

*An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press Books, 2014. ISBN: 9780807057834

In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's reexamines the American historical record and moves it passed the typical narratives of colonialism, revolution, and American exceptionalism. Dunbar-Ortiz's analysis will impact the field of Native Studies and even general United States history with its examination and focus on "Settler colonialism . . . [as] a genocidal policy 6)." It is, as Dunbar-Ortiz argues, impossible to write American history without the acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples. Dunbar-Ortiz shatters the myth of "free land" and conquered Natives. She instead focuses on "the absence of a colonial framework (7)," which she believes is the reason that most historians overlook Indigenous history. In other words, historians need to view colonization as an on going process and not a past historical structure. The norm has been to examine Settler-Native conflicts as inevitable; however, our current history has actually been a direct result of a one-sided genocidal land grab. In order to understand the present history, historians must examine, and more importantly, *accept* these genocidal tendencies (p. 9).

Dunbar-Ortiz's academic work succeeds in providing a general reexamination that provides readers, especially those with limited or no knowledge of Indigenous histories, with new ideas that challenge American exceptionalism and myth. For example, events like the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 often seem to be the one negative exception of American expansion, but in all reality, it was the norm. John Smith and other early leaders encouraged the slaughter of Native peoples, especially those that did not provide food and clothing to the settlers (60). Dunbar-Ortiz uses examples like this throughout the book to demonstrate settler colonialism, which includes any type of American expansion that resulted in the forced removal

and extermination of Native peoples. Settler colonialism serves as a justification for other consequences such as cultural genocide, which developed through the harsh Native American boarding schools of the nineteenth century.

Using settler colonialism as a lens to examine both American and Indigenous history demonstrates the reality of these genocidal tendencies used to eliminate and remove Native peoples. Dunbar-Ortiz traces its history and acknowledges that settler colonialism was perfected, not during the rapid development of the United States, but rather prior to contact (33). It began, she argues, with the development and privatization of land in various European countries. Her main example is the Ulster-Scots, who immigrated to America in mass numbers, and eventually emulated the same settler colonialism that the English had used to force them to America. In other words, the same settlers, who according to American exceptionalism and myth came for religious freedom and prosperity, actually immigrated because they had been forced off their own land.

Dunbar-Ortiz provides a thorough and exhaustive collection of research. Nevertheless, in the author's note, Dunbar-Ortiz promises to provide a unique perspective that she did not gain from secondary texts, sources, or even her own formal education but rather from "outside the academy (xi)." Furthermore, in her introduction, she claims her work to "be a history of the United States from an Indigenous peoples' perspective but there is no such thing as a collective Indigenous peoples' perspective (13)." She states in the next paragraph (14) that her focus is to discuss the colonist settler state, but the previous statement raises flags for how and why she attempts to write it through an Indigenous perspective. Dunbar-Ortiz appears to anchor herself in this Indian identity but at the same time raises question about Indigenous perspective. Dunbar-Ortiz must be careful not to assume that just because her mother was "most likely Cherokee," her

voice automatically resonates and serves as an Indigenous perspective. These confusing and contradictory statements do raise interesting questions about Indigenous identity that Dunbar-Ortiz should have further examined. Are all Indigenous identities a result of settler colonialism? What is the basis for an Indigenous identity? Can one truly have an Indigenous perspective? What type of sources would be used to provide this perspective?

A perfect example of an Indigenous perspective would have been to use oral histories. For instance, the Cherokee removal story has probably been passed down to younger generations and will continue to be. These perspectives would have served as actual representatives of Indigenous people effected by settler colonialism. The use of oral histories and Native sources rather than its heavy reliance on secondary sources would have allowed her work to become a groundbreaking work. Nevertheless, *An Indigenous Peoples' History* lays out a framework for future scholarly work. Additionally, it will be an excellent resource for contrasting Manifest Destiny and other common misconceptions. Overall, *An Indigenous Peoples' History* serves as a triumph that reexamines the history of the United States. Her work provides a simplified but important history that can and should be taught in American high schools and freshman level college courses to challenge the ideas of American exceptionalism.

John Little is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at the University of Minnesota.