

Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America. By Gary Clayton Anderson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 472 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

This ambitious and rigorously documented study argues that American behavior toward Indians is best characterized as “ethnic cleansing,” which might also be understood today as “war crimes” or “crimes against humanity.” Anderson tracks this behavior from earliest contact through to the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1891, effectively addressing the entirety of America’s centuries-long Indian wars. To begin, the author carefully parses the title’s provocative use of “ethnic cleansing,” borrowing from and building upon language employed by the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and Geneva Conventions. Anderson goes to some pains to distinguish ethnic cleansing from what it is not—genocide—and he emphasizes that the book offers “a moral indictment, not a legal one” (6). In this way, the work perhaps may rattle those readers who prefer the more volatile term and the several studies that argue for its use—Ward Churchill’s *A Little Matter of Genocide*, for example. Yet it dovetails neatly with David Stannard’s significant *American Holocaust*, as well as Anderson’s important earlier study on a related topic, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820–1875*.

Anderson is as exacting with his employment of *ethnic cleansing* as he is indefatigable in supporting his consistent line of argument. He employs the term because he identifies no uniform pattern of behavior that aimed to exterminate all Indians. Anderson notes that many at different times called for what would have amounted to genocide, but he illustrates in rich detail that even if typically fueled by racism, on the whole aggressive American expansionism normally first set its sights on land acquisition, by any means necessary. Indian removal was as much a means to an end as it was an end in itself.

Despite relentless pursuit of its argument, the book is balanced and evenhanded. For example, Anderson notes that comparatively benevolent reformers often softened more murderous expansionist impulses. Yet these reformers too were cut from a quintessential American cloth: while committed to less violent territorial growth than those who favored simple extermination as the solution to the “Indian problem,” they were no less bigoted in perceiving Indian savagery. In any case, for four centuries Indians were incessantly forced from their ancestral lands—in short, as Anderson has it, plagued by ethnic cleansing.

The book is divided into three parts: the first charts the early European invasion and the various justifications for it; the second traces the period of treaty-making; while the third explores the period of manifest destiny through to the nominal closing of the frontier, circa the early 1890s. The first section establishes an imperial context into and from which subsequent American behavior should be understood. While Anderson is not especially strong on the topic of Spanish America, he nonetheless demonstrates clearly that any European moral aversion to ethnic cleansing was washed away by greed. The second section focuses on treaties and highlights the hypocrisy of American growth in elegant academic prose. Consider, for example:

In an ironic twist, the very liberals, like [Thomas] Jefferson, who had formulated the intellectual arguments regarding freedom and equality for America soon embraced a policy calling for the removal of all Indians to the western bank of the Mississippi River. Once there, they would have time to change . . . The argument for removal matured almost immediately after Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801. With a smugness that almost defies belief, the Jeffersonians soon promoted ethnic cleansing as a general policy that would benefit American Indians. (109)

In other words, Indians should have been thankful for ethnic cleansing. Of course, they were not, and resisted it. But the odds were against them at every step. The result was that the ethnic cleansing, according to Anderson, was accomplished against a well-established history of “persuasive strategies” that included theft, bullying, chicanery, lying, misrepresentation, forced hunger, rape, forcible confinement, unilateral breaking of treaties, murder, and deportation (121).

The third section illustrates how the United States in its own right refined and took ownership of behavior learned from Europeans. While American anti-imperial rhetoric may have laid claim to “exceptionalism” and the triumphal and lofty phrasing of manifest destiny, these cultural expressions merely signified how ethnic cleansing had become effectively naturalized: ordinary, quotidian. The result was ongoing, rapid, seemingly unstoppable American growth. Unfortunately, the study contains no maps. If its subject “should haunt America,” as the title suggests—and the author capably demonstrates that it should—providing visuals would go a long way to making the book more attractive to nonspecialists. This section’s impressive series of chapters brings to mind related studies, such as Anders Stephanson’s *Manifest Destiny and the Empire of Right* and Greg Grandin’s *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. Even more than these, it conjures and contextualizes Noam Chomsky’s assertion that the United States has engaged in state terrorism almost ritually.

Anderson’s three-part approach effectively generates a series of crisp, compact, precise, and pithy chapters, serving the author’s purpose nearly too well. That is, even though the power of the book’s thesis emerges ineluctably amid a barrage of widespread, copious primary and secondary evidence, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian’s* ever-changing cast of historical actors is nearly overwhelming. Although this renders it less approachable for casual readers, nonetheless Anderson’s work is “must” reading, for advanced students and scholars in particular. It might appear as if the work’s commendably lofty ambition slightly undermines itself, but it ultimately serves as a textbook example of how to pursue an idea and wrestle it into book form. Given the task the author has set himself, this is no small achievement. The temporal reach and geographical breadth of the work demands that it explain a complex interplay of characters and competing interests, and Anderson handles them with the sure-handed expertise of a senior scholar at the top of his game. In sum, this is an important and necessary book. One hopes that it might prompt further study of the ways in which popular culture aided and abetted American ethnic cleansing.

Mark Cronlund Anderson
University of Regina