLaughlin argue that the practice of raising beef cattle triggered significant transformations in Indian communities, including the formation of social classes. Both authors also explore the internal politics related to the leasing of Indian grazing lands, and how competing political orientations are linked to the variable socioeconomic positions and interests of individuals and groups. Sattler examines these processes among the Creek and Seminole up through 1900, while McLaughlin focuses on twentieth-century class dynamics at Fort Berthold. Like the other contributors to this collection, Sattler and McLaughlin stress actor-oriented, strategic behaviors when considering interactions between Indian and non-Indian societies, rather than conceptualizing Indian peoples as powerless and passive vis à vis a monolithic nation-state.

The common experience of internal colonization, federal Indian policies, and capitalist economic structures throughout Native North America can create impressions of homogeneity within and between cultures and contemporary circumstances, which too often mitigate against an appreciation for the complexity of issues. Beyond clarifying commonalities, it is important to refocus attention through the recognition of ongoing legacies to potential variability in environmental, economic, and sociocultural contexts, and to recognize the cultural construction of both pragmatic and theoretical models. Overlooking these issues has contributed to problems in the past; acknowledging them is a basis for a more informed future, and one that we hope can lay groundwork for innovative new approaches.

#### NOTES

1. Frieda Knobloch, *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 2. Knobloch is referring here to the ideology and practice of western agriculture since the word was first defined in English (1603), not to food production in general.

3. Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

4. The intellectual history of the concepts of "agrarianism" and "savagism," and their antithetical construction has been explored by Roy Harvey Pearce in *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), and James A. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture* (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1989).

5. Quoted in R. Douglas Hurt, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 86.

6. In Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Treaties 1778-1883* (New York: Interland Publishing, 1975), 885.

7. For the history of allotment and its effect on Indian farming, see Leonard A. Carlson, *Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land: The Dawes Act and the Decline of Indian Farming* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

8. Wheeler-Howard Act (Indian Reorganization Act), *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 48:984-88, sec. 6 (1934).

9. For an overview of New Deal programs, see Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977).

10. *Indians at Work* 1:4 (October, 1933): 15.

11. Some varieties of indigenous cultigens such as corn now exist only as museum "specimens"; see, for example, Castle McLaughlin, "The George F. Will Collection: A Cornucopia from Native North America at the Peabody Museum," *Symbols* (Spring 1998): 19-21. An overview of Native American heritage resources can be found in Gary Paul Nabhan's *Enduring Seeds: Native American Agriculture and Wild Plant Conservation* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989).

12. Here we can only indicate a sample of recent work. In 1992, the journal *Agricultural History* (Volume 66, number 2) published a collection of papers focusing on reservation agricultural histories. That effort was organized by the historian Thomas R. Wessel, who has spent several decades researching reservation farming and ranching. R. Douglas Hurt published a chronological overview titled *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to the Present* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987). Among the recent case studies of reservation farming are David Rich Lewis' *Neither Wolf nor Dog: American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) and Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvest: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990). Plains Indian ranching has recently been the subject of two books, Peter Iverson's *When Indians became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994) and *Legends of Our Times: Native Cowboy Life*, by Morgan Baillargeon and Leslie Tepper (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).