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Review of *White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802-1892* By William E. Unrau

Maril Hazlett
University of Kansas

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White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802-1892. By William E. Unrau. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996. Illustrations, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xi + 180 pp. \$25.00.

This book examines how the federal government and private capital, through interlocking agendas, used the alcohol trade in nineteenth-century Indian country to achieve the removal and dispossession of Native peoples from their remaining lands. William E. Unrau argues that federal Indian land cession policies influenced the increase in the region's alcohol trade, thereby ensuring the failure of Indian prohibition. His analysis, challenging the racist view that Indians are by nature disposed to alcohol, claims instead that whites in Indian country "set the standard" for Indian drinking.

Unrau proves that poorly drafted prohibition legislation, conflicting court decisions, and non-enforcement of treaty and legislative guarantees caused the failure of Indian prohibition. He also describes how non-Indian market forces used the corrupt annuity payment system to increase Indian access to alcohol, making it possible for non-Indians to gain access to Indian assets and lands. These non-Indians' perceptions of "savage" Indian alcohol consumption in turn contributed to the devaluation of Indian sovereignty and were invoked to deny Indians "civilized" human rights.

The author also claims that Indian alcohol consumption was in part learned behavior from whites, Indians having observed white, male drinking patterns at army forts and along trade routes, then imitating them. He also discusses the theory of Indian drinking as a protest against non-Indian regulations and Indians' progressively marginal status. Given the paucity of Indian accounts to support this, however, he cautions that the evidence is thin. His point still holds that the "postremoval liquor trade was socially and economically devastating to most western Indians while at the same time providing considerable economic

resources for the white invasion of the trans-Missouri West. . . ."

Certainly, tribes' own historical experiences of alcohol cannot be explained without Indian sources or solely through non-Indian accounts. Army posts and trade routes actually helped alcohol penetrate further into some Indian communities than others. Today, wide variations in alcohol use also exist among tribes and individuals within them. As Unrau notes, most Native American tribes were not exposed to alcohol before white contact. There is also no evidence to argue that contact with whites rendered Native cultures unable to integrate alcohol into their own world views and deal with it on their own terms.

From a political and economic standpoint, this book offers important information on how, working together, federal regulation and predominantly non-Indian private trade shaped the context of alcohol problems in Indian country. While Unrau limits his cultural analysis of Indian drinking patterns according to what he sees in the available data, he certainly combats the racist stereotype of Indians as naturally predisposed to alcoholism.

MARIL HAZLETT
Department of History
University of Kansas