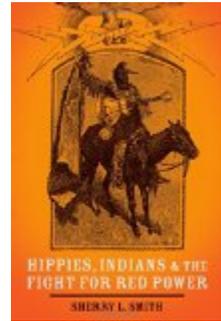


Sherry L. Smith. *Hippies, Indians and the Fight for Red Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xiv + 265 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-985559-9.

Reviewed by David Farber (Temple University)

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Social Change Partnerships and American Indian Activism in the Sixties

This is an outstanding book with a terrible title. Or perhaps it's a good title—just not for this book. Let me get the title business out of the way first.

Sherry Smith's book is titled *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power*. In fact, the book doesn't focus on "hippies." Only one chapter is about hippies and Indians. The rest of the chapters, as Smith carefully explains, detail how Native American people in the 1960s and 1970s allied with "a disparate collection of liberal, progressive, and radical organizations, churches, and individuals of various races and ethnicities" to fight for greater economic and political power (p. 215). Judging by the endnotes, I think Smith started this project by researching how and why a set of cultural rebels in the sixties became enamored of Native Americans and where that set of feelings and relationships led. In time, Smith discovered that the "hippie" piece of the story, while fascinating, explained too little of the history she wanted to analyze. Instead of a story about hippies and Indians she has written a much bigger story. I am not sure why she stuck with the hippie-centric title; perhaps the dullness of the more accurate title I used to head this review is a partial explanation.

Smith has written one of the very best histories of "Red Power," the sixties-era American Indian social change movement. Her method in analyzing the Red Power movement is innovative and, I think, an exemplary approach to studying other social change movements. She offers a simple but critically important in-

sight for understanding how relatively powerless minorities often must struggle for justice and power in a democracy: American Indians "knew they could not do it alone. There were simply not enough of them. The levers of power rested in non-Indian hands" (p. 215). As a result, Indians needed allies. Smith's history of Red Power, then, analyzes how Indians, in particular struggles and in particular places, gained coalition partners. These coalitions, she reports, were often fraught with tension. Conflicts between Indians and their allies over tactics and strategy were commonplace. This made political progress difficult but not, she emphasizes, impossible. Indeed, Red Power activists won a series of major victories.

Smith is careful throughout to keep her focus on Native American activists and to stress their central role in the specific causes and campaigns she describes. But Smith does not overplay the singular agency of her Indian protagonists. Many older social history accounts of sixties-era activism, especially those centered on civil rights movements, often focused narrowly on the courage and autonomy of activists, while explaining much less about the funding, organizing, litigating, lobbying, and coalition-building aspects of social movement political struggles. Too often, histories of social change movements thoughtfully analyze the "movement"—especially stories of inspirational mobilization and dramatic direct action—without sufficiently analyzing the "social change" aspect of the process. Smith is careful to explain the nuts and bolts of movement resource development and coalition building within the

Red Power struggle: how money was raised and from whom; why specific non-Indian groups or individuals joined particular efforts and what they brought to the effort; how specific social change coalition partners challenged, and strengthened Indian activists' goals; and how Indian activists and their allies intersected and negotiated with people who had formal power and authority. Smith is equally focused on how these Indian-led coalitions led—or did not lead—to social change and greater Indian sovereignty.

Smith analyzes this process and progress in a compelling narrative built on a provocative claim. She argues that in the sixties era, at least, “public protest ... represented an increasingly common way for the dissatisfied to register their complaints and gain an audience to hear them.... America had become a ‘society of the spectacle’ ” (pp. 15-16). Thus, Smith primarily structures her narrative around a few key spectacles launched at specific sites: “Frank’s Landing on the Nisqually River, Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, the commune country of northern New Mexico, the BIA Building in Washington, D.C., and Wounded Knee Village on the Pine Ridge Reservation” (p. 16). While Smith’s accounts of these individual sites of protest and resistance are not groundbreaking reconstructions, they are each richly told and in every case Smith brings new evidence and new voices to her account. In her chapter on New Mexico communes (the history I know best), she has taken sources familiar to subfield experts and combined that material with rich archival digging and interviews with key actors to craft a new narrative. She is able to explain not just how the mostly white communards interacted with both *Hispanos* and Indians but how *Hispanos* and Indians—especially the Taos Pueblo—reacted to and found some utility in their interactions with the “new settlers.”

Smith’s New Mexico commune and Indians chapter exemplifies one of the problematic aspects of her overarching project—a problematic about which Smith is quite aware. She is interested in how Indian activists in the sixties era worked with others to achieve their political goals. Hippies, as Smith points out, were not especially useful as political allies. Still, she insists that “if they did not marshal much in the way of political skills, they attracted considerable media attention and became, perhaps unwittingly, part of the [Taos Pueblo] tribe’s public relations support system” (p. 141). Well, maybe. But Smith is not able to offer much in the way of proof of the “public relations” utility of the hippie connection. As she notes, far more useful to the Taos Pueblo were a

host of more traditional advocacy groups and individuals, including Representative James Haley (chairman of the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs), the ACLU, and a number of religious organizations, including the American Friends Service Committee. Mostly, in the hippie chapter but often in other chapters, too, Smith tells us relatively little about how and why these kinds of more established groups and individuals became key allies of Indian activists. There is, in other words, an imbalance in Smith’s history between her detailed accounts of sixties-era Indian alliances with African Americans radicals, New Leftists, Chicanos and her usually less detailed accounts of Indian alliances with other less militant or radical partners and supporters—even if those more staid partners and supporters were often more useful in aiding Indians’ political goals, especially their struggle for greater sovereignty.

An exception to this pattern occurs in Smith’s generous and fascinating account of the many roles the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) played in Indian struggles. Perhaps because the archival records of the AFSC are particularly rich, Smith is able to examine this group’s efforts to support Indian activism with great insight and useful detail. Her account of how pacifistic AFSC figures wrestled with violence-accepting Red Power militants is particularly useful in understanding the complex relationship between dedicated frontline activists and their equally principled supporters. Smith also gives us an original perspective on how the AFSC, with relatively little money and few powerful connections, proved so useful to Indian activists. If hippies were only marginally useful allies for Indian activists, the AFSC demonstrated how effective and influential well-timed and well-conceived support can be for a social change movement. The American Friends Service Committee played a surprisingly powerful role in almost every major social change movement from the 1950s through the 1970s (and after) and we are still just learning how and why the AFSC was able to have so much reach, influence, and effect.

For readers fascinated by the sixties era, Smith has researched and written an indispensable book. Her account of how Indian activists fought for greater sovereignty and control over their lands and their collective lives by attracting outside support and forging alliances with non-Indians is a moving and thought-provoking tale. For her fellow research scholars, Smith has written an exemplary account of a major sixties-era social change movement that can serve as a conceptual model.

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