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Review of *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press* By Mary Ann Weston

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Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press. By Mary Ann Weston. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996. Selected bibliography, index. x + 188 pp. \$55.00.

As a lay historian of the American Indian and a television producer specializing in programs dealing with Native American subject matter, I've lectured frequently at high schools and colleges on stereotypical images of Native Americans in film, television, and popular literature and on how these media have shaped and reinforced such images throughout our turbulent history of contact. Focusing only on entertainment in the past, I found *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press* singularly informative in how the news media have also molded and solidified the general public's perceptions of Native Americans.

Mary Ann Weston has written a well-documented book explaining the dilemmas Native Americans typically face when dealing with mainstream news media, dilemmas created by reporters not having enough time to investigate an often complex story fully; by the remoteness of the areas of the country in which many Native Americans dwell (out of sight out of mind); by journalists and newscasters lacking even a rudimentary understanding of the subject matter in the first place and little interested in the kind of stories we would like to see reported to the general public. Weston's study is a valuable source for anyone seeking to develop a better comprehension of what has transpired in the relationship between Native Americans and the dominant society during the twentieth century and how and why that relationship has been reported in a manner that supports the institutions of this country.

The first chapter, "Indians, Images, and the News Media," offers historical background for why stereotypical images of Native Americans originated and why they persist into the present. Understanding the historical dynamics that imprinted the contradictory images of

the “noble savage” and the “heathen savage” on the minds of the dominant culture assists in explaining the way most newspaper and television news departments have reported on Indian affairs in the past and continue to report on them even today.

Beginning with the 1920s when the policies of the United States government toward Native Americans incorporated the concept of assimilation, through the termination period of the 1930s, to the relocation era of the 1950s, on to direct action and self-determination in the 1970s, and talking-back-to-the-media in the 1980s and 1990s, *Native Americans in the News* gives a good accounting of how the news media reported events and provides useful synopses of the vital historical episodes that shaped the federal government’s dealings with Native Americans.

Reading Weston’s book, I kept asking myself whether things had changed that much from the 1920s to the 1990s when it comes to reporting news about Native Americans and concluded they had not. Although the news media have become more conscientious about not using the words “squaw” or “brave” to describe us, they are still fixated on the idea that Indians are novelties or exotics, much as it has always been. *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century Press* goes a long way in illuminating the public to this fact.

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