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## Reviews

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**The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians**, 2 vols. By Francis Paul Prucha. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Maps, illustrations, tables, appendices, bibliographical essay, index, 1302 pp. \$60.00 Cloth.

This is Francis Paul Prucha's *magnum opus*. It is a great work. Most fields of American history have their great works of synthesis. Until now American Indian history has not. This study will join in the league of Thomas Bailey's *A Diplomatic History of the American People* and Ray Allen Billington's *Westward Expansion*; as a standard by which other studies of American Indian affairs will be judged. American Indian history needed this book, has long awaited it, and rejoices at its publication.

The author is a recognized authority on United States-American Indian relations. A history professor at Marquette University, Harvard University graduate, visiting professor and scholar, Prucha has written eighteen books. His major works include the well-received *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834*, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846*, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indians, 1865-1890*, and several major bibliographies, articles, and review essays. In 1982-1983 he was president of the Western History Association.

Scholars of the American Indian face many problems. Indian history crosses culture and discipline lines. It covers a broad time frame. It is political and legal, ethnic and cultural. It is rural and urban, past and present, and American Indians today have a quasi-legal relationship with the United States unlike that of any other peoples. Most studies of Indian affairs are limited to specific time periods, wars, or individual tribal histories. Some have tried to bridge the gap of these diverse topics. Wilcomb E. Washburn, among other historians, has added significantly to our understanding of white-Red relations (see for example his *Red Man's*

*Land/White Man's Law*). Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle's masterful synthesis *American Indians, American Justice* is a major step forward in understanding the complexity of Indian legal status. Alice B. Kehoe's *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account* is a significant anthropological account. Early writers and historians from James Adair and Henry Schoolcraft to Joseph P. Kinney tried to write "comprehensive" histories. All of the above studies and others are useful, but none is a complete, narrative historical synthesis.

*The Great Father* is a political history of the formal relations between two peoples. It is "a survey of the full scope of American Indian policy from the time of the Revolutionary War to 1980" (p. xxvii). The book attempts to present a "reasonably complete discussion of the course of American policy development and implementation," and it concludes that there has been "more fundamental unity and continuity in the government's policy" than one would have thought (p. xxvii). It touches on all aspects of federal-Indian relations including political, legal, and constitutional questions, civilization, assimilation, education, alcohol, crimes, conflicts, and perhaps most important, the development of a bureaucracy to manage Indian affairs. This study is an excellent synthesis. Prucha's command of the relevant historiography and primary documents is impressive. He is to be commended for bringing this study up to 1980; for too long has much of the twentieth century been ignored, especially the contemporary period.

Prucha draws heavily from his earlier works, and his treatment of the period from the Articles of Confederation to removal is sterling. The detailed footnotes (at the bottom of the page where they belong) are greatly appreciated and valuable, helping to overcome the seemingly short bibliographical essay that runs only twenty-six pages. Tables, charts, and maps complement his smooth prose. The appendices listing the Presidents, Secretaries of War and Interior, and Commissioners of Indian Affairs, Indian population figures, and the nomenclature of the Bureau of Indian Affairs are very useful, especially Appendix C, which gives the names of all tribal entities presently having a government-to-government relationship with the United States. This study is a historical narrative, but it is also a very valuable reference work and, in this vein, an index at the end of Volume One would have been very helpful.



This work has other strengths in addition to the ones listed above. Short summary statements at the start of each section help explain the often complex narratives that follow. By dealing with the broad scope of United States-Indians relations, Prucha is able to correctly stress connections usually overlooked in period pieces and tribal histories. For example, he uses 1880, the decade of the shift from reservations and conflict to assimilation and allotments, as the dividing point between the two volumes. This seems correct; it is a very crucial decade. He also points out that the coming of removal in the 1830's must be studied within the context of nullification and states rights. This is often ignored. President Andrew Jackson was under extreme pressure not to alienate the southern states at this critical juncture, or as Prucha writes: "the United States government could not risk an all-out confrontation with the state of Georgia" (p. 197). For topics or eras that have been less well treated by historians, such as the period from 1887-1934, this study provides the student with a good overview and references, excellent aids for future studies.

Can this work be criticized? Does it have major weaknesses? It is hard to find fault with research, style, and scope of *The Great Father*. Major criticisms of this book will probably fall into two categories, its breadth and his interpretations. Some will question bringing the narrative up to the contemporary period. Can effective, interpretive history of Indian-white relations for the past two decades be effectively written? The answer is yes, and beyond that, the discipline needs a better understanding of the present era. What can not now be written is a definitive history of this period. In fact, Prucha has already answered this criticism in another essay, stating that, "until historians know the outcome of the events they narrate, they have no way of knowing how much space to allot them." As with any work of synthesis, it is possible to dissect any individual part and find omissions of fact or scholarship, but that does not mean that the broad synthesis is poor or invaluable. If the profession had better synthesis, it would have better monographs.

Prucha does, however, make some broad generalizations that will not sit well with some scholars. He characterizes much of United States-Indian relations as paternalistic, i.e. the title, *The Great Father*. This is true but some may not be willing to go as far as he does when he writes that "the national policy of paternalism to the Indians" . . . was . . . "deeply imbued with a sense

of mission, of carrying out God's commands of justice and compassion" (p. 33). He also states that when the United States secured control of the eastern half of the continent, the Indians "lost their powerful [European] allies . . . it was clear to both Indians and whites that the United States dealt with the Indians from a position of dominance" (p. xxviii). Was that so clear to Tecumseh, the Creeks, and others? This reviewer is not so sure. Did the United States *know* "it was superior to the Indians" as he writes on page thirty-one? His use of the phrase "war whoop" of the Indians (p. 25) is disconcerting, but a far cry from Francis Parkman's "heathen savages" or Washington Irving's Indians as "a game animal, not to be degraded by useful or menial toil."

On the other hand, Prucha strongly condemns United States actions in some instances. He characterizes the removal policy as motivated by "the land hunger of the whites" and these was no effective check upon the covetousness for land" (p. 195). Prucha writes that the reformers of the late nineteenth century acted with an "ethnocentrism of frightening intensity . . . not easily eradicated" (p. 610). His conclusion about the allotment period is succinct: it "failed miserably" (p. 895). One excellent point that Prucha makes about allotment is how could the reformers expect the Indians to become independent farmers when agribusiness and mechanization were driving small white farmers off the land (p. 896).

This reviewer does feel that there is one serious omission. There is no discussion of Indian cultures and almost nothing about the Indian policies of the six North American colonizers. In his preface Prucha addresses this point. He states that his intention is to concentrate on the "history of federal Indian policy" and "not detail the history on Indian communities" as a matter of "expediency" and because "it is not possible to treat the 'Indian story' in such a unified way" (p. xxix). Admittedly, there are hundreds of Indian cultures with different attitudes and goals, but in a work of 1,300 pages with forty-seven chapters, it seems that an introductory chapter on American Indians would have been helpful. In terms of colonial policy, he does treat the British to a small degree, but did the French, Spanish, Dutch, and Swedes (and Russians) have no effect at all on United States Indian policy formation?



The last three chapters detailing the contemporary period are very good. Prucha stresses that Indians *have* made sizable gains since 1960. For example, in terms of medical care, Indians have to some degree closed the "health gap" with their non-Indian counterparts, though they still have not achieved full equality in health care (p. 1149). Another major point that is often overlooked is that 49% of Indians today (1980 census) live in urban areas even if most white Americans think of Indians as reservation peoples. Questions about the status of these urban Indians must be addressed. And the future, as the next century approaches? Prucha feels that Indians must make economic progress to achieve self-determination and self-sufficiency. What Washington Irving wrote more than a century ago remains true today. To most white Americans the history of Indians in this country "is an enigma, and a grand one—will it ever be solved?" This long awaited, excellent study, helps considerably.

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**The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euramerican Relations.** By Kenneth M. Morrison. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. x + 256 pp. \$24.95 Cloth.

This study of French-English-Abenaki relations from early proto-historic contacts through Dummer's Treaty of 1725 is organized around an interpretive, explanatory, and judgmental focus connoted by the phrase "ideal of alliance," which is to say those styles of interpersonal interaction characteristic of the major parties engaged, considered as individuals, not as social actors. The dynamics of these interpersonal engagements, as portrayed by Morrison, turned on efforts to find mutually satisfactory accommodations between persons of different cultural backgrounds seeking (p. 4) "to find common ground and to take responsibility for their lives." The key dynamic emphasized, thus, consists of controversies between individuals arising out of fundamentally different ideal or normative values, which molded the ways they