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Summer 1999

**Review of *Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History* By Roger L. Nichols**

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Barsh, Russel Lawrence, "Review of *Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History* By Roger L. Nichols" (1999). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1569.

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*Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History.* By Roger L. Nichols. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. Illustrations, maps, notes, selected bibliography, index. xvii + 383 pp. \$60.00.

On the first page of this encyclopedic essay on North American Indian history, the reader learns that there were “no empires or

kingdoms" among aboriginal Americans. This remark is difficult to reconcile with the growing archaeological evidence of regional territorial struggles among the Mississippian city-states that sheltered a majority of the continent's indigenous population. More importantly, it implies from the outset that history began when Europeans introduced complexity and conflict. Pre-Columbian ideologies, memories, and political alignments are therefore essentially irrelevant to an understanding of post-invasion events. Nichols's work is a minefield of similarly pat generalizations.

A comparative analysis of the development of Indian policy and Indians' resistance in Canada and the United States is long overdue. The two countries share common European and indigenous cultural roots and similar institutions, and profess many of the same ideals. Lagging somewhat behind the US in terms of population and industrialization, Canada has been preoccupied with asserting a distinct identity in the face of a growing tide of American mass media, consumer goods, and investments. Indians are 3 percent of Canada's population, and barely 1 percent in the US, but in Canada they represent an electoral majority over much larger areas and constitute the country's largest, most visible social justice challenge—comparable to African Americans in the States.

Anglo-America provides us with an opportunity to explore the role of demographic differences on Indian policy under conditions of relatively small differences in national political cultures or institutions. Unfortunately, Nichols's study is lacking in either an explicit hypothesis or comparative methodology. His chronicle leaps back and forth across the 49th parallel every few pages, reminding the reader of broadly shared experiences such as the rise of manufacturing, world wars, and 1960s social activism. National *differences*, which might illuminate differences in each country's response to Indian advocacy, are nowhere systematically or critically addressed. His narra-

tive is further undermined by his exclusive and uncritical reliance on secondary sources and by his failure to identify points on which contemporary scholars disagree.

After hundreds of pages of fast-forward historical detail, Nichols devotes scarcely a page to an attempted synthesis. He concludes that "[a]lthough the details and timing of the changes differed in the two nations, the general pattern held with only modest variations." The "general pattern," he explains, has been a loss of independence and increasing marginalization, followed by "renewed cultural strength and political awareness." Stated thus, Nichols's synthesis is trivial. It describes every ethnic, indigenous, and nationalist movement in the world. The "modest variations," which Nichols fails to identify or explain, deserve a genuine comparative analysis.

There are significant differences between the ways Canadian and American Indians talk about being Indian, about the nature of their rights, and about their ultimate objectives. The Canadian discourse emphasizes the central role of the Crown (as opposed to elected governments), the rejection of national citizenship, the necessity of power-sharing at the national level (through, among other measures, special parliamentary seats), and the legitimacy of international alliances and armed struggle. Canadian Indians organize more conferences and meetings on "healing," while their southern neighbors prioritize "economic development." Organized violence *against* Indians appears to have been more commonplace in the United States than in Canada. Critical historiography should help us understand such differences. Nichols's ambitious treatise does not even identify them.

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