Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series)

By Philip J. Deloria

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The Boston Tea Party, the Order of Red Men, Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts, Grateful Dead concerts are just a few examples of the American tendency to appropriate Indian dress and act out Indian roles. This provocative book explores how white Americans have used their ideas about Indians to shape national identity in different eras—and how Indian people have reacted to these imitations of their native dress, language, and ritual.

At the Boston Tea Party, colonial rebels played Indian in order to claim an aboriginal American identity. In the nineteenth century, Indian fraternal orders allowed men to rethink the idea of revolution, consolidate national power, and write nationalist literary epics. By the twentieth century, playing Indian helped nervous city dwellers deal with modernist concerns about nature, authenticity, Cold War anxiety, and various forms of relativism. Deloria points out, however, that throughout American history the creative uses of Indianness have been interwoven with conquest and dispossession of the Indians. Indian play has thus been fraught with ambivalence—for white Americans who idealized and villainized the Indian, and for Indians who were both humiliated and empowered by these cultural exercises.

Deloria suggests that imagining Indians has helped generations of white Americans define, mask, and evade paradoxes stemming from simultaneous construction and destruction of these native peoples. In the process, Americans have created powerful identities that have never been fully secure.

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Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series) By Philip J. Deloria Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal
Americans need Indians in order to define themselves as Americans, asserts Deloria (history, Univ. of Colorado). Beginning before the Boston Tea Party, and continuing into the present, Americans have adopted Indian attire, images, and traditions for both political and individual needs. These acts separated us from our European forebears while creating a unique American identity with which we are only partially comfortable, declares the author. As the country evolves, the ways in which Americans identify with Indians also change. Deloria, who is the son of Vine Deloria (Red Earth, White Lies, LJ 9/15/95), follows a strong family tradition of critically examining Indian-white relations. He demonstrates how "Indian play" has always taken on new shape and focus to engage the most pressing issues of a particular historical moment, and he notes that American views of Indians tell us much more about Americans than they do about Indians. While readers may wish the author had dealt more with Indian reactions to these phenomena, this important book belongs in all American history collections.?Mary B. Davis, Huntington Free Lib., Bronx, NY

From Kirkus Reviews
A provocative study of the role of American Indians in forming the character of the US. Following D.H. Lawrences observation that the American character is essentially paradoxical (wanting to savor both civilized order and savage freedom), Deloria (History/Univ. of Colorado) traces the tendency, apparent since the arrival of the first colonists, of Anglo-Americans to appropriate Native American dress, customs, and habits. It was no accident, Deloria writes, that the perpetrators of the Boston Tea Party donned Indian headdresses before sending British cargo into the drink; they at once wanted to disguise themselves and proclaim a kind of solidarity with the continents first inhabitants. It allowed the restrained New Englanders to enjoy freedoms, and even a certain licentiousness, that wouldnt have been possible in plain clothes. Indian societies were deconstructed and imagined in American literature, in secret societies like the Tammany and Cayuga Wolf all-white tribes, and in more open organizations like the Boy Scouts, whose American founder, Ernest Thompson Seton, suspected real Indians of harboring unpatriotic sentiments. Deloria turns up fascinating oddments, including the story of one Colorado Boy Scout troop that went native to the point that the national organization tried to reeducate them, but the scouts managed to reconstruct the secret Shalako ceremony of the Zuni Indians so convincingly that Zuni elders built a special kiva for the masks the young men had made. Deloria notes that although the Boy Scouts of La Junta were not Indians, they were also more than simple, straightforward white boys. He is less admiring of the hippies, Deadheads, and modern New Agers who continue to appropriate elements of Native American religion and culture today. But in the end, he concludes, Indianness was the bedrock for creative American identities, but it was also one of the foundations . . . for imagining and performing domination and power in America. A valuable contribution to Native American studies, and worthy of attention by readers in many fields. --

Review
...a quirky but ultimately convincing study ... [Deloria] builds his case with caution and precision, careful to avoid sweeping claims. -- *The Boston Globe, Michael Kenney*

Welcomed into the Outstanding Book Winner's Circle by the Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Bigotry and Human Rights in North America -- *Gustavus Myers Center*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gregory Jones:

Do you certainly one of people who can't read pleasant if the sentence chained in the straightway, hold on guys this specific aren't like that. This Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series) book is readable simply by you who hate those straight word style. You will find the information here are arrange for enjoyable studying experience without leaving also decrease the knowledge that want to supply to you. The writer associated with Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series) content conveys thinking easily to understand by a lot of people. The printed and e-book are not different in the written content but it just different as it. So , do you even now thinking Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series) is not loveable to be your top record reading book?

Tommie Matthews:

Nowadays reading books are more than want or need but also become a life style. This reading practice give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with education books but if you want feel happy read one using theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. The particular Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series) is kind of guide which is giving the reader unforeseen experience.

Mary Clement:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the extra time or they will get great deal of stress from both daily life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not really a huge robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to you actually of course your answer will probably unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading guides. It can be your alternative throughout spending your spare time, the actual book you have read is Playing Indian (Yale Historical Publications Series).

Anthony Koch:

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