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## Review of *World War II and the American Indian* by Kenneth William Townsend

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Although the publisher claims on its jacket cover that Kenneth William Townsend's *World War II and the American Indian* "offers the first history of the twenty-five thousand Native Americans who served during World War II," it is actually the third general history of Native American participation in the war effort. Alison R. Bernstein's *American Indians and World War II* (1991) and Jeré Bishop Franco's *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (1999) precede it, as have several smaller scale or more focused studies. Numerous biographies dealing with Native American veterans of the war, studies of the particular roles Native Americans played in combat, such as the Comanche Code Talkers, as well as tribal histories of the period are also in the works and should appear in print in the near future. Given the current interest in the "Greatest Generation," it appears that literature on the subject will expand considerably.

Townsend's study is meticulously researched and well balanced. He covers federal Indian policy up to the beginning of the war and offers a good analysis of the watershed policies of John Collier as the principal archi-

fect of the Indian New Deal. But the heart of Townsend's history is contained in two important points. He argues that America, and especially John Collier, needed Indians to counter the charges that the United States was really a racist society only slightly less oppressive than Germany or Japan. After all, American society was segregated and racial minorities were living at the lowest economic levels. Collier worked hard indeed to obtain full Native American participation in the war effort in order to demonstrate that American Indians were not only ready to take up arms and stand shoulder to shoulder with white men in integrated military units, but also that, as a result of the Indian New Deal, Indians were fast becoming legitimate American citizens. In his attempt to repair the damages done by the nineteenth-century assimilation and allotment policies, Collier had opened himself up to charges that he was essentially segregating Indians by allowing the tribes to reorganize their own governments and maintain their reservations. Full military participation would dispel the idea of possible Native American disloyalty and confirm that the Indian New Deal was in fact a workable solution to the "Indian Problem."

Because there was, as Townsend correctly points out, resistance to entering the military service on the part of some Native Americans, Collier made uncharacteristic efforts to compel draft resisters to abide by United States statutes. In part, Collier's willingness to compel Native Americans to participate in the war effort was to prove that Indian people had not been receptive to Nazi propaganda. Townsend supports the notion that Collier was correct in his assessment of Native American draft resistance, which appeared in relatively isolated places where America and its war effort were irrelevant or among groups asserting their own sovereignty. Nazi propaganda did not make many inroads into tribal societies. On the contrary, Native Americans volunteered or submitted to the draft, as Townsend points out and as Collier never tired of informing the American public, in

numbers exceeding their proportion of the population.

But why did Native Americans seemingly devote themselves and their tribal resources to the war effort? Several scholars have reduced Native American participation in the armed forces to either the attempt to legitimize themselves as American citizens, the lack of economic opportunity on the reservations for young men, the status given to soldiers in some Native American communities, or to the simple fact that Native Americans, as a result of Collier's insistence on full participation, were heavily recruited. Townsend correctly views the Native American acceptance of American military service as multifaceted and complex. Native Americans entered the service and fought in the great battles of World War II for a wide variety of reasons. That they did so certainly aided the overall war effort and contributed to the victory over the Axis in more ways than one. Townsend's book is a worthy effort and a definite contribution to the growing literature on the "Greatest Generation."

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