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## Review of *Addictions and Native Americans* by Laurence Armand French

Benson Tong  
*Wichita State University*

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**Addictions and Native Americans.** Laurence Armand French. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000. ix + 180 pp. Notes, bibliographical references, index. \$64.95 cloth.

Notwithstanding the title, this short book focuses largely on health issues arising from alcoholism in the indigenous population of North America. The evidence overwhelmingly points to this particular substance abuse as the number-one killer among Native Americans, accounting for the four leading causes of death: accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, suicide, and

homicide. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which plagues infants with physical and psychological problems, is another effect of Indian alcoholism.

Psychologist Laurence Armand French argues that such maladies stem from psychocultural marginality. American Indians socialized within the Euro-American, Protestant ethic often have little appreciation for traditional epistemological methodology. A Native world-view centering on an ethos of harmony—respect for and cooperation with nature and humankind—controlled pre-contact substance use. But contact with Europeans, followed by colonization, disrupted and destroyed traditional customs. The changing context—which included the debilitating health of Indians suffering from diseases, war, and privation; urbanization that ruptured kinship networks; and the loss of political power—undermined the practice of cultural norms regulating the use of psychoactive substances. Almost the entire first third of the book covers these well-known arguments, which French states repeatedly.

French's underlying assumption—one he shares with many of his professional co-workers in this field—is that Native Americans could not adapt to Euro-American society. Such scholars and health care practitioners sometimes assume that Native American cultures can only exist in two ways: either as cohesively traditional or crushed by the arrival of a Euro-American competitive ethos. A good number of acculturated Native Americans who attended government boarding schools, however, grew up as cultural brokers who mediated between the two worlds for the betterment of their peoples.

Cultural revitalization along with tribal self-determination constitutes the panacea for the existing ills. French points out that Native clinicians recommend culture-relevant prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies for their clients. But United States laws constricting Indian religious practices or proscribing such treatments in the past, such as the use of peyote rituals, have blocked the expansion of such an approach in combating substance abuse. Traditional sweat lodge purification, vision quests, and Sun Dance rituals are tribal-centric treatment approaches that have been successful in the past but remain controversial in the mindset of the non-Indian world and even for some acculturated Indians.

Ironically, French briefly suggests, but does not expound on thoroughly, that a Native world-view placing a high value on independence, a reluctance to refuse favors among kin, and a resentment of authority has led to a difficult prevention and treatment situation for traditional Native Americans. Most likely such individuals would reject contemporary Euro-American

interventions and techniques. But would they react the same to indigenous ones? French's book sheds little light on this question.

The volume's final section explores the most recent form of substance abuse, gambling, which has become an illusionary way out of poverty and related personal and social problems. Most Indian gamblers are, however, not pathological. Since social conditions rather than an impulse-control disorder shapes the gambling habits of most of the Indians involved, French recommends promoting a healthy sense of tribal traditionalism as the best focus of treatment.

This monograph is a useful addition to the growing scholarship on Native American health issues. Scholars with an interest in American Indian history and culture along with health care professionals will find the concise summary of the current state of knowledge on this topic a foundation they could use for research, activism, and interpersonal relations with contemporary Indians. **Benson Tong**, *Department of History, Wichita State University*.