



Indian Givers: How Native Americans Transformed the World

Jack Weatherford

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" As entertaining as it is thoughtful....Few contemporary writers have Weatherford's talent for making the deep sweep of history seem vital and immediate."

THE WASHINGTON POST

After 500 years, the world's huge debt to the wisdom of the Indians of the Americas has finally been explored in all its vivid drama by anthropologist Jack Weatherford. He traces the crucial contributions made by the Indians to our federal system of government, our democratic institutions, modern medicine, agriculture, architecture, and ecology, and in this astonishing, ground-breaking book takes a giant step toward recovering a true American history.

Indian Givers: How Native Americans Transformed the World Details

Date : Published August 3rd 2010 by Broadway Books (first published December 12th 1988)

ISBN : 9780307717153

Author : Jack Weatherford

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Anthropology, Native Americans



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From Reader Review Indian Givers: How Native Americans Transformed the World for online ebook

Runningfox says

I learned from this book about the many contributions American Indians have given not only the USA but the entire world..Jack Weatherford is 100% right when he says American Indians have been underrated and mostly ignored when it comes to the contributions they have made to the world economy, food supply and overall culture..This book makes an American Indian even prouder to be an American Indian and I think every American Indian should read this book..

Rachel Jackson says

Indian Givers delves into a topic probably many Americans already know but have chosen to ignore or repress: the contributions that the first people of this country gave to the world, sometimes unwillingly, for the betterment of the modern society we have today. Author Jack Weatherford does a very thorough job digging into historical research to find just how much we take for granted today was something invented and/or perfected by American Indians.

Everything from agriculture to food to medicine has its roots in American Indian technologies, and so many people are none the wiser for it. I'd heard of some of these contributions myself, but I'd never read anything as detailed into their origins as *Indian Givers* was, which was very informative and impressive. It's not always presented in the best ways, specifically that the book focuses quite a bit on the early years of European discovery and not how (or if, even) those discoveries are still relevant today. I would've preferred more purely political contributions, or at least critical analysis of how the United States government, specifically, incorporated American Indian ideals into their own infrastructures — this is touched on somewhat, but as much as I would've liked.

Plus, parts of the book drag, specifically, when Weatherford starts every single chapter with an anecdote about himself on his journeys to research (or something) for this book. I felt he had a difficult time connecting his own travels and experiences with the research he actually used for the rest of the chapters — he could have broadened the historical context and not included first-person narrative about himself. Consequently it took me several weeks to finish this book because I could barely slog through some of the information he gave.

It is clear Weatherford did extensive research, which shows — and becomes more interesting — in the latter half of the book, where some of the political and economic effect come into play. I particularly liked the part about Indian medicines that were legitimate cures/helps to diseases before Europeans came and wiped them all out with deadlier diseases. Many modern vaccines we have come from Native American uses, which was something I'd heard before but Weatherford made it more clear. And the structure of the U.S. government being based on the Iroquois League was also an insightful tidbit, as were all of the other sections that credited American Indians for the most basic infrastructures we take for granted today — but without their perfection by the Native Americans of this hemisphere, we wouldn't be nearly as advanced as we are.

Zee Huxley says

Indian Givers

How the Indians of the America Transformed the World

By Anthropologist Jack Weatherford.

Ironically the term “Indian giver” is a familiar term is in reference to a person that gives a gift and then takes it back. However, this old adage has nothing to do with the title of this book.

A remarkable read. A groundbreaking book that recovers the fascinating history of the Americas and the crucial contributions that the Indians of the Americas made on a global scale. These include democratic institutions, modern medicine, agriculture, architecture, and ecology. Interestingly, the Indians of the Americas were the first to harvest some sixty percent of foods eaten in the world today. Imagine if you will Italian or Greek food without its tomatoes or the Irish without their potatoes. Chilies, chocolate, corn, beans, squashes, the list goes on. Not to mention the wealth of gold and silver that was taken from the Americas by the Europeans.

My commentary below (apart from the book).

Even though much was given. So much more was taken. Over 500 treaties were made with the Indians of the Americas—and more than 500 broken.

Flash forward to this twenty-first century—the fall of 2016—North Dakota. Tribes of Native Americans from around the country gathering together, protesting an oil pipeline that will run through the heart of the U.S., crossing many waterways with the potential of damaging the largest aquifer in the country. The Native Americans are the heart of this country. They view this land as sacred and are working to protect it. There is no “other” planet. This is it. We all need to appreciate this sacredness before its too late.

Pray for peace, love, and understanding,

Zee Huxley

www.zeehuxley.com

Ngaire says

A great read - this book really held my attention. I had no idea what incredible agriculturalists Indians were, or that their styles of government had such a profound effect on the political structures of the US. I didn't even know that caucus is an Iroquois word. This was very eyeopening - and totally made me want to know more about these incredible peoples. Full of interesting facts - the Inca's roads through South America are still probably the best roads in many countries, and many of their structures are still the most sturdy. Kind of made me sad though - the Indians of the Americas are so marginalised, and we've lost so much knowledge and culture.

Wade says

I was completely unaware that so many prominent European thinkers and writers (including Karl Marx) were

so profoundly influenced by the American Indian form of government and political practices, especially those of the League of the Iroquois. The example of American Indian governance was a true catalyst that helped America's Founding Fathers think outside the box, beyond the Old World monarchies and limited attempts and outlines of democracy by the Greeks. The League of the Iroquois provided a living, well-functioning example of a true democracy in action that our founders were able to study through personal interaction and immersion over several decades leading up to our independence.

Carol says

This title should read, Without the Indians of the Americas, we would still be in the Dark Ages.

Brie says

Very well written and super eye-opening! Many times reading this book I had one of those “that sounds familiar... that makes sense!” moments. I was able to connect the information in this book with what I know of world (largely European) history. The story of Native Americans as told by Weatherford is both enlightening and sad, and as the book concludes: the Americas were found 500 years ago but have yet to be discovered.

Fun moment reading this: written in the early 90s, Weatherford mentions the American quinoa crop as mostly unknown to Western people. Now, quinoa is ubiquitous!

Diane says

I was very interested in this book and it was a big disappointment. The topics are treated in a very superficial way and the author tries too hard to prove his points. I felt he had an offhand and unbalanced approach to the information.

I also kept coming across blunt references that I questioned. For example, early on (p. 28) he states that the Hudson's Bay Company is “the oldest company in the world ...continuously operating since May 2, 1670.” Since I was aware that the Cambridge University Press has been operating since the 16th century, his assertion made me question his other facts. Of course, if he means oldest in the new world or oldest commercial trading company, he may be correct. Later (p 226-229) he kept referring to the cure of malaria in the world. Malaria is hardly in the cured category and is still one of the major causes of death. Quinine may treat malaria but I don't think it is a cure. These may be picky on my part, but he is so offhand about his facts, that I was uncomfortable believing what he said about other things.

That said, I did enjoy the two chapters on farming. And, I enjoyed finding out how beaver hats were made. My favorite sentence in the book: According to the Hurons, the Europeans lost their freedom in their incessant use of “thine” and “mine”

There must be better written books on this topic.

Dr.J.G. says

The title of the book has two inaccuracies amounting to lies, to begin with.

First and foremost, they are NOT Indian. The European migrants knew this, Columbus knew this, and for sake of keeping a falsehood so Columbus would not risk his reputation or lose his head the sailors working with him who all knew this were sworn to say the opposite. Everyone knew Columbus had not reached India, and everyone nevertheless insists on calling the natives of western continent "Indian", perpetrating a lie, not merely an inaccuracy.

This is doubly racist, since it deprives the said natives of their own identity to begin with, and also no one has asked India if there is any connection whatsoever between the people that lived in a land across the world and India (yes, of ancient trade and exchange of skills, but not populations or identity). The falsehood dumps all non European non African non Oriental non Islamic people into one basket, a huge racism of an assumed hierarchy and separating the high and the low and the others nowhere. It is stupid, racist, ignorant, false, and high time it stopped. High time the natives of the western continent were able to assume their own identity. Unless they wished to claim Indian ancestry and to return to India, that is. Unlikely, since if anything they are connected to Siberia and Mongolia and Pacific islands, which makes far more sense.

Which brings one to another racist imposition of a name, that of the continent. Vespucci Amerigo was one of the sailors who supposedly discovered the continent, and to impose his name on the continent, not even asking a native what they called their land, is supreme racism. America is a racist term by definition.

And then, to belatedly allow that the natives "contributed" to US and "transformed the world" - hollow, they did not massacre all newly arriving migrants, in fact they helped the migrants settle like all good neighbours do, and so they in fact are the founding stone of the edifice in every way! That is only in the north, while in the southern and central parts the migrants were plundering marauders who destroyed everything precious in name of faith. "They had astronomy, architecture, arts, crafts; European migrants had guns and gunpowder" is perhaps a rephrasing of the famous assessing of the encounter, but pretty good to give the idea.

Of course they were givers! They had a superior system in terms of environment as well, which is only recognised now that the fear of global warming and fear about a lack of future for humanity has made some - not all - people do a double take! In addition to what others failed to recognise, they also had potato and tomato and chillies and chocolate, and where in the world can people do without every one of these indeed! Germans post wwi survived on potato as do poor in many a societies even now.

For that matter, the huge (and mostly unnecessary - who ever died or fell sick for lack of face paint?) cosmetic industry of west derived its origin and ideology from an oriental culture of China and Japan where faces of Geishas and upper class women were painted masks, which got copied to Europe for fashion, while the system of administrative examinations and system generally was copied by British and integrated into their own structure of governance.

A good amount of vocabulary in English is borrowed from Arabic, Persian and India, while Latin and Greek are younger siblings if not daughters of Sanskrit (and therefore the ease of India in European languages beginning with English), realised and perforce admitted by Europe long before the present era of denial.

And of course Africa, with her stolen raw materials (like other colonised lands) and kidnapped men and women (unlike other lands) that made US prosper before the civil war dismantled the slavery and dislocated the now free ex-slaves once again, with equality still a faraway goal and animosity of ex-slavers growing to high pitch. Solution? Liberia? Workers work for food and return, much like Germans would like Turks and others to do, is the pleasure of pale colour races?

Gratitude at the very least is way past due. Acknowledgement likewise. Yes, the world gave and Europe received and forgot to say thank you. These belated acknowledgements are better than never, and what next? An equal status? For the givers who received only victimisation in return?

Brian Andersen says

This book made some good points but got bogged down in the minutia. Then it seemed to go off on a Marxist tangent. While I don't disagree that Marx and other revolutionaries that followed were influenced by the Iroquois confederacy, I think the author spent too much time on it and seemed to be promoting it. I did enjoy reading about how the discovery of America changed the world economy. It also never really occurred to me that the riches found in many old European churches and castles were all pillaged from the New World. I'll give it three stars for research alone.

Janice L. says

Overall, "Indian Givers" was a good book and seemingly well researched. Some of it drags, but some chapters read well. He gives many, many examples of the contributions of food, medicine, and philosophy that have contributed to world culture, but sometimes fails to acknowledge the parallels that developed in the rest of the world. For example, Mr. Weatherford extols the design and construction of the Inca roads, but fails to recognize that the Romans created an equally intricate paved road system much earlier. Ingenuity is world-wide, but is geared towards the problems at hand. The primary criticism I have of this book is when he makes broad, over-reaching statements such as on page 58 when he says, "...without American precious metals and methods of processing, the industrial revolution would never have spread to Europe." The Industrial Revolution would eventually have come as society progressed. It may have originated in Europe or been imported from Asia (where the Chinese considered the Europeans as barbarians", or from Africa. It may have evolved differently or on a different time scale, but I believe it would have happened.

All in all, I recommend "Indian Givers" as a good book to read, consider, and draw your own conclusion.

Jeanne says

For some reason this was not an easy read for me, even though I found the subject matter very interesting. The numerous contributions native Americans have given to the world we live in is beyond impressive.

David R. says

A very fine treatment of Native American contributions in the realms of agriculture and pharmacology, and of abuse of native cultures. The other material is rather uneven, and in the case of politics and economy is a reach: reminds me of the old Soviet schtick about the Russians having invented everything. The footnotes are sparing and the bibliography is awfully thin, suggesting that Weatherford may be a little more imaginative than scholarship would demand.

Ushan says

How did the Indians of the Americas transform the world? They domesticated potatoes and maize that became staple foods of large areas of Eurasia and Africa; they discovered the healing power of the cinchona bark against malaria and of berries against scurvy; their labor mined the silver that financed the commercial revolution in early modern Europe; their political organization influenced European philosophers from Montaigne to Marx and Engels.

Christy says

We used this in teacher training on how to teach accurately about Native Americans in social studies classrooms. Weatherford has so many examples that are interesting for teacher and student alike. So often, teachers don't think to prepare young students before Native Americans come as guests, and kids ask questions like "where's your feathers?" and are disappointed and even disdainful if they're not dressed in traditional garb or talk about Indian affairs instead of doing war whoops.
