Sources in the Native American Past

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Preface

Native voices: Sources in the Native American Past provides readers with a variety of historical documents covering the full span of Native American history, from their earliest beginnings to the twentieth century. Selected carefully, each document sheds light on Native North America, and tries to provide readers with the Native American perspective on their history. Historical documents consist of primary sources created during a particular time period. Understanding Native American history sometimes requires the use of nonconventional sources, some of which are included here, because Native Americans left few firsthand accounts before the nineteenth century. Reading primary sources is quite different from reading textbooks and other secondary sources. Textbooks and secondary sources have the reader in mind, and authors structure their books in a particular way to tell the reader what is important. People in the past were not always thinking about their reading audience, and therefore, they did not always highlight what was most important for their readers. Reading documents penned by nonnative peoples only adds to the difficulty of interpreting primary sources. Readers should have some historical background before approaching any document. Then they can look for cultural biases and assumptions on the part of the authors, and critically interpret what authors clearly state or imply about Native American peoples and cultures. All of the documents in Native Voices challenge readers to determine for themselves how Native Americans made history happen. Native Voices is a wonderful collection to assign in conjunction with Pearson’s Native American survey textbook, First Americans: A History of Native Peoples, coauthored by Kenneth W. Townsend and Mark A. Nicholas.

I would like to thank all who have supported this project from its inception. My family has stood by me during the entire process. Pearson has provided ample time and resources. I would like to thank Charlyce Jones-Owen, Nicole Suddeth, and especially Sherry Sprague. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Florida Atlantic University.

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INTRODUCTION

Native voices: Sources in the Native American Past guides students through the tremendous span of Native American history, from 30,000 years ago to the present. The documents in this book do not follow the standard chronology of most American history textbooks. The documents show how native peoples were not in the background of important events in American history, but were active players and shapers of such events. Some of the sources are indigenous in origin. Others, written by people of European ancestry, will require students to find the “native voice” in documents, biased because of European values and beliefs. The documents cover native North America across diverse demographic, cultural, social, and geographical boundaries. Each section starts with a brief introduction. Each document has its own introduction to provide more historical context. Questions at the end of each chapter hopefully engage discussion in that they connect the documents to the time period in the particular section while asking students to use Indian experiences to compare important historical events or trends.

Chapters One through Six cover the period from before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to 1850. In the section that deals with pre-Columbian times, the voices of indigenous activists appear along with origin stories. This is to engage readers to think less about the science of the “Bering Strait” argument and more about Native American understandings of the world and their origins. In this collection are also documents relative to the Spanish movement into South America and portions of North America as part of the larger narrative of Native American history. Selected documents also cover how Native Americans handled changing circumstances in the face of French and English colonization, and how native peoples in various circumstances adjusted. Moving from the American Revolution to 1850, the excerpts consistently emphasize both multicultural and many geographical perspectives. Unique to this volume, for example, is the framing of the Indians’ Revolution as a continent-wide event. Documents allow students to probe the colonists’ revolution against the British and how indigenous groups positioned themselves within a conflict that they did not start, while other sources also cover important indigenous revolutions in the southwest and California. The Indians’ Revolution, in this volume, continues until 1814. The documents reflect that broad span of time, examining continued tribal warfare in the Old Northwest and the South, the rise of prophets, and the eventual defeat of native resistance east of the Mississippi. Chapter Six documents the Indian voice as the United States forcibly removed tribal peoples to the west. Equal attention is paid to Indian removal in the South and North, the various voices from both native men and women who were opposed to removal as well as treaties used to accelerate Indian removal. Other native voices in Chapter Six try and capture a range of native experiences and possibilities in the western part of North America before, during, and after the United States tried to wrest control of the farthest reaches of the continent from Indian groups and foreign European powers. Chapters Seven through Twelve cover Native American history from 1850 to the present. Native Americans were not hidden somewhere from the main events of this period of American history; in fact, they were active participants in American westward expansion, the Progressive Era, the Great Depression, and both world wars. Throughout these pivotal moments, Native Americans set their own course, oftentimes as individuals, and sometimes as communities. Native Americans wrote most of the historical sources in this collection. Balanced with some treaties and federal policies, the documents primarily focus on native culture and identity and political activism and community sovereignty. Rather than simply including federal treaties and policies, the historical sources are unique in that they were written by Native Americans oftentimes for Native Americans. Readers will see the various cultural practices native peoples used to resist or adapt to American westward expansion, reservation life, and the reform movements such as boarding schools at the end of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, Native American intellectuals sought their own voices to address other native peoples about some of the problems that beset their communities. Sources capture how native men experienced the horrors and tragedies of two world wars. During the Great Depression, Native Americans fought to preserve their communities in the “Indian New Deal,” and
documents demonstrate exactly how they did this. Letters, oral testimonies, and petitions and addresses from prominent Native American activists fill out the volume from the 1950s to 1970s, a time of new indigenous activism that paralleled the well-known African-American civil rights movement. Native peoples in the final set of documents speak for themselves into the twentieth century when they continued to chart their own paths, using laws, politics, art, and other outlets to empower themselves and their communities.