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Review of *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* By Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser

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Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion. By Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser. Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997. Illustrations, appendices, notes, index. ix + 308 pp. \$18.95 paper.

In *Loyal till Death*, Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser retell the North-West Rebellion from the Indian perspective, an ambitious task not without precedent. Earlier revisions of the events of 1885, such as Rudy Weibe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1976) and Walter Hildebrandt's book of poetry *Sightings* (1991), deconstruct the historical narrative, so that "from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it," as Linda Hutcheon notes in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), "we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as

well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few." *Loyal till Death*, however, is not *historiographic meta-fiction*; as a work of history it must be critiqued as such.

Stonechild and Waiser stress the important influence of oral history for an Indian account; "over fifty interviews were collected" and are discretely interspersed throughout the text. As well as relying heavily on the papers of Reed, Dewdney and Macdonald, the authors most often cite historians Sarah Carter, Hugh Dempsey, J. L. Tobias, D. Morton, and R. Roy. Arranged in thirteen chapters, the overall writing by the book's two authors appears seamless, though perhaps repetitive. The volume is rich with illustrations, not so much of the unsung many (there is indeed a preoccupation with the aboriginal political elite), archival photos, maps, sketches, and paintings. There is a wealth of archival material here, and from an academic perspective an index of illustrations would have been a useful research tool.

Loyal till Death's thesis is simply that the First Nations of western Canada remained loyal to the Crown in 1885 and were deliberately saddled with rebellion in an attempt by Indian Affairs officials to subjugate them and speed up acculturation. Without much doubt the book highlights Canadian assimilationist policies and their influence on the North-West Rebellion. Ultimately, it presents a constructed history, the result of its authors' researching accumulated archival collections for evidence that First Nations in western Canada openly "rebelled" with the Métis—evidence which, in the absence of a Métis archive, one is hard pressed to find. This is not to dispute the thesis, which in its telling is quite convincing; rather it is to call into question the book's overall aim. The authors leave little doubt that some First Nations oppose arguments that they willingly participated in a Métis vision for the west, a stance which other First Nations would disagree with. It is hard not to conclude that the telling of history, in

this case, diminishes the Métis in order to distance First Nations from accusations of rebellion, for which First Nations, the authors argue, paid more gravely than did the Métis. Even if this revisionist history tells us more about First Nations perspectives in 1885, its disservice to the Métis is unjustified.

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