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2004

## Book Review: Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism

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Perdue, Theda, "Book Review: Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism" (2004). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 279.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism.* By Devon Abbott Mihesuah. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. xxii + 246 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Devon Mihesuah has written a powerful book about the impact of colonization on the indigenous peoples of North America, especially indigenous women. Never losing sight of the enormous diversity of indigenous America, she nevertheless draws out commonalities—the centrality of women to indigenous religions, economies, and decision-making; the deleterious effects of European invasion; the efforts of indigenous women (and men) to revitalize their cultures; the social and individual healing that comes through tribalism and activism. The essays do not comprise a narrative history but instead develop interrelated themes in three parts—“Research and Writing,” “Colonialism and Native Women,” and “Activists and Feminists.” Trained as a historian, Mihesuah provides a useful overview of the past in “Colonialism and Disempowerment,” which concludes with examples, such as domestic abuse and the power of stereotypes, that link the history of European oppression to modern social issues. In an essay on the Cherokee Female Seminary, she explores both the internalization of European racial and gender norms and the creation of a strong sense of tribal identity among students, suggesting that the effects of colonialism are remarkably complex.

More than a mere chronicle of oppression, however, Mihesuah’s essays primarily present a plan of action. Her command of the literature on Native Americans or indigenous peoples, the term she prefers, is cross-disciplinary and compelling. She also draws on an even broader literature, particularly that on colonialism and on African Americans. Recognizing the important differences between African Americans and indigenous peoples, especially those stemming from the sovereign rights of tribes, she nevertheless draws useful analogies in forging a course of action for personal healing and community activism. While many of the essays focus on what indigenous people can—must—do for themselves, she also turns her attention to that bane of many Native communities, the academic researcher who is likely to be non-Indian. Once again, she offers concrete guidelines for ethical research, the nuts and bolts of which unfortunately appear in the notes, and she raises important issues about the merging of feminist studies and indigenous women’s studies. These essays should be required reading in every research seminar.

While many of these essays have been published previously or are revised versions of such, their collection in a single volume is useful to Indian and non-Indian academics. And they clearly establish Mihesuah as a leading indigenous intellectual.

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