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Review of The Comanche

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The Comanche. By Willard H. Rollings. Indians of North America, edited by Frank W. Porter III. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. Maps, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, glossary, index. 111 pp. \$15.95.

The Comanches were the only tribe from the Pacific side of the Continental Divide to carve out a permanent niche for themselves on the Plains after the arrival of Europeans and horses in the region. Although they based their life almost totally on the horse, the Comanches remained unique in many ways among plains tribes. They neglected the annual Sun Dance rituals and communal buffalo hunts common to other tribes and failed to develop a system of soldier societies to regulate various tribal activities. Despite the many scholarly studies of them, much needs to be explained about their societies, such as the reasons a poorly organized and unpopulous folk could achieve such success against both other Indians and Europeans.

Willard Rollings's *The Comanche* is not intended to supply new information. Amazingly brief (approximately eighty pages of text), it seems to have two incompatible purposes. First, the publishers advertised the book as intended for sale to public school libraries (its principal L.C. listing is *Comanche Indians—Juvenile Literature*). On the other hand, it is part of a series aimed at giving "all Americans a greater comprehension of the issues and conflicts involving American Indians today." This latter task calls for more than a juvenile format.

Given the publisher's and editor's confusion, it is difficult for the author to find the right style. Thus, one of the best informed scholars in the country on the subject is guilty frequently of "writing down" for the editor's intended audience, apparently seeking "readability." The results can be very banal.

During a war expedition, the war leader . . . directed the group and gave orders. . . . The war leader's authority to tell people what to do lasted only as long as the raid. After the group returned to the band he lost his power to tell others what to do. (p. 27)

The publisher's series format only allowed a few bibliographical citations, and consequently *The Comanche* contains only seven entries, omitting, for example, William T. Hagan's masterful *United States-Comanche Relations*. Factual errors are few; omissions much more frequent. Fewer than ten pages are devoted to the last one hundred years of Comanche history. One simple miscalculation needs correction. The Comancheria contained many times the "24,000 square miles" given on p. 29. The 24,000 figure might be approximately accurate for the Llano Estacado, but the Comancheria included many other geographical areas. (See the map on p. 25.)

The Comanche does have its positive aspects. It provides a factually accurate introduction to the subject that avoids the tendency of many writers to concentrate solely on Comanche-Texan relations. Rollings gives a better description of Comanche-Spanish relations than many much more ambitious works. The volume's illustrations are both numerous and exceedingly well chosen. One hopes Rollings will eventually write the type of study of which he is capable.

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