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Book Review: *Kiowa Ethnogeography* By William C. Meadows

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With his latest book Meadows has made a significant contribution to our understanding of Native American ethnogeography. Comprehensive in scope, the work addresses the Kiowa people’s evolving relationship to the land from their initial migration from the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to contemporary life in rural southwestern Oklahoma. Meadows demonstrates that the Kiowa people have maintained a sense of homeland
throughout two episodes of migration, confinement to a reservation, and the allotment of tribal lands in 1901. After providing a useful overview of research on Native American ethnogeography, he delves into a discussion of Kiowa interactions with the environment in the centuries preceding the reservation period. Meadows introduces Kiowa terms for geographic features and traces the interconnections between place names, personal names, and historic events. He also provides an overview of the 19th-century Kiowa cultural landscape, identifying and describing sites of cultural and historical significance.

In subsequent chapters, Meadows explains how the creation of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache reservation and allotment transformed the Kiowa cultural landscape and contributed to the emergence of distinct Kiowa communities. In the process he makes an important contribution to our understanding of Kiowa social organization. During this period, he notes, new cultural forms were introduced, including Christian churches, cemeteries, and allotments. Other locations acquired significance because they served repeatedly as the setting for religious, ceremonial, or social events.

An entire chapter is devoted to the analysis of a reservation-era map created by Black Goose, a prominent 19th-century Kiowa man. The map is one of the few surviving examples of Native American cartography from the Southern Plains. Meadows’s analysis reveals not only valuable information about Kiowa settlement and land use patterns in the reservation period, but also how the threat of allotment may have influenced the map’s production.

The work concludes with a consideration of contemporary Kiowa ethnogeography. Meadows explains that despite a decline in the use of Kiowa language place names, the Kiowas retain an emotional connection to the physical environment. This connection is evident in Kiowa storytelling and in Kiowa attempts to commemorate their long association with the Southern Plains by erecting monuments and signage to identify the location of important events in Kiowa history. In previous chapters, Meadows briefly mentions Kiowa participation in programs at historical sites such as Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Medicine Lodge, Kansas. That the efforts of contemporary Kiowa people to maintain a connection to these and other sites was not elaborated upon further in this final chapter is an unfortunate omission that does not, however, diminish the overall significance of the work.

The appendices contain a wealth of information, including Kiowa names for landforms, watercourses, and meteorological phenomena. Undoubtedly, this is the most comprehensive list of Kiowa place names ever assembled. As such, it represents an important contribution to community members’ ongoing efforts to preserve and revitalize the Kiowa language. Ultimately, Meadows handles his topic with a deft hand, combining statistical analyses of place names to reveal patterns in Kiowa naming practices with lengthy quotes from his consultants that convey the intense emotions connecting them to the Kiowa homeland. The result is a work of such breadth that it possesses relevance for scholars working in a wide variety of disciplines. Michael P. Jordan, Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma.