

Culture



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[See table of contents](#)

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Book Reviews / Compte rendus

TAYLOR, Colin E., ed. consultant and STURTEVANT, William C., technical consultant. *The Native Americans: The Indigenous People of North America*. New York: Smithsonian, 1991, 256 pp., illus., hard cover.

by Fraser Pakes,
Canmore, Alberta

One can almost hear the sighs and comments of readers seeing the title of this book. What? surely not another general survey of Native North America? Hasn't it all been said by now by authors such as Wissler, Driver, Jennings, and Oswalt, not to mention the multi-volume project still in progress - *the Handbook of North American Indians*? The answer is "No" and even the most cursory glance at the pages of this new book will revive the jaded eye. For the editors have managed to take a well-trodden subject and produce something that emerges fresh and invigorating, as though for the first time.

The structure of the book is in itself by no means unusual. The editors have chosen the classic Wisslerian culture area approach in which to operate. The nine areas have been allotted to six writers. Of these Colin Taylor provides the major contribution covering Plains, Plateau and Basin, Sub-Arctic, and the Northeast. William Sturtevant looks after the Southeast, while Nancy Parezo deals with the Southwest. Susan Rowley, John Langellier, and Victoria Wyatt provide the sections on the Arctic, California and the Northwest Coast, respectively. Natalie Tobert has written the introduction. Each section begins with an introduction to the physical environment of the culture area, continues with a discussion of the people's lifeways, and their adaptation to their environment, and closes with a survey of the more recent historical events precipitated by contact with a Westward-expanding white population. If ethnology provides the framework for the book, then history provides the margins for the culture areas, and a number of the chapters seem to use 1890, the date of the closing of the American frontier, as their termination point. While this is fine for the American situation it provides problems for the Canadian areas due to the differing pace of frontier-pushing. As well the book does little to change the common stereotype that

after 1890 nothing really interesting happened to First Nations people. This is particularly so with coverage of the Arctic, where the Inuit are left with their days taken up in making ice houses and urging their dog teams into the Arctic mists. At the same time the striking development and importance of Inuit modern art is left untreated.

While the book's mandate is to look back, it is perhaps unfortunate that a 'contemporary' chapter could not have been included to give an overview of the Indian's world today. What little there is of the 'contemporary' is sprinkled intermittently through the text (art on the Northwest Coast, economic and environmental matters in the Sub-Arctic, and philosophy and identity in the Southwest chapter). The quality of the writing is generally high, and the book is a treasure trove of information not generally found in surveys of this type. However, what really helps bring it all to life and give the book its distinctive character are the illustrations, photographs and artifact montages.

More than 250 photographs from the Smithsonian and the American Museum of Natural History grace the pages of this book. (That every page is illustrated sometimes leads the reader to ponder whether this is a photographic essay with explanatory text or vice-versa!) Most of the photographs used are refreshingly unhackneyed and complement the text's emphasis on the material culture of the various areas. But even these well-chosen images do not compete with the effect made by the collection of artifact montage double-page spreads. These photographs of artifact assemblages, numbering in total one thousand artifacts from the Smithsonian and the American Museum of Natural History, provide a dazzling display of beauty to the eye. They provide a wide range of examples of the artistic production of a particular tribal group within a culture area, and allow the reader at a single glance to oversee a material culture inventory. (It would surely be a valuable contribution if the publishers could arrange to have large format posters made of these spreads, and packaged separately to service schools and other institutions).

There are the few inevitable errors in the use of so many illustrations. For instance a photographic image of a group of dancers on page 160 is identified as "Tlingit", while on page 164, the same group of danc-

ers in a different pose are identified as "Haida". (The dancers are Haida in Klinkwan, a Kaigani Haida village). Again, the portrait of *Man on a Cloud* (page 85) clearly shows him wearing a 'whiteman' shirt while the caption describes him as wearing a "scalp shirt". One further minor criticism has to do with the book's dust jacket. The combination of the book's size - 13 1/4" by 10 1/4" - allied to the cover's cliché illustration of a photographic portrait of a Plains Indian superimposed upon a painting of a buffalo hunt, tends to give the appearance of a book designed for children. When are publishers of general surveys of North American Indians going to be courageous enough to give the over-worked Plains images a sabbatical, and allow a Tsimshian, or Muskogee, or Delaware the opportunity to represent the North American Native people on book covers? (To add insult to injury, the book's endpapers portray a traditional Plains war pictograph, and its two front title pages, a Plains warrior on each!)

In summary, *The Native Americans* provides a pleasing harmony of text and illustration such that its potential 'reference work' style does not inhibit it from being in itself a 'good read'. Neither has its outward appearance detracted from its ability to present a very sound, well-researched introduction to the continent's Native peoples, while its fine collection of illustrative material will lure the reader back time and time again to discover previously unseen gems of native art.

David YOUNG, Grant INGRAM, Lise SWARTZ, *Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. 145 pp.

by Antonia Mills,
University of Virginia

Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer recounts the encounter of University of Alberta anthropologist David young and two of his graduate students (Grant Ingram and Lise Swartz) with Russell Willier, a Woods Cree healer and medicine man. "Encounter" is the key word and a new concept to be highlighted in anthropological literature. Like an "encounter group," the interaction in *Cry of the Eagle* is mutualistic, the product of a two-way dialogue in which the strengths and weaknesses of the participants and their world views are revealed.

In a sense, every and any interaction between an anthropologist and the Native is an encounter. This book, however, focuses on the mutual impact of Russell Willier on Young, Ingram and Swartz and of these three people on Russell Willier. What is new in this encounter is having a member of a traditional society conversant with English and filled with enthusiasm to demonstrate the efficacy of his spiritual world and healing techniques on people outside the sphere of his culture. What is new on Young, Ingram and Swartz's part is their willingness to help Willier do so and their clear, honest report of the encounter between them.

The encounter began in a manner typical of many contacts between anthropologist and Native healer: Young came to know Willier while conducting research on the endangered crafts of the Woods Cree. It did not take long for Willier to shift the emphasis to spiritual concepts that are very much alive and well. The book begins with Young's description of the spiritual world of the Woods Cree as dramatized by Willier, portrayed through conversations with him, and through condensations of what he said.

Young's second chapter includes a description of a ceremony akin to a shaking tent ceremony performed by a friend of Willier's to which Willier invited Young and his family. The depiction of the experience of the ceremony sets the tone for the rest of the book: the reporting is clear, first person and engaging. Young describes the unusual events (a mouse appearing at his wife's feet when she was sitting in the midst of a large crowd) to convey the power of the experience.

The third and pivotal chapter, written by Ingram, describes the good and bad uses of medicine. The chapter gives a candid portrayal of the double bind of the Native healer and the concept that ill health and bad luck are the result of curses or attacks from rivals or enemies. In this world view, to have power is also to invite attack. Willier distinguishes between good and bad healers, maintaining that the good ones only heal, although they must sometimes parry the attacks of others in ways that at the very least make them suspect of having harmed an adversary. While Ingram and Willier describe the good healer as walking the "Sweetgrass trail" in integrity, the chapter reveals through numerous examples that even the best men, such as Willier's late father (portrayed with touching reverence), are attacked and killed by others.