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NAS 200

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September 3, 2017

A Comparison of Chronologies and Their Simultaneity: The History of Indian Nations

Separate chronological timelines exist for the same events in history--each developed from a different point of view. In the case of Native American history, we have studied three separate timelines. One timeline is composed by an American lawyer working for the American Civil Liberties Union, a graduate of Ivy League colleges--Stephen L. Pevar. Another timeline is composed by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), and is included in *An Introduction to Indian Nations on the United States*. The third "timeline" is a wikipedia page that is authored by several people. The issue with having three separate timelines is in their simultaneity, or lack thereof. In one timeline you may see a specific era defined within a different set of years than another timeline. This is an issue because it represents an underlying disagreement between the authors of the timelines, clearly both authors have different ideas of what happened and when, which begs the question: who do we believe? The best answer is neither or both. To have some concept of history it is best to take into account all sides of the story.

The timeline authored by Pevar has an 'era' that is not included in either of the other timelines-- "1787-1828: Agreement Between Equals". This short era is representative of the tone of the entire timeline, Pevar seems to be trying to make an uncomfortable period of time in history seem less horrific than it truly was. In the timeline authored by indigenous peoples the only era that may include Pevar's "Agreement Between Equals" is the "Colonial Period" defined

by the NCAI as a “proliferation of European colonies”. This period description acknowledges colonial governments’ treatment of Indian tribes as foreign governments and efforts to make peace. Overall the specific dates have a tendency to shift between each timeline, as well as tone.

The tone of each timeline can be easily conveyed through differences in language and framing of events. The following words are representative of Pevar’s tone for the allotment and assimilation era, from 1887-1934: “assimilation”, “extinguish”, “erase”, “force”, “surplus”, “disrupted”, “destroyed”, “taken away”, “leased”, “conferred”. Compare these to this short list from NCAI’s description of the same period: “assimilate”, “dictate”, “forced conversion”, “taken”, “surplus”, “without compensation”. Pevar’s words take on a passive and dry descriptive tone, whereas the NCAI’s succinct description of the period conveys the injustice of this era. Pevar also uses “surplus” as if it is a defined and accepted term, whereas the NCAI actually puts surplus in quotes, as if to say “The colonial government considered land they took from indigenous peoples to be a surplus of their own land.” The wikipedia page seems almost to combine Pevar’s and the NCAI’s descriptions, providing longer, more contextual descriptions of each period.

I consider the wikipedia page to be the best out of the three, because it uses the same tone of the NCAI in stating facts and events in a tone conveying some sort of moral disagreement with colonial governments, while including some of the factual statements Pevar had that the NCAI did not. The wikipedia page also provides certain insights as to why or why not certain policies did not work: “Allotment did not work, because is was not something Indians were used to. They did not view the land as something to own. Instead, they viewed it as their home.”

(Wikipedia, Federal Indian Policy) This brief discussion at the end of the allotment and

assimilation section offers some insight into the Indians' point of view, rather than a dry denotation of events and policies.

Simultaneity of chronologies is not so much an issue as it is an educational tool. It offers insight into the attitudes and perceptions of the authors, on both sides of historical events.

Works Cited

1. "Federal Indian Policy." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 31 Aug. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Indian_Policy.
2. Pevar, Stephen L. *The Rights of Indians and Tribes. American Indian Historical Timeline*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
3. *An Introduction to Indian Nations in the United States. A Brief History of Federal Policy Toward Indian Nations*. National Congress of American Indians.