

Weekly Feedback

In the book, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America*, author Daniel K. Richter attempts to tell the story of Indian victimization by the colonists from an Indian perspective. Richter believes that “Facing east on our past, seeing early America as Indian country, tracing histories truly native to the continent, we might find ways to focus more productively on our future.” As for the phrase, “facing east,” this refers to the direction in which the Indians viewed their colonial neighbors. This is a story Richter believes is especially important given the fact that Europeans will become a minority in America once again, arguing, therefore, that understanding the roots of the colonial conquest of the Indians is more important than ever.

One problem with his story, however, is that there are not many Indian records to tell their side of the story. Consequently, Richter has to rely mainly on accounts taken by the colonists to try to shed light on the Indians’ perspective and how they must have felt about losing their land. This poses a problem when trying to write an historical book, as the author is forced to interpret and imagine emotions too much without enough hard facts to back up those feelings. There are not enough hard facts. While Richter uses the available Indian accounts that he can, most notably the stories of Metacom, Pocahontas, and Tekakwitha, takes what is known and depicts as vivid an image as possible about Indian life, the story, overall, becomes one big drama.

Without question, Richter takes the side of the Native Americans in this story, depicting the Europeans as aggressors against the Indians. He explains how the Indians were willing to co-exist in exchange for their autonomy and how a “balance of power” between such European nations as Great Britain, France, and Spain spared the Indians from suffering a worse fate earlier on from what they eventually endured with removal. This balance of power, he mentions, helped Indians nations, like the Mohawks and Iroquois to prosper immensely. Playing one nation against another definitely helped the Indians, but this manipulation would not last forever.

After their victory in the Seven Years’ War in 1763, the British were left alone with the Indians and the land that belonged to the other European nations was ceded to the British. Richter believes that from this point on, the colonists were determined to take all of the Indians’ land away. However, he fails to point out that one reason for this was because the Indians were attacking the colonists. This was certainly a motive for taking away Indian land. The Indians were not as innocent as Richter makes them out to be. In fact, the problem of Indian attacks was the reason why the English colony of Georgia was created, as a buffer zone for the Carolinas, from Indian attacks in Florida. But where in Richter’s story does this appear? Nowhere. Richter simply wants to portray the colonists as cruel monsters. He claims that he is telling a necessary and important story on the origins of American history that is not biased towards the Europeans. However, instead of being biased towards the Europeans, he is overly biased towards the Indians. He claims that the American treatment of Indians with removal was ethnic cleansing, but this is also misleading. While Americans were looking to expand, they were also trying to drive away their Indian attackers. Richter further claims that Indians were singled out in the new American nation as being inferior, but that is also not the case, as African Americans were seen in the same light as Indians were. In addition, the author omits important information such as that the main cause of the War of 1812 was because the British were financing Indian attacks against the colonists. An Atlantic history from a multinational perspective may be important, but at the least, a story that is less unbiased would be appreciated.