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Review of *An Indian in White America* by Mark Monroe

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An Indian in White America. By Mark Monroe. Edited by Carolyn Reyer. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. Preface, afterword. xi + 236 pp. \$49.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Mark Monroe's autobiography, edited from his tape-recorded memories by Carolyn Reyer, joins a sizable body of Indian autobiographies resulting from a collaboration between white editors and Indian narrators. Where earlier accounts often catered to white fascination with traditional Indian life, the title here indicates different concerns. After a traditional childhood in North Dakota, Monroe moves to Alliance, Nebraska, where he experiences small town racial prejudice. Unable to find work, he enlists and is wounded in Korea. Initially successful as a baker when he returns, he drifts into a gruelingly portrayed alcohol addiction, which wrecks many years of his life.

On the wagon eventually, he regains his self-respect, becoming involved in community actions to help Indian alcoholics and other impoverished and disadvantaged Indians. He stands (unsuccessfully) for local political office, becomes permanently engaged in community work, and is able, in spite of personal tragedies, to look back with pride on a life rescued and worthy of respect.

Kenneth Lincoln, a longstanding friend, has provided an Afterword (itself a common pattern in Indian autobiographies, where white authorities have authenticated, or otherwise framed the Indian account) in which he places Monroe in a larger context of Indian continuance and recovery. He presents him as "a Sioux warrior born out of the old ways into the hardpan modern world" and talks of the account as "seeded within the oral tradition of tribal people." No doubt, but perhaps to stress the traditional aspects of Monroe's account may give a wrong impression of what is distinctive and finally moving about it. Racism, discrimination, poverty, and the struggle to counter their devastating effects in his own life and in his community—these are the themes of Monroe's book, and they are deeply related to his sense of being an Indian; this is a given. The book's title might suggest a contradiction, a paradox, but Monroe's real concern is not to probe this paradox, but rather to live it successfully. At an Indian dance in his honor on his return from Korea, he is given a traditional name "for fighting for my country, for being an American soldier, for being an Indian," but there is no sense of contradiction here. Rather, there is a pragmatism, combined with a quiet generosity of spirit about his approach, which allows him to deal with the indigent and helpless without condescension but also allows him to approach white officials with a lack of rancor and an assumption of good will, which often pays dividends. In the end, as he would be the first to admit, his victories have been small ones, but in his patient faith in community action and self-respect he perhaps offers us a powerful and compelling vision of what that much used

political term self-determination might actually mean.

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