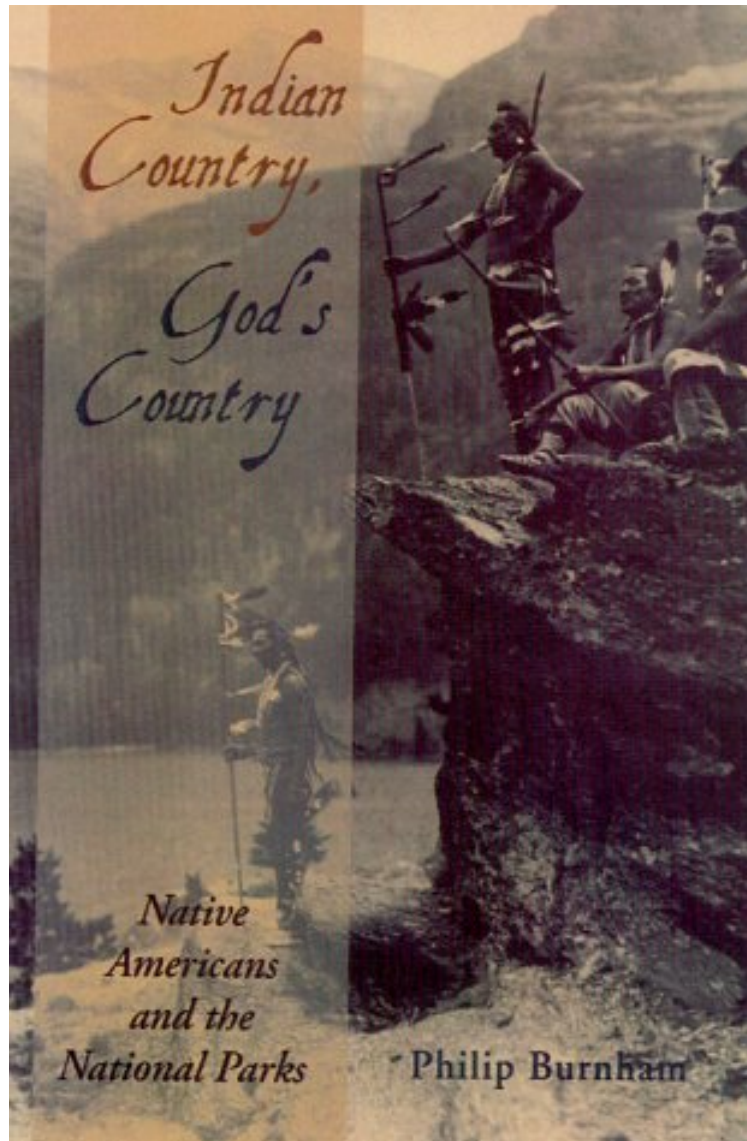


Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans And The National Parks

Philip Burnham

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Philip Burnham : Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans And The National Parks before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Indian Country, God's Country: Native Americans And The National Parks:

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful. A superb contribution to Native American studies. By Midwest Book Review Indian Country, God's Country is a freelance expose of development histories of selected national parks

and Indian reservations, including Glacier National Park and the Blackfoot Reservation, The Badlands and Pine Ridge, Mesa Verde and the Utes, Grand Canyon and the Havasupai and Death Valley and the Shoshone. Obtaining information from a variety of sources including personal visits and interviews as well as research, author Burnham traces beginnings of the National Park Service, Congressional attempts to mainstream Indian expansion of the parks frequently at the cost of reservation land, and the parks as they are seen today from both tribal representatives and government employees, superintendents and rangers. It is a series of tales rife with conflict. The few successes are carefully described as "hard-won compromises that have given tribes more autonomy and greater cultural recognition in recent years, while highlighting stubborn conflicts that continue to mark relations between tribes and parks (cover flap)." Of all the sites explored, Burnham is most optimistic about the seed of justice sprouting in Death Valley, ironically. The Shoshone with spokesperson Pauline Esteves has reinstated interest in use of the Shoshone language and also learned to use publicity and other strategies to encourage sovereignty and empowerment of the Timbisha. "From the Sun Tours transportation contract at Glacier to the Shoshone claim for a land base at Death Valley to the Havasupai struggle for land in the Grand Canyon to the Oglala fight for development in the Badlands, the Park Service has never surrendered anything in disputes over Indian land without a protracted struggle (p. 309)." There are many unanswered questions on both sides. There is no doubt that continued bargaining will ensue. The power of a book like *Indian Country, God's Country* is the light it sheds on the ongoing struggle, in all its complex history. Nancy Lorraine, Reviewer4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Interesting facts, but unclear on the bigger picture. By Arthur Digbee Whites treat Indians badly. If you think that park rangers are saints who protect America's natural and cultural heritage-well, don't forget that these rangers are almost all white, and whites treat Indians badly. Keep these things in mind and nothing in this book will surprise you. Your reaction to the first paragraph of this review will probably determine your reaction to this book. The book does a good job documenting the National Park Service's (NPS) mistreatment of its Native American neighbors (and previous residents), focusing on Death Valley (Tishimba band of Shoshone), Mesa Verde (Ute and others), Grand Canyon (Havasupai and others), Badlands (Oglala Sioux) and Glacier National Parks (Blackfoot, Salish and Kootenai). But it's not clear to me why Burnham wanted to tell this story, beyond his sense of outrage as he learned more about the subject. We know that white people do bad things to Indians, we know that the NPS consists of white people, and most of us can complete that syllogism. Burnham doesn't help us go much beyond this, and doesn't offer up any kind of overall argument. For example, Burnham doesn't attempt to decide whether the NPS is better or worse than other whites, or whether it's become better or worse over time. (The last part of the book suggests that the NPS is better than most, and getting somewhat better over time.) He doesn't offer up any real solutions, though for (unexplained) reasons he likes the changes at Death Valley more than he does, say, the successes of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai or the Ute Mountain Utes. Instead of reasoned argument, he manages to give us sustained outrage. All too often, this outrage is supported mostly by his choice of adjectives to describe the facts. The book is not without its virtues. It does provide a lot of historical facts about Native Americans and these parks. Burnham also conducted quite a few interviews of park officials and Natives around these parks. So there is a lot of information about the subject collected here, some of it clearly hard-won. The book is well-written, and moves along well. But it could have been much more.

Historian Philip Burnham traces the complex and still changing relationship between Native Americans and the national parks from the earliest years of the National Park Service to the latest Congressional initiatives. He recounts how Indians were first removed from their traditional lands (which sub

"Combining highly charged prose and convincing evidence, Burnham relates how five parks were partially formed from the Native American estate." -- Choice Magazine, September 2000 "It's not just Indians who need to heed the lessons of this book and the ultimate illusion of ownership." -- Christian Science Monitor, July 27, 2000 "This book is a well-written treatment of a subject barely touched on by historians of the American West." -- Washington Times, July 23, 2000 "Those who have never realized how our national parks benefited from the mistreatment of American Indians should...read it." -- Salt Lake Tribune, October 8, 2000 About the Author PHILIP BURNHAM is a teacher, writer, and historian based in Washington, D.C. He has a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of New Mexico, has been a correspondent for *Indian Country Today*, and has published several books about American history and culture. He currently teaches at George Mason University.