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**Review of *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains* By Howard L. Harrod**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains.* By Howard L. Harrod. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995. Introduction, notes, bibliography, index. xx + 149 pp. \$29.95 cloth. \$15.95 paper.

Primarily this is a book about pre-reservation religions among the Hidatsa and Mandan, with a final chapter on the Cheyenne and Crow. Its purpose, an important one, is to reveal Hidatsa and Mandan culture as dynamic and transformative, nourished by religious values that provided social continuity as well as a symbolic language for adaptation and innovation. Unlike the many books dealing with northern Plains religions as static, or locked into unchanging cycles of religious ritual, *Becoming and Remaining a People* clearly shows how northern Plains religious experience and interpretations shaped new patterns of identity and social reconstruction while providing a language for determining symbolic boundaries between various groups who nevertheless borrowed from each other.

Contact with both Euro-Americans and other native groups stimulated reinterpretation of older origin traditions or ritual processes through innovative dreams and visions requiring dreamers to adapt and reconstruct inherited patterns of thought, behavior, or oral narratives. This is certainly a refreshing view and breaks native religions out of the static mold created by so many "traditional" interpretations of Plains religions. Harrod tracks the creation stories and ritual patterns of the Lone Man narratives, showing how they differed among the various divisions of the Mandan yet provided a context for the performance of the Okipa ceremony. He then contrasts this with the Charred Body narratives of

the Hidatsa in relation to the Naxpiké ceremony and its tie to the Long Arm bundle. In doing so, he discloses how each group, struggling to maintain the core values of cultural identity, evolved by adapting to devastating events along the Missouri affecting its survival, such as the 1837 smallpox epidemic. Rather than extinguishing cultural identity, these events stimulated a new religious synthesis aimed at maintaining tribal identity.

Harrod goes on to discuss two other examples of adaptation and innovation, showing how religion played a crucial role in sustaining cultural continuity. Breaking away from the Hidatsa, the Crow evolved from river village culture to high Plains nomadic buffalo hunters, their religious world view changing to integrate new elements (such as the Tobacco societies) that offered a unique spiritual context for Crow adaptation to buffalo hunting. The Cheyenne, influenced by the Mandan and Hidatsa, made similar adaptations, particularly in their development of the sacred arrow tradition which the author sees as influenced in particular by the Charred Body tradition of the Hidatsa. The book's final section summarizes some key points regarding attitudes toward the interpretation of native religions that scholars of religion should read with care. The creative adaptation Harrod emphasizes is still ongoing, and the vitality of native spirituality lies precisely in this capacity to draw on complex resources of inherited tradition while seeking innovative expressions of culture and identity. I recommend the volume highly.

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