

**Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory.** By Andrew Denson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 289 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper; \$19.99 electronic.

In *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory*, historian Andrew Denson charts the multiple ways in which the so-called “Trail of Tears” has been commemorated by both white Southerners and Cherokees over the past one hundred and fifty years. In the early nineteenth century, the United States government forcibly relocated thousands of eastern Native people from their homelands to territories across the Mississippi River, resulting in much death, dispossession, and despair. The Cherokee Removal, perhaps because of the consistent efforts to memorialize it, has become the iconic moment of Indian Removal in the American historical consciousness. It is paradoxical that Indian Removal, which marks one of the darkest moments in our nation’s history, should be the object of passionate memorialization. This is the paradox that drives Denson’s investigation and which, in the end, he successfully resolves.

Denson argues that at the root of this paradox is the deeply held American trope of the “vanishing Indian,” one that erases American Indians from America and defines American mistreatment of Indians, however lamentable, as the cost of progress and democracy. Denson is clear that commemorations of Cherokee Removal are not about remembering Indian Removal but are, in fact, “monuments to absence,” or commemorations that are designed to deny Cherokee existence on, and claims to, the Southern landscape, while simultaneously inscribing white Southern possession and rights. But in the hands of Cherokees the same markers, celebrations, and reenactments perform a kind of memory work that is wholly opposite: it signals clearly that the Cherokees are still here.

Denson begins with a detailed overview of Cherokee history, focusing on the Removal era and the subsequent Cherokee efforts to reconstitute their homes, communities, and governments located both in Indian territory (present-day Oklahoma) and in their homelands, where a small group of Cherokees managed to avoid removal (present-day North Carolina). Denson also roots the memorializations of Cherokee removal in the nineteenth century, when white American reformers were decrying Indian removal after the fact. These reformers formulated a suite of themes that to this day are foundational to Southern Removal monuments. Although tinged with a tone of national penance and regret, these themes perpetuate the false legend that Indian people were mostly destroyed and that any who remained were relics of the past, while acknowledgments of the United States’ mistreatment of Native Americans and crimes against them are followed by US national redemption. Cherokee reformers of the time, faced with relentless American efforts at Indian dispossession and destruction of Indian governance, nonetheless set themes of their own, still in play to this day. They too leverage the memory of Removal, but to assert tribal autonomy and national sovereignty.

Denson presents several additional case studies from the early twentieth century to today in which both white Southerners and Cherokees commemorated Indian

removal by playing on and reestablishing these themes. Denson crafts compelling historical contexts for his case studies that demonstrate how monuments to history are themselves shaped by the historical moments in which they exist. He begins in early-twentieth-century Appalachia where local promoters, desperate to find a viable economic outlet during the depression, began a tourism campaign for the recently established Great Smoky Mountains. The Eastern Band of Cherokees, themselves reeling from the economic tumult of the times, were pulled into these efforts and subsequently became active participants. Like the grand forests of the Smokies, tourism promoters and local boosters, Native and non-Native, heralded the Cherokees as ancient and wise relics who for now are bypassed by the modern world. The promotional literature offered to tourists an opportunity to still see “real Indians” before they all disappeared. Cherokee participation in tourism often played to stereotype, but Denson argues their mere presence asserted tribal identity and survival and managed to unsettle such promotional proclamations about the doomed Native. Denson then takes us inside the ironies of prewar Georgia and Tennessee, when white Southern boosters bickered over the right to claim Indian removal sites—with no Indian participation whatsoever. The city of Chattanooga’s historic celebrations and multiple monuments to the Cherokees provide an especially apt case study of how white Southerners appropriated a romanticized version of Indian Removal to memorialize Tennessee statehood, atone for historic wrongs, and assert proprietary rights over place. The whole spectacle, of course, underscored white domination and racial superiority, both of which could be celebrated and memorialized without threat since, according to this narrative, Indians had long ago “disappeared.”

With the late twentieth century’s civil rights movement, the trope of the vanishing Indian was placed within a new historical context. Denson’s analysis of the reconstruction of the Cherokee capital in Georgia, New Echota, illustrates how this memory work still involved the amelioration of national white guilt and safely allowed white Southerners to nod to a national awakening to racial diversity and equality but without compromising their ideals of white superiority or risking confrontation. The Indians, to their way of thinking, were long gone, not marching through Southern streets with African American civil rights supporters. From these predominantly white commemorations Denson then takes us to two indigenous ones. He analyzes two historical dramas written by white playwright Kermit Hunter during the civil rights era that began as tourism projects: *The Trail of Tears*, performed by the Cherokee Nation until 2005, and *Unto these Hills*, a play the Eastern Band of Cherokees still performs today. Denson argues that despite the overt patriotic themes, neither drama simply celebrates Cherokee and American history. The Eastern Band was able to put *Unto these Hills*’ success as a tourist attraction to good use in their struggle over termination with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Cherokee Nation leadership used *The Trail of Tears* to reinforce the authority of the newly constituted Cherokee government.

Denson’s final case study analyzes the National Park Service Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. A commemorative highway established in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that runs from North Carolina to Oklahoma, this project involved both Native and non-Native collaborators as well as a plethora of local

and state supporters over hundreds of miles. Denson takes us inside this collaboration, detailing the various economic, historic, social, and emotional points of view and the compromises promoters had to make in order to get the project completed. It is the largest monument to Indian history in America and, as Denson makes clear, holds much significance for that fact alone. Even so, Denson insightfully argues that the trail harkens back to nineteenth century themes in that it commemorates Indian Removal while relieving national white guilt and erases centuries of American and Indian entanglements. Despite heavy Native involvement, the memorial highway's message is that Indian Removal, while certainly wrong-headed and malicious, was an inevitable cost of progress and American democracy.

These case studies are an important addition to the scholarship on public history, memory, and the place of Indians in American history and consciousness. While one could fault Denson for focusing mostly on Southern states and the Eastern Band rather than the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, I would argue that his geographic focus yields the more poignant analysis. Because Indian Removal did indeed result in a large absence of Indians from the South, by and large white and African American southerners do not encounter Native people on a daily basis, unlike their counterparts in Oklahoma. This actual absence underwrites and makes possible the unquestioning deployment of the vanishing Indian trope in Southern public history and Southern historical memory. It also makes possible the unquestioned absence of Southern Indians from most Southern histories. Denson's deep and clear analysis, however, reveals the odd and oftentimes contradictory stories told by these monuments to absence.

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**Native American Nationalism and Nation Re-building: Past and Present Cases.** Edited by Simone Poliandri. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017. 222 pages. \$80.00 cloth; \$22.95 paper; \$21.80 electronic.

The 1982 Centennial Meeting of the Indian Rights Association (IRA) in Philadelphia was historic for many reasons. Not only was it one of the last meetings of IRA before its dissolution as an organization, it may have been the last time that Vine Deloria Sr., Vine Deloria Jr., and Sam Deloria appeared together at the same event. When Vine Deloria Jr. concluded his address at the meeting, he seemed to me to be very pessimistic about the future of American Indian tribes in the United States, saying it was very possible that in the future, maybe in one hundred or two hundred years, Indian reservations would no longer exist and Indian people would live their lives in communities not unlike other communities in the United States. His comments at that IRA meeting many years ago provide a useful context for my review of this book.

At the outset, *Native American Nationalism and Nation Re-building* is described as a series of interlocked case studies, written by anthropologists and historians, covering various political, social, cultural, legal, economic and historical issues related