

Redhorse Bennett, C. (2022). *Our Fight Has Just Begun: Hate Crimes and Justice in Native America*. University of Arizona Press. 232 pp. USD 29.95 (pbk), USD 100.00 (hbk). ISBN: 978-0816541676.

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Our Fight Has Just Begun: Hate Crimes and Justice in Native America provides an in-depth analysis of the history and current situation of hate crimes against Native American people. The book begins with the preface written by the author Cheryl Redhorse Bennett, a citizen of the Navajo Nation, a descendent of the Comanche Nation – a scholar, professor and activist, who details her knowledge and experience with anti-Indianism, racism, hate, injustice, and violence from the shopping mall to interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Using a mixed-method and multidisciplinary approach, this book combines a decolonized framework and Western knowledge and methods. The author gives explicit reasons for writing the book, including raising awareness of hate crimes against Native Americans, honouring the victims and survivors, filling the gap in the literature, redefining hate crime, and recommending a way of ameliorating the racial conflict in the US. Importantly, this book provides a call to action and hope for social change.

Our Fight Has Just Begun brings together stories with true people, statistics, pictures, and more, to give a comprehensive perspective on these issues. The book focuses on the Four Corners area, which is a region in the Southwestern US, including Southwest Colorado, Southeast Utah, Northeast Arizona, and Northwest New Mexico. The Four Corners region has within it various Native American tribal groups, including the Navajo Nation (which is the largest group), the Hopi, Ute, and Zuni tribal Nations. The region has faced

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a lot of hate towards the Native people, an example of which is “Indian rolling”, which is outlined in Chapter One, whereby the author compares it to the lynching of African Americans. “Indian rolling” describes the assault of Native Americans by non-Indians in border towns. As documented by the author, the victims of these premeditated, bias-motivated attacks often are blamed for these attacks, especially if they were intoxicated during the attack. The lack of attention and care that Native American victims receive has influenced Dr Bennett’s motivation to write this book.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with Navajo people who had experienced hate crimes in Farmington, New Mexico. This town borders a Navajo Reservation and has a history of hate crimes against Native Americans, including a massacre. This history has been documented in the Farmington Report, which was first written by the New Mexico Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights in 1975 and then again in 2005, which showed mostly superficial changes were ever made. The Farmington Report recommendations did not engage in addressing structural and systemic issues, which enabled the continued hate crimes against Native Americans. The first report was written a year after Three Navajo men were murdered, with their bodies found in different locations near Farmington in Chokecherry Canyon. The bodies of Benjamin Benally, John Harvey, and David Ignacio were beaten, burned, and mutilated.

Chapter Four details the federal government’s involvement in the investigation of the murders and how the judicial decisions and recommendations in the Farmington Report failed the Navajo community. The outcome of the murders was that the perpetrators were sent to a youth home due to the belief that they could be rehabilitated. Understandably, after the killers were let off with no criminal convictions, many Native Americans were upset with the outcome of the case and the continued lack of accountability for those who killed Native Americans.

Dr Bennett shares the racist history that has placed Indigenous people in the country in a cycle of violence that has continued through many generations since colonization. Through its inadequacy to respond to hate crimes, the justice system plays an active part in the hate and violence that Native Americans experience. Legislation such as the *Civil Rights Act* of 1968, the *Hate Crime Statistics Act* of 1990, and the *Local Law Enforcement Hate*



Crimes Prevention Act of 2009 have been introduced as an attempt to provide equal rights and enforcement of hate crimes. However, despite the efforts of the federal government to ensure local law enforcement agencies report hate crimes to a national database, many departments have refused to report hate crimes, or only partly report such incidents. Due to a lack of consensus on hate crime definitions, Dr Bennett creates a new five-level classification system, with level one including mostly property crime and level five being the most serious involving murder and non-negligent manslaughter.

There has been an increase in hate crime incidents and racist rhetoric in the West, most notably from the former president of the US, Donald Trump, who is “condoning hate speech” through his derogatory rhetoric (Bennett, 2022, p. 19). The author also connects the injustices that happen to other groups in the country, including the hate and violence that occurred before and during the Civil Rights era to African Americans and the unrest that occurred, and the hate against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. This book came at a time when missing Indigenous people have been finally given some attention by the media and government, after centuries of neglect (Ficklin et al., 2022) as part of a larger movement for government reform, especially within the criminal justice system.

The book provides ample context on the history of hate and racism experienced by Native Americans for the average person to understand the complexities and provides enough nuance and detail for a person with expertise in crime and law to learn more. It is important for any American to read as we often forget that this land was violently stolen from Nations like the Navajo and that we benefit at the cost of Indigenous peoples who continue to suffer. While reading the book, I connected to various aspects and perspectives of the stories; as a person with European and British ancestry, it is important to acknowledge the wrongs of my ancestors and learn how they have impacted the Indigenous peoples of the lands that my ancestors and I have occupied. This responsibility gives me a duty to learn how best to support Indigenous rights and equity. As my family is of mixed heritage, including descendants of enslaved Africans and Native Americans, I also have personal experiences with the generational trauma that continues to impact communities and the violent discrimination that is still prevalent in the country.

This book details information that any informed citizens should know especially considering most of our history classes from primary school to higher education gave an inaccurate and softened perspective to the ‘finding’ of America and promoted stories of Thanksgiving and Pocahontas but overlooked the enslavement, kidnapping, rape, torture, and genocidal war against Indigenous peoples. The settler-colonial hierarchy that was established when the Europeans came to America is still part of our communities today, and the examples of hate speech and violence against Native Americans within this book are a testament to that.

Our Fight Has Just Begun provides the reader with a deep understanding of how racial violence towards Native Americans is entrenched systemically and how the continued power of white supremacy impacts Native Americans. The author answers the questions she set out at the start of the book with empirical support and well-told stories. Through sharing stories of both hate and survival and recommending grassroots movements and governmental reform, the author provides hope for a better future, in which racial hate and injustice are reduced, and future generations can live in a more just society. The book succeeds in filling a much-needed hole in research and knowledge about Native Americans, who are often overlooked in our society, especially in criminology and criminal justice research.

References

- Ficklin, E., Tehee, M., Killgore, R. M., Isaacs, D., Mack, S., & Ellington, T. (2022). Fighting for our sisters: Community advocacy and action for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. *Journal of Social Issues*, 78(1), 53-78.