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## Review of *Voices of the Plains Cree* By Edward Ahenakew

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*Voices of the Plains Cree*. By Edward Ahenakew. Edited by Ruth Buck. 2nd ed. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995. Introductions, illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliography. xxii + 130 pp. \$18.00 paper.

*Voices of the Plains Cree* was first published in 1973 by McClelland & Stewart. As it has been out of print for some time, the Canadian Plains Research Center has rendered useful service in once again making this important book available in a new edition with striking and attractive cover artwork by Allen Sapp.

In the 1920s, Edward Ahenakew, a Saskatchewan Cree ordained into the Anglican priesthood in 1912, quietly began to write down the memories and legends told to him by Chief Thunderchild (Peyasiw-awasis, also known as Kapitikow), then living on Onion Lake Reserve (Saskatchewan). Thunderchild, a follower of Big Bear in the 1870s, spoke vividly of warfare, horse raiding, and buffalo hunting, and told many old stories of which Ahenakew, as a loyal church worker, never openly spoke. In the same period, Ahenakew himself expressed his thoughts and perspectives through constructing the semi-autobiographical character of a fictional Cree storyteller, Old Keyam. Keyam gave powerful voice to perspectives, concerns, and frustrations that Ahenakew felt he could not afford to utter publicly. *Okiyam* means, in Cree, "Oh, never mind" or "It doesn't matter," a gently ironic name for a speaker to whom these things mattered a great deal. The stories were not just stories; they conveyed strong truths about Cree losses and regrets in the face of the patronizing and often oppressive behavior of Canadian Indian Affairs officials and of Ahenakew's Church of England superiors. In 1973, Ruth Matheson Buck, a longtime family friend of the Ahenakews, compiled and edited these texts for publication.

The story collection of "Old Keyam" in particular is a fascinatingly subversive text. It compares in some ways (as Stan Cuthand notes in his new introduction) to the writings of Ahenakew's contemporaries, Mike Mountain

Horse and Joseph Dion. It also brings to mind the works of two earlier Native clergymen, the New England Pequot Baptist William Apress (recently collected in a new edition by Barry O'Connell) and the Saskatchewan Cree-Assiniboiné, Charles Pratt, sensitively examined by his descendant, Winona Stevenson ("The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow [Charles Pratt], 1851-1884," in J. S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds., *Reading beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* [Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1996], pp. 306-29). The book is useful and interesting for both students and general readers.

Yet as a new edition from a major Canadian research center, the volume is also disappointing in several ways. The major new addition is the thoughtful and illuminating thirteen page introduction by the Cree scholar and teacher, Stan Cuthand, who knew Ahenakew well. Yet inexplicably, the book's cover, title page, and advertising make no mention of this addition, and Cuthand's name appears only at the end of his contribution.

This reviewer also deplores the lack of an index and of running heads to assist readers in keeping track of chapters and their topics. The problem is aggravated by the lack of titles for Old Keyam's twelve stories; readers must review each one to discover or recall its major topics. The Ahenakew manuscripts apparently survive, yet their location and full contents are not described. We learn that Ruth Buck selected and recast the material to be published with some care and a certain bias (understandable from her perspective and in the context of her time), yet the new edition offers no scholarly review of this matter and adds no previously unpublished material. Nor have we an adequate accounting of the relevant papers of Paul A. W. Wallace, a professor who corresponded with and greatly encouraged Ahenakew in his writing (although Stan Cuthand's introduction fortunately outlines Wallace's important role).

If Native voices from the past are to be fully and adequately heard, publishers and

editors must meet higher standards in presenting and evaluating such texts. We must also understand and be explicit about the selection processes and mediation they have undergone in the hands of others. This work goes a certain distance in its endnotes and in the adding of Stan Cuthand's introduction. We should aim higher, however. It is not that much more expensive to go beyond the minimal reprinting standards found here. Publishers are too often harvesting returns from "new" books that feed the present hunger for Native voices, without satisfying the appetite, nourishing the mind, or doing full justice to the issues and complexities surrounding the voices we seek to hear. A university research institute should do better than this.

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