Upon Native Ground

The Corona Papers Post #5.

Context: This post seeks to address the vertical aspect of the Corona Papers project by highlighting the native stewards of the land on which this project has been conducted.

At the outset of my research to answer the questions posed by SJDHP “[Material Conditions](http://criticaldh.roopikarisam.com/criticaldh/material-conditions/)” pars. 8 and 9, I resolved to be receptive to avenues of inquiry that differed from previously held notions. One soon presented itself, as I discovered a remarkable article from an 1845 American Indian newspaper discussing the proposed “Nebraska Territory” from the perspective of the native peoples. It was argued in no uncertain terms: “Should the proposed Territory be established the consequences that will result thereby to the whole Indian population of the west, are beyond conception” (Ross and Ross 1845). The authors went even further in their predictions: “Intrusion will follow intrusion, wrong be piled upon wrong till the condition of the Indians become intolerable” (Ross and Ross 1845).

Their claims were more than justified. The state in which I have been conducting the work for this course is land natively stewarded by countless peoples, all of whom were adversely affected by the formation of the Nebraska Territory. The authors list several tribes that would be (and subsequently were) directly affected: Delaware, Kanza, Kickapoo, Sac and Foxes, and Ioway (Ross and Ross 1845). Through other research I found a great number more, including the Omaha, Ponca, Winnebago, and Cheyenne (Jackson 1881). These lands were taken by white settlers through a variety of tactics ranging from the underhanded to the atrocious. Most common was the “ceding” of land by native tribes to the US government in a series of misleading and degrading treaties; NET’s Nebraska Studies program (2018) notes that “in all, there were 18 separate treaties between 1825 and 1892 in Nebraska alone,” with several dozen tribes signing their lands over the government (Kappler 1904).

Once their land was taken, the conditions of the Indians were worsened further by their forced placement on reservations, as mandated by the Indian Removal Act and other federal legislation. Proving Ross and Ross’s predictions of “intolerable conditions,” reservation life was often dire: “many of the Omaha Indians” were “destitute, and were begging for food, and for credit in the stores, in the Nebraska towns near the reservation,” with “considerable suffering among the Indians” (Baxter 1887). These conditions were commonplace for the native peoples in the early days of Nebraska the territory and Nebraska the state. Acknowledging their suffering, and the land appropriation crimes committed by white settlers, is crucial to a vertical understanding of the current DH project.

Works Cited

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