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Review of *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978: Symbols in Crisis of Authority* By Loretta Fowler

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Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978: Symbols in Crisis of Authority. By Loretta Fowler. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Illustrations, photographs, tables, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 373 pp. \$26.50.

The thesis of this book is that the Arapahoe, who share the Wind River reservation of Wyoming with the Shoshoni, have somehow adapted better than other tribes to white domination through the creation and use of effective political symbols, particularly those values associated with traditional age grades, a distinctive feature of early Arapahoe society. Fred Eggan, in the Introduction, states that it is clear from the author's account "that the Arapahoe *have made the most successful adjustment to white culture of any Plains tribe*" (xv, italics added). It is a wonder why this intolerable statement was included. For many Indians a mandate for "successful" adjustment to white culture is regarded as racist doctrine. Adjustment to their own culture is quite adequate.

In Fowler's carefully constructed cultural history she merely states that Arapahoe history, and particularly the way it is interpreted by tribal elders, "serves as a charter for the decisions and relationships of the present" (xvii). For the purpose of underscoring tribal distinctions, one must agree that certain traditional values persist, but the manipulation of cultural symbols is not unique to the Arapahoe. Today the Northern Plains is replete with similar examples of attempts by native peoples to construct new and meaningful cultural identities despite continuous threat of destruction by external forces.

Fowler spent eleven years researching and writing this extraordinary book, integrating field work at Wind River with library research. The book is organized into two parts: "Political History, 1851-1964"; and "Politics Today, 1965-78." The first part is divided into four chapters and the second part into three, each chapter being divided again into historical periods of some consequence to the Arapahoes

but perhaps of more significance to white Americans. On two or three occasions in the description of Arapahoe religion, the author's writing comes alive, and one would like to see more of this rather than the often repetitious recitation of military memoranda and archival anecdotes. But then, methodology is a matter of personal taste, not objective reality.

The historical contribution will be welcomed by American anthropologists. The book is careful and cautious, but occasionally the Arapahoes emerge as real people. They themselves will probably find use for this book as a documentation of their struggle against the federal government.

It is questionable, however, whether a case can be made for the Arapahoe's adapting better than any other subjugated people. Their relatively small population and the fact that they did not seriously oppose the federal government seem to be reasons as good as age-grade societies for their "adjustment." On the other hand, the recent oil ripoffs at Wind River might suggest that the Arapahoe did not fare as well as some.

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