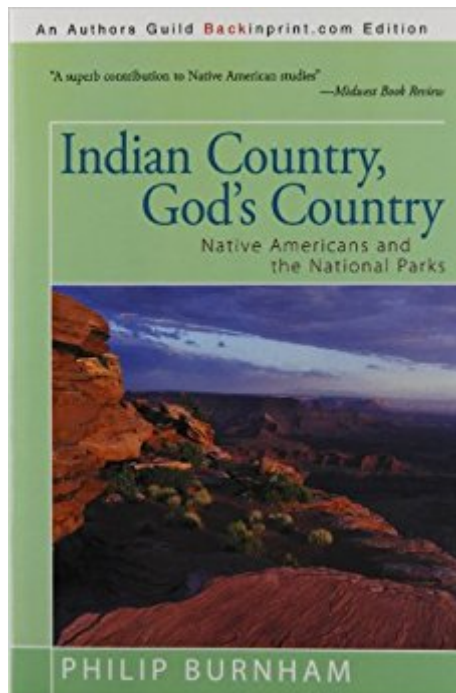


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Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans And The National Parks



Synopsis

The mythology of gifted land is strong in the National Park Service, but some of our greatest parks were gifted by people who had little if any choice in the matter. Places like the Grand Canyon south rim and Glacier had to be bought, finagled, borrowed - or taken by force - when Indian occupants and owners resisted the call to contribute to the public welfare. The story of national parks and Indians is, depending on perspective, a costly triumph of the public interest, or a bitter betrayal of Americas native people. Combining highly charged prose and convincing evidence . . . this superb book constitutes a moving account of [tribal] defeats and victories. Choice Its not just Indians who need to heed the lessons of this book and the ultimate illusion of ownership. Christian Science Monitor A great asset to the literature on the relations between Indian people and the National Park Service. American Indian Culture and Research Journal

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Customer Reviews

Indian Country, God's Country is a freelance expose of development histories of selected national parks and Indian reservations, including Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Reservation, The Badlands and Pine Ridge, Mesa Verde and the Utes, Grand Canyon and the Havasupai and Death Valley and the Shoshone. Obtaining information from a variety of sources including personal visits and interviews as well as research, author Burn ham traces beginnings of the National Park Service, Congressional attempts to mainstream Indian expansion of the parks frequently at the cost of reservation land, and the parks as they are seen today from both tribal representatives and

government employees, superintendents and rangers. It is a series of tales rife with conflict. The few successes are carefully described as "hard-won compromises that have given tribes more autonomy and greater cultural recognition in recent years, while highlighting stubborn conflicts that continue to mark relations between tribes and parks (cover flap)." Of all the sites explored, Burnham is most optimistic about the seed of justice sprouting in Death Valley, ironically. The Shoshone with spokesperson Pauline Esteves has reinstated interest in use of the Shoshone language and also learned to use publicity and other strategies to encourage sovereignty and empowerment of the Timbisha. "From the Sun Tours transportation contract at Glacier to the Shoshone claim for a land base at Death Valley to the Havasupai struggle for land in the Grand Canyon to the Oglala fight for development in the Badlands, the Park Service has never surrendered anything in disputes over Indian land without a protracted struggle (p. 309)." There are many unanswered questions on both sides.

Whites treat Indians badly. If you think that park rangers are saints who protect America's natural and cultural heritage-well, don't forget that these rangers are almost all white, and whites treat Indians badly. Keep these things in mind and nothing in this book will surprise you. Your reaction to the first paragraph of this review will probably determine your reaction to this book. The book does a good job documenting the National Park Service's (NPS) mistreatment of its Native American neighbors (and previous residents), focusing on Death Valley (Tishimba band of Shoshone), Mesa Verde (Ute and others), Grand Canyon (Havasupai and others), Badlands (Oglala Sioux) and Glacier National Parks (Blackfoot, Salish and Kootenai). But it's not clear to me why Burnham wanted to tell this story, beyond his sense of outrage as he learned more about the subject. We know that white people do bad things to Indians, we know that the NPS consists of white people, and most of us can complete that syllogism. Burnham doesn't help us go much beyond this, and doesn't offer up any kind of overall argument. For example, Burnham doesn't attempt to decide whether the NPS is better or worse than other whites, or whether it's become better or worse over time. (The last part of the book suggests that the NPS is better than most, and getting somewhat better over time.) He doesn't offer up any real solutions, though for (unexplained) reasons he likes the changes at Death Valley more than he does, say, the successes of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai or the Ute Mountain Utes. Instead of reasoned argument, he manages to give us sustained outrage. All too often, this outrage is supported mostly by his choice of adjectives to describe the facts.

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