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Book Review: Indians in Unexpected Places

William Bauer

University of Wyoming

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Americans witnessed the end of the Indian Wars, the concentration of American Indians on reservations, and the rapid industrialization and urbanization of American life. Many people assumed that since Indians were locked away on reservations, they had little to say about and made few contributions to “modernity.” When American Indians acted in ways that contradicted the idea that Indians were “pre-modern,” non-Native Americans interpreted these “anomalous” people and instances as either exemplars of the assimilation process or proof that Indians were inherently flawed. For instance, many believed that Indians who purchased automobiles had either adopted aspects of a superior culture or profligately squandered their meager resources.

In contrast, American Indians invested meanings into their activities that contradicted America’s understanding of modernity and race. James Young Deer and Princess Red Wing directed and acted in films that contested the emerging stereotypic Westerns, inverting commonly held ideas about miscegenation and assimilation. Despite the surprising number of ideas that existed about Indians and modern life, most non-Native Americans believed in their stereotypes and racial expectations. Deloria argues that they considered Indians pre-modern because it soothed the tensions they felt as they modernized. He also suggests this resulted from the unique nature of the American Indian civil rights movement. While African Americans struggled for inclusion, American Indians have fought for sovereignty, self-determination, and an anomalous place in American political, social, and cultural life.

Deloria provides an engaging look at the politics of modernity in United States history. In an era when groups such as Oklahoma-based One Nation and people like California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger seem uncomfortable with American Indians who own casinos and press the boundaries of tribal sovereignty, Deloria demonstrates that Indians have been participating in “modernity” throughout the twentieth century. It is also refreshing to see

Indians in Unexpected Places. By Philip J. Deloria. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004. xii + 300 pp. Photographs, illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper..

In his first book, *Playing Indian* (1998), Philip Deloria examined the ways that non-Indians used American Indian images to create their own identity. In his latest book, Deloria looks at the American Indians who challenged the assumptions that often informed those representations. During the first few decades of the twentieth century, American Indians appeared in places where non-Indians did not expect to find them—on football fields, in beauty parlors, in Cadillacs. As Indians entered these unexpected places, they challenged notions of modernity, tradition, and the conventional role many people had created for them. Ultimately, though, they failed to change America’s racial beliefs and ideology.

the history of Plains Indians presented in such a manner. In many movies and television mini-series, Plains Indians are often depicted as pre- or anti-modern. In Deloria's hands, Plains Indians, as well as the others mentioned in the book, are not noble savages but people who participated in defining modernity in the twentieth century.

WILLIAM BAUER
Department of History
University of Wyoming