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Review of *Dancing on Common Ground: Tribal Cultures and Alliances on the Southern Plains* By Howard Meredith

Victoria Lindsay Levine
Colorado College

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Dancing on Common Ground: Tribal Cultures and Alliances on the Southern Plains. By Howard Meredith. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. 218 pp. \$29.95.

Howard Meredith has produced an ambitious and thoughtful study of cultural interaction and exchange among Southern Plains tribes in *Dancing on Common Ground*. The project emerged from discussions in an American Indian Studies course taught at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. Meredith demonstrates that the concept and practice of alliance—between individuals, between tribes, and between tribes and larger environmental and spiritual systems—has dominated Southern Plains cultural perspectives.

Using ceremonial dance as a metaphor for native systems of governance, the author examines the ideas of reciprocity and cooperative interaction in Southern Plains myth and religion. He even incorporates features of Southern Plains aesthetics and ideology into the structure and style of the book itself: the book is presented in sixteen chapters, invoking

an important symbolic number among Southern Plains peoples. He also employs a recursive narrative style that resonates with native oral and literary traditions.

The first two chapters introduce the study and discuss the social and economic systems native people developed in response to the physical environment of the Southern Plains. The next nine chapters survey the history and culture of Southern Plains peoples, beginning with the Wichita, who were the original inhabitants of the region, and including the Caddoans, Comanche, Kiowa, Plains Apache, Delaware, Cheyenne, and Chiricahua Apache. The last five chapters of the book examine the history of federal Indian policy and the consequences and implications for contemporary Southern Plains peoples.

The current policy of self-determination fails to recognize that many tribes are too small and too poor to maintain a viable existence in the free enterprise system of the late twentieth century. Meredith advocates intertribal federation and suggests that the Southern Plains tribes may build such an alliance using skills and knowledge acquired through centuries of interaction and exchange.

Meredith is, however, rather heavy-handed in his representation of Euro-Americans. While a tough critique of federal Indian policy is both necessary and appropriate, the repeated reproach of Euro-American intellectual traditions is unwarranted. In addition, the book would have benefitted from better editing, for certain statements are unclear while others are not fully substantiated. Despite these shortcomings, *Dancing on Common Ground* is a powerful and insightful book.

VICTORIA LINDSAY LEVINE
Department of Music
Colorado College