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**Review of *Handbook of North American Indians* Volume 13.
Plains. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie**

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REVIEW ESSAY

Handbook of North American Indians. Volume 13. *Plains*. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie. [General Editor, William C. Sturtevant.] Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2001. Maps, illustrations, sources, bibliography, index. xvi + 1360 pp. \$101.00.

INDIANS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS

To say that the *Plains* volume of the Smithsonian Institution's *Handbook of North American Indians* has been long awaited is a literal as well as a figurative verity. Research for the volume began in 1971, then stalled until 1985, when Raymond DeMallie took over as editor and reinvigorated the project. Still, progress remained slow until 1998, as other volumes in the series were given priority. Then an all-out push was made to complete the work: manuscripts written in the 1970s and 1980s were revised, often through the addition of a co-author, and the content was generally updated to reflect the state of knowledge in the 1990s. The last manuscript was accepted on 14 November 2000, a year before publication.

The wait was worthwhile. The final product is a comprehensive and scholarly synthesis of Plains Indian ways of life from 12,000 BCE to the 1990s, from the Prairies of Canada to the Rio Grande, and from archaeological records to tribal traditions. The volume (which comes in two parts of about seven hundred pages each) is handsomely presented: there are photographs on almost every page, each explicated in detail as to provenance and content in an accompanying caption, and frequent

maps expertly done. If the reader needs additional information beyond the mass of material in each chapter, the bibliography contains more than two hundred pages of references, drawn from many scholarly fields. DeMallie deserves praise not only for pulling it all together, but for his own chapter contributions—seven in all, either as sole or joint author. It is a major accomplishment.

Beneath the main content conveying the remarkable diversity and richness of Plains Indian societies, there is a subtext that reveals the ways anthropologists have interacted with and represented indigenous peoples. Most of the authors are anthropologists, with a sprinkling of historians and scholars from other disciplines. Only one scholar—JoAllyn Archambault—has a tribal affiliation noted in the list of contributors. Possibly there are other Native Americans here who chose not to give their tribal affiliation, but it seems they are poorly represented. There is a tradition of collaboration between anthropologists and Indian experts—Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, for example—and it would have been enterprising on the part of their writers to have co-authored some chapters in this manner.

The matter goes even deeper. Despite the scope of the content, which includes, for example, a chapter on tribal traditions and records as well as attention to Indian languages throughout, these are very much narratives written from the outside. Periodization is often arbitrarily imposed, and topics covered in the tribal ethnographies—subsistence, adornment and clothing, technology, life cycle, and so on—give the impression not only of an outside view but somehow a view from above. In the chapter on the Pawnees, for example, Douglas Parks, a distinguished scholar who has the skills, including linguistics, to project a view from the inside, uses 1803, the year of the Louisiana Purchase, as a dividing point in his chronology. Yet surely 1831, a date of no great significance to most Americans, was the critical turning point in Pawnee history. That year, their population was reduced by as much as fifty percent by smallpox, transforming them from one of the most powerful nations on the central Plains to a weakened people on the defensive against the equally imperialistic Sioux and United States. In a Pawnee telling of their history, it is likely that 1831 would be seen as a more significant date than 1803.

At least Parks uses the date of a historical event to structure his account; some authors use that most abstract and arbitrary periodization, the century mark, in their tribal histories, as though 1800 or 1900 had special significance to the Crows, for example, or the Kansas, or indeed to anyone else. And before leaving this contentious issue of authorial viewpoint, I should note that some of the photographs, capturing historical and contemporary religious practices, made me feel like a trespasser into the most sacred spaces of Indian life. Here, quite literally, is the view from the outside, right into the heart of a people's privacy. In short, this volume reveals as much about anthropology as it does about Plains Indians.

The core of the volume, more than six hundred pages, is devoted to detailed analyses of individual Indian societies during recent centuries. It is to the credit of the editor and the

authors that these histories are brought right up to the 1990s, emphasizing the supreme insight that despite the protracted attempts to assimilate them and, in some instances, to kill them, and despite the loss of lands and the terrible impact of disease, these peoples have endured. There is some variation in content and depth of analysis from chapter to chapter, but less than might be expected thanks to DeMallie's strong editorial hand and his selection of accomplished authors for the job. There is also a rather standard format to the chapters. They generally begin with sections on territory, origins, and language. A single map depicts each tribal territory and generally, but regrettably not always, the land cessions by which the traditional territory was reduced to a reservation fragment, or the routes of the removals that banished the Indians to an extra-territorial reservation. There is usually a detailed treatment of cultures and societies in the nineteenth century, with attention to such topics as religion, political organization, kinship, life cycle, warfare, and so on. History is covered in varying time periods from the eighteenth century almost to the present. In all chapters, most impressively in Parks's essays on the Arapahos, Arikaras, and Pawnees, there is a section on synonymy, the various names in Native American and European American languages that have been applied to the particular group or sub-group. These ethnographic chapters end with a discussion of principal sources. The Sioux alone are given more than one chapter, with separate discussions of the "Sioux before 1850," "Santee," "Yankton and Yanktonai," "Teton," and "Sioux, 1930-2000." This is definitive coverage and, for those of us who have struggled to differentiate the various divisions, a valuable service in clarification.

The core of individual ethnographies is bracketed by more than three hundred pages at the beginning of the volume dealing with such matters as linguistic divisions, prehistory (yes, still that derogatory term), and history, and about two hundred pages at the end covering various "special topics."

DeMallie's introduction summarizes the various definitions of the "Plains Culture Area" and the general characteristics of Plains Indians, while justifying their division into Prairie and High Plains tribes for the purpose of the volume, a distinction made largely on the bases of substantial permanent villages versus year-round occupancy of teepees, unilineal descent versus bilateral bands, and hereditary status versus more fluid social hierarchies. This is followed by a pair of interesting chapters on the history of archaeological and ethnographical research in the region. Many of the most famous anthropologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cut at least some of their teeth on the Plains: from Lewis Henry Morgan to James Owen Dorsey, Alice Fletcher, Alfred Kroeber, Clark Wissler, and on to the authors represented in this volume. Too little, in my opinion, is made of Gene Weltfish, whose study of one year (1867) in the life of the Pawnees¹—a study with sensitivity to the Indians' own calendar and routines—is called merely "a comprehensive historical ethnography" (36).

This survey of anthropologists and their representations of Plains Indians is followed by a chapter on environment and subsistence, four chapters on languages, and ten on ways of life and evidence of those ways of life during the ten millennia preceding the arrival of Europeans on the scene. It is worth emphasizing here the historical depth of human occupancy in this part of the so-called "New World," where Paleo-Indians lived by hunting and gathering as far back as 12,000 BCE. A chapter on the post-contact period among the village tribes of, mainly, the middle Missouri valley serves as a transition to four of the strongest essays in the book—William Swagerty's assessment of the impact of European Americans on Plains Indians before 1850, Loretta Fowler's continuation of the story since that time, and companion pieces by Jennifer Brown and David McCrady on the First Nations of the Canadian Prairies. This willingness to give the Canadian portion of the region equal attention (in the individual

tribal essays too) is another strong point of the volume.

The nine chapters closing the book deal with significant aspects of Plains Indian life that could not be fitted into, or considered sufficiently, in earlier ones. There is a chapter on "Enigmatic Groups," peoples, for example, who were briefly encountered by explorers, perhaps, then disappeared from the map. There are also essays on the Sun Dance, kinship and social organization, intertribal religious movements, celebrations and giveaways, music and art, and tribal traditions in this final section.

A chapter on repatriation would have been appropriate at this point. True, the return of substantial amounts of skeletal remains and other sacred objects to their rightful owners is a recent phenomenon, dating back only to 1989 (Nebraska's Unmarked Human Burial Sites and Skeletal Remains Act) and 1990 (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act). But a brief paragraph at the end of Wedel and Krause's essay and passing references elsewhere (including a poignant photograph on page 299 of Northern Cheyennes taking the remains of ancestors killed at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in 1879 back to Busby, Montana) do not do this topic justice. In fact, "repatriation" does not even merit an entry in the index. The return of the Sacred Pole to the Omahas in 1989, which is briefly noted by the authors of the tribal essay (and again depicted in a moving photograph), could have been featured in much more detail in such a chapter on repatriation. These events are of fundamental significance to Native peoples: their dates are the major divides in their own chronologies.

Nancy Lurie, in an earlier volume of the Smithsonian series, argued that the working symbiosis that had brought mutual benefits to anthropologists and Native Americans from 1930-1950 disintegrated in succeeding decades as resentment over continuing colonization—by academics and others—seethed.² Is there any indication from the *Plains* volume that anthropologists have changed their interactions with, and representations of, Native

Americans? Its encyclopedic form, of course, limits any experimentation with narrative style, along the lines, say, of Weltfish's *The Lost Universe*, and contributes to a conventional rhetoric and content that places Native peoples very much in the position of objects being studied.

Again, the volume would have benefitted by including them more in the telling of their own story. The lack of attention to repatriation expresses, perhaps, the ambivalence some anthropologists still feel about returning items of scientific importance to Native Americans.³ But even as a predominantly conventional treatment, there is no denying that this is a storehouse of knowledge and, as such, will be of great use to Plains Indians, as well as to outsiders such as this reviewer.

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NOTES

1. Gene Weltfish, *The Lost Universe: Pawnee Life and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977).

2. Nancy O. Lurie, "Relations Between Indians and Anthropologists," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), pp. 548-56.

3. Virginia Morrell, "An Anthropological Culture Shift," *Science*, 264 (1 April 1994): 20-2; and, most recently, "Can you Dig it?" *The Economist* (30 March 2002): 69-72.