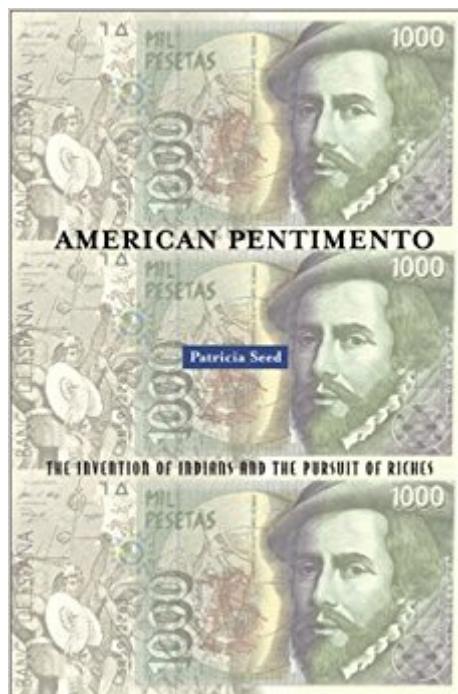


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American Pentimento: The Invention Of Indians And The Pursuit Of Riches (Public Worlds)



Synopsis

Americans like to see themselves as far removed from their European ancestors' corrupt morals, imperial arrogance, and exploitation of native resources. Yet, as Patricia Seed argues in *American Pentimento*, this is far from the truth. The modern regulations and pervading attitudes that control native rights in the Americas may appear unrelated to colonial rule, but traces of the colonizers' cultural, religious, and economic agendas nonetheless remain. Seed likens this situation to a *pentimento*-a painting in which traces of older compositions or alterations become visible over time-and shows how the exploitation begun centuries ago continues today. In her analysis, Seed examines how European countries, primarily England, Spain, and Portugal, differed in their colonization of the Americas. She details how the English appropriated land, while the Spanish and Portuguese attempted to eliminate "barbarous" religious behavior and used indigenous labor to take mineral resources. Ultimately, each approach denied native people distinct aspects of their heritage. Seed argues that their differing effects persist, with natives in former English colonies fighting for land rights, while those in former Spanish and Portuguese colonies fight for human dignity. Seed also demonstrates how these antiquated cultural and legal vocabularies are embedded in our languages, popular cultures, and legal systems, and how they are responsible for current representations and treatment of Native Americans. We cannot, she asserts, simply attribute the exploitation of natives' resources to distant, avaricious colonists but must accept the more disturbing conclusion that it stemmed from convictions that are still endemic in our culture. Wide-ranging and essential to future discussions of the legacies of colonialism, *American Pentimento* presents a radical new approach to history, one which uses paradigms from anthropology and literary criticism to emphasize language as the basis of law and culture. Patricia Seed is professor of history at Rice University. Public Worlds Series, volume 7

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