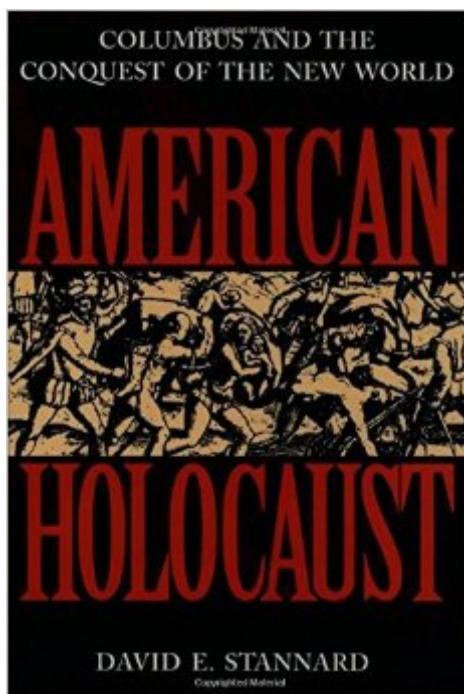


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American Holocaust: The Conquest Of The New World



Synopsis

For four hundred years--from the first Spanish assaults against the Arawak people of Hispaniola in the 1490s to the U.S. Army's massacre of Sioux Indians at Wounded Knee in the 1890s--the indigenous inhabitants of North and South America endured an unending firestorm of violence. During that time the native population of the Western Hemisphere declined by as many as 100 million people. Indeed, as historian David E. Stannard argues in this stunning new book, the European and white American destruction of the native peoples of the Americas was the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world. Stannard begins with a portrait of the enormous richness and diversity of life in the Americas prior to Columbus's fateful voyage in 1492. He then follows the path of genocide from the Indies to Mexico and Central and South America, then north to Florida, Virginia, and New England, and finally out across the Great Plains and Southwest to California and the North Pacific Coast. Stannard reveals that wherever Europeans or white Americans went, the native people were caught between imported plagues and barbarous atrocities, typically resulting in the annihilation of 95 percent of their populations. What kind of people, he asks, do such horrendous things to others? His highly provocative answer: Christians. Digging deeply into ancient European and Christian attitudes toward sex, race, and war, he finds the cultural ground well prepared by the end of the Middle Ages for the centuries-long genocide campaign that Europeans and their descendants launched--and in places continue to wage--against the New World's original inhabitants. Advancing a thesis that is sure to create much controversy, Stannard contends that the perpetrators of the American Holocaust drew on the same ideological wellspring as did the later architects of the Nazi Holocaust. It is an ideology that remains dangerously alive today, he adds, and one that in recent years has surfaced in American justifications for large-scale military intervention in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. At once sweeping in scope and meticulously detailed, American Holocaust is a work of impassioned scholarship that is certain to ignite intense historical and moral debate.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My one quibble with this book is that it only chronicles destruction - it does not discuss the long and continuing resistance of Native American people and cultures. In places like Vermont, the Abenaki continue to live in the shadows of their white neighbors, learned to use guitars and fiddles so we wouldn't be arrested for drum playing, and quietly suffer through continuing discrimination (there are several stores, where I could walk in and wait as long as the store is open, and not be served). A dirty little secret of the Democratic Party, which continues to hold the governorship of Vermont, is that it runs on a platform of never recognizing the Native People of Vermont - whether or not we gain federal recognition. (For fair comparison, I should note that the Republican Party wants to remove sovereign status from all Native Nations.) This is racism, and Vermont history is completely whitewashed. The few times the Abenaki are mentioned in Vermont history textbooks that are sanctioned for use in the schools, we are constantly labeled as murderers and thieves. Never mind, of course, that we were murdered and raped in large numbers by European settlers who were stealing our crops and land. Besides the continuing tribal resistance, there are very important modern movements of resistance that are pan-Indian, and embrace Hispanics and sympathetic whites and others, such as the Seventh Generation Project in Minnesota, and Tonatierra in Arizona. The worst critique most people have come up with about this book is that its count of native peoples in the Western Hemisphere is inflated. That is hardly the case.

American Holocaust was published in 1992 in occasion of the 500 year anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the Americas. In the midst of much celebratory scholarship praising the greatness of Euro-American history and culture, Stannard wrote a book that tells history from a very different side. It presents a vivid account of the European conquest of the Americas and focuses attention on how the often celebrated conquest resulted in nothing less than a holocaust for the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The first two-thirds of the book consist in a very graphic reconstruction of HOW the colonization of the Americas took place. Stannard pulls no punches and delivers us all the

horror and brutality of the European invasion in no uncertain terms. The overall effect is rather depressing, but at the same time enlightening. Reading it before a hot date, though, is not suggested since you will probably be in a bad mood for hours. The second half of the book switches gears and focuses on WHY the colonization of the Americas took place the way it did. Showing he is not afraid of controversy, in a chapter entitled "Sex, Race, and Holy War" Stannard draws a direct connection between Christianity and the genocide of Indian peoples. Stannard himself admits that this is not the only explanation for the brutality of Euro-American conquest, but he suggests religion was an important part of it, and I tend to agree with him. Overall, the book is nothing short of amazing. Unlike most boring historical analysis, this is one that--love it or hate it--is impossible to remain indifferent to. It is very captivating and beautifully written. The only major flaw in Stannard's work is that he tries too hard to pigeonhole all facts in a "good Indian" versus "bad European" portrait.

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