

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History. By Roger L. Nichols.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3gt9c6d9>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 24(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Frideres, James S.

Publication Date

2000-06-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

“private property,” but she remembers as she turns back to the east that “L.A. has sacred mountains” and that this too is Native land (p. 9). This healing perception counters the Euro-American concept of ownership as she journeys in the four directions of the circle.

The formal structure of Belin’s book is divided into four parts, connecting the traditional Diné worldview of the cardinal directions with the movement of her artistic interpretation of experience. The themes develop from the urban blues of the first poems that alternate lyric and narrative patterns to the culminating poetic essay “In the Cycle of the Whirl,” in which she recapitulates the particulars of her life and memories in light of what they mean to her as a writer. As she closes the volume, she looks toward the future of her life and writing, knowing that it will be centered in tribal experience. Conflating images from Navajo history of removal and traditional stories, she sees her path as “A Long Walk, perhaps battling new giants” (p. 84). In the larger cycle of life and death she sees her writing as “emergenc(y),” a new beginning in which she feeds the “hunger” of her writing from her “journey home” with all that implies for her as a Diné (p. 85). Thus two major themes of her writing converge, the return of the urban Native to her homeland and the recovery from oppression, in a statement of clear purpose. Her writing is born in the formation and expression of self and the body, but a self that is collective, with many voices that can be heard through her. Thus the ending of the volume sends the reader back to the beginning to hear the voices again, a journey worth taking.

Melissa Hearn

Northern Michigan University

Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History. By Roger L. Nichols. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 383 pages. \$19.95 paper.

Analyzing thousands of documents over hundreds of years in the space of less than four hundred pages would seem a daunting task, particularly when the aim is to provide an understanding of the relationship between Indians and non-Indians in Canada and the United States of America. The sheer complexity of such a comparison, in which the author had to take into account differences in demography, history, and culture, is compounded by the difficulties in obtaining documents that allow for comparison. As a result, it took Nichols nearly fifteen years to complete this book but his perseverance paid off. His intimate knowledge of the historiography of both countries is impeccable and the wait allowed him access to considerable work that was carried out in the field of aboriginal studies both in the United States of America as well as in Canada over the past decade-and-a-half. Readers may disagree with some of his conclusions, but they cannot argue that he failed to access a specific piece of archival data or was unaware of some contemporary material. Nichols has produced a fine piece of scholarship and one that students will find useful and informative. The book is a first in providing a historical account of Indian-white relations in both countries.

As Nichols points out, this book is about the many facets of the settlement process that affected different parts of Canada and the United States. He goes on to show that Indian-white relations are not just about the "evil whites" abusing Indians. In a bold and innovative step, Nichols argues that Indians were active, creative agents who manipulated objects and situations in accordance with their own values and interest through a variety of strategies. While pioneer Americans and Canadians were not positively disposed toward Indians, the interaction between them was not solely predicated on that ideology. Given the diversity of Indian cultures across Canada and the United States and differing time periods when contact took place, cultural contact with each group is evidenced in differing values and practices but, unfortunately, with the same devastating results. As noted by others, when the white settlers landed in Canada and the United States of America, they held the Bible, and the Indians held the land. The whites knelt down, closed their eyes, and prayed. When they opened their eyes and stood up, the Indians had the Bible, and the whites had the land!

With a caricaturist's knack for description, Nichols dredges up a vast history of Indian-white interactions. Nichols' research is authoritative and his conclusions are sound, resulting in a fascinating read. It is about time aboriginal studies received this type of academic scrutiny, but it is this same kind of criticism that too often scares even the most devoted scholar who embarks upon a comparative historical analysis of aboriginal-white relations. Scholars will thank Nichols for his effort. The provision of maps is an important source of information and gives the reader an understanding of the land areas involved in treaties, the location and size of reserves, and Indian disbursement across the two countries.

While a landmark work, the book is also rather limited. But the author is well aware of this when he notes that when trying to cover a five-century time span, a writer must avoid a heavy dependence on specificity. Nevertheless, the extensive bibliography will allow the reader to embark upon her or his own journey into specificity if she or he desires to do so. A few activities are described in enough detail for the reader to gain a sense of what was happening at the time. In the end, Nichols is able to create an accurate, although at times morbid, picture of aboriginal-white relations in both countries over five centuries, including the twentieth century. At the same time, Nichols packs this book with fascinating details, such as Bacon's Rebellion (1670s), the Yamasee War of 1711, and the Chickasaw resistance in the 1820s.

While there are specific differences between Indian-white relations between the two countries, the story remains remarkably similar. It should not come as a surprise then, that contemporary legal rulings in both countries refer to judgements in case law from both countries. Nevertheless, small differences in historical contexts sometimes led to major differences today. The size and placement of reserves, the basis for self-government, the extent of pan-Indianism, and the legal rights of Indians are quite different on either side of the forty-ninth parallel.

Nichols occasionally gives bits of offbeat, captivating history, such as the story of the Shawnee prophet Tenskwatawa during the early nineteenth

century. Nevertheless, he is able to avoid the jargon that has become vogue in some academic quarters—there is no “liminal,” “hegemonic,” or “chthonic” here. His work demonstrates exhaustive historiography, an understanding of the historical context, and a keen comprehension of the larger history in which Indian-white relations played out. In addition to its fine historical analysis, this is a reference book that will be of substantial use for graduate students and scholars working in the area of Indian-white relations.

Little material has been written on Indian-white relations from a North American comparative perspective. What little has been produced has anatomized aboriginal peoples. This is a lucid, intelligent guide to the straightforward business of analyzing the historical material available to scholars. Nichols has written a good book about an important subject matter that has implications for the ethnic myriad that now confront Canadians and Americans alike. There are occasional fumbles, particularly in the more contemporary portion of the book, but the reader will come away deeply affected by a writer who faithfully crafts his story based upon historical evidence.

Indians in the United States and Canada is a worthwhile and necessary addition to the small body of comparative work now emerging in Native studies. It is definitely a book that anyone interested in the historical relationships between Indians and whites should acquire. He makes a significant contribution to our understanding and assists in re-imaging the historical contacts between the two cultures.

James S. Frideres
University of Calgary

Life Woven with Song. By Nora Marks Dauenhauer. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. 135 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

Life Woven with Song recalls both Luci Tapahonso's *Blue Horses Rush In* and some of the essays in Carter Revard's *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*. Like Tapahonso's work, Dauenhauer's book reflects a deep rootedness in indigenous language and traditions; like Revard's, it draws attention to political as well as familial contexts. All three voice a sustaining responsibility to their people's past and commitment to their future. But these very commonalities assure that *Life Woven with Song* also differs from Tapahonso's and Revard's books. With them, it expands our sense of what it has meant to be Indian in the twentieth century. At the same time, it joins such works as *Life Lived Like a Story*, Julie Cruikshank's 1990 collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, as well as Elizabeth Nyman's and Jeff Leer's 1993 *Gágiwdul:àt: Brought Forth to Reconfirm: The Legacy of a Taku River Tlingit Clan*, offering another distinctive piece of the story of Tlingit continuance in the century just past.

These three books have much in common. Each demonstrates the inseparability of traditional culture, knowledge of a particular place, and personal experience. But each centers on a different part of traditional Tlingit territory, which includes most of Southeast Alaska and parts of northwestern British