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Facing East From Indian Country: A Native History Of Early America



Synopsis

In the beginning, North America was Indian country. But only in the beginning. After the opening act of the great national drama, Native Americans yielded to the westward rush of European settlers. Or so the story usually goes. Yet, for three centuries after Columbus, Native people controlled most of eastern North America and profoundly shaped its destiny. In *Facing East from Indian Country*, Daniel K. Richter keeps Native people center-stage throughout the story of the origins of the United States. Viewed from Indian country, the sixteenth century was an era in which Native people discovered Europeans and struggled to make sense of a new world. Well into the seventeenth century, the most profound challenges to Indian life came less from the arrival of a relative handful of European colonists than from the biological, economic, and environmental forces the newcomers unleashed. Drawing upon their own traditions, Indian communities reinvented themselves and carved out a place in a world dominated by transatlantic European empires. In 1776, however, when some of Britain's colonists rebelled against that imperial world, they overturned the system that had made Euro-American and Native coexistence possible. Eastern North America only ceased to be an Indian country because the revolutionaries denied the continent's first peoples a place in the nation they were creating. In rediscovering early America as Indian country, Richter employs the historian's craft to challenge cherished assumptions about times and places we thought we knew well, revealing Native American experiences at the core of the nation's birth and identity.

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Customer Reviews

At the center of this bold and thoroughly astonishing history of Native Americans are narratives of three Indians generally known to Euro-Americans: Pocahontas, Blessed Catherine Tekakwitha and the Algonquin warrior Metacom, also known as King Philip. Telling each of these stories a romance, the life of a saint, the destruction of a "noble savage" from the European and then the Native American perspective, Richter elucidates an alternative history of America from Columbus to just after the Revolution. Taking his cues from historian Carl Becker's famous assertion that history is "an imaginative creation," Richter, director of the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, recasts early American history from the Native American point of view and in doing so illuminates as much about the Europeans as about the original Americans. After explaining the vast scope of Native American culture probably more than two million native people lived east of the Mississippi in 1492 in villages that were "decentralized and diverse, but not disconnected" Richter reconstructs the Native American experience of the European. Using a variety of sources missionary tracts, official state art (the seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company featured a native with the words "Come Over and Help Us"), military reports and religious writings by both Europeans and Native Americans he describes a world far more layered than that of accepted U.S. history. Exploring the varying complexities of different native peoples' relationships with England, France and Spain, he argues that the Native Americans were safer during the colonial era than after the Revolution, when the idea of a white, democratic country took hold. Gracefully written and argued, Richter's compelling research and provocative claims make this an important addition to the literature for general readers of both Native American and U.S. studies. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Director of the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the acclaimed *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Univ. of North Carolina, 1992), Richter here offers a masterly work that eschews the long-standing perception that Native Americans were nothing more than marginalized bystanders as Europeans colonized North America. Focusing on the period between the 15th and 18th centuries, the author instead shows that Native American communities adapted to the many stresses introduced by the arrival of the Europeans and were active participants in creating a new way of life on the continent. This title, which should be read alongside Richard White's *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge Univ., 1991), provides a valuable perspective that is often overlooked in books about

the same period. Highly recommended for all public and academic libraries. John Burch, Campbellsville Univ. Lib., KY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this book, Daniel Richter explores some of the history of Native Americans who lived east of the Mississippi, from the time of their "discovery of Europe" not long after 1492 to the early 1800s. Throughout, he attempts to reconstruct something of what this period was like, not for Europeans and their descendants (who were facing west, as it were), but for Indians (who were facing east). In order to get at his subject, Richter routinely attempts to read between the lines of texts produced by Euro-Americans. In addition, he exploits the findings of archaeology and listens to folklore, which sometimes lends support to unconfirmed readings of the other sorts of evidence. In Chapter 1, Richter unfolds some of the initial stories related to the expeditions of Hernando de Soto and visits of Jacques Cartier. Chapter 2 details the economic, ecological, and biological ramifications of the Indians' contact with Europeans. In Chapter 3, Richter, while facing east, takes up the biographies of Pocahontas, Kateri Tekakwitha, and "King Philip." Chapter 4 explores a methodological question that is basic to his approach: How should historians read and interpret documents in order to get at the thoughts, interests, and motivations of Indians? In Chapter 5, while following a chronological progression, Richter now enters the eighteenth century, imagining the view from the east of an Atlantic Imperial World. Coming into the era of the American Revolution and its aftermath, Chapter 6 focuses on the year 1763, the time of Pontiac's Rebellion and Paxton Boys affair. That date and those events, says Richter, marked the end of a long era when Native- and Euro-American power was much more balanced. The Epilogue takes its title from a historical lecture delivered by "William Apess, a Pequot": Eulogy on King Philip. Here, Richter cites this nineteenth century lecture, which compares favorably King Philip to George Washington, and the Indians' cause to the American Revolution, as an early example of facing east. There are at least two reasons why some readers may not like this book. First, although the research behind it is impeccable, its method is exploratory, experimental. Nowhere does Richter pretend to give the final word about anything he's discussing. This isn't straight performance of a long, classic piece. It's more like several short pieces of jazz. Second, what seems clear to me is that the chapters of this book were written at different times, with breaks in between. Consequently, the chapters, though closely related, read like a series of stand-alone explorations. I gave this book five stars because, as I see it, this is the work of a disciplined historian who does not shy away from the creative, imaginative character of his craft. Facing East from Indian Country is the product of hard work and a bit of courage. I can't help

admiring that.

With a bit of trepidation I used Facing East in a U.S. Survey, and the students loved it. While they found much of the material on religious culture challenging, it also formed the core of the best discussion I've had in years about an assigned book. Not in a history class, but have an interest in early America and Indians? I can not recommend this book more highly.

The author provided an excellent description of how the American Indians responded to and interacted with Europeans as the Europeans continued their westward push across the North American continent. Two other books that covers some of the same topics are "1491" and "1493". Much of what you will find in these books are not currently being taught in schools. These three books changed my understanding of American and world history.

Mr. Richter does a fine job of deftly parsing small bits of information to imagine the Indian American's point of view. I was rather expecting an I-hate-America diatribe, but that's not at all what this is. It DOES show that between the clash of cultures in North America, the natives were much more adept to adapting (because they had no choice) than were the Europeans. And adapt they did, somewhat successfully until the war of Independence was fought between the US and Britian. After that, well, there were so many indefensible acts by the new US that it came down to "civilize-or-die" to the natives. Even those that did civilize were not safe, being punished by vigilantes for 'outrages' by other Indians - not even of the same linguistic group. Those few who understood the complicated culture of the natives were by and large ignored, while small bands of cunning Indians would sell land that wasn't even theirs. Sometimes it is said that there's enough blame to go around; if by that it's meant that because all Natives were not "Good Injuns" we should exterminate those who refuse to be deported, well okay. Some say slavery was the darkest blot on our history, I believe it was the lies, broken treaties, forced removals, genocide and outright stealing of land that is that darkest chapter. Read also Eve Ball's "indeh", and Britton Davis' "The Truth About Geronimo."

This book has a WEALTH of information. I gave it 4 stars only because the writing style is somewhat dry. I consider it an important book because "American" history has 2 sides to it- that of the original Americans and those who eventually identified as American. My early ancestors were the pilgrims who came to these shores and who wrote the history. This book helps provide some

measure of balance to the history that was lacking in my ancestors' one-sided view of events in America.

Very good. Thank you.

An academic page-turner, in my opinion. In describing the process of the European takeover of the North American continent, the author illuminates the history of European-Indian relations in a way that created, at least for me, a shock of recognition - the sense that finally the pieces fall into place and the story is complete and credible (and for anyone, like me, whose family has been here long enough to be part of the process, sufficient to make you want to fall on your sword). A subtle, insightful, well-written and well-documented gem.

okay

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