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Review of *American Indian Population Recovery in the Twentieth Century* by Nancy Shoemaker

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American Indian Population Recovery in the Twentieth Century. Nancy Shoemaker. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999 xiii+156 pp. Figures, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0-8263-1919-X).

One might expect a book on American Indian historical demography to be a lugubrious recitation of catastrophic losses accompanied by tiresome

moralizing, but this slim volume gives us ethnohistory at its best. In place of thick descriptive narrative, Shoemaker offers us a refreshingly concise empirical analysis. Conclusions are not simply assertions, but concise statements supported by data presented in clear tables and graphs.

Shoemaker steers clear of the 1492 population debate in order to focus on demographic recovery, which occurred in the twentieth century after the aggregate US Indian population reached a nadir of 237,000 in 1900. She does this through a comparative examination of the separate population histories of five nations: the Senecas, Cherokees, Red Lake Ojibways, Yakamas, and Navajos.

After a long decline, American Indian populations grew after 1900, especially from 1960 on. The post-1960 surge was partly due to general American improvements in longevity, partly to the correction of earlier undercounting, partly to shifting self-identification, and partly to higher rates of intermarriage. In the second half of the twentieth century, many people who previously self-identified as “white” opted for Indian identity, including many descended from mixed marriages. Shoemaker also notes that while one acquires ethnicity through self-identification on a census form, one’s postmortem identity is often assigned by a doctor or mortician. Little wonder that the initially reported Indian infant mortality rate in Oklahoma for the period 1975-1988 was well below average. The rate nearly doubled when corrections were made for misidentified Indian infants.

This raises some larger issues. One might claim Indian identity but not be able to gain inclusion on a tribal role. Similarly, a group of people might claim corporate Indian identity yet fail to gain recognition as such. Anyone can check the Indian box on a census form, but becoming an enrolled member of a recognized nation is another matter. The Cherokees are very liberal, the Senecas are not. Being Cherokee is very popular these days and the Cherokees are exceedingly accepting. While the Senecas used wholesale adoptions to reverse decline in the seventeenth century, now they exclude even the children of Seneca men and non-Seneca women. Seneca numbers have been increasing recently, but at nowhere near the Cherokee rate.

So population change was not just a matter of high mortality and low fertility among American Indians up to 1900 and a reversal of those rates since then. We cannot understand demographic processes if we start with unrealistic assumptions about the clarity and impermeability of ethnic boundaries.

Shoemaker refers to shifts in racial identity as a kind of migration, and in one sense it is. However, I prefer “recruitment.” This term, like its antonym “expulsion,” allows us to focus on group formation processes that

may or may not also involve the physical movement implied by “migration.” These demographic processes are at the heart of what we should be trying to understand in ethnohistory, and therefore an expansion of precisely defined terms seems to me to be worthwhile.

Shoemaker navigates through the data deftly, comparing the Indian nations to each other using key indices, then comparing them with “white” and “black” census data. An important conclusion is that Indians have come to resemble the general US population, both socioeconomically and demographically. In short, *American Indian Population Recovery* is a significant contribution to historical demography. **Dean R. Snow**, *Department of Anthropology, Pennsylvania State University*.