Summer 2011

Review of *Native America: A History* by Michael Leroy Oberg

Roger L. Nichols

*University of Arizona*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)

Part of the [American Studies Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/americanstudies), [Cultural History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/culturalhistory), and the [United States History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unitedstateshistory)


[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2693](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2693)

In this solid text Michael Oberg presents his version of American Indian history. From the start he works to avoid presenting just another encyclopedic narrative likely to leave readers "awash in a sea of facts and data disconnected from any coherent narrative." To this end he focuses on how eleven Indigenous communities dealt with the European invasions of North America. His list includes groups as disparate as the Chumash and Pueblo peoples in the West, the Potawatomis and Dakota Sioux in the North, the Crows, Kiowas, and Caddos in the Plains, and Eastern peoples such as the Mohegans, Powhatans, Cherokees, and Senecas. With this approach he illustrates the variety of these Indian nations' experiences in dealing with the changes wrought by contact with the invading powers.

Oberg's previous scholarship analyzes the relationships between tribes of the Northeast and the Virginia and North Carolina coastal regions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a focus that clearly dominates the narrative here. While devoting the first four of ten chapters primarily to the eastern tribes provides a solid base for his discussion, it also limits the time and space he has to deploy other groups into his framework. Yet among Plains tribes, Oberg's consideration of the Caddos readily illustrates his themes. They faced Spanish, French, and American governments as well as having to compete with neighboring Indian groups. Their experiences, along with those of the Crow and Arapaho people, with trade, migration, disease, and warfare allow him to integrate his consideration of Native responses and approaches. Though giving less attention to well-known events, battles, and individuals than most texts do, Native America helps readers see the broad patterns of Indian experiences in the region.

Oberg's unusual, but thought-provoking, organization has two distinct flaws. First, it overlooks totally the groups and events in the Pacific Northwest. Disputes revolving around Native prophets, Christian missionaries, salmon fishing, mining, and railroads remain unexamined here. The second is the author's minimal treatment of the decades stretching from the 1930s to the present, the period on which most ethnohistorians for the past generation have increased their attention. These weaknesses aside, the narrative is well grounded, and its ideas are clearly presented.

ROGER L. NICHOLS
Department of History
University of Arizona