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Review of *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition* Edited by Lisa Philips Valentine and Regna Darnell

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Theorizing the Americanist Tradition. Edited by Lisa Philips Valentine and Regna Darnell. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. vii+397 pp. Notes, references. \$65.00 cloth (ISBN 0-8020-4229-5), \$27.95 paper (ISBN 0-8020-8077-4).

The twenty-five essays in this volume enhance our understanding and appreciation of the Americanist tradition of anthropological theory and practice. The Americanist tradition, as several authors point out, has been concerned historically with Native-language texts and the knowledge they encode about the culture of Native communities and the individuals who compose them. The Americanists' concern with texts was manifested in the efforts of Albert Gatschet, George Dorsey, James Dorsey, Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and others in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to document and preserve the oral knowledge of cultures that were being rapidly transformed or erased altogether. Theoretically, the Americanists believe in the inseparability of language, thought, and reality; they see culture as a mutable, historically contingent system of symbols. Practically, the texts—which are the products of long-term fieldwork and involvement with single communities—continue to serve as the bases for both ethnographic and linguistic studies.

The papers, covering an array of issues, are grouped into three broad categories. Ten deal with the historical development of the Americanist

tradition, with questions regarding authority and the authenticity of texts, and with the importance of cultural relativism as a weapon in the emancipatory struggles of indigenous peoples in the twentieth century. Twelve papers are concerned with Native-language texts and literacy, with the politics and policies of Native-language education in Canada, and with changes that occur in discursive performances, and texts and their relation to the development of new circumstances. Three papers examine alternative approaches to Native texts in the Americanist tradition, current perspectives on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and the ways in which anthropologists concerned with queer theory are using the idea of “insider knowledge” or standpoint perspective of individual social actors, derived in part from the Americanist tradition, to explore new dimensions of the human experience. Other themes cut across the editors’ categories. Six papers provide insights about individual practitioners and the influences that molded their work—such as Sapir’s focus on interpersonal relations, a concept developed during the interwar years by his close associate, psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan.

This is a collection of first-rate essays each of which merits close reading in its own right. The collection itself is also a corrective to the more excessive claims of contemporary writers influenced by cultural studies, postmodernism, and postcolonial theory who simultaneously proclaim the novelty of their views regarding the importance of Native language texts and have little appreciation of what anthropologists were doing a hundred, fifty, or even ten years ago. The authors provide a historical account, not a narrative or just-so story, of the Americanist tradition and its implications for anthropological inquiry in the new millennium. Their account ties Native language texts to the social and political-economic circumstances in which they were produced and are still read today. **Thomas C. Patterson**, *Department of Anthropology, Temple University*.