even the trees and plants . . . are our brothers and sisters. So when we speak of land, we are not speaking of property, territory, or even a piece of ground upon which our houses sit and our crops are grown. We are speaking of something truly sacred.[47]

Yet it would be wrong to end this story on a note of pathos, for if there is one thing that characterizes the Cherokees it is their resilience. Despite all that has happened since Hernando de Soto burst into their towns 450 years ago, the Eastern Cherokees are still living where Cherokees have lived since long before Columbus. Nor does the story of the Western Cherokees end with Oklahoma's statehood. Despite a century of effort to disperse and assimilate them, they number 80,000 today, 10,000 of whom still speak the Cherokee language.

The government of the Cherokee Nation, suppressed in the late 1890s, has been reborn at Tahlequah. In 1970, Cherokees elected their principal chief for the first time since 1898, and in 1975 they adopted a new constitution that gave traditionalists a genuine say in the Nation's affairs. The present principal chief is Wilma Mankiller, an able and dedicated descendant of her namesakes of the past.

Here is an excerpt from Chief Mankiller's State of the Nation address, given at Tahlequah on September 1, 1990:

As we approach . . . the twenty-first century . . . I can't help but feel hopeful about our future. I think the strongest thing I see as I travel around to Cherokee communities and talk with people is their tenacity. Despite everything that's happened to our people throughout history we've managed to hang on to our culture, we've managed to hang on to our sense of being Cherokee. . . .

When people ask where I want the Cherokee Nation to be in the twenty-first century I always tell them I want to enter the twenty-first century . . . not on anybody else's terms but on our own terms. . . . Two hundred years from now people will gather right here in this very place and there will still be a very strong Cherokee Nation. Someone will stand up and say that this past year's been a good year. . . .

We are going to do everything in our power to make sure that the Cherokee Nation continues to exist.[48]

Ronald Wright
Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492
HM, New York, 1992.

FIFTEEN

IROQUOIS

[Indians] are simply living on the benevolence and charity of the Canadian Parliament, and . . . beggars should not be choosers.

— John A. Macdonald, prime minister of Canada, 1885

No nation has the right to hold a captive nation.

— Mohawk Warrior Society, 1981

The rebirth of the Six Nations — the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora — may be taken literally: there are today at least 60,000 Iroquois, more than at any time in three and a half centuries. Metaphorically, rebirth takes many forms: the spread of the Longhouse religion; the revival of languages, especially Mohawk; the growth of Iroquois nationalism.

Of the modern Iroquois, some 25,000 are Mohawks, 80 percent of whom live within the outline of Canada. In the summer of 1990, the Iroquois were suddenly reborn in white consciousness when Canadian front pages were filled for three months by what became known as the Oka Crisis or Mohawk Revolt. Canada's history — an unsightly history swept under the threadbare rug of its national myths — came back to haunt it.

When I began writing this book, I could not have imagined that the government of this country in which I live would send more than 4,000 troops — equipped with tanks, artillery, jet