

Culture



William W. ELMENDORF, *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993, 416 pages, \$49.95 (hardcover)

Bruce G. Miller

Volume 13, Number 2, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083142ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083142ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Miller, B. (1993). Review of [William W. ELMENDORF, *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993, 416 pages, \$49.95 (hardcover)]. *Culture*, 13(2), 110–111. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083142ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1993

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

that must be understood in any effort to interpret violence. He does a thorough job of this for the period of the Great Depression, documenting the effects of state policy on certain collective behaviours. His essay is most interesting, providing insights to an important time in Canadian history.

Yet Overton's essay on public order in the 1930s does not deal with the question of past levels of violence in Newfoundland. To liken criminal victimization to Depression-era collective unrest is as problematic as equating it with the war deaths of the 1940s. The violence in these different historical periods have markedly different characters, effects, and origins.

The difficulty with this book is its lack of common focus. Despite their expressed aim to examine recent changes in patterns of violent behaviour, the authors have forayed into the separate areas of criminal violence, public fear, and political unrest. There is no clear definition of their subject, and despite Overton's recognition that crime is not a "social fact" (p. 201). There is little discussion of the problems inherent in such a research agenda. Different groups experience varying levels and types of violence in our society, and to avoid an ecological fallacy, it is necessary to examine the question from that perspective. It is possible that some of these problems are attributable to the changing focus of the research project, the background of which is discussed in the book's preface.

While the verdict is probably just, the authors have sometimes travelled an uneven road in the effort to reach their conclusions. And while they raise important questions, they do not, as Leyton suggests, "effectively demolish" the myths of a "crime-free past" and a "crime-ridden present" (p. 121). In addition to being too cavalier in its findings, the other major difficulty with the book is its lack of integration, a problem inherent in the confluence of three very different essays (though some may legitimately see this as a strength). Still, this is an interesting and well-written work that adds to the understanding of one of society's most common concerns.

William W. ELMENDORF, *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993, 416 pages, \$49.95 (hardcover).

By Bruce G. Miller

University of British Columbia

In 1934 William Elmendorf, an undergraduate student, began a long-term collaboration with Henry Allen, a Twana born in 1865. The two established a relationship appropriate to a Twana elder and a young person, that of teacher and student, and Allen began the long process of narrating his version of Twana culture and history. In 1938, Elmendorf, by then a student of Kroeber at Berkeley, met Frank Allen, born in 1858 and the elder brother of Henry. Although Frank Allen disliked whites for the profoundly disturbing post-contact changes in his home area of western Washington state, he too agreed to work with Elmendorf. Frank Allen chose the topics and Elmendorf listened carefully, interrupting as little as possible. *Twana Narratives*, one of the products of Elmendorf's collaborations with the Allen brothers, is an invaluable and exciting contribution to the study of Northwest Coast societies, and more specifically, the Coast Salish. It is a rare, book-length narration by First Nations people about life in the middle and late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The volume is equally gripping in the accounts of the so-called "Indian Wars" of the 1850s, graphic in the details of Secret Society initiations, and humorous in describing the problems the interior Yakima people encountered canoeing on saltwater. *Twana Narratives* provides perhaps the richest view of Coast Salish life published to date. Elmendorf provides an introduction to his methods, and indexes place names, individuals, and topics.

There are many reasons why this volume might not have succeeded and why it does not conform to some versions of present-day theoretical and methodological requirements. The work was done before the day of the tape recorder and Elmendorf transcribed the conversations (predominantly in English) by hand; Elmendorf's interests were not in the then-current Twana society, but rather, in salvage ethnography; Elmendorf assumed that members of a society are culture bearers, and subsequently the work is not aimed at reflecting the diverse viewpoints of men and women of different backgrounds; there

is limited material which contextualizes the narrations by the Allens, showing, for example, the order in which topics were taken up, or what was going on at the time. Despite all of this, Elmendorf has produced a classic of collaborative anthropology, not for theoretical reasons, but because of his fundamental respect for the Allens and for Twana society.

Twana Narratives is important in part because it reveals the influence of Native collaborators on anthropological thought. Much of Elmendorf's work has been aimed at understanding Coast Salish culture in its regional context and one can easily see how his time with the Allen brothers early in his career helped him to think this way. Elmendorf notes (p. xii) that "A principal goal, in describing native cultures in this part of the world, should be to define what cultural forms are necessarily and sufficiently associated with what sorts of social groupings." The Allen brothers' accounts of spiritual practices, warfare, economic life, and social class all are embedded within the informal social networks which continue to operate in Coast Salish country. For example, Frank Allen described Skokomish reliance on shamans from other communities with curing abilities the Skokomish lacked (and *visa versa*), attendance at potlatches throughout the region (including the Cowichan, Sooke, and Songish of southern Vancouver Island), and a multi-tribal Coast Salish war party of 200 canoes to oppose the Lekwiltok.

Twana Narratives is perhaps most valuable for the rich descriptions of Twana cultural life and social relations, but the volume also contains much for those interested in such topics as the period of resettlement on reservations, the connection between spiritual life and everyday life, and the relations between government representatives and Native peoples. Because of the care and detail, the volume provides valuable documentation for First Nations engaged in litigation to protect treaty rights (I have already used the book for this purpose). *Twana Narratives* makes very clear the value of Native oral traditions and the historical sensibilities of the Allen brothers.

I am left with one lingering question: why are the massive depopulations of Coast Salish communities in the late eighteenth century not reflected in the Allens' accounts which reach back to this period? My guess is that this text will be helpful in understanding the effects of disease, depopulation, and culture contact on the Coast Salish.

Milton M.R. FREEMAN, Eleanor W. WEIN, and Darren E. KEITH, *Recovering Rights: Bowhead Whales and Inuvialuit Subsistence in the Western Canadian Arctic*, Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute and Fisheries Joint Management Committee, 1992, 155 pages (paper).

Evelyn Pinkerton

University of British Columbia

Sandwiched between an introduction in Inuvialuktun and appendices on correspondence related to permitting the 1991 bowhead whale hunt near Aklavik, N.W.T., this slim volume is as much a celebration of cultural renewal and reinvention for the subject community as it is a slice of ethnohistory and current events for the outsider. The core of the book is one chapter recounting the events surrounding the 1991 bowhead whale hunt by this village of 760. Photographic and textual description of material, social, and ritual preparation before and after the hunt — and the whale's butchering and cooking by 100 people — is peppered with pithy quotations from elders and children. Elders are overwhelmed by the joy of this event; school children to whom the cherished bowhead *muktuk* has been distributed bubble with generalized delight. The intensely emotional testimonials are sparse, understated, and moving.

The bowhead is valued chiefly for the *muktuk* (the skin and fatty connective tissue), used today only as a special gift and feast food because of its scarcity. The Inuvialuit ceased subsistence hunting during the commercial whaling era because they had a plentiful supply of *muktuk*, considered a useful byproduct by the whaling industry. Today, however, the act of hunting is valued for itself. The reader surmises that in the contemporary context, the bowhead hunt has become a symbol of reclaiming control. The authors portray a more self-conscious cultural identity being sought here, relying on descriptions of the desire of the community to conduct the hunt, and analyses of factors which have prevented a (successful) hunt until 1991.

Curiously, what comes through suggests the book should be entitled "recovering traditional practices," rather than rights. These are not people struggling with bureaucracies so much as people