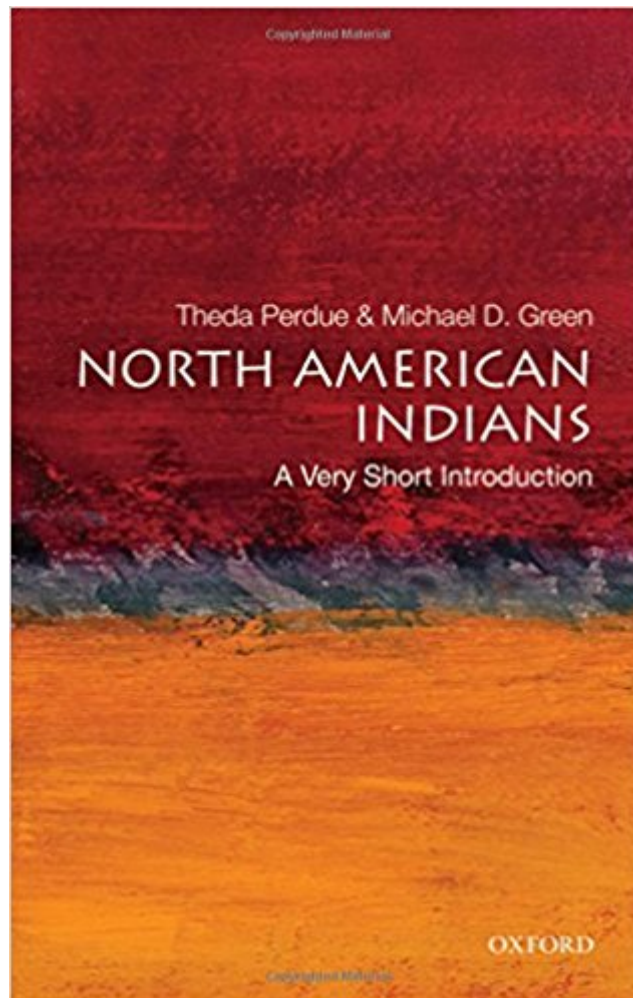




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North American Indians: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

When Europeans first arrived in North America, between five and eight million indigenous people were already living there. But how did they come to be here? What were their agricultural, spiritual, and hunting practices? How did their societies evolve and what challenges do they face today? Eminent historians Theda Perdue and Michael Green begin by describing how nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers followed the bison and woolly mammoth over the Bering land mass between Asia and what is now Alaska between 25,000 and 15,000 years ago, settling throughout North America. They describe hunting practices among different tribes, how some made the gradual transition to more settled, agricultural ways of life, the role of kinship and cooperation in Native societies, their varied burial rites and spiritual practices, and many other features of Native American life. Throughout the book, Perdue and Green stress the great diversity of indigenous peoples in America, who spoke more than 400 different languages before the arrival of Europeans and whose ways of life varied according to the environments they settled in and adapted to so successfully. Most importantly, the authors stress how Native Americans have struggled to maintain their sovereignty--first with European powers and then with the United States--in order to retain their lands, govern themselves, support their people, and pursue practices that have made their lives meaningful. Going beyond the stereotypes that so often distort our views of Native Americans, this Very Short Introduction offers a historically accurate, deeply engaging, and often inspiring account of the wide array of Native peoples in America. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

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Customer Reviews

Theda Perdue is Atlanta Distinguished Professor of Southern Culture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of many books, including *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives* and *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*. She is past president of the Southern Association for Women Historians and the American Society for Ethnohistory, and will serve as president of the Southern Historical Association in 2011. Michael D. Green is Professor Emeritus of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has held fellowships from the Newberry Library and the Rockefeller Foundation and is former chair of the Native American Studies Program at Dartmouth College.

This book outlines every single North American tribe and the extreme difficulties Indians faced due to their removals. One by one Perdue details the most important issues that plagued North American Tribes emphasizing the horrific Federal disregard for treaties and broken promises that still hinder recognition to this day. From the arrival of Soto, through the formation of the Five Civilized Tribes, Perdue gives a brief but solid account of tribal resilience, spiritual practice and cultural history. From the Northeast clear out to the West, tribes barely eeked out an existence following the steamroll effect that Manifest Destiny provided, laying the foundations for U.S. Government Indian extermination. The book is an eye opener, and leaves the reader in quite a shock as there is not much good news embedded within these pages. It's a reality check and an overview of the numerous roadblocks the Federal government has bestowed on every single Indian tribe that ever roamed North America.

This book is a great introduction to American Indians. It gives a great chronology of the legal battles between the US government and different nations and tribes. Though it covers a great deal of information and is extremely condensed do not expect to see the individual histories or beliefs of each tribe, especially tribes from the northeast that are only discussed in brevity or completely left out. Over all, this is a great book to get better insight into the history of Native Americans.

This book covers a breadth of information that is astounding considering it's size. If the other books in this series are as good I'd recommend those as well.

Concise and easy to understand overview of the histories of (mainly) indigenous people of that is now the U.S.A. I strongly recommend this book for anyone interested in history or politics.

As a general review of our dealings with the Indian tribes it was very good. It should prompt you to look at specific tribes to learn more about that particular tribe. Uncle John

Very interesting but a little bit long for being "a very short introduction".

small book with small print.

The books in the Oxford University Press' "Very Short Introductions" series are valuable to readers seeking an introduction to a subject new to them and to readers with a strong background in a subject seeking an informed, brief overview. In reading this particular very short introduction to "North American Indians" (2010), I fall on the latter side of the spectrum. I spent a good part of my life as an attorney in the area of Federal Indian Law. This book brought me back to the subject, after an absence of several years, and allowed me to reflect without the pressure of a deadline or of a complicated issue to be addressed. Thelma Perdue and Michael Green wrote this "Very Short Introduction", and both have long backgrounds in studying American Indians. Perdue is Atlanta Distinguished Professor of Southern Culture at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill while Green is Professor Emeritus of American Studies and History at the same university. Perdue and Green have collaborated on earlier books about the Cherokee Nation as well as writing books individually. With an engaging modesty, the authors point out that "[t]his little book is part of a series that opens the door to a particular topic. Like the others in the series it is far from comprehensive." The book addresses a controversial subject that extends over a lengthy period of time and place and that addresses many individual groups under the cover of the generic term "Indian". As of the writing of the book, the Federal government recognized 564 Indian tribes, in addition to other groups which are not Federally acknowledged. A "very short history" must move quickly over the material, both with fact and understanding. The book presents its subject succinctly and well. The writing is clear, informed, and to the point. The authors offer their perspective on a frequently tragic history but do not polemicize. The present Indians as actors in their own destinies rather than as passive

victims. The authors describe and support current trends in Indian policy under which, as they conclude, "Indian people speak for themselves". The larger portion of the book is historical and chronological. Perdue and Green begin with the early history of Indian peoples beginning in pre-historic times and extending to the period before European contact. They proceed to discuss Indian relationships with the Spanish, French, and English in pre-revolutionary war days. This history presaged much subsequent history as the Indians worked resourcefully to hold their own and to play the Europeans off against each other. Divisions in Indian leadership plagued the tribes as did, much more importantly, the spread of contagious diseases. Indians had not developed immunities to these diseases and were decimated in shocking numbers. The book describes Indian policy in the east United States, with some emphasis on events surrounding the War of 1812. A good deal of attention is given to the removal west of the southeastern tribes in the 1830s and to other lesser-known instances of forced relocations. The discussion of the east moves to the west with a treatment of the Great Plains, the decimation of the buffalo, Custer, the reservation system and more. Perdue and Green discuss the vacillation in Indian policy that came to the forefront with the end of treaty-making in 1871. The United States sought to allot the reservations into individual ownership and established schools and other facilities to assimilate Indians into the mainstream of American life, with some limited success and many tragic failures and mistakes. The latter parts of the book address continued policy shifts, and the varied Indian responses, during the 20th Century. Policies shifted from assimilationist to those which sought to emphasize tribal sovereignty and independence, within the Federal scheme. The book covers the background of the modern policy of tribal self-determination and its accompaniments, including tribal contracting for the provision of services, tribal education, tribal efforts to control mineral and resource development on the reservation, tribal business, the acknowledgement process, tribal gaming activities and more. A great deal of material is offered in a necessarily quick way. The final chapter of the book explores Indian contributions to American culture in areas such as literature, art, dance, film, the preservation of cultural and historical artifacts, journalism, and more. This discussion offered a good deal that was new and fascinating. Perdue and Green offer an excellent very short introduction to American Indians and their history. The book will probably be of most value to new readers but those with background will learn as well. I enjoyed the opportunity to explore Indians and the United States again in a reflective, thoughtful way free from the pressure of the work place. Robin Friedman

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