



Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century

Fergus M. Bordewich

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In the face of a new lightly romanticized view of Native Americans, *Killing the White Man's Indian* bravely confronts the current myths and often contradictory realities of tribal life today. Following two centuries of broken treaties and virtual government extermination of the "savage redmen," Americans today have recast Native Americans into another, equally stereotyped role, that of eternal victims, politically powerless and weakened by poverty and alcoholism, yet whose spiritual ties with the natural world form our last, best hope of salvaging our natural environment and ennobling our souls.

The truth, however, is neither as grim, nor as blindly idealistic, as many would expect. The fact is that a virtual revolution is underway in Indian Country, an upheaval of epic proportions. For the first time in generations, Indians are shaping their own destinies, largely beyond the control of whites, reinventing Indian education and justice, exploiting the principle of tribal sovereignty in ways that empower tribal governments far beyond most American's imaginations. While new found power has enriched tribal life and prospects, and has made Native Americans fuller participants in the American dream, it has brought tribal governments into direct conflict with local economics and the federal government.

Based on three years of research on the Native American reservations, and written without a hidden conservative bias or politically correct agenda, *Killing the White Man's Indian* takes on Native American politics and policies today in all their contradictory--and controversial--guises."

Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century Details

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From Reader Review Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century for online ebook

Rachel says

This non fiction book is an intelligent discussion and appraisal of where native Americans are in US society today and what their future holds. It is challenging and critical but even handed. An excellent read for those wanting to get beyond the myths of who the native Americans are.

Eric Wright says

Thoroughly researched. A good entry point into contemporary Native American policy and concerns from a balanced perspective.

Daria Astara says

As a nonfiction writer myself, I return to this book to study the quality of the writing, which is vivid, insightful, and brilliant -- creative nonfiction at its best. The author also wields irony with a gentle hand. He shares his unique personal perspective as he takes us along on his explorations and asks tough questions, often leaving the reader to make up his/her own mind.

As far as content, his is an eye-opening perspective that I appreciate -- that our common culture has romanticized native american spirituality without fully appreciating the native american. We have simplified "the noble savage" without understanding the individuality and variety of native american cultures and peoples. This book provides vivid snapshots to fill in a few gaps.

I suspect not everyone will rate this book highly based on whether they agree with his premise or not, but this is an extremely well-written book.

Joe Echo-hawk says

Must read for anyone interested in the complexities that indigenous cultures living in the land of their conquerors face. It is complicated on both sides, and this book explains many aspects of the history that is not taught in our common history courses.

Miranda says

A book I am reading for a college course. Some parts are very insightful. Overall a bit of a tough read for me...

Craig says

It's not all feathers and beads in this book. Through this book, Bordewich is determined to destroy the main stream view of American Indians; he does this through a number of specific cases like, for instance, the Lumbee's struggle to gain federal recognition in a time when a certain "standard" for an American Indian predominates American culture. A must read for anyone interested in what defines a "true Indian."

j.marvin says

Nothing better on contemporary Indians.

Nothing better on contemporary white ranchers who live near contemporary Indians.

Dean Akin says

A fair look at the unraveling story of what it means to be a Native American Indian. The author is very sympathetic to the problems of the indian culture and tribal life but is not blinded by the myths and contradictions that make up much of the modern retelling of the history of the American indian. Instead of telling the same old monotonous, often historically unbalanced, story of "White man bad, Red man good", Bordewich is intellectually more honest than most in his assessment of the problems that face the modern Indian. The first half of the book is highly empathetic while the second half is more realistic in it's assessment about the future survival of the enigmatic Indian.

Chris says

This was a very informative book and one that I will spend a lot of time thinking about. The goal of the book wasn't to place the blame on the hardships that Native Americans have today on anyone - the answer to that is obvious. It's white people, the Europeans who came here in the fifteenth century.

It goes beyond this and raises some very interesting questions. White Americans have always seen Indians through various lenses - savage, child of nature, drunk or something else. However, those stereotypes - the myths - are simply that. The book gives numerous examples of tribes that were anything but gentle towards nature and other examples of tribes who were anything but savage in any way. It is simply the creation of these personas that people today still see Native Americans through - and that's an issue.

Today, reservations, for the most part, have sovereignty (for better and for worse - the book raises several good points as to how sovereignty can also be used for bad things, such as the denial of basic civil rights) and the ability to move forward and create a better future for themselves and the book delves into a lot of detail about how some tribes of done this, some have not at all and others are beginning to. However, if the myths and misconceptions are still in place, can Americans and Indians ever come together as people and not...something else?

The book also goes through some interesting aspects of how Native treatment has been seen in America.

Until the early 20th century, little thought was given. Once this started to turn around (especially in the 1930's and onward), this is where people began to create these weird mythologies and almost godlike reverence for the "pristine child of nature" Indian that, in fact, didn't typically exist. It was an interesting section.

Anyway, I seriously should have taken notes because there was a lot more I found interesting but it is what it is. Good stuff. I can't wait to use this in my classes.

April Brown says

What ages would I recommend it too? – Fourteen and up.

Length? – Several days read.

Characters? – Memorable, several characters.

Setting? – Historical and Modern United States.

Written approximately? – 1996.

Does the story leave questions in the readers mind? – Yes. What will happen next? Will other minority's follow their lead?.

Any issues the author (or a more recent publisher) should cover? It would be nice to have a website with links to updated information.

Short storyline: This book focuses on how Native Americans view themselves, others, and how the European Americans view them. It covers several aspects of their lives, and several different accepted, and unhistorically documented tribes.

Notes for the reader: This is an example of how history can be rewritten, as well as how we rewrite it every day.

Jessica Ennis says

Excellent perspective into Indian Reservations!

Nichole says

read this for my native american history class. it's an eye opener for those of us without much knowledge of the modern native american.

Rachel says

What an amazing eye opening book! There was so much I didn't understand and that broke my heart reading. I couldn't believe the way some native americans are treated just because they are native! I really feel this book should be on everyone's bookshelf.

Rae says

One of the finest books written on United States Indian relations. The author is objective, coming down just as hard on the Native Americans as he does on the US government. I highly recommend this for anyone wanting background and understanding on the subject.

Rachel Jackson says

Killing the White Man's Indian is a must-read book for anyone interested in truly understanding Indian policy and history in the United States as it adapts and change to a modern millennium. Although the book is two decades old now, author Fergus Bordewich's hard-hitting and well-written assertions and proposals about Indians in America still apply to tribal politics and reservation life today as it applies to how white people perceive the 20th- and 21st-century Native American.

I was skeptical goign into this book, centered as it was in some parts early on on bringing white people into the discussion with Indians. The book is, Bordewich insists, not just for Natives but also for Americans as both cultures and races redefine what it means to even be American in this country when taking race and history into context. Thankfully, Bordewich then opens up his book with a bang, talking about how history is exactly why we need to redefine what it means to even be Indian in this day and age. Bordewich discusses historical events in a way that goes deeper than just a straight history of what happened; he applies it to a modern context of vibrant Indian communities, talented tribal leaders and new inspired movements to bring Indian reservations up to the same pace as their non-Indian American counterparts—while at the same time still defining and inventing new identities for themselves.

A large theme of *Killing the White Man's Indian* is the too-easy romanticization of Indians in the context of the past. Bordewich mentions towns and rivers and parks named after Indians, but people still seem to view indigenous people as only things in old Western movies or American myths that no longer exist: "It is almost as if a culture that is literally saturated with allusions to fictional Indians had no interest in living Indians at all," he says. But the problem with this overarching American view is that many Indian policies continue to affect non-Indian Americans today, so we all need to know our country's history to be able to include people of color into a new kind of mainstream culture. If Indians do anything that is determined by white culture to be "un-Indian," it angers and frightens people because Natives are defying stereotypes that white people made for them, and leaving the simple boxes that broader American culture has tried to keep them in: the savage, the warrior, the nature-lover, the all-seer, etc. Bordewich adeptly puts these notions to bed.

But he doesn't let Native American nonsense off the hook either. I was surprised at how outspoken he was against some Native commentary, especially considering that most books I've read about Native history do indeed come with a bit of that pitying, nostalgic air of American history; even authors of seemingly straight nonfiction histories have bias, and their tendencies to view Indians as a thing of the past does certainly come across in those books too. Bordewich, however, treats Natives like any other currently existing person and

faction in the world: with respect but also with skepticism. I learned that the Lakota weren't always against the sale of the Black Hills; indeed, they wanted to sell them for profit, as long as the profit was adequate for them. I learned that the Lumbee have an ambiguous history and no one can quite define how and why they should be considered Indian, other than a vague feeling among tribal members there. I learned that some tribal leaders in the southwest are fighting against what they perceive to be white development even though many of their tribe don't even agree that it encroaches on sacred sites.

The very idea of "the Indian," Bordewich insists, is something that has been manufactured by policy and white supremacy, those who want to segregate Native Americans into reservations and keep them there and not let them adapt to white ideals, while at the same time wanting to exterminate and assimilate them. So now white people want to keep Indians stuck into those roles of the past—but another problem, Bordewich says, is that Natives themselves have confined themselves into roles that others have set for them. They feel like they also have to embody the spiritual, wise, old Native of history rather than modernizing their beliefs, cultures or governments to a modern age. This viewpoint was a refreshing one, that Natives have become complacent not because of the U.S. government oppressing them—although I don't deny that's also true—but because they also feel stuck under this idea of "sovereignty" that discourages them from seeking any more, real power under the federal government's imposition of their roles. U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, back in the early days of this country, said that Indians were to be like wards of the government, and that idea has been maintained for two centuries, hurting both Natives and the government in how Indian policy works. But Bordewich asserts that now it's time for sovereignty to become a real thing, in which Indians actually hold power and can negotiate for their success—he explains several success stories of tribes who are remaking their futures on their own terms. This, Bordewich, is the direction that tribes need to go, and he urges into that future.

The entire book was a motivating and sobering look at what both Native Americans and other Americans need to do to truly progress into the 21st century, rather than continue the segregation, discrimination and romanticization that have persisted for too long. I'm always an advocate for Americans to read about Native history, but this was one of the best books to get a broad look at modern Native issues rather than continuing to stay in the past.
