



Indians in Unexpected Places

Philip J. Deloria

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Despite the passage of time, our vision of Native Americans remains locked up within powerful stereotypes. That's why some images of Indians can be so unexpected and disorienting: What is Geronimo doing sitting in a Cadillac? Why is an Indian woman in beaded buckskin sitting under a salon hairdryer? Such images startle and challenge our outdated visions, even as the latter continue to dominate relations between Native and non-Native Americans.

Philip Deloria explores this cultural discordance to show how stereotypes and Indian experiences have competed for ascendancy in the wake of the military conquest of Native America and the nation's subsequent embrace of Native "authenticity." Rewriting the story of the national encounter with modernity, Deloria provides revealing accounts of Indians doing unexpected things--singing opera, driving cars, acting in Hollywood--in ways that suggest new directions for American Indian history.

Focusing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries--a time when, according to most standard American narratives, Indian people almost dropped out of history itself--Deloria argues that a great many Indians engaged the very same forces of modernization that were leading non-Indians to reevaluate their own understandings of themselves and their society. He examines longstanding stereotypes of Indians as invariably violent, suggesting that even as such views continued in American popular culture, they were also transformed by the violence at Wounded Knee. He tells how Indians came to represent themselves in Wild West shows and Hollywood films and also examines sports, music, and even Indian people's use of the automobile--an ironic counterpoint to today's highways teeming with Dakota pick-ups and Cherokee sport utility vehicles.

Throughout, Deloria shows us anomalies that resist pigeonholing and force us to rethink familiar expectations. Whether considering the Hollywood films of James Young Deer or the Hall of Fame baseball career of pitcher Charles Albert Bender, he persuasively demonstrates that a significant number of Indian people engaged in modernity--and helped shape its anxieties and its textures--at the very moment they were being defined as "primitive."

These "secret histories," Deloria suggests, compel us to reconsider our own current expectations about what Indian people should be, how they should act, and even what they should look like. More important, he shows how such seemingly harmless (even if unconscious) expectations contribute to the racism and injustice that still haunt the experience of many Native American people today.

Indians in Unexpected Places Details

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AJ says

this b00k rulez!

Michael says

I must confess that I didn't read the whole book. But what I remember was pretty good, but it would have been better if written in a less academic manner.

Savannah Donnelly says

One of my favorite Western History books. Deloria's writing is powerful, unique, and philosophical. I'd recommend it to history nerds and regular nerds alike. One of my favorite books.

MyNameIsTim says

The first few chapters of this book are standard America-is-evil diatribe that is typical of most "minority history" writers these days. To read this you'd think that America in 1491 was full of rainbows and sunshine and even babies never shed a tear until the evil white man destroyed everything.

The highlight is the chapter about Native Americans' contribution to sports. I was particularly fascinated by the author's description of the opposite paths of Indians and blacks in sports. Indians were encouraged in professional sports in the first half of the 20th century and as a result were extremely overrepresented, but they were left behind in the second half and are practically nonexistent in pro sports today.

It was also mildly interesting to read about Indians in film and how they adapted to technology. But the author's angle is very patronizing. He tries to "disprove" the idea that Indians weren't intelligent enough human beings to realize the benefits of automobiles or movies. It's quite disrespectful to Indians (which is surprising because the author is part-Indian) and to the readers to begin with the assumption that Indians are stupid.

Lloyd says

The book is fine. The athletics chapter is the most insightful and informative.

Gorfo says

This book breaks down the perception that indian history halted back in the days of westerns and cowboys.

Native history is alive and natives have adapted with technological advances, often before their prairie neighbors. Reading this book I realized how many unconscious biases about natives that I had. This books takes a much needed dive into other aspects of native history that have become forgotten.

Brian says

I was really disappointed by the first half of the book, but the second half was better. Like much scholarly writing, it often felt like someone trying to take simple concepts and make them seem complex and grandiose by using words and phrasing that no one would use in a normal conversation. The first chapter in particular struck me that way. But the last few chapters hit a groove where the ideas and arguments being presented were more interesting and more interestingly described.

Oh and the pictures were by far the best part. Some hilarious and thought provoking images!

Loren Toddy says

Very interesting book to read and discuss. For most Natives its like preaching to the choir, I hate that phrase, but its appropriate here. It is a bit dry but well worth reading.

Isadora Wagner says

A great read. Highly recommended!

Jean says

Excellent book that details the misconceptions about Native American history and the transition into modern culture.

Mallory Whiteduck says

Phil seeks to uncover the secret histories of Indian life in this book, where he follows a cohort Native writers and artists in the 1920s who acted in ways that society did not expect. Seminal reading for understanding "The Indian."
