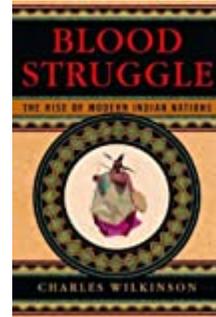




**Charles Wilkinson.** *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations.* New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. ix + 544 pp. \$15.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-393-32850-9; \$26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-05149-0.



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## Sowing the Seeds of Indigenous Revitalization

In his recent book, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*, Charles Wilkinson, Distinguished University Professor of Law at the University of Colorado, characterizes the looming threat of termination of Indian tribes' sovereign status in the 1950s as a historic low-point for Indian nations. Yet, by no means is it the author's intent to narrate a dark tale of dispossession and passive victimization. Rather, Wilkinson begins with termination in order to exhibit later the numerous ways in which Indian communities became active agents in their own survival and well-being, despite the most brutal of federal policies. Wilkinson effectively demonstrates the rise of modern Indian nations from the ashes of termination through his extraordinary wealth of knowledge and experience, the likes of which can only be attained through a career as long and fruitful as his own. Wilkinson highlights not only key achievements in Indian Country, but also devotes significant attention to the new generation of college-educated Indians behind these influential movements. The establishment of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Menominee Restoration, and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) all emerge as particularly important

stories in the movement toward tribal self-determination.

Of the countless examples Wilkinson employs, the founding of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in 1944 represents a key moment in the rise of America's Indigenous Nations. Though Wilkinson devotes a relatively small portion of chapter 4, "The Making of a Movement," to discussing the establishment of the NCAI, readers should not underestimate its historical significance. As Wilkinson notes, until the 1940s American Indians were largely unsuccessful at organizing on the national level. Organizations such as the Society of the American Indian and the Teepee Order of America were largely unproductive and ignored in terms of Indian policy. In the 1940s, the Association of American Indian Affairs was almost exclusively white in membership, while, in the nineteenth century, the Friends of the American Indian was an all-white organization.

Though Wilkinson does not discuss the dramatic changes in Indian identity—particularly since the 1960s—it is important to bear in mind that many indigenous people of the 1940s still primarily identified with their specific tribal (rather than inter-tribal) identities. Find-

ing a common ground and uniting toward a shared cause proved enormously difficult in the early days of the NCAI when tribal members accused the organization of being “both too professional and too Oklahoma” (p. 103). With an influx of recently returned World War II veterans eager to join the cause, the NCAI—though struggling and representing a relatively small number of Indian nations—began working to achieve Indian suffrage in New Mexico. The ability of American Indian people to collaborate in the 1940s and 1950s in an effort to advance a nationwide agenda of sovereignty and civil rights was indeed an historic achievement, often overlooked in light of the more boisterous movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Ada Deer was among these boisterous and outspoken tribal leaders of the 1960s and 1970s, playing a key role in the restoration of the Menominee following termination of their federally recognized tribal status in 1961, when former tribal members now became shareholders of Menominee Enterprises, Inc. According to Wilkinson, “a voting trust, not individual Menominee, held and voted the corporation’s shares” (p. 183). Only four of the seven members of the voting trust were Menominee and the only potential the Menominee had to regulate their own affairs would be to elect more tribal members as voting trustees; however, another trust (the First Wisconsin Trust Company of Milwaukee) had control of nearly 80 percent of the votes cast, leaving the Menominee in a seemingly hopeless situation.

Now being taxed as residents of a non-reservation Wisconsin county, the Menominee sank further into despair with the loss of the tribal hospital and schools. In 1970, Determination of Rights and Unity of Menominee Shareholders (DRUMS) formed as both a community advocacy group and a clever organization of shareholders. Led by Ada Deer and Jim White, DRUMS disrupted environmentally hazardous land development projects, marched to the Wisconsin state capital, and eventually elected Deer as the new chair of the voting trust. With years of hard work and their fair share of good fortune, Menominee Restoration became a reality in 1973, despite the Department of the Interior’s earlier stall tactics. Deer eventually went on to serve as chairperson of the newly restored Menominee Nation, and later as Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) during the Clinton administration.

In a book about the rise of modern Indian nations—while giving due credit to leaders such as Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt, and Russell Means—Wilkinson devotes much more significant attention to both intellectuals and

elected tribal officials, such as Vine Deloria Jr., Hank Adams, Ada Deer, and Billy Frank Jr. According to Wilkinson, “the modern tribal sovereignty movement has had no single great inspirational leader, no Martin Luther King, Jr., no Cesar Chavez.... Yet if one person may be singled out, it is Vine Deloria, Jr.” (p. 106).

Portraying the occupation of Alcatraz Island and the American Indian Movement’s (AIM) Trail of Broken Treaties march to Washington, D.C. as somewhat unorganized (or perhaps merely presenting these stories for what they are), Wilkinson sees tribal leadership in this era as ultimately more meaningful than urban activism: “In a movement directed toward legal recognition of tribal governments, they [AIM] were not elected tribal officials” (p. 149). Wilkinson creates an image of Indian Country as united on the principles of autonomous self-governance and the preservation of treaty rights. The intellectual leadership of Hank Adams and Vine Deloria Jr. provided community leaders with a rally cry uniting Indian Country with a common vision of self-determination.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971, according to Wilkinson, represented another tremendous step toward the recognition of Native rights. When Alaska became a state in 1959, nearly 90 percent of the land was designated as “public domain” for mineral leases and homesteading, which left the Natives uneasy as to the future of their hunting and fishing rights, which sustained a considerable portion of the indigenous population. The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) was established in 1966 to advance the cause of statewide land claims, filing claims with the Department of the Interior that, by the end of the 1960s, accounted for most of the state. In an unprecedented move, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall issued a freeze of all Alaskan territory, closing it off to all outsiders seeking a federal land transfer, which proved to be a bold move at a time when many were salivating over rich oil prospects in the north. Lobbyists remained ardent in their negotiations with the federal government and on December 18, 1971, President Nixon signed the historic Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) into existence, securing 40 million acres and nearly one billion dollars for Alaska Natives. However, similar to Menominee termination, Alaska Natives now became shareholders of tribal corporations. Nonetheless, the AFN reclaimed 12 percent (an almost unimaginable portion) of their homeland.

In the second half of the twentieth century, American Indians collaborating through organizations such as

NCAI, DRUMS, and AFN stood firm in their commitment to autonomous tribal sovereignty. As Wilkinson succinctly argues, “the modern Indian movement has put on grand display America’s truest nobility—its commitment to give dispossessed peoples the chance to thrive—but it took the passionate and informed determination of Indian people to activate that impulse” (p. xv).

Perhaps a bit longer than necessary, readers need not be intimidated by the breadth of Wilkinson’s sweeping legal history as his narrative style is both compelling and accessible. Wilkinson chooses to de-emphasize casino gaming, arguing that “gaming has played an important role, but the scope of the modern tribal sovereignty movement goes far beyond it” (p. xv). Though, in narrat-

ing an optimistic tale of indigenous resurgence, Wilkinson hardly acknowledges the many harsh realities and social problems in Indian Country today, leaving readers wondering what work remains to be done. Still, this book is a tribute to the inspirational stories of determined Indian leaders and the many great accomplishments they have made in the twentieth century. It is also essential for anyone wishing to deepen their knowledge of twentieth-century American Indian history. Finally, it effectively argues that the modern Indian revitalization movement should be recognized as a significant chapter of U.S. history. Charles Wilkinson’s *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* is likely to become a time-honored classic in its field.

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