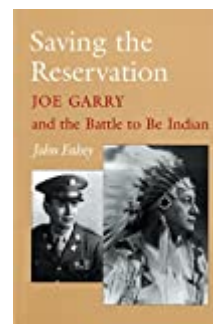


**John Fahey.** *Saving the Reservation: Joe Garry and the Battle to Be Indian.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. xi + 220 pp. \$26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-98153-6.



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## Paper Warriors to the Rescue

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Joe Garry was the product of an intercultural frontier. His family line included Matthew Hayden, an Irishman who came West with the Indian-fighting U.S. Army, and Spokane Garry, Chief of the Spokanes, who was educated and converted to Christianity at a young age and returned to the tribe in 1832 “determined to educate and Christianize” his people (p. 91). Garry’s father, Ignace, was a devout Catholic who also honored Native traditions, insisting that his children be conversant in two cultures. Beginning at the age of nine, Joe Garry attended the DeSmet mission boarding school for boys, later graduating from Gonzaga high school before moving on to the Haskell Institute and then Butler University in Indianapolis where, in an earnest letter to his father, he expressed his ambition to make something of himself—“If I went home now and be a clerk that’s all I’ll ever amount to. There is no future in it” (p. 99).

Garry was an assimilated Indian who never minded suiting up in his white buckskins or ceremonial costumes for non-Indian audiences. The summer after he graduated from Haskell, he worked at summer camp in In-

diana as a “lifeguard and instructor in Indian lore,” and throughout his career as an Indian advocate he never minded playing the role of a cultural intermediary, even if it meant “playing Indian” for whites. In one of the most telling passages of this important book, John Fahey writes that Garry “liked to be Indian among whites; he liked to portray his Indian heritage and customs; he enjoyed telling of Indian ways and showing Indian finery; and he liked to sing Indian chants to recount the legends of his people. In all these Joe found a role he could play exceedingly well” (p. 101).

It was in such a role that Joe Garry would find his niche and elevate himself beyond the level of a common clerk to become one of the leading Indian advocates in the postwar period. He was a natural leader—sincere, hard-working, earnest, articulate, dignified—who was also gifted with good looks and a charming, likeable personality that served his purposes in both Native and white worlds, which he was able to navigate with enviable grace. Such skills, along with his ambition to “amount to” something, led Garry to serve his people. By the end of the 1950s, Garry could say that he was the

first American Indian elected to the Idaho legislature, and he was president of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, chairman of the Coeur d'Alene tribal council, and a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, not to mention "Outstanding Indian of North America" for 1957 (p. 111).

In this detailed and well-researched study, Fahey chronicles the efforts of Garry and other so-called "paper warriors" who battled in the twentieth century what Sitting Bull and Geronimo had battled in the nineteenth—the U.S. Government's determination to liquidate Indian lands and eliminate Native American cultural and national identity. In the case of Garry, this battle took the form of fighting against Congress' termination policy of the 1950s which, in the grand tradition of American democracy, sought to end "Indian segregation" by abolishing government responsibilities towards Indians and thereby bestowing upon Native peoples "all the duties, obligations, and privileges of free citizens" (p. 31). In sum, this meant that Indian peoples would be given the "freedom" to lose their reservations, while the federal government would be "liberated" from the onerous burden of continuing to meet their legal obligations to Indian peoples.

Fahey does an admirable job of documenting the struggle of Garry and the NCAI against termination. He also gives a wonderful biographical account of Garry as well as a very good, concise history of the Coeur d'Alene tribe. Unfortunately, much of the book, especially the first sixty-five pages, is largely an institutional history of the NCAI which gets bogged down in the meticulous detailing of annual conventions, lobbying efforts, panel discussions, circular letters, committee resolutions, and government hearings. On the whole, the book is a history of uncommon people—mainly the dashing and dignified Garry, but also the flamboyant Helen Peterson, the diplomatic and eloquent D'Arcy McNickle, and other mostly assimilated Indians who fought the government's efforts to terminate its trust responsibilities to Native Americans. But much of Fahey's account is bloodless: the human actors are veiled behind concurrent resolutions, joint telegrams, and executive committee minutes. Fahey tries to enliven his prose with an occasional metaphor ("Joe Garry collected the shards of tribal discontent like colored pebbles in a stream, forming them into a mosaic of coercion and thralldom," p. 24), but his efforts fail largely because, except for the excellent chapters on Coeur d'Alene history and Garry's early life, the author's language begins to mimic the dry bureaucratic style of his

sources. The reader scarcely gets a feel for Joe Garry until chapter six when Fahey chronicles Garry's early life. It is in this chapter, when Fahey liberates himself from bureaucratic detail, where the book and its subject really spring to life.

Fahey does an admirable job of dramatizing the significance of Garry and the NCAI's efforts to fight termination and otherwise preserve tribal resources from congressional actions. Chapter titles like "Emergency!" and the "The Crucial Year" convey the immediacy and peril of years when Congress introduced bills which were, in the words of Helen Peterson, "probably the most frightening and threatening to Indian property and rights in this century" (p. 45). But these battles—as important as they were—do not hold the drama of earlier Indian efforts to defend Native resources and cultural identity. Why doesn't the heroism of these twentieth-century struggles ring out like that of the Pueblo Revolt, Tecumseh's fight against American expansion, the Ghost Dances, or even the American Indian Movement, when clearly they were part of the same tradition of resistance whereby Indian peoples have fought, always against overwhelming odds, to preserve their land, their cultures, and their integrity? The answer is clear: the paper warriors did not fight with their bodies, but with their words. Their struggles were waged in the committee rooms of Congress rather than on battlefields, with typewriters and phones rather than guns and arrows. Moreover, their battles were meant to preserve Native American resources but not necessarily "traditional" Indian culture. For these reasons, the "paper wars" of the twentieth century have, unfortunately, garnered much less attention than previous, more romantic conflicts.

The paper warriors were themselves highly assimilated—educated, clean-cut, and formally attired. They often held positions within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which bred much suspicion among "reservation Indians" who questioned the motives of "Bureau Indians." They were a select group, as indicated by the first meeting of the NCAI in 1944, which was attended by twenty-two representatives from eight different tribes, the majority of them Cherokee, Chippewa, and Choctaw, all but one of whom worked for the BIA. Such selectivity raised questions about their self-interest. It also raised questions about their "authenticity," that bugaboo of ethnic cultural identity which divides "true" members of a race from those "just masquerading." In the context of Indian life, this manifested itself as a conflict between Traditionalists and Progressives, rank-and-file and elites, keepers of the faith and "Uncle Tomahawks."

To be clear, the paper warriors were “bona fide Indian leaders” rather than emissaries appointed by the dominant culture. In 1939, a number of the founding members of the NCAI walked out of an academic seminar on “The North American Indian Today” because, as Fahey explains, they were “convinced that most of those attending had become so acculturated that they no longer represented reservation Indians” (p. 11). Afterwards they drafted a resolution calling for an “all-Indian conference” limited to “bona fide Indian leaders, [a] conference ... free of political, anthropological, missionary, administrative, or other domination” (p. 11). At the same time, however, “reservation Indians” often criticized the leadership of the NCAI for being too ambitious and self-aggrandizing, and Congress believed that NCAI activists (“the high-powered propaganda machine of ‘professional Indians’ and their manipulators”) had “drowned out” the voices of “real Indians” (p. 31). In looking at the his-

tory of these warriors, however, there is little doubt as to their “authenticity.” They came from reservation backgrounds, they navigated their way through intolerant and abusive educational systems, and, in the end, they used their many skills to fight on behalf of their people to literally save Indian lands—hence the title, “Saving the Reservation.” However, the subtitle, “the Battle to Be Indian,” encourages the reader to consider questions of Indian identity—exactly what it means to be Indian, then and now. Fahey is much more interested in Garry and his peers’ efforts to save reservations than he is in their efforts, conscious or otherwise, to define for themselves and society an Indian identity that transcended the boundaries of Progressive and Traditionalist. But readers interested in both topics—and anyone interested in the struggle of Indian peoples to combat termination—will find much useful information in this exhaustively researched book.

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