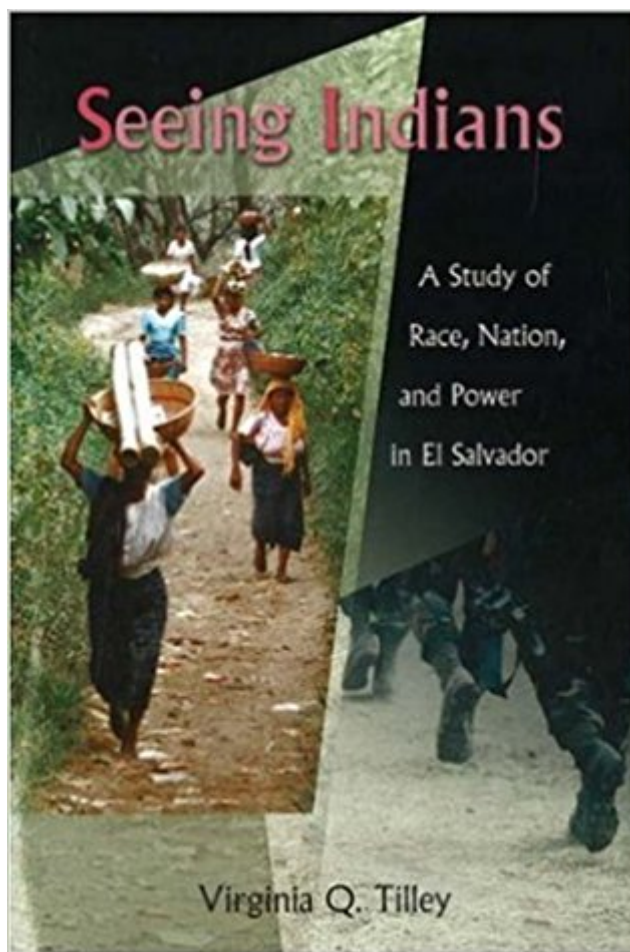


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# Seeing Indians: A Study Of Race, Nation, And Power In El Salvador



## Synopsis

Since the 1930s, government claims and popular thought within El Salvador have held that the country no longer holds any Indian population. *Seeing Indians* explores why this claim has endured despite the existence of substantial indigenous communities within the country's territory. Drawing on history, anthropology, and archaeology, Virginia Tilley delves into the history of Salvadoran racial thought and nation-building to illuminate the political motives for eradicating Indians from the country's national consciousness. Part I draws from the author's own ethnographic research in El Salvador and Guatemala to show how "Indian-ness" has persisted, in contested forms, within El Salvador. Part II traces how the Salvadoran definition of being Indian has been altered to fit within the country's desired image as a racially unified society--and to erase Indians from public records after 1932. The author explains in Part III the motives driving the myth of Indian disappearance and ends with a look at the debate that raged in the 1990s regarding El Salvador's indigenous peoples' attempts to express themselves politically. As Tilley notes, the transnational indigenous rights movement, translated into potent funding leverage by non-indigenous donor agencies, has "actually generated new difficulties for the Salvador indigenous communities and their movements for national recognition by erecting new standards for 'being Indian' that clash with older ideas and local experience."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A cross disciplinary study of the political motives for eradicating indigenous identity in El Salvador.

Virginia Q. Tilley is associate professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York. Among her specializations are ethnic conflict and indigenous peoples and race relations in Latin America. Virginia is now working in Johannesburg, South Africa.

This is a very good informative book, that clarify many doubts about the sociopolitical and economic history of El Salvador.

Throughout most of the twentieth century if you asked mainstream Salvadorans about their country's indigenous populations they would have told you that their country was fully mestizo. Virginia Tilley's remarkable book not only shows that the idea of a country without Indians was patently incorrect, but also why a discourse of ethnic homogeneity was in the interest of the dominant classes. Her discussion of the mechanisms used by the state to make the indigenous minority disappear from the national consciousness is illuminating. In the process of telling the story Tilley provides sophisticated and clear discussions of the conceptual complexities of race and ethnicity. It is not surprising that this excellent work was selected as book of the year by the Central American Conference of Anthropologists in 2006.

We as Salvadorians know that we are of indigenous descent and many of us keep our culture alive, the reason why before the 1990's we didnt outwardly practice our traditional religions our dances etc. is because the government was full of oligarchs who denied our existence. How many statues of Pedro de Alvarado are there in El Salvador??? NONE! You see the celebration of our cultural heritage everywhere from murals to festivals.those who espoused the traditions of our people did not get recognized at a salvadorian independence day celebration until september 15th 2009 thanks to the fact that we have the FMLN in power!!!the speakers of our Pipil language went to fewer than 200 elderly speakers in the 1980's to over 3,000 people most of which are in elementary and high school plus some college students!what we faced in El Salvador was cultural genocide, and denial from the government. In fact last year the census figures were distorted in order to say that 9% of the population is white! that is a complete fabrication because I have been to El Salvador many many times and am from there and a white person is rare!!! the figures should read 10% full blooded Indian!!!! if you dont believe me go to panchimalco, izalco and the remote areas of morazan plus many other places!Naja Ninemi PIPIL tik Cuscatlan! (I AM PIPIL FROM CUSCATLAN!)

This book examines what should be an interesting subject, that El Salvador decided there were no

Indians left and thus read the indigenous people out of history and politics. But when one delves in deeper they find that this is not exactly the case and that some aspect of this book is itself anthropologically dishonest and racist. El Salvador didn't decide that Indians don't exist rather the state decided to stop classifying people as 'Indian' because it saw how racial and ethnic classifications had led to ethnic and racial strife in other places (most recently in Rwanda). Therefore in an attempt to unify the country and perhaps make people realize that class and ideology divide them more than race, race was simply abolished as a definition. It was largely immaterial anyway because most people in EL Salvador were, like Mexico, of mixed ancestry and racial consciousness was mostly a western invention. Therefore the attempt of this book to go back and 're-create' race in order to make people identify themselves by skin color and thus encourage racism, is quite strange for a book that purports to think the very policy was racist. Race is largely a western construct invented in the wake of Darwinism. Rather than critique El Salvador the country should be praised for ending racial division and instead enshrining tolerance, which is why the country never suffered the tragedies of Guatemala and elsewhere. Seth J. Frantzman

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