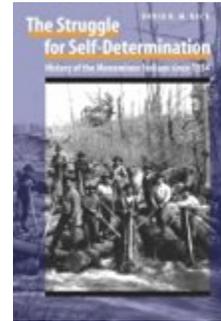


David R. M. Beck. *The Struggle for Self-Determination: History of the Menominee Indians Since 1854*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xxviii + 296 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-1347-0.

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## Defining a Menominee Future

In *The Struggle for Self-Determination*, Beck presents the second part of a two-book history of the Menominee Indians. His first study, *Siege and Survival: History of the Menominee Indians, 1634-1856*, was published in 2002 and recounts the manner in which the Menominees of Wisconsin negotiated the intrusions of French, British, and American colonizers and managed to retain both a diminished reservation and their cultural autonomy. *Siege and Survival* places Menominees in the forefront of the historical narrative, and Beck ably reveals that while the pressures of outsiders gradually undermined the power of the nation and its leaders in the first centuries of contact, the Menominees' core cultural values grounded their ability to resist the intrusions. As he now illustrates with great success in the continuation of that history, the Menominee cultural foundation did not crumble as tribal leaders repeatedly faced off against the U.S. government after 1854.

The title of the preface, "Shaping a Tribally Defined Existence," aptly introduces both the intentions of the Menominees from 1854 to the present and Beck's presentation of that history. As he did in his first book, Beck delivers a comprehensive narrative that incorporates the voices of those Indians and non-Indians who played important roles in events. The thirteen chapters that follow the preface detail the Menominee struggle with the U.S. government that never strayed far from three areas—land, timber, and culture. From the battles over timber management and the development of the tribal economy to the promotion of agriculture and the concept of civiliza-

tion, this contest rested on a fundamental philosophical difference between Menominees and U.S. officials. "The two cultures simply defined success in radically different ways," Beck writes. "So while both sides seemed to have the same goals—Menominee success in modern American culture—their definitions of success differed so drastically that they were constantly at loggerheads with each other" (p. 128).

In the early years on the reservation in northeastern Wisconsin the Menominees showed a willingness to work with American officials to ensure the economic stability of their people, even if it meant shifting their focus to agriculture. Problems arose, however, when poor soil and environmental troubles undermined the Menominees' efforts. When the Menominees sought a new approach to subsistence and survival, they came up against American officials who refused to abandon the vision of Indian farmers. In short, "federal officials seemed concerned with form while the tribe desired substance" (p. 8). This proved a sticking point for the remainder of the century and beyond, and even as the Menominees suffered and the population dropped severely in the late 1800s, government agents and other officials emphasized agricultural dependence as the only proper path for the future.

Though the Menominees viewed their circumstances from an alternate perspective and had different expectations, they could not escape federal oversight and intrusion. Beginning in 1871, first symbolically and then

practically, the Menominees and the U.S. government struggled over control of the timber spread throughout the reservation. A mix of pine trees, aspens, hardwoods, and cedar grew on the reserve that encompassed nearly one quarter of a million acres. The Menominees knew the value of this natural resource but held fast to the principle that a timber-based economy served to benefit the community as a whole, and was not meant to support the success of a few, much less the interests of non-Menominees. Yet the weight of federal paternalism overwhelmed Menominee efforts from the late 1800s into the first several decades of the 1900s. Even legislation like the 1908 LaFollette Act, which theoretically provided for sustained-yield timber production and management according to tribal interests, became an avenue for federal control and micromanagement.

The first quarter of the twentieth century was the low point for Menominee self-governance. But under the leadership of men like Mitchell Oshkenaniew and organizations such as the Menominee League of Women Voters the Menominees began to fight back. In the 1920s and 1930s they resisted allotment, protested forest mismanagement, and proposed a Menominee corporation that would enable the tribe to control its economic future and preserve its cultural traditions. Yet while they voted overwhelmingly to accept the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, they rejected incorporation as defined by John Collier and the Office of Indian Affairs. The sequence of events was a perfect example of the dangerous line walked by tribal leaders and members into the 1970s. Though constantly striving for tribal self-government and control of resources on the reservation, the Menominees were also justifiably wary of the consequences of ending the trust relationship with the federal government.

As those familiar with Menominee history are aware, the very success of Menominee resistance to federal control was both a catalyst and a justification for

government-sponsored termination of that trust relationship in 1954. Beck details the specific effects of this government legislation as well as the fight led against it by Menominees on and off the reservation. Yet while the Menominee Restoration Act of 1973 marked a crucial victory that cannot be overstated, Beck places that moment at the beginning of another series of conflicts and struggles faced by the Menominees as they negotiated relations with the US government during the latter decades of the twentieth century. Despite expanded economic development, including the opening of a casino in the 1980s, Menominee County maintained its position as the poorest in the state in 2002. Beck does conclude on a positive note, observing that the continued existence of the forest on the reservation is “a visible symbol of the successful fight for survival and self-determination of the Menominee people” (p. 188). At the same time, however, he also includes words of caution, knowing that the Menominees will always have to defend their position against those who would use tribal self-governance and economic stability as a springboard for ending the federal trust relationship.

Though less than two hundred pages of text, this is a dense book that requires the reader’s full attention. Even Beck admits that the historical events covered “are almost overwhelming when studied in detail” (p. xvi). But this history cannot be told properly without the detail he includes. And the narrative operates within a framework and from a perspective that Beck, in partnership with the Menominee Historic Preservation Department, constructed to represent the interests of both historical scholarship and the Menominee community. All told, he has written an impressive study that, together with *Siege and Survival*, presents an unbroken and valuable narrative that relates the consistent efforts made by Menominee men and women to preserve their cultural, political, and economic foundations even as they adapted to the changing world around them.

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