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Review of *American Indians and the Mass Media* edited by Meta G. Carstarphen and John P. Sanchez

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Earlier in the year, I spent some time on the White Earth Lake Reservation (Ojibwe) in northern Minnesota. At one point, to counter some nasty diaper rash (not mine), I went into a store to buy corn starch. My only choice was Argo. I was prepared for discomfort—I've always hated the bizarre half-Indian-maiden / half-corncob figure that has come to be recognized as Argo's brand, and the irony of purchasing this item, on this reservation, in the middle of the Corn Belt was too much. But, thankfully, Argo had changed its label, so at least there was one less thing to feel awkward about. That awkwardness—that profound awkwardness that lies within the matrix of capitalism and representation—is the engine that drives the essays in American Indians and the Mass Media.

The “media” in the title is mass indeed. Topics of the fifteen essays include images of Indians in Life magazine, the popular film Smoke Signals, the movement to eradicate the word “squaw,” the Native American Journalists Association, and the debate surrounding the infamous “Fighting Whites” mascot issue. Argo corn starch even makes a cameo in a compelling essay by Victoria E. Sanchez in which she interrogates the history and effects of Native product icons. This piece is one of the strongest in the collection, despite the fact that it has almost nothing to do with the media.

The weakness of this volume—how broadly it defines “media”—is probably also its strength. Scholars and teachers looking for essays on
Indians in television, documentary film production, activist radio, or the growth of Indian feature films should look elsewhere. This book is less interested in theorizing media studies and more interested in expanding our notion of Indians and journalism. Of the fifteen essays, over half are about print journalism like newspapers, magazines, feature writing, and journalistic protocols. It is rare to see so many essays explore the complicated relationship between print journalism and Native issues. I was particularly intrigued by Meta G. Carstarphen's essay on early persuasive appeals in the Cherokee Phoenix and the Cherokee Advocate. Carstarphen's blending of journalistic inquiry with classic rhetoric is well executed and convincing. On the other end of the historical spectrum, Juan A. Avila Hernandez examines how colleges and universities are preparing Native students to enter the fields of journalism and communication.

American Indians and the Mass Media will be most useful for scholars and graduate students in American Indian studies and journalism as well as those on the more print-heavy side of media and communication studies. Each essay features discussion questions, so the book could also be used for certain advanced undergraduate courses. Ultimately, Carstarphen and Sanchez have assembled an eclectic study that will make some important contributions to the field of American Indian journalism.

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