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## Review of *Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land* By Victor P. Lytwyn

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land.* By Victor P. Lytwyn. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002. xiv + 289 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

In *Muskegowuck Athinuwick*, Victor Lytwyn provides a detailed study of the indigenous people of the Hudson Bay lowlands. At its core is the author's extensive historical research in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg; the academic context is the scholarly debate over the effects of the fur trade on indigenous peoples. As a historical geographer, Lytwyn brings an important spatial understanding to the Cree past, which is conveyed through the accompanying maps.

The first half of the book is the more methodologically diverse, as it examines pre-contact history, international relations (particularly the alliances with neighboring Cree and northern Ojibwa and the hostilities with Inuit, Chipewyan or Dene, and Iroquois or Haudonosaunee), and the resource use of the Swampy Cree. Synthesizing the archeological literature, Lytwyn outlines the longstanding scholarly resistance to (and only recent acceptance of) what Aboriginal oral traditions say: that people have been occupying the region for thousands of years. The final three chapters examine Cree involvement in the fur trade from the early seventeenth century until the emergence of the Hudson's Bay Company as the dominant non-Native interest in the region in 1821. At times this section reads more like a contribution to debates in fur trade scholarship than an interpretation of Aboriginal experiences. Lytwyn avoids simplistic explanations of fur trade dependence and culture change, seeing

instead the Cree becoming involved in a complex web of social and economic relationships with the Europeans in their midst.

In addition to the argument that the Cree retained a significant degree of control over their lives, several other themes emerge. First, the archival record clearly demonstrates that the northern "fur" trade was a multifaceted enterprise, as the Cree not only provided pelts, but also a wide range of products (notably geese, fish, and caribou meat) and services (including transportation). Second, as throughout the Americas, epidemic diseases took a deadly toll; populations rebounded, but the social effects were devastating. Finally, the lives of the Cree were intimately tied to the land and its resources. This is effectively portrayed in the book's most innovative chapter, organized around the seasonal cycles of the Cree year.

Like the book as a whole, the chapter illustrates the challenges facing those studying the Aboriginal past. *Muskegowuck Athinuwick* goes some distance towards incorporating Cree world views and perspectives, particularly in relation to the environment. This is largely accomplished, though, by consulting the writings of non-Aboriginal fur traders; Cree oral accounts tend to be relegated to explanatory footnotes. Lytwyn's Cree calendar, with its twelve months and four seasons, is based on fur trader Andrew Graham's observations; the Cree, however, continue to name the thirteen moons and six seasons. Such examples point to the need for scholars to re-examine the Aboriginal past to engage in further dialogue between the written accounts of non-Native observers and the knowledge of Aboriginal oral historians. Then books like *Muskegowuck*

*Athinuwick*, which provides a rich and much-needed resource on the Aboriginal history of the subarctic, would be even richer.

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