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Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century. By Fergus M. Bordewich. New York: Doubleday, 1996. 400 pages. \$27.50 cloth.

Once upon a time, not very long ago, in the United States of America —

A Cahuilla man murdered a young boy on the Pima-Maricopa reservation in Arizona. He could not be prosecuted there, even for unlawfully firing his gun; the Supreme Court held that since tribes are sovereign entities, none has inherent jurisdiction over a member of another. The community on the Campo Indian reservation, near San Diego, California, no longer willing to be totally dependent upon federal funding, decided to build a state-of-the-art toxic-waste disposal facility, to be leased to Mid-American Waste Systems for \$2 million dollars or more annually. The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewas, in North Dakota, fired the editor of the tribal newspaper after she attempted to gain access to the minutes of tribal council meetings. She had no legal recourse.

At the same time —

The Paiutes at Pyramid Lake have gained effective control over the water supply of Reno and a large part of Nevada. The Pequots of Connecticut became operators of a highly successful casino, which has raised the standard of living of tribal members to an almost unheard-of level; in addition, the tribe contributes millions of dollars annually to the economy of the state.

These are some of the provocative events and developments recounted by Fergus M. Bordewich in *Killing the White Man's Indian*, as he demonstrates how the exercise of tribal sovereignty in the United States today affects both Indian people themselves and their neighbors. There are many benefits. Bordewich concludes, however, that although fuller autonomy is both the logical next step in the evolution of relations with these "domestic dependent nations" and the best remedy for the disastrous policies of the past, it has opened a Pandora's box of questionable, and in some cases abusive, actions. Tribal governments were established by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which made no provision for separation of the executive, legislative, and judicial functions. As a result, the governments often act undemocratically. Further, Bordewich asserts, the underlying premise of many tribes, that "cultural purity" (p. 328) justifies or depends upon separateness and exclusivity, is flawed. It implies a failure of American values.

The “white man’s Indian” of the title is “the Indian of the Euro-American imagination” (p. 33), and Bordewich talks about many ways of “killing” him. He begins by demolishing the images and stereotypes created by whites, the misunderstandings and misrepresentations which subtly or blatantly distort both Indian and non-Indian perception. He speaks of the literal killing of Indians seen as impediments or threats to the march of civilization. He reminds us of the educators who sought to “kill the Indian to save the man” and so end the cycle of dependency, perhaps not knowing that treating Indians as if they were white was another way of killing them. Ultimately, “killing the white man’s Indian” might permit the creation of a new, postmodern Indian — born again, in a cultural, if not just spiritual, sense, awakening to the possibilities in reclaimed sovereignty.

This book is disturbing because it questions one of the deepest, most firmly entrenched North American myths, that of the noble and piteous, fearsome and defeated, beautifully spiritual but ultimately unknowable Indian. It is also disturbing, however, because Bordewich overlooks in a crucial sense the experience of the very people whose lives he seeks to examine in the impartial light of careful reporting.

Whose possibilities do Indians seek in exercising their reclaimed sovereignty? Are they those of the “dominant society”? Are they those inherent in the contemporary cultures of the peoples themselves? Or are they possibilities negotiated in each case between the two? Bordewich is concerned that actual practice is determined too often by the worst of factionalism and short-sighted profiteering, evils which have plagued Indian communities under colonialist policies. Yet at the same time what he holds up as paragons are models of success strictly in a “white” sense: profitable business ventures. The Choctaws of Philadelphia, Mississippi, taking a lesson from developing countries in East Asia, have chosen corporate investment as the path to empowerment — and have succeeded beyond everyone’s expectations. Bordewich insists that “there is, in their story, no underlying agony, no tragic catch, no corrosive seed of failure. It is a success story, pure and simple” (p. 305).

It cannot be denied that profit has given some tribes the independence and autonomy they require if they are truly to exercise their sovereignty, but the business mentality also runs counter to the very beliefs and values that have distinguished Indian communities from their non-Indian neighbors. Although

Phillip Martin, the Choctaw tribal chief, asserts that "in fact, we don't have to give up our language, our culture, or our traditions" (p. 333), Bordewich appears uninterested in how these have fared since the 1920s, when "nearly 90 percent of the tribe were still full-bloods and most spoke no English at all" (p. 305). It would be helpful to know how this has worked, for ideally the self-government and self-determination of Indian peoples empowers them to live as themselves.

The book is valuable for raising and exploring these questions, and it does so without romanticizing them or (for the most part) making them black and white issues with easy answers. Bordewich, however, is not the impartial observer he would have us believe. He regularly tips his hand with sardonic comments on whatever he judges deliberate wrongheadedness, stubborn insistence, or suspect motives. A hiring preference for Indians at the BIA gives it "the dubious distinction of institutionalizing racial discrimination for the first time as a criterion for federal employment" (p. 84). The account of an anthropologist's last moments with "the kid" — the ancient cranium of a child who suffered severe infections — which he is packing in the museum for reburial on Indian land, is pure melodrama. Despite the fact that "shysters did swindle many gullible Indians of their allotments, it is also true that homesteaders went West in pursuit of honest dreams, secure in the promise of equal rights under American law" (p. 125).

Priscilla Wald, writing in Karl Kroeber's *American Indian Persistence and Resurgence* (Duke University Press, 1994) shows that the gap between the cultures cannot be bridged from the white side — nor from the Indian side using non-Indian values. The tribal leaders in *Killing the White Man's Indian* are, indeed, doing things on their own terms, but Bordewich doesn't really let us see how this is happening or what is "Indian" about it. He seems to rely only on linear logic and pragmatic common sense in evaluating people's responses to the challenges of modern times, and in judging whether they have met goals which are, in the end, no different from those set by the failed policies of the past.

In a jarring section of the final chapter, Bordewich presents an apologia for the policies and practices of the past and present: each plan was well-intended in its time, and countless billions of dollars have been spent on Indian affairs. He cites Charles Wilkinson (*American Indians, Time and the Law*, 1987): "The United States never disavowed its relationship with native tribes, has never abrogated its treaty commitments. . ." (p. 312). In this light

current practices are seen as the latest step in an ongoing effort to accommodate Indian rights and values. But (just to cite one example) Bordewich has told earlier how the Sioux "surrendered" the Black Hills: The US "ignored existing treaties that required the signatures of a majority of Sioux males for any cession of land; when only a handful agreed to sign away the Hills, Congress annexed them anyway" (p. 229). Further, Bordewich asserts that genocide was never the official policy of the US government; for example, government officials always acted (legislatively, at least) to protect Indians from settlers. Yet he describes "the wholesale extermination of coastal tribes in the Pacific Northwest" (pp. 48-49) and states that during the 1850s the federal government reimbursed California nearly \$1 million for payments to Indian-killers (p. 50). It is a moot point whether genocide was official policy or not.

All this said, *Killing the White Man's Indian* is probably unique in presenting contemporary issues which question ingrained assumptions about Native peoples. And Bordewich is accurate in saying that the United States needs "a clear, nationally agreed-upon idea of what tribal sovereignty is really supposed to be" (p. 337). Hopefully, Indian peoples will have the principal voice in formulating the answer.

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Native American Writing in the Southeast: An Anthology, 1875 - 1935. By Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., and James W. Parins, eds. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. 248 pages. \$16.95 paper.

Littlefield and Parins' volume is a well thought-out compilation of "conscious" authorship from a sampling of writers of Southeastern tribal origin. In their Introduction, they note the many constraints to which they subjected themselves in choosing these (relatively) few pieces as exemplary of a given time and common ground. Twenty-eight are thus included in this book, representative of five major tribes originally from the Southeast, but in the case of most, wholly or partly "removed" to Indian Territory/Oklahoma.

Among these writers are Choctaw, Chickasaw, Yuchi (Euchee), Muscogee (sometimes referred to as "Creek"), and Cherokee