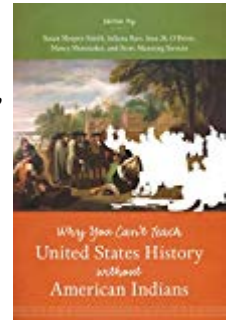


**Susan Sleeper-Smith, ed.** *Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 352 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-2120-3.



**Reviewed by** Ashley Riley Sousa

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**Commissioned by** F. Evan Nooe (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

I read *Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians* at the recent Advanced Placement US History reading in Louisville, Kentucky, during breaks from grading essays. It generated a tremendous amount of interest from my fellow AP readers, a dozen or so of whom approached me to ask what the book was about. When I explained, all remarked that they wished they knew more about Native American history and needed their own copy of the book. Teachers of the United States survey are eager to incorporate American Indian histories and perspectives into their survey courses and do it well. The interest is there and the contributors to this volume have provided solid building blocks from which teachers can adapt and even reconstruct their US survey courses to make American Indians central to the story of US history. The essays are divided according to the standard split in a two-semester US survey course: "U.S. History to 1877" and "U.S. History since 1877," with an additional section of three essays that focus on "Reconceptualizing the Narrative." They repre-

sent a mix of approaches: some emphasize how teachers might reconsider key events and eras in US history to foreground Native experiences or help students understand why Native people were central to the events and processes in question, while others offer practical classroom activities, such as primary source analyses, that teachers will find immediately useful. The final three essays take a holistic view of the survey course and how teachers might change their approach to the survey altogether to build Native history into their courses from the ground up. The content and conceptual essays work well together, suggesting a range of approaches that will have broad appeal. It is impossible to do justice to the full range of essays in a short review. This is one of the strengths of the volume: the essays are so useful because they address such a diversity of events and processes. But a few stood out to me as particularly relevant to my own teaching and will hopefully give a sense of the range of topics and strategies covered.

James D. Rice's "Rethinking the 'American Paradox': Bacon's Rebellion, Indians, and the U.S. History Survey" demonstrates how "a Native-centered account of Bacon's Rebellion actually meshes better with the major themes and interpretations common in U.S. history surveys" including "the centrality of slavery, the rise of an aggressively democratic society, and the vexed relationships between (and legacies of) slavery and democracy down to the present" (p. 44). Rice orients Bacon's Rebellion within the context of Native conflicts and networks of alliance that stretched from New York to Florida, highlighting the relative weakness of the Virginia colony as colonists sought to transform land hunger into coherent policy in the face of internal political division and paranoid fears of Indians. In emphasizing the centrality of Native societies to a more familiar historical episode, he is able to connect the Native history of Bacon's Rebellion to the prevailing narrative by placing Indians in the center of the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion. As perpetrators and victims of an expanded slave trade, Indians diverted tensions away from Virginia's frontier and profited both Virginia Indian traders and planters eager to acquire slave labor to fill the void left by dwindling supplies of indentured servants after 1660. Indian slavery, Rice argues, "served as a vital bridge" in the final decades of the seventeenth century between indentured servitude and African slavery in colonial Virginia, accounting for some 40 percent of Virginia's enslaved workforce from 1670-1700 (p. 51).

Similarly, Jean M. O'Brien's essay on the California gold rush locates the gold discovery within an indigenous world of trade and diplomacy, demonstrating how teachers might reconsider standard narratives of the gold rush found in textbooks. O'Brien examines how seven standard US history textbooks treat the role Indians played in the gold rush, criticizing the "narrative erasure" of Indian people in standard explanations of the gold rush, its causes, and consequences. The comparison of textbooks to more Native-centered

scholarship could itself be a useful pedagogical tool in the classroom. One could easily imagine following O'Brien's lead and prompting students to think through the implications of these textbooks' dismissal of Indian participation in the construction of Sutter's sawmill (the site of the gold discovery), the work of Indian miners that were among the first prospectors in the gold fields, and the reality that the gold discovery and subsequent rush played out on lands legally owned by several Indian societies that fought to hold onto their lands and survive in a brutal climate of murderous violence and greed. In challenging readers to remember "these narrative structures cannot possibly account for what comes later: for the ongoing, determined, and frequently successful battles tribal peoples in California made to insist on the recognition of their existence and rights," O'Brien invites us to imagine how the telling of the past impacts our understanding of the present: in this case, the continuing endurance of California Indian societies and their demands for their existence and rights to be recognized (p. 114).

The essays in the pre-1877 section of the book offer exciting and practical suggestions for reconsidering how we approach making Indians central to our narratives of US history, but perhaps more valuable are those for the post-1877 period. As the introduction correctly notes, if students learn about American Indians at all in a survey course, it is likely to be in the colonial and early national periods, where Indians are often mentioned insofar as how they represent obstacles to European and American expansion or "how Native Americans succumbed to epidemic disease and were pushed off their lands by white settlers" (p. 1). Jeffrey Ostler's essay, "Indian Warfare in the West, 1861-1890," invites teachers to build on standard textbook characterizations of the Indian wars of the late nineteenth century by considering them in the context of US ideologies of empire and just use of violence, which took shape out of the concept of total war, which was employed to

such devastating success during the Civil War. Ostler argues for “an approach to Indian warfare in the West that emphasizes a structural analysis of violence and other forms of destruction inherent to U.S. empire building” as well as the survival of Indian nations (p. 160). By challenging textbook interpretations of these wars as resulting from “a clash of cultures” (an enduring aspect of the mainstream narrative) teachers can help students consider how such wars emerged from a US policy under which “Americans thought they had the right to take all Native land and justified this on grounds that assumed white supremacy; Indians who resisted ... acted reasonably and according to commonsense principles of justice; U.S. policy-makers and local authorities regarded resistance as illegitimate and believed they had the right to destroy Indians engaging in it, while at times refusing to discriminate between resisting and non-resisting Indians” (p. 153). Ostler advocates using Indian accounts of this era to provide needed counterbalance to the common textbook error of assuming total Indian victimization and promoting the stereotype of the vanishing Indian.

Other essays examine Indian participation in major events and processes in twentieth-century US history which many teachers may have not considered to be Indian histories. Andrew Needham’s “Powering Modern America: Indian Energy and Postwar Consumption” stands out as a fine example of how introducing Native-centered stories into the narrative can help students better understand how colonialism has shaped the modern United States and “the central place that Indian land and labor played in the creation of modern American life” (p. 252). Needham invites readers to “follow the electric power lines that reached into suburban houses back to their beginnings” in Indian country (p. 241). He challenges the assumption that the growth of electrical infrastructure and the burgeoning consumerism it sustained represented aspirational modernity in contrast to the underdevelopment of both America’s rural periphery and the decolonizing Third

World. Citing industrial coal mining and processing on reservations in the Mountain West, Needham connects industrial capitalist development in the West with federal Termination policy and its goal of bringing Indians, in the words of the Hoover Commission, “into this nation’s modern economic life by helping Indians achieve this new standard of living” (p. 249). Of course, this new standard of living was dependent upon Indian country continuing to be locked into an extractive colonial economy in which poorly paid Native workers went without the conveniences of modern suburban life so that others might have them. This emphasis on the United States’ ongoing colonial control of Indian country sheds new light on the consumer-driven economic boom and suburbanization that feature so prominently in most post-1877 US survey courses and puts Indians and Indian country squarely and inescapably in the center of the story. It also suggests an alternative teaching of Cold War foreign policy, which attempted to engage the developing world with the lure of modernity made possible by the United States’ own colonial domination of American Indians.

The final three essays in the book outline approaches for completely re-envisioning how we teach the survey itself. Mikal Brotnov Eckstrom and Margaret D. Jacobs’s “Teaching American History as Settler Colonialism” offers a framework for creating a coherent narrative into which the essays in this volume, as well as much of what would already fall within a standard survey course, would fit nicely. For example, Eckstrom and Jacobs propose a “shift” in how teachers present the material they likely already use: “Instead of dwelling primarily on the issue of taxation without representation as the root cause for the American Revolution, a settler-colonial approach would bring greater attention to ... how Americans chafed at the British Proclamation Line of 1763” (p. 263). The essay includes ideas for assignments that would help students better understand how the structures of settler colonialism

and Native resistance to it are central to American history. K. Tsianina Lomawaima demonstrates how an in-depth examination of the development of US federalism can help students understand the impact Indian nations have had on the legal and political development of the United States, as well as how those developments, particularly the concept and practice of sovereignty, continue to shape the relationship between the United States and Indian nations. Lomawaima outlines a pedagogy and learning outcomes for the classroom with the goal of “linking new information to existing structures of knowledge” using case studies to help students break down existing “inaccurate, prejudicial” knowledge structures that inhibit them from understanding the importance of Native people to the ongoing development of American law and governance (p. 276). Finally, Chris Andersen emphasizes the global dimensions of US history as a way to understand the importance of indigenous people to American development. Noting that twentieth-century (and, I would add, much of the rest of) US history “is the history of consumption” and that “the history of consumption is the history of global colonialism,” Anderson describes the global context of US Indian policy as “part of a broader set of projects that were happening around the world,” including resource extraction, territorial acquisition, and global economic integration. He also draws parallels between post-World War Two Native American activism and “the growing activism of indigenous leaders, communities, and peoples in nation-states around the world” (p. 289). While some might dislike his (admittedly) overly general characterization of the cultural similarities between American Indians and other indigenous societies, his framework suggests how teachers might construct a compelling narrative of twentieth-century US foreign policy—a place where we do not often see an obvious opportunity to foreground American Indians in the story.

These essays represent just a few highlights in a rich collection of possibilities for re-envisioning

how we teach some of the key events and processes in the US history survey. Whether you already incorporate American Indian history as a significant part of your survey courses, or are just beginning to imagine how to do so, there is something in this volume for you. As a historian of Native North America, I thought I had done a fairly good job making Native histories central to my survey course, but I found myself reimagining my own US survey course before I even set the book down. If you teach the US survey, this volume belongs in your collection. Even if you do not teach the US survey, these essays will help you rethink the role of American Indians in the periods or topics you do teach.

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