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Review of The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation

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The Enduring Indians of Kansas: A Century and a Half of Acculturation. By Joseph B. Herring. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990. Introduction, illustrations, maps, notes, selected bibliography, index. xii + 236 pp. \$25.00.

In a region as well mapped and paved as Kansas Indian studies, anyone promising better roads to improved understanding faces large obstacles. The author pledges himself to a "true picture" of certain Kansas Indians as "multidimensional human beings," one that shows how they "strategically utilized their syncretic cultures in order to survive in a hostile Kansas." If not obvious, the latter statement is conceptual garbage, while the story he tells is everything but multidimensional. On the contrary, what this author does is to impose on the historical record his own version of the currently popular, orthodox Indian Story: his "enduring Indians" are pruned, twisted, and decorated to fit the latest Noble Savage stereotype. Unwitting readers may well be bamboozled by the author's sanctimonious declarations; those with special knowledge of Kansas Indians will not have their thinking shaken at its roots.

The author's "enduring Kansas Indians" comprise only a minority of all those from the Old Northwest and other parts who, after 1825, resettled in what was then the northern part of Indian Territory. These include merely some Kickapoo, Sac, Chippewa, Christian Indians (i.e., Canadian Munsee), and Potawatomi. These "enduring Indians," in the author's terms, are those who "cherished their cultures" enough to "struggle" against "assimilation," although, following "common-sense strategies," they deliberately allowed themselves to "acculturate" with the paramount goal of remaining on their sacred "tribal homelands" in Kansas. Aside from the prairie chauvinism evident in such phrasings, the author manages to reify a whole series of complex, theoretical constructs.

The author's personal image of good Indians

blots every page. Those worthy of his deferential judgments insist on living in protected, rural locations in political segregation. Good Kansas Indians have faith in their ability to cope independently (!) and "cherish" their "traditional" religions. They have hope in a future designed by themselves, charitably share with the collective within, are prudent, pacific, and temperate in dealing with powerful outsiders, seek only justice, and display great fortitude. Lest the point be missed, the author measures his glamorized Indians with the scale provided by the Judeo-Christian tradition's Seven Cardinal Virtues. Undoubtedly, this deformation will make these author-invented Indians appealing to some devout readers, those dedicated to the glorification and preservation of "The Ethnic" among us.

Looking at the obverse of the author's characterizations—where not-so-good Indians and their Whiteman counterparts are his stigmatized targets—confirms the suspicion that his coinage is of an extraordinarily ethnocentric stamping. Unworthy Indians, in his view, abandon Kansas, their homelands, and their cultures for other styles of living elsewhere. Defective Indians exhibit individualist self-pride and, when provoked, wrath. They are envious of their neighbors' possessions and ape their ways, lust after what they have not, and avariciously seek personal gain. Indeed, of the Judeo-Christian tradition's Seven Deadly Sins, sloth is the only one the author does not accuse ignoble Kansas Indians of. Of course, in the minds of some intellectuals, shiftlessness has been supplanted by private enterprise as a Great Sin, and a great many Kansas Indians were and are, indeed, privately resourceful.

The author's knowledge of Kansas Indians seems to be entirely second- or third-hand: he apparently has no first-hand, systematic research experience with any of them and gives no hint of *verstehen*, of empathetic insight into their thought-worlds. *The Enduring Indians of*

Kansas is, moreover, largely derivative and is often an internally contradictory, directionless hodgepodge that will leave many readers confused. Contrary to his claims to charting bright new roads, at best the author manages to identify and to fill several minor potholes left in the work of his predecessors. Unfortunately, a good many of these ruts he himself digs: he has a lamentable tendency to self-glorification, accomplished by shotgun denunciations of others' work, dishonest criticisms based on systematic distortion, misquoting, decontextualization, and paraphrasing that reverses the plain meaning of their words and conclusions.

However, the many failings of this book represent more than the author's assumed role of public relations flack for struggling, "enduring" Indians. From title onward, the book is conceptually weak and defective. His two key ideas, "acculturation" and "assimilation," are used in an elementary textbookish, sophomoric fashion, and the formal definitions deployed are incredibly out of date. Anthropologists have not thought of acculturation as limited to diffusion or as invariably causing cultural decay, as this author does, since 1937, while sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists abandoned the one-way, irreversible, identity-destroying construction he places on assimilation in the late 1950s. Before he set out on his task of designing better roads to knowledge of Kansas Indians, he should have studied at least a few of the thousands of scholarly books, monographs, and essays on these varieties of cultural and social change. Overall, if this book is an exemplar of the latest of the new, improved models for Indian historiography, as back cover hype proclaims it to be, I grieve for the poor patronized Indian.

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