An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States: A review

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Introduction

Historical writing, to the frustration and anger of many, is largely still rooted in the assumptions and myths of Euro-American exceptionalism. Grand narratives of progress, conquest and ‘civilization’ remain alluring tropes for those who write histories of settler states such as Australia, Canada and the USA. These pernicious fictions distort and dominate public knowledge of the past, and continue to implicitly structure and influence scholarly historical research and writing. For an increasing number of people within, between, and beyond the academy, however, these fictions and the harms they perpetuate in the present are the source of a cacophonous dissonance. Increasingly, these colonial, racist, and violent histories are being challenged by Indigenizing, anticolonial, and decolonizing analyses. These works present critical histories of dispossession and expose the distortions of history needed to perpetuate these colonial myths. When you have gained some understanding of Indigenous histories, of the brutal and uneven
nature of colonization in North America, and of the ways that scholarly knowledge production has contributed to those processes, it is impossible not to be aware that colonialism and racism continue to structure a great amount of present-day writing and research.

It was, therefore, a distinct pleasure to read Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’ *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*; this time, a national historical narrative that provoked anger and frustration not toward an implicitly colonial and uncritical history, but toward the processes and brutalities of the colonization of the lands and peoples now claimed by the United States. Indeed, it is refreshing and energizing to read a comprehensive history of America that refuses to conform to the tired national tropes of American exceptionalism, manifest destiny, or frontier conquest and instead rests firmly on the vitality, presence, and persistence of Indigenous peoples and the multiple conflicts, entanglements, and stories that constitute the overarching process by which the United States has come to be: settler colonization.

Dunbar-Ortiz quite rightly rejects the validity, accuracy, and hegemony of the framework of American progress and ‘civilization’ from which that approach derives. Rather, this comprehensive and sweeping history reconstructs American national history according to the fundamental process by which the nation state came to be, and which has disproportionately affected and devastated the lives of millions of Indigenous people. Taking up an anticolonial framework, Dunbar-Ortiz brings us face to face with the historical reality of the creation and perpetuation of the United States, and sets a new baseline for our knowledge and assumptions about American history.

Dunbar-Ortiz’ key concern in *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* is to change the standard of public knowledge of American history in order to promote wide reaching positive change in America. To do this, she constructs a convincing and straightforward national history that rests on a new periodization that re-frames the terms of engagement and understanding of American history, focusing on the stages and types of colonization and experiences of Indigenous peoples. She does not depart significantly from a linear temporal approach in this reframing and, as such, the new periodization is not dislocating (and upsetting) for readers who are not yet familiar with Indigenous historical knowledge that is not predicated on linear Judeo-Christian concepts of time. This allows readers to more easily follow the new format Dunbar-Ortiz develops by changing the categories and key moments that delineate historical periods, and therefore to continue into the book’s narrative and argument.

Instead of relying on moments of triumphant national founding or the ‘great white men’ approach to history, Dunbar-Ortiz develops a periodization of American history consistent with her anticolonial framing. The traditional and implicitly colonial “Colonial, Revolutionary, Jacksonian, Civil War and Reconstruction, Industrial Revolution and Gilded Age, Overseas Imperialism, Progressivism, World War I, Depression, New Deal, World War II, Cold War, and Vietnam War, followed by contemporary decades” (xiii) framework is replaced. Dunbar-Ortiz instead structures American history starting with interconnected Indigenous peoples across the continent, then, cultures and practices of conquest, multiple violences and genocides inflicted on Indigenous peoples, the birth of the American nation state, the consolidation of American power
on the continent, overseas imperialism and domestic peacetime colonialism, and present-day colonialism. By juxtaposing the periodization generated through her colonial analyses with the typical ‘old’ US history framework, Dunbar-Ortiz changes the terms of engagement with the past while at the same time giving non-specialist readers a reference point to navigate the text.

Through her construction, Dunbar-Ortiz asserts and advances an understanding of US history that relies on Indigenous experience rather than colonial expectations. While in other hands this might run the risk of simply adding Indigenous content to the narratives of American history, that is not the case here. Rather, Dunbar-Ortiz does not simply add new bookmarks to the same old history text – generating a version of American history from an Indigenous perspective – but instead, generates an entirely new historical narrative of the USA. As such, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* draws on the approaches and practices of both Indigenous history and EuroAmerican history – form, theory, and methodology – in order to present a national narrative in which Indigenous and settler people alike will see and understand themselves and their interrelationships.

**Critical interventions**

The book’s critical intentions are signalled early on, leaving no illusions that established narratives of American nationhood will be left intact. The first chapter strikes at many of these popular narratives directly and early, clearing the way for the assertion of the book’s core arguments. Here Dunbar-Ortiz tackles myths big and small, from the doctrine of discovery, to constructions of ‘cultural conflict’ as a way of diffusing guilt, to trendy postmodernist studies focusing on Indigenous agency and empowerment that frame Indigenous-Settler conflicts as an ‘encounter’ and ‘dialogue.’ What these popular myths have in common is the masking of atrocities and the scope of the centuries-long and continent-wide land grab. Dunbar-Ortiz does not spare ‘progressive’ social dynamics, critiquing multiculturalism, and the ‘respectful’ construction of the gift-giving Indian as smoke screens intended to obscure the fact that the US is based on the “looting of an entire continent and its resources” (p. 5). She does not just seek to add new or alternative historical understandings, but instead writes directly against “no-fault history” – history rooted in perceptions of *terra nullius* or Doctrine of Discovery – that normalize the emergence of America against a backdrop free from moral and ethical responsibility (p. 231). And rather than fall into the trap of believing that complex post-colonial theories that ‘recognize’ subaltern peoples and politic of marginalization, Dunbar-Ortiz unflinchingly critiques the tendency for theorists to “obliterate the present and presence of Indigenous nations struggling for their liberation from states of colonialism” (p. 231). In contrast to these approaches, she argues for a distinctly indigenist approach that integrates tribal knowledge, Indigenous practices, and ongoing and potential future efforts to create social change as necessary for developing robust and accurate histories. I greatly appreciate that Dunbar-Ortiz engages with theory and scholarship as a potentially useful tool, as well as a potentially harmful weapon; she does not fetishize the tool (theory) and focuses instead on the work that needs to be
done with all of these tools. Through this treatment, concepts like *homo sacer* (p. 224) – currently all the rage in settler colonial political theory – are decentred except to the extent that they can contribute to a deeper understanding of Indigenous life and struggles.

Moving from the theoretical interventions, the second chapter, titled ‘Follow the Corn,’ begins with a clear statement that America is not – and never was – a ‘New World’; rather, it must be understood as, “a birthplace of agriculture and the towns and cities that followed, America is ancient” (p. 15). This chapter also emphasizes the role of Indigenous women in domestication of plants and in cultivation, innovative practices that provided that bases of many Indigenous economies. This subtly and skilfully critiques tropes of Indigenous economies as ‘undeveloped’ while foregrounding Indigenous femininity and the gendered differences between Indigenous and (Euro)American societies. Her following of corn is a great narrative thread: Indigenous in form and content, corn is discussed as a distinctly ‘Indigenous’ crop, and the fortunes of Indigenous peoples as strongly connected to the fate of the corn itself.

In the chapters that follow, Dunbar-Ortiz builds on this by layering and weaving a comprehensive history of the founding and rise of America as a settler colonial nation state. This narrative tapestry shows many of the expected historical scenes, but often through perspectives that few Americans have or would care to consider. Particularly strong in this book is how Dunbar-Ortiz links the history of American settler colonization of Indigenous nations in the construction of the continental United States with broader areas of American imperialism and conquest. On contemporary military adventurism, for example, Dunbar-Ortiz argues “the Iraq War was just another Indian war in the US military tradition” (p. 194). The chapter ‘US Triumphalism and Peacetime Colonialism’ explicitly links the multitude of efforts by many administrations and military leaders, to overthrow democratically elected governments overseas, particularly focusing on the work of the CIA in the mid-to-late 20th century. She exposes the roots of technologies of domination common to American exploits – including surveillance, starvation (economic sanctions), mass incarceration, brutal intimidation, and coordinated campaigns of misinformation – to colonial practices used to claim the lands of Turtle Island and deployed against Indigenous peoples.

This same chapter parallels the violence against animals as a part of US military campaigns and actions against Indigenous peoples and the deep trauma caused by these attacks. Her description of Navajo goats and sheep slaughtered by government agents in the 1930s (p. 172) reminds me of the slaughter of the working dogs that supported Inuit, Dene and other northern nations by the Canadian government,1 or the slaughter of the plains buffalo in both Canada and the United States, done to drive Indigenous peoples into dependence and submission.2 Similarly, Dunbar-Ortiz also discusses the ways that plants and the land itself have

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1 For an example, see the report by the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (http://www.qtcommission.com), which includes details that over 20,000 sled dogs were killed by government and police forces in the 1950s through 1970s.

been targeted and have suffered through colonization. One example that she mentions is the loss of topsoil as a result of destroying the natural long grasses of the prairies in order to plan short grass for cattle ranching (p. 144). Conceptually, Dunbar-Ortiz demonstrates that the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples is inextricably linked to the devaluation of non-human lives under colonization. Practically, the juxtaposition of these various oppressions force the reader to consider if America, founded in violence and dispossession, can ever escape reliance on these tactics. Regardless, Dunbar-Ortiz ably achieves her goal: to prove that “[although] US imperialism abroad might seem at first to fall outside the scope of this book, it’s important to recognize that the same methods and strategies that were employed with the Indigenous peoples on the continent were mirrored abroad” (p. 162).

These re-examinations of America as less a land of liberty and more a land of violent conquest require a similar reconsideration of American identity: of what it means to belong to American society, what it means to be at home on the land in America. The canon of America’s origin stories contains numerous literary greats renowned for their nation-building contributions to culture, while ignoring their roles as colonizers, racists, and perpetrators of violence (p. 130). The ideology of democracy in the American settler state owes much to the Enlightenment philosophes who became rich off exploited labour and plantation economies, and went on to articulate a version of ‘liberty and freedom’ that became synonymous with the American dream. That is a wildly problematic contradiction. As Dunbar-Ortiz argues, this contradiction engenders a deep well of intentional, comfortable ignorance; right into the present day, “the affirmation of democracy requires the denial of colonialism” (p. 116).

This denial is no simplistic thing. On the American origin myth, famed novelist James Fenimore Cooper has described Americans as a unique “race, a new people born of the merger of the best of both worlds, the Native and the European, not biological merger but something more ephemeral, involving the dissolving of the Indian” (p. 104). In many ways, American identity is not predicated on opposition to Indigenous peoples, but on the absorption of indigeneity into an American narrative that extends forwards and backwards in time, encompassing all of the peoples and lands of Turtle Island. Dunbar-Ortiz explains that American identity needs Indigenous people to exist, but only for a moment, because what America truly needs is for Indigenous people to disappear: “Neither superior technology nor an overwhelming number of settlers made up the mainspring of the birth of the United States or the spread of its power over the entire world. Rather, the chief cause was the colonialist settler-state’s willingness to eliminate whole civilizations of people in order to possess their land” (p. 96). Is it any wonder, then, that American society and the United States governance are quick to turn to “extravagant violence” and “irregular warfare” (p. 59) against Indigenous peoples at home and abroad? In eliminating ancestral ties to land, America eliminates those who could question its own foundational claim. If there is a critique of this book on this issue, it is that Dunbar-Ortiz does an excellent job on how these dynamics have played out across the US-Mexico borderlands, but curiously ignores similar issues along the 49th parallel. Despite the incredible complicity between

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Canada and the USA in settler colonial conquest – even evident in conflicts between the neighbouring states, such as the War of 1812 – there is only scant mention of USA-Canada border and relations.

Overall, Dunbar-Ortiz has created a sweeping historical narrative that is both well founded and extraordinarily accessible; this second point deserves particular attention. *An Indigenous People’s History* stands out immediately because of its readability. Indeed, this book is such a pleasurable read that the reader is drawn rapidly along as Dunbar-Ortiz covers a broad historical scope, and intervenes in how we understand US history. Beyond the enjoyment I took in reading it, this readability is noteworthy for two reasons.

First, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* will reach a much wider *audience* than many academic works dealing with similar subjects and research. Practicing historians will recognize that much of the content already exists in a diverse set of scholarly sources, but this particular book is intended for general non-fiction readers and for interested non-specialists. As such, Dunbar-Ortiz has created a book that is at once absorbing, easy to follow, free of unnecessary academic jargon, engaging and enlightening. This strategy is key to helping readers follow what may be an epistemically and at times emotionally challenging presentation of American national history. While informed by rigorous scholarship, this book demystifies the ‘Ivory Tower’ thinking that often hides behind complex terminology and obscure referencing. Indeed, I would strongly recommend *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* as a gift for non-fiction readers among family and friends. This sort of historical engagement is vitally important, especially for reaching the kinds of audiences who might otherwise choose to consume the political biographies and military histories that are often complicit in colonial myths and narratives. The readability also makes this book of great (and efficient) use to international scholars, as it provides a concise and handy introduction to a wide range of US-based literature that shares obvious connections with other colonial situations globally. For critical scholars of US history, it is likely that *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* will not introduce new knowledge but instead will affirm the findings of more specific scholarly study and contextualize it by weaving a national narrative that invites comparisons between regions and across time periods. As such, the accessible and dynamic *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* represents a useful teaching tool and jumping-off point for more specific teaching and study.

This leads to the second implication of the striking readability of the book: the *message* of the book is delivered in a particularly effective and unavoidably obvious way. The history of Indigenous peoples and of the processes and workings of the colonization of the United States are not hidden here at all. It is not difficult to find; it is not limited by localisation or isolation, or excused by triumphant stories of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom.’ Indigenous peoples’ experiences of and involvement in the generation of America as a settler colonial society do not belong to a historical niche; they are centralized as the history of America. By making the book so deliberately accessible, coherent, and comprehensive, Dunbar-Ortiz argues implicitly and convincingly that the history of colonization and genocide – and the Indigenous resistance to and survival of – are indisputable facts of how the US came to be that should be understood by
everyone. Thanks to the struggles and efforts of countless Indigenous scholars and the support of a variety of non-Indigenous activists and academics working in solidarity with Indigenous struggles, there is today unprecedented availability of information on Indigenous peoples, colonialism, and racial violence and dispossession. Dunbar-Ortiz’ deliberately accessible narrative implicitly adds to the argument there is no excuse not to know this history. Understanding American colonialism and Indigenous resistance requires no special training or technical skill; it is the minimum we should expect of each other and ourselves.

As a historian and a teacher, I also have a special interest in the historiography of this piece. The challenging and unique periodization that Dunbar-Ortiz employs, which I described above, is useful, but this is not a book for historians (as none of this is ‘new’ history based on ‘new’ research). Rather its usefulness and appeal lie in the comprehensive narrative and broad introduction to American history. I can see a great utility for this book as a teaching tool, both in formal education and in informal, social education. I would use it as a jumping-off point for a more in-depth history of American colonization of North America; it would be especially suitable for introductory courses on Indigenous Studies or as part of a comparative political geography course situating America alongside other settler states such as Canada, Aotearoa, Australia, and South Africa. I believe that Dunbar-Ortiz would agree with this assessment, as she early on states that, the “main challenge for scholars in revising US history in the context of colonialism is not lack of information, nor is it methodology… The fundamental problem is the absence of the colonial framework” (p. 7). The book brings that colonial framework back into focus. For me, despite the reliance on Indigenous knowledge and histories, this is more accurately a history of the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the construction of the United States than it is ‘Indigenous’ history as such. An Indigenous history would extend even further beyond the temporal boundaries of this book, and given the diversity of Indigenous peoples and histories, would necessarily take a very different shape.

Nonetheless, Dunbar-Ortiz does take up the priorities and practices of Indigenous history, opening her book with a chapter centralizing the role of the land as both the source of Indigenous identity and culture, and the object of colonial ambition. In ‘The Land’ (Chapter 1) Dunbar-Ortiz states unequivocally that, “Everything in US history is about the land – who oversaw and cultivated it, fished its waters, maintained its wildlife; who invaded and stole it; how it became a commodity (‘real estate’) broken into pieces to be bought and sold on the market” (p. 1). This resonates with Indigenous knowledge and other recent work on settler colonialism in North America generated from both settler colonial critiques⁴ and Indigenous assertions of nationhood and belonging.⁵ This chapter also serves the important purpose of giving the reader tools to make sense of what will come next. For those familiar with the subjects of settler colonialism, Indigenous histories, and Indigenous-Settler politics, this is may not be new ground, but this

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⁴ For example: Adam Barker’s PhD thesis, “(Re-)Ordering the New World” (2013), or Harsha Walia’s Undoing Border Imperialism (2013).

⁵ For example: Leanne Simpson’s Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back (2011), or Glen Coulthard’s Red Skin, White Masks (2014).
focus on land does signpost the particular choices and approach of the author. Read in conjunction with the Foreword, which situates the author through her lived experience as a Settler American from Oklahoma, the two sections lay out a clear sense of the book’s intention, tools, and goals.

Working from this land-centric construction, Dunbar-Ortiz takes important approaches to other issues that follow, breaking free of some common dynamics of discourse on Indigenous history and colonisation. She side-steps discussions of race which can become a quagmire of recognition politics by focusing on the fact that Indigenous peoples were not colonized as a racialized group, but as distinct nations, cultures and peoples who were racialized in the process. By centralizing “‘colonization,' ‘dispossession,' ‘settler colonialism,' ‘genocide’” and the contest over land as essential to understanding narratives of racial discrimination in the Indigenous experiences of America – and therefore pre-empting multicultural rights as a solution to Indigenous dispossession – Dunbar-Ortiz instead asserts that it is these concepts which truly “drill to the core of US history, to the very source of the country’s existence” (p. xiii). Further, Dunbar-Ortiz centralizes these terms not to establish them as the necessary framing of Indigenous people in America, but rather to disrupt and trouble them. Indigenous peoples’ survival is portrayed as dynamic and vibrant, not passive or failed. The acknowledgement of genocide as a vital framework for understanding American history is likewise not intended to promote genocide as a means of analysis, but rather to disrupt narratives of terra nullius or disappearance – both historically and in the present. In conjunction, Dunbar-Ortiz introduces the concept of “survivance” which she identifies as “an active presence… the continuance of narratives… survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy and the legacy of victimry” (p. 217). This is a useful framework, and one that merits further development in the future.

As should be clear, key to Dunbar-Ortiz’s work is the recognition that colonization is both central to the development of the American state and society, but also remains a vibrant force in America. Dunbar-Ortiz is careful to point out that, in addition to understanding how colonialism works in general, it is essential to be aware of the ways that colonialism manifests differently in the lives of the diverse peoples who now occupy Indigenous lands in America. Different racialized and oppressed groups have participated in the dispossession and colonization of Indigenous peoples in a variety of ways, often coerced and for dubious reward. This is part of the tradition of European colonialism to turn, for example, former slaves into the foot soldiers of colonization (p. 147). Dunbar-Ortiz also centralizes the role of often relatively small settler collectives in colonizing Indigenous lands and violently oppressing Indigenous peoples, a critical point since colonization is often ascribed primarily to the actions of the state or capitalist corporations. This reminds me of the HBO series, Deadwood, in which settlers, identifying particularly valuable resources (such as gold) build settlements beyond state borders (in the territory of the Fort Laramie Treaty), creating the conditions for the state to then assert power in order to ‘protect’ the settlers from ‘marauding Indians.’ Taken as an aggregate of small-scale colonial conflicts, Dunbar-Ortiz shows how settler colonization was not a singular event, and
that the frontier was constantly being redrawn. The important implication here is that colonization was – and is – continuous.

Dunbar-Ortiz’s work stands alongside a number of other contemporary works identifying that individuals in settler states are complicit in structures of colonial domination (p. 229). However, the book’s contribution to this discourse is limited by an unclear engagement with settler colonial theory. Too often, in asserting a particularly American form of (settler) colonialism, Dunbar-Ortiz is not able to make clear the specific functioning of American settler colonialism, and therefore what can actually be done about it. There is a growing and robust body of literature on this subject, on what creates and maintains settler states and societies, but in this book the terms of the discussion are too general. For example, Dunbar-Ortiz argues that the “logical progression of modern colonialism begins with economic penetration and graduates to a sphere of influence, then to protectorate status or indirect control, military occupation, and finally annexation” (p. 191). This homogenizes the diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples; for example, Indigenous nations of what is now California who were initially imposed upon by the mission system, or eastern nations whose claims to land seem to have simply dissipated along with American independence, moving from distinct nations to annexed and disappeared peoples in one fell swoop.

It is also worth critically engaging with the proposition at the beginning of the book, “The form of colonialism that the Indigenous peoples of North America have experienced was modern from the beginning: the expansion of European corporations, backed by government armies, into foreign areas, with subsequent expropriation of lands and resources” (p. 6). This is a similar form of homogenization, reading the project of modernity – as both intellectual pursuit and social structure – backwards onto some decidedly un-modern projects. There was no central modernist blueprint for the colonization of the Americas; it was a contested project in which modernity was worked out in the doing. Further, the modernist project also required the connection of the Americas to other, distant shores; Gurminder K. Bhambra has described how modernity did not spring into being in Europe, but grew out of the interconnection between, in one example, American cotton and arable land, weaving technology from India, slave labour from Africa, and the growing industrial infrastructure of European empires. It is important not to homogenize the histories of Euro-American encounter and exploitation in North America, or to over-simplify how they can be understood through particular theoretical frameworks. We must take seriously Alfred and Corntassel’s warning about “shapeshifting” colonialism as a continuing threat to Indigenous peoples, otherwise there is a risk of losing sight of how colonialism actually impacts on Indigenous peoples lives.

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6 See for example: Walia (2013), Taiaake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel’s widely read article ‘Being Indigenous’ (2005), or Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang’s exceptional article ‘Decolonization is Not a Metaphor’ (2012).


Turning to the way *An Indigenous Peoples’ History* is put together, it is not so much a problem as a curiosity that the book has no illustrations. This is a refreshing departure from many mainstream histories; too often in historical writing, images – and particularly photographs, such as the infamous Edward Curtis portraits – are used with no great care or consideration given to the use of such visual texts. Images need attention and contextualization to be ‘read’ and understood, and for issues of consent and permission and naming to be raised. One of the most common conceits of historical writing is the lazy and uncritical inclusion of images. Truly, this book needs no illustrations as the writing is descriptive and creates rich images in the mind of the reader. However, I would have liked to see some maps included: the absence of any maps, when a significant proportion of the book deals with the specific and shifting conflicts over Indigenous lands the territorial becoming of what is now the US, feels like a missed opportunity. To understand Indigenous histories, and the true, colonial history of America, geography matters, and perhaps more than anything, this absence hints at the intended audience of the book. To any American-based reader or Americanist scholars, likely maps for an overview historical work like this would add little. Americans are *au fait* with the locations of the US states, where such divisions relate to major geographical features such as the Rio Grande, Mississippi, and mountain ranges. I recognize that, if Dunbar-Ortiz’ intended audience is primarily American, the inclusion of maps would add to the cost of production, and would require centralizing cartographic methods that have been central to colonialism, for dubious benefit. However, while recognizing that these are both concerns that need attention, the fact that this book is otherwise very well suited for an international and non-specialist audience makes the absence of maps frustrating and also telling. We are often self-centred in North America, assuming the rest of the world knows – or should know – about our internal divisions (states, geography, provinces). Not challenging this limits the otherwise widespread utility of this book, because I think that there are two audiences for which this book is critically useful, if not indispensable: those of us engaged in research and activism around decolonization and Indigenous resurgence outside of the US, and the broad international public.

**Conclusion**

Dunbar-Ortiz’s goal for her book is to contribute to resistances to American imperialism, identifying – correctly in my opinion – that more than any social justice movement or political community, it is “Indigenous peoples [who] offer possibilities for life after empire” (p. 235). She is under no illusions as to how massive a project it is to envision, let alone pursue, a post-imperial society in the Americas. She warns us against cheap and easy reconciliation, since: “No monetary amount can compensate for lands illegally seized, particularly those sacred lands necessary for Indigenous peoples to regain social coherence” (p. 206). She hopes that the Indigenous experience of colonization and resistance to it can play a role in both fracturing structures of empire and restoring Indigenous nationhood. She asks, “How might acknowledging the reality of US history work to transform society?” (p. 2), a pertinent question given that it is
widely accepted that ‘truth telling’ is a key part of unsettling and confronting colonialism in settler states. For Indigenous peoples, though, this history is likely to be less about unsettling or acknowledging suppressed facts of colonial oppression, than it is an affirmation of what Indigenous peoples have long known: that “there is a direct link between the suppression of Indigenous sovereignty and the powerlessness manifest in depressed social conditions” (p. 211). As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz shows in *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*, numerous oppressions rest on Indigenous dispossession, and Indigenous resurgence holds perhaps the greatest possible chance of showing Americans what true freedom and liberation could be.

**References**


