

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

2009

Book Review: *Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development* By Sebastian Felix Braun

Ken Zontek

Yakima Valley Community College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Zontek, Ken, "Book Review: *Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development* By Sebastian Felix Braun" (2009). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1001.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1001>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development. By Sebastian Felix Braun. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. xii + 271 pp. Maps, photographs, tables, references, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Swiss-born University of North Dakota anthropologist Felix Sebastian Braun focuses on the recent development of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation's bison herd program by tracing the origins, implementation, and demise of Pte Hca Ka, a corporation designed to establish a sizeable bison presence on the reservation for a variety of sociocultural and economic reasons. *Buffalo Inc.*'s 14 chapters roughly divide into three parts, each of which includes a chapter specifically focused on Pte Hca Ka along with contextualizing commentary chapters.

Braun first recounts the evolution of the reservation as well as the bison cooperative movement and bison management, culminating in the incorporation of Pte Hca Ka. The second part, documenting the expansion of Pte Hca Ka, is intertwined with commentary regarding the blending of cultural identity and politics that led to competing visions for the bison corporation while it tried to wrestle with issues of bison ranching, particularly in cattle country. The later chapters explain the reorganization and ultimate collapse of the corporation. Braun surrounds this narrative with several assessments regarding sustainable development and cross-cultural comparisons ranging from reindeer herding and sheep rearing to whaling and Aboriginal land management, although he does not make the obvious comparison with similar bison efforts in Canada. Ultimately, the author summarizes that "economically, the corporation [Pte Hca Ka] was a disaster," yet its "social and cultural impact . . . should not be underestimated. For a time, the corporation was one of the most successful development projects in Indian Country."

Braun proves most insightful when he narrates the story of Pte Hca Ka, providing depth to a phenomenon that "Some people will see as simply another failed project on a reservation." Nonetheless, his work becomes problematic in light of analyses often characterized by regrettable contrasts, e.g., "I knew how to speak Lakota better than many people I encountered, and I think it would be a hugely arrogant assumption of mine to conclude that they must hold fewer Lakota values for that." Readers also must endure some awkward constructions such as "the post-neofunctionalist, post-equilibrium-homeostasis anthropological argument targets. . . ." More vexing concerns emerge from the treatment of sensitive issues on the reservation, and no amount of rhetorical self-authentication vindicates the author, e.g., "the game wardens often discussed the issue with me while

they were stopping by for coffee.” Indeed, Native Americans capably define themselves and make their own assessments.

The last word here comes from a Cheyenne River Lakota scholar intimately associated with bison restoration and referred to in *Buffalo Inc.* Commenting on Braun’s research on the reservation, the resident noted, “He still thinks that anthropologists have the right to determine who among Indians is the legitimate voice . . . and does not have a clue as to how Indians regard the significance of the herd. It is very wasicu-oriented (no disrespect intended).” **Ken Zontek**, *Department of Social Science, Yakima Valley Community College*.