

Daniel M. Cobb. *Say We Are Nations: Documents of Politics and Protest in Indigenous America since 1887.* H. Eugene and Lillian Youngs Lehman Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 316 pp. \$32.50, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-2480-8.

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Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

How have Native American activists, officers, and community leaders; Native organizations; and Native intellectuals and academics addressed, challenged, protested, or appealed to US and international authorities to take responsibility, recognize, or act upon sovereignty issues that affected specific Native communities or Native peoples in general? Daniel M. Cobb takes up this question in *Say We Are Nations*, an anthology of Native-authored primary sources sampling the history of Native American political activism between 1887 and 2015. The author presents a blend of Native voices that offer an alternative political view to the mainstream one on many Native-related issues that have characterized the history of federal Native policy and politics in this time span. These issues include nation building, the recognition of sovereignty, the respect of treaty rights, self-government, citizenship, land tenure, the improvement of Native people's living conditions inside and outside the reservations, racism and discrimination, identity, and social justice. Cobb, an associate professor of American studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, grounds his expertise on long-standing research about Native American activism that has produced such works as his and Loretta Fowler's 2007 edited collection *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and*

Activism since 1900 and his 2008 *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty*, which are known to scholars in the field, thus making him qualified to tackle this topic.

Say We Are Nations contains an acknowledgments section, brief introduction, fifty-five documents, brief conclusion, endnotes, bibliography, and index. The fifty-five documents that Cobb selected are each a few pages long and are grouped into five chronologically consecutive periods: the Dawes Act era of 1887-1924; the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) era of 1934-54; the termination, urbanization, and civil rights era of 1954-68; the self-determination era of 1969-94; and the present era, 1994-2015. This structure is logical, effective, and reader-friendly. A longer introduction would have allowed for a more robust framework to support the main content of the volume; on the other hand, the author situates this work well within the existing literature on the topic.

Cobb's stated goal for this volume is to employ reflexive and intersubjective historiography—a recent methodological approach in the humanities and social sciences that gives greater consideration to the position of the author and the researcher-researched relationships as integral parts of any scholarly product—to showcase indigenized ideas, meanings, and perspectives on the

history of Native American politics and policies in order to provide an “alternative narrative of Native activism” (p. 3). At the same time, Cobb refrains from offering his own perspective on the documents, and rather compels readers to engage in their own “intellectual excavation ... and interpretive work” (pp. 5-6). The author opts for an unguided direct read over a readily interpreted analysis of words by Native activists and leaders, including Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) Queen Lili’uokalani’s 1899 appeal to US Congress to allow a new constitution for the Kanaka Maoli Nation, Cayuga Chief Deskaheh’s 1923 appeal to the League of Nations in Geneva against Canada’s aggressive assimilationist policy, Vine Deloria Jr.’s 1965 testimony “We Were Here as Independent Nations” before the US Senate, and chairperson of the Gwich’in Steering Committee Sarah Agnes James’s 2011 call against oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The approach represents both a strength and a weakness of the book. On the one hand, it constitutes a strength in that such greater interpretive autonomy allows readers to create their own interpretive threads in order to link the documents. Researchers will also appreciate the selection of documents as well as the ample list of additional references accompanying each chapter, which make this book a valuable starting resource toward different research paths. Some of the documents included in this collection—for instance, the National Congress of American Indians’ *Declaration of Indian Rights* of 1954 and the Indians of All Tribes’ *Manifesto* of 1969—have widely circulated among scholars in the field, while most of the others are testimony of Cobb’s meticulous archival research. On the other hand, the author’s “very low profile” necessarily, albeit unintentionally, restricts the target audience to scholars of Native American, civil rights, and governmental policy issues as well as their students, while placing the book’s scope somewhere be-

yond the full reach of much of the general readership.

Each document is preceded by an introductory paragraph that places it in its historical context, presents the author briefly, contains endnotes with references to further materials, and ends with a “consider how the author discusses...” sentence that loosely points the reader toward an interpretive key of the themes presented. Although useful for placing each document in its historical and political context as well as introducing its authors, the limited information contained in each introductory paragraph likely prevents nonspecialist readers from capturing the full significance of each contribution and requires them to engage in additional research to understand it. Many of the book’s points may get “lost in translation” to the uninformed reader who might likely not possess much, if any, knowledge of and background on key elements of the post-1887 history of Native policies and activism, such as the Dawes Act, the Cherokee Freedmen’ case, the Indian New Deal, the Red Power era, and the Cobell case, among others. Certainly, many general readers may be compelled to make the effort, which then would serve one of the main purposes of the book, namely, to stimulate readers’ interpretive paths. Yet the author may be overly optimistic in trusting much of general readership to engage in additional, unguided background research. Thus, the current format may run the risk of falling onto unfertile land, thus diluting the power and purpose of its message. Of course, this is generally not a problem for scholars knowledgeable about Native American issues who can connect the dots when those links are not ready-made. *Say We Are Nations* appears to be a resource best suited for both researchers and instructors of undergraduate and graduate courses, as it provides a solid starting point toward prolific, eye-opening discussions, when coupled with further investigations, readings, and explanations.

On the bright side, the book is effective in inserting Native activism in the fabric of national politics, thus underscoring its relevance beyond the scope of the specific issue that each document relates to. Interestingly, the book's release in 2015 preceded the events related to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) crisis, one of the principal forums where Native (alongside non-Native) activism has manifested on a national scale in current times. One may say that *Say We Are Nations* provides a valuable framework to allow the placing of the NODAPL movement, and all future struggle for Native rights, in context with the centennial history of Native political action.

The documents reveal many different, sometimes opposing, views that Native activists had on such themes as the US Citizenship Act and the IRA. An example of this is the juxtaposition of Ho-Chunk reformer and Indian Service employee Henry Roe Cloud's words in favor of the IRA (chapter 10, "As One Indian to Another") with Lakota delegates from Standing Rock and Rosebud in the Dakotas George White Bull and Oliver Prue's opposite view on the act (chapter 11, "Fooled So Many Times") in 1934. *Say We Are Nations* is very effective in showcasing the complexity and multidimensionality of Native political discourses. The documents also reveal the change of tone—from early deference to later cooperation, from skepticism to more recent confrontation—in Native activists' actual or virtual engagement with Senate committees, governmental agencies, and, more broadly, mainstream America. Interestingly, Cobb also includes documents that address less explored themes, such as the racism experienced by Native peoples in Jim Crow's South, thus adding successfully to the representation of Native political experiences in post-Dawes Act America. The documents contained in this anthology highlight the ability of Native leaders and authors to make use of Euro-American principles, arguments, and political language to demonstrate the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and irregularities in governmental policies and actions directed to the

Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native populations. The activists' numerous invitations to the government to abide by its own principles of law and legitimacy by respecting the signed treaties with tribal nations is a recurrent example of this.

Among the strengths of this volume is also the successful attempt to give voice to Native people and their representations of politics and policies, which are often alternative, if not opposite, to the mainstream ones. The book contributes to the ongoing academic and extra-academic Native efforts to regain control of the historical narrative that, until recently, has been the monopoly of the government and the settler-colonial society.

One weakness of the book is the repetitive nature of some documents, which sometimes offer just another example of the same idea or action trend, thus dampening the reading flow and the reader's self-interpretive effort. This is particularly evident if one approaches this volume as a single narrative to be read from start to finish. On the contrary, when seen as a collection of documents to be retrieved independently, the volume's rich table of contents is a valuable asset for research and education purposes.

Finally, there is a small point that many readers who are familiar with Native American issues may likely catch. The map of Indigenous America provided at the beginning of the book is incomplete, as it only shows a partial number of the US-based tribal nations. In addition, the author does not indicate how the reader should use this map; thus, one can assume that it only serves the purpose of providing a general geographic overview of Native presence in the United States. In this format, though, the map is uninformative, at best, and deceiving, at worst.

In sum, Cobb has produced a well-researched, valuable resource for scholars and educators in history, anthropology, and Native American studies. *Say We Are Nations* is a useful start point for researchers who explore Native activism, Native

nationalism and nation building, and the history of Native-government relations. It is also well suited for adoption in Native American undergraduate and graduate courses, and can fit well into American studies and civil rights history syllabi. Given its format and organization, the book is only valuable to general readers who are willing to perform additional background research to both frame the documents in their historical periods and understand their origin, authorship, purpose, context, and outcomes. Because of this, *Say We Are Nations* is a good read, but not for everyone.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-amindian>

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