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Review of *Our Town on the Plains: J. J. Pennell's Photographs of Junction City, Kansas, 1893-1922* By James R. Shortridge

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Our Town on the Plains: J. J. Pennell's Photographs of Junction City, Kansas, 1893-1922. By James R. Shortridge. With an essay by John Pultz. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000. Photographs, bibliography, index. xii + 242 pp. \$29.95.

The nineteenth-century settlement of the Great Plains coincided with a number of technological developments, including improved railroad equipment, the steel plow, and the agricultural combine. Photography was among these technical developments, ensuring that the process of settlement would be both celebrated and recorded. The history of Junction City, Kansas, is bound up with such technological developments. Located near the junction of the Republican and Smoky Hill Rivers, it grew close by the site of Fort Riley in northcentral Kansas and became a railroad town and county seat by the 1870s. By 1890 the community was prosperous and its economy diversified.

Enter photographer J. J. Pennell. One of the region's many local photographers who established thriving businesses to record family, civic, and commercial life, Pennell operated in Junction City for nearly three decades. More artistic than many photographers, he left a fascinating record of a community both typical and unique. Following an informative introduction by John Pultz, curator of photography at the University of Kansas Spencer Art

without a thought to what this has done to Native societies over time.

Given this state of affairs (about which the book is silent), why is it that there are still anthropologists who insist on fashioning or inventing new theories primarily aimed at trying to explain why Native people have such difficulties adapting to the modern world? I think part of the answer to this very old question is clear and simple and staring us straight in the face—and it is called colonialist genocide. If I were asked to write a prescription for social and psychological disaster among Native peoples, something that would surely bring about a near total collapse of their ancient societies, it would go something like this: Initially, I would put them on reservations and take away their art. In this way I would sever them from their mythology, philosophy, history, religion, land, and language in one stroke since all of these are fundamentally integrated or embodied in their social systems through their land and art. Art is the primary means by which they effectuate what is equivalent to Western society's libraries, churches, court-houses, theaters, and schools. I would then legislate laws, enforceable at the point of a gun, of course, which would allow me to replace their accumulated wealth of oral, historical, and spiritual knowledge and traditions with my own special brand of social philosophy, economics, and religions, all based upon a social system relying heavily upon avarice as its most basic social tenet and coupled with the identification of those Native peoples as "primitives and savages." That law would then be enforceable for at least seventy years in such places as government run boarding schools. I would then insist upon using unprovable abstract scientific theories to describe the different versions of reality these ancient peoples harbor towards themselves. Furthermore, I would require everybody to use the same vernacular established by these parochial theorists whenever the subject of the Native American came up, in whatever context. Finally, I would prescribe the muzzling of the Native voice, or perspective, in various ways

so that Native people's experiences of metaphysical reality could never become known as fact. And I would do all of this in the name of "freedom," such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom to trade, freedom of the press, and so forth. After that prescription had been carried out faithfully by my army of willing accomplices, what do you think I would have created? Nothing less, I believe, than a seriously dysfunctional individual and society faced with an almost insoluble problem of adaptation and survival in a contemporary world. How could any reasonable person expect anyone so completely disenfranchised as this simply to go out and take care of business as usual?

With its limited frame of reference, that is what Euro-American society has done to Native people, as *Collecting Native America* amply exhibits, albeit unwittingly. Nevertheless, it is a testament to the true genius of Native people that we were able to survive at all. It was not simply the taking away of the land and resources that acted as the final *coup de grace* in all of this; the warehousing and theft of our art had to play a major if not basic role here as well.

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