

Pursuing Knowledge, Surviving Empire: Indigenous Explorers in the Removal Era
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For the Native peoples of eastern North America, exploration was a long-established practice that evolved amid, and as a creative response to, Euro-American imperialism. Yet despite their millennia-long tradition of investigating the continent, Indigenous explorers have been almost entirely absent from histories of North American exploration and, more broadly, from scholarship on the production and circulation of knowledge. This neglect has distorted some of these fields' central premises, including the relationship between knowledge and empire. The history of Indigenous explorers reveals that exploration was not simply an instrument of imperialism but also a contested means of trying to withstand it. This use of exploration to defy imperialism was especially clear during the era of Indian removal, when a wide range of eastern Native peoples explored the West in search of knowledge that, they hoped, could forestall or mitigate expulsion. Centering their pursuit of knowledge offers a framework for approaching Indigenous responses to removal in a way that encompasses the experiences of diverse Native nations while also rooting their actions in their own intellectual traditions.