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Review of The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival By William E. Farr

Robert C. Carriker
Gonzaga University

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Tribal histories usually rely upon archival documents and oral traditions for source material. This book adds another source: the lens of a camera. *The Reservation Blackfeet* offers approximately 200 photographs as a reliable, visual record of tribal cultural change. "Here are windowpanes," suggests Professor William E. Farr of the University of Montana, "that looked out on the past . . . [as] fixed, rectangular glimpses . . ."

Blackfeet tribal history is complex. Once the dominant tribe in present-day Montana, they were seduced into the white man's world during the buffalo robe trade of the 1830s. In 1855 they agreed to a sizeable reservation, but beginning about 1870 white pressures for grassy plains vacated by the declining herds of buffalo increased. Conflicts arose, and the United States Government in 1873 and 1874 decreased Blackfeet tribal lands. The Starvation Winter of 1883–1884 once and for all turned the Blackfeet tribe of warriors and hunters into reservation braves. In succeeding years the tribe suffered further land reductions and endured a federal Indian policy that attempted to merge the red man into the mainstream of American society. Meanwhile, the Indians found comfort in the practice of their own culture. In time the New Deal programs of the 1930s would reconfirm the Blackfeet's faith in themselves.

Most of the photographs acquired by Farr covering 1882 to 1910 came from whites living off the Blackfeet reservation. These materials are quite rich in detail. Photographs taken between World War I and World War II are less numerous, but perhaps even more useful because after 1910 photography was increasingly popular with Indian families. White men, especially professional photographers eager to make a systematic record of Indian images either for sale or for documentary purposes, were very much aware of material that should be deleted in their depth of field. Indians, on the other hand, were less knowledgeable about what might be retained as background in their photographs, thus providing historians with a record of places and things, as well as people,

The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882–1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival. By William E. Farr, foreword by James Welch. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984. Photographs, bibliography, index, maps, epilogue. 232 pp. \$19.95.

in the fluctuating cultural life of the Blackfeet.

The well-written text is informative, even as the captions for the photographs are useful. Farr's conclusions are traceable to a brief bibliography, but there are no footnotes. Perhaps it was the intention of the University of Washington Press to market *Reservation Blackfeet* as a popular coffee table style picture book rather than as a scholarly tribal history. In either case the book is recommended.

ROBERT C. CARRIKER
Department of History
Gonzaga University