

Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians

Susan Sleeper-Smith, Juliana Barr, Jean M. O'Brien, Nancy Shoemaker, and Scott Manning Stevens, eds.

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015, 335 p. Paper, \$29.95.)

A tremendously powerful book, *Why You Can't Teach United States History without American Indians* challenges educators to consider their complicity in erasing American Indian nations and people from the history they teach. While repeatedly recognizing the difficulty of circumventing the narrative imposed upon classrooms by U.S. history textbooks, the authors ask educators to reconsider their dependence on those books. Crucially, the authors also provide resources—theories, articles, books, and primary-source references—that challenge standard narratives, reframe sources, and rethink student engagement.

“U.S. history cannot be taught without American Indians because the United States has been inexorably shaped by Native nations,” writes K. Tsianina Lomawaima in her essay on federalism. “Native nations set the conditions for the creation of the United States as Native lands were claimed as U.S. lands. Everything else flows from that irreducible violence.” The legacy of that violence continues to this day, argue the book’s authors, not only in an immediate physical and economic sense but in the way in which American Indian people and nations are omitted from history in all but the most token ways. In the book’s first section—U.S. History to 1877—Juliana Barr makes this point particularly clear, exploring the ways in which courses and texts barely address the history of North America before contact with Europeans. Adam Jortner develops this point in his essay on cartography, demonstrating the ways in which maps regularly omit Native borders, territories, and actions while depicting processes and events to which Native people were central. Paul T. Conrad argues that any understanding of the development of U.S. slavery must include analysis of the Indian slave trade, which predated (and was concurrent with) the enslavement of African people. Minnesotans will be pleased by Scott Manning Stevens’s insistence that analysis of the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862 is essential for understanding the Civil War as a whole.

Section two—U.S. History from 1877—opens with Jeffrey Ostler’s essay, “Indian Warfare in the West, 1861–1890,” a particularly strong contribution to the collection. Ostler draws attention to the fact that U.S. military tactics included the regular slaughter of noncombatants, rendering “battle” a deeply misleading term to describe conflict; Ostler prefers “massacre” and “potential massacre.” In asking for a more complete understanding of military action by Native nations and the U.S. alike, Ostler insists we pay attention to more than Little Bighorn,

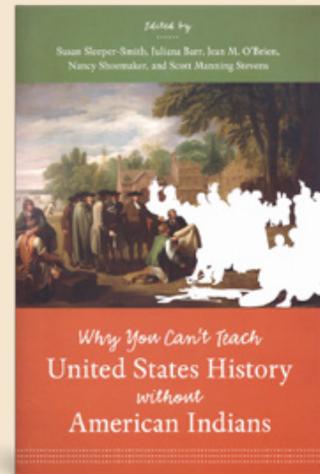
Chief Joseph, and Wounded Knee. Other key essays also prompt reflection on U.S. history narratives. In a chapter about the New Deal, Mindy J. Morgan points out that the Migrant Mother photographed by Dorothea Lange was Cherokee, and uses general ignorance of this fact to highlight larger truths about the ways in which American Indians are sidelined in considerations of labor during the Great Depression. John L.

Laukaitis’s essay offers a clear and usable delineation of the difference between the American Indian sovereignty movement of the 1960s and ’70s and the Civil Rights movement of the same era. It does a particularly good job of directing readers toward texts and primary sources that will complicate their teaching of the period.

Section three moves away from the consideration of discrete moments in time and toward suggestions for ways to reconceptualize the whole U.S. survey course. In essays on settler colonialism, federalism, and global imperialism, authors provide concise summaries of recent advances in scholarship and suggest concrete ways to rethink timelines and narratives. Each essay offers a strong introduction to different organizing concepts, providing educators with a thoughtful starting point for the wholesale reorganization of their work.

All of this book’s royalties will go to the Newberry Library’s D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies. The authors hope that these funds will assist Native scholars to make use of the library’s significant holdings in American Indian history and, thus, enrich the scholarship on which continued reimagining of the American history survey course may rest. This is a laudable goal and makes the purchase of this text by educators and libraries—and its assignment in undergraduate and graduate education and history classes alike—even more worthwhile.

—Catherine J. Denial



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Minnesota Modern: Four Artists of the Twentieth Century

Moira F. Harris, Brian Szott, and Ben Gessner

(Afton, MN: Afton Press, 2015. 181 p. Cloth, \$45.00.)

In *Minnesota Modern*, authors Moira Harris, Brian Szott, and Ben Gessner deliver a long-overdue history of the careers of four Minnesota artists who helped shape a midwestern aesthetic in the early-to-mid-twentieth century. Dewey Albinson, Cameron Booth, Clement Haupers, and Elof Wedin became established during the Great Depression and between the two world wars, when the art world was perched between American scene painting and abstraction. Against this historical backdrop, this volume has a two-fold mission: First, it seeks to characterize the artists' signature style, which weaves together compositional elements of modernist painting and the rich fabric of Minnesota's landscape, culture, and people. Second, the authors place these artists within a larger art-historical context by examining their European influences, their educations, both local and abroad, their leadership in national programs (such as the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project), and their influence on the next generation of Minnesota artists. *Minnesota Modern* establishes the importance of these men regionally and nationally.

Four essays—one for each of the artists—strike a delicate balance between scholarly examination and approachable journalism. With strong research, extensive footnotes, and context provided by other historians, art critics, and the artists themselves, each essay also includes anecdotes that give insight into each artist's character. Harris, for instance, mentions Albinson's accidental involvement in charting land along the Pigeon River near Grand Portage for the Minnesota Historical Society. She also notes his interest in making his own paint colors, varnishes, tools, and frames. In her chapter on Booth, she tells the story of the artist's near-commission for the Coca-Cola Company. Szott's and Gessner's chapter on Haupers includes an entertaining postscript: artist LeRoy Neiman jovially recalls an afternoon of *plein-air* painting with Haupers, who had forgotten to bring his brushes. For his own postscript to his essay on Wedin, Szott reminisces with one of the artist's students, who reveals the best painting technique he ever taught her. These asides humanize the artists and give the book broad appeal not only to history buffs, art enthusiasts, and artists, but to "everyday" readers, too.

The authors' stylistic analyses create the most compelling passages in this book. Harris highlights Booth's return at the end of his life to painting equine subjects, comparing them to similar compositions from his earliest years as an artist. (Unfortunately, she does not elaborate, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions from her keen observations.) Szott and Gessner explore the influence of Haupers' longtime part-

ner and fellow painter, Clara Mairs, successfully arguing that Haupers' "strength as an artist shines in his portraits." Szott engagingly explores Wedin's midcentury development toward abstraction. Employing well-placed images of Wedin's paintings, he demonstrates how the artist adjusted his palette and fragmented his compositions until recognizable forms were completely eliminated.

Szott's discussion of Wedin's two preparatory sketches for his 1960s oil painting, *The Blue Road*, presents an especially clear example of this technique.

The strength of the essays in *Minnesota Modern* is supported by the book's design. More than 185 color images of artwork illustrate the text, in addition to historic photographs (favorites include an image of a young Albinson painting from a canoe and one of Booth posing with an earlier self-portrait). Astoundingly, many of the featured artworks can be found in local collections, including the Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Museum of American Art, and Weisman Art Museum. The preface, by Minnesota collectors John and Colles Larkin, offers their unique perspective as early fans of these artists. They also give fascinating insights into how they became friends to and collectors of the four painters. Finally, while the omission of women artists may seem like a significant oversight, the publisher considers *Minnesota Modern* to be a companion volume to its 2011 release, Julie L'Enfant's *Pioneer Modernists: Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists*. Together, these texts cover the influential careers of this state's most talented artists.

—Nicole Watson



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