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Review of *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889-1920* by Melissa L. Meyer

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The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920. Melissa L. Meyer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994. Photos, maps, figures, tables, and bibliographic essay. xviii + 333 pp. \$40.00.

In this work Meyer draws primarily upon the substantial resources available from the colonial U.S. bureaucracy and other written and unwritten materials. The focus of this study is the incorporation of the Anishinaabe land and resources by Euro-Americans and the concomitant marginalization of the Anishinaabe people in Minnesota.

Migration and cultural reordering were key adaptive strategies of the Anishinaabe. Amalgamation, splintering, intermarriage, and ethnogenesis accompanied all the Anishinaabe migrations. Each migration, whether seasonal migrations before contact with Euro-Americans or the more recent migration to Minnesota, was prompted by different circumstances and led to new cultural adaptations. Meyer undermines the myth that traditional Anishinaabe society was static and unchanging.

Marital ties were often used to cement alliances even before contact with Euro-Americans. Intermarriage was used to seal trading partnerships

with European fur traders leading to the development of a unique Métis society throughout the region. This bicultural class mediated between the natives and Euro-Americans. After the fur trade collapsed the Anishinaabe moved to the White Earth Reservation. Individuals of mixed descent then used their ties to the Anishinaabe bands to secure rights to live on the White Earth Reservation.

The concentration of Anishinaabe bands at White Earth led to two distinct communities. The White Earth ecosystem allowed for the culturally conservative full-bloods to practice the seasonal round of hunting, harvesting and gardening in the eastern portion of the reservation, while the mediating and entrepreneurial Métis and successful farmers were attracted to the central and western part. These ethnic groups seldom interacted.

The two communities peacefully shared the White Earth Reservation until Congress passed allotment legislation and targeted the Anishinaabe for removal of the protective trust relationship. Economic interests won out over Anishinaabe rights as lumber companies and land speculators used Métis agents to gain access to the allotted resources at White Earth. This led to conflict between conservative Anishinaabe and the Métis. In addition, outside interests easily gained control of Anishinaabe land after legislation was passed which declared mixed bloods competent to sell their land. Full-bloods were a protected class and could not easily sell their land, but even mixed-bloods who did not want to sell their land were cheated out of it.

Investigations proved the fraudulent nature of these transactions, but to adjudicate these claims government officials deemed it necessary to categorize Anishinaabe as full-blood and mixed-blood. The adjudication did not use native definitions, but turned to racist, scientific standards. Blood status replaced the concept of competence in determining who could sell their allotments. Government actions systematically reduced the number of Anishinaabe categorized as full-bloods and the number of pending cases.

The meaning of the terms "mixed-blood" and "full-blood," which earlier had reflected cultural and ethnic differences, became political symbols. The contested allotments led to ethnic orientation determining factional alliances. The Métis took a capitalist and assimilationist posture, while the conservatives emphasized equity and the welfare of community and kin. Demographic and economic trends worked against the conservatives and they lost the struggle for control of their land, but assimilative policies ultimately dispossessed both ethnic groups. The Anishinaabe entered the mainstream U.S. society as landless, impoverished, and marginalized people.

This work makes a significant contribution to the study of the Anishinaabe. *The White Earth Tragedy* is well researched, with an excellent bibliographic essay, though several figures are too complex. Those interested in understanding the circumstances of dispossession, marginalization, and the sources of conflict and factionalism within this Anishinaabe community will find this book a treasure of information. The study explores the Anishinaabe's adaptability, rather than solely portraying them as homogenous, unchanging, helpless victims of externally developed policies. Particularly welcome is its inclusion of Anishinaabe value systems and political systems into a broader model of Euro-American incorporation of Indian land and resources. **Jerry A. Schultz**, *Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development*, *University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS*.