



Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indians

Suzan Shown Harjo (Editor) , Kevin Gover (Contributor) , Philip Deloria (Contributor) , Hank Adams (Contributor) , W. Richard West Jr. (Contributor)

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Treaties: The History and Legacy of US-American Indian Diplomacy explores the promises, diplomacy, and betrayals involved in treaties and treaty making between the United States government and Native nations. One side sought to own the riches of North America and the other struggled to hold on to traditional homelands and ways of life. The book reveals how the ideas of honor, fair dealings, good faith, rule of law, and peaceful relations between nations have been tested and challenged in historical and modern times. The book consistently demonstrates how and why centuries-old treaties remain living, relevant documents for both Natives and non-Natives in the 21st century.

Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indians Details

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From Reader Review Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indians for online ebook

Roxanne says

As history goes the US has never kept a treaty with the Indians. I was just at The Medicine Lodge Peace Treaty in Medicine Lodge, Kansas and that treaty they made was broken.

bibliotekker Holman says

A great multimedia read where images are as evocative and important as the text. A good place to start with the issue of treaties before moving on to the beef in Vine Deloria and Raymond Demaille's multi-volume Documents of American Indian Diplomacy.

Corinne says

This was a fascinating read. Native American history is odd in that the one thing that everyone knows about it is how little everyone knows about it. Native American history is held up as the very epitome of white-washing and eurocentrism rampant in US history. And, while most history books will probably devote a chapter to Native Nations now, it's still a gaping hole in our curriculum. I note this because, even knowing that I knew very little about Native American history, Nation to Nation shocked me by showing me that I essentially knew nothing. I tried to keep this review focused on the book itself, but I learned so many things that I just need to share, so there's a fair bit of content below.

But first up: the book. The physical book is beautiful, but a little unwieldy. I expected it to be the size of your average hard cover, but it was actually somewhere between that and a coffee table book. Since there was no way that I would have been able to read it on my subway commute, it took me longer to read than it otherwise would have (sans notes, index, and acknowledgements, the book is only 225 pages long). What it lacks in portability, however, it makes up for in general prettiness. The book is packed with beautiful, full color photographs of people and places. Sometimes the photos are old portraits of actual people, sometimes contemporary maps, and sometimes artifacts from Native American cultural centers and museums. While I did not expect any pictures going into the book, it's now hard to imagine it without them. The pages were large, glossy, and nicely put together (although I did spot two typos).

As for content, Nation to Nation says that it is about the treaty relationship between the Native Americans and the US government, and it does not lie. It is a collection of essays from both Native and non-Native authors, each focusing on a particular part of treaty history. The main narratives focus on treaty content and meaning, so there is a lot of legal and quasi-legal analysis, but this discussion is often broadened to look at the social and historical effects that treaties had on the people who made them and on us today. Most people don't realize this, but treaties made with other nations are on par with federal statutes and supersede state laws, and this includes treaties with Native Nations. And, although the US basically ignored its treaty obligations for most of the last couple of centuries, many of these treaties are still technically the law and are still being argued in courts.

One of the most interesting things that I learned from Nation to Nation was how sacred Native people hold their treaties. You'd think, because these treaties commemorated huge losses of lands and other misfortunes, that Native Americans would be less than enthusiastic about them. However, for being very much between a rock and a hard place (even those in favor of treating Native Americans with dignity and respect only advocated paying for land rather than just taking it; they never considered allowing the tribes to actually keep the land), the Native signatories were able to accomplish some very impressive things in these documents. First and foremost, treaties treat Native Nations as sovereign nations, which is a huge deal, especially now that the courts have stopped ignoring these parts of the treaties. Second, they reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on ceded land. Since none of this is ever really taught, many people erroneously believe that the US government grants Native Americans "special rights" to hunt and fish outside of state regulation, when, in reality, the Nations simply never gave those rights up. A very practical reason why this topic should be better covered.

It should go without saying that this is not a happy book. Although it ends on a hopeful note for the future of Native/US relations and the recognition of treaty rights, it is a rough journey getting there. The relatively short history of Native/US relations is a history of ethnic cleansing, frequently slipping over into genocide. Again, this was not news to me, but to read about this in detail was a sobering experience. To know that people in the past tended to be racist and treated Native Americans poorly is not the same as watching a tribe dwindle from 20,000 members to about 800 in two pages and less than a decade, reading about the process of tribal "terminations" (which is exactly as horrifically dystopic as it sounds), or, after reading about a successful peace treaty negotiation, discovering that all the signing chiefs would be killed by US forces within months.

Since I received Nation to Nation as a GoodReads First Read book, I kept a little notebook near me as I was reading, intermittently writing down things that might make for an interesting review anecdote. Eventually, however, I realized that I was essentially just writing everything down, which sort of defeats the purpose. Even so, I have to share the tidbits that made me want to hit my head against a wall:

- 1) US politicians encouraged hunting the buffalo to extinction so that the Native Americans would be forced to become "civilized" farmers instead of hunters;
- 2) Native children were forced to go to boarding schools, where they were beaten for speaking their native language. The book mentions one man who eventually spoke several languages, but only stuttered in one: his native tongue. Because of the beatings;
- 3) Natives were marched to a reservation so that they could become civilized farmers. The reservation was on land that could not be farmed;
- 4) During the marches to reservations, soldiers raped the Native women. If a male family member stood in their way, they would kill him, and rape the woman. These rapist-murderers were in charge of civilizing the Native Americans;
- 5) Abraham Lincoln gave a speech to some chiefs in which he told them that red men were naturally more violent than white men. This was during the Civil War;
- 6) 1990s protests against treaty rights included throwing rocks, full beer cans, and pipebombs at Natives who were trying to fish. You could also buy bumper stickers that said "Save 2 Walleyes, Kill a Pregnant Squaw." The Nineteen Nineties.

7) Last but not least, in 1823, the Supreme Court officially set forth the Doctrine of Discovery, which states that land belongs to the first Christian European power that “discovers” it, and that native inhabitants are merely tenants because...magic? God? Incoherent mumbling? No one knows. The chief justice based the ruling off of a book about colonial America. A book he wrote. A book he wrote “without the benefit of primary sources.” Fun fact: this is still the law today.

In short, this history is one that should be known, and I think Nation to Nation makes it interesting and accessible, and the use of treaties to ground the discussion provides ample opportunities for historical, legal, and social analysis and education. It also does not shy away from the many horrors of this relationship, although I’m sure you could fill volumes with those sorts of stories, but still maintains a hopeful outlook, predicated on social change. I highly recommend it because there was so much that I didn’t know.

Jason Lewis says

A great overview of the relationships between the up and coming United States and the American Indian tribes that they corresponded with during that growth. The pictures are colorful and give a greater understanding of the tribes and cultures involved.

Even though I knew it would be impossible to read in just one sitting, some parts felt as though it read like a textbook, kind of slowing me down. Otherwise, very informative showing just how little we know or are taught in the history of the development of the United States and its relationship with American Indian and Native American groups in that growth.
