

Culture



Peter CARSTENS, with foreword by Chief Murray ALEXIS, *The Queen's People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 333 pages, \$22.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth)

D. R. Hudson

Volume 13, Number 1, 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081412ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081412ar>

[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

Hudson, D. (1993). Review of [Peter CARSTENS, with foreword by Chief Murray ALEXIS, *The Queen's People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 333 pages, \$22.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth)]. *Culture*, 13(1), 103–104. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081412ar>

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/>

the fact that the Donald Marshall Jr. case “invites broader political and cultural analysis because not only was one individual grossly wronged by the criminal justice system but an entire political/historical relationship between two communities was compromised and ignored by government” (p.82).

This, then, is the stuff of Royal Commissions. Government is seen to be done; an avenue by which the powerless can take recourse in the law is more apparent than real; recommendations are made and are devoid of any political power which would enforce implementation; and, as the author describes, racism continues in a more subtle package (p.99). The book is a timely reminder that colonialism is alive and well.

This said, in its entirety the collection of essays would have benefitted from a more thorough editing process. There are numerous instances wherein exact sources are repeatedly cited and unnecessary duplication could have been avoided. Repeated reference to the exhortation “Felix, don’t put your balls in a vice over an Indian” (p.41, p.54) and to the extract from the Grand Council of the Mi’kmaq Nation (p.73, p.79) would be better eliminated. And in a work of this length, it is considered unnecessary to restate so often, and in so similar a way, the details of Marshall’s case.

Nonetheless, these are small criticisms. Together and separately both texts represent valuable contributions to the field.

Peter CARSTENS, with foreword by Chief Murray ALEXIS, *The Queen’s People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 333 pages, \$22.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth).

By D.R. Hudson
Fraser Valley Community College

Carstens’ book describes the processes of incorporation into the Canadian state of an Okanagan Indian population in the upper part of the Okanagan Valley, southern British Columbia, and the resultant reserve community which emerged. The view is based on a long-term relationship Carstens describes

with this Okanagan community. Integral to the argument is that the Okanagan were subject to external economic and political institutions which extended the hegemonic power and control of the Canadian state. In describing these processes, Carstens introduces the reader to what he sees as the integration of social anthropology, ethnohistory, sociology, and political economy. Hence, there is a sprinkling of Max Weber along with what most Plateau researchers have learned — that one has to ‘de-Thompsonize’ the writings of the early Plateau ethnographer and associate of Boas, James Teit.

In pursuing the theme of control, Carstens’ book has two main parts. The first deals with the actual processes of incorporation, and key factors in the transformation of power: the impact of the fur trade and a gold rush, the severe depletion of game in the period 1820-1850, the power of missionaries, and the ability of Indian agents and government bureaucracies to exercise control using the Indian Act. The creation of reserves paved the way for land grabs by settlers and ranchers in the 1800s. In the second part of the book, Carstens presents his interpretation of the ways in which the contemporary reserve community operates. He points out, for example, that one outcome of the ways in which land was alienated was the individualization of Okanagan Indian land ownership. The central theme of the book seems to be captured in the statement that “all Indian reserve communities are encapsulated . . . by one common administrative style” (p. xvii); hence, the Okanagan can be seen as representative of others who have a “reserve culture”.

The story is told in seventeen chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing traditional chieftainship; Chapters 2-6 describe the changes in the 1800s and early 1900s which limited and transformed Okanagan culture (at one point, Carstens refers to Okanagan conflicts as parallel to those of ‘peasant-farmers’). Chapters 7 and 12 return to the issue of chieftainship, and its transformation under state policies and altered economic circumstances. Chapters 8-16 describe the reserve community, and how the band council attempts to deal with issues such as unemployment. Carstens presents the internal political process as one of competition between factions, as various patronymic networks vie for power.

Much of Carstens’ account is tied into key Okanagan individuals, whom he identifies as chiefs. Carstens merges individual biographies with cultural processes, describing chiefs from 1865 on, and

their relations with external forces. Certainly a criterion for chieftainship was the ability to deal with these forces. While he doesn't delve into it, this seems to parallel New Guinea "Big Man" studies. However, the actual extent of an Okanagan chief's power is unclear, although a core part of the analysis rests on the power of the chiefs through their individual initiatives. Because of the emphasis on individuals and their life histories, general processes of change may be overlooked by the reader. One of the more intriguing themes pursued is the extent to which traditional chieftainship could accommodate the positions sought by the Department of Indian Affairs. An interesting aspect of the presentation is the detailed look into the Euro-Canadian settler/rancher community, especially ranchers who married Okanagan women, created their own spheres of political, social, and economic influence, and then married Euro-Canadian women — setting the stage for revisionist settler history.

Carstens relies a lot on African examples (along with some general studies which seem to have very little bearing on the Okanagan material anyway), to illustrate his points, while at the same time seeming to ignore or dismiss other regional anthropological studies and praising the works of selected historians. It's not clear to what extent the cultural patterns Carstens describes (especially the power of chiefs) extend throughout the Okanagan. I see a lack of a critical use of studies in B.C. and the Plateau region in which political economy (a major thrust of Carstens' study) has been used. There seems to be little objective reason provided for the acceptance or rejection of particular works. Others have attempted to deal with the issues raised by Carstens, although perhaps not to the same extent, and much of the recent research conducted in anthropology in B.C. — land issues and Aboriginal rights in particular — has been influenced by many of the issues raised by Carstens.

Carstens' use of biographies to track change is interesting, and undoubtedly will provide the basis for debates within anthropological circles and the community itself, and will be of particular interest to those of us who have worked with Okanagan communities. The myriad of detail and subjective comments, however, may obscure the understanding of some fundamental hegemonic processes.

Brian HAYDEN (Ed), *A Complex Culture of the British Columbia Plateau: Traditional Stl'atl'imx Resource Use*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992; 584 pages, \$70 (cloth).

By Henry S. Sharp
University of Virginia

This edited volume, with its immense quantity of maps, figures, and tables, is a notable attempt to provide a "detailed description of the important aspects of resource use by the traditional cultures in the region" (p. 4) of the Middle Fraser Canyon. It contains 11 numbered chapters with Hayden providing an Introduction (1) that gives an overview of the work, its intentions, and a preliminary theoretical positioning of the work. Hayden ends the book with a well done and provocative summary (11).

Diana Alexander's chapters provide detailed descriptions of the environment based upon its division into "units that are internally uniform in terms of culturally important resources" (2), and "A Reconstruction of Prehistoric Land Use in the Mid-Fraser River Area Based on Ethnographic Data" (30). These two chapters provide a description of the known available resources and create a framework for the interpretation of aboriginal life that is particularly useful in conjunction with Nancy Turner's equally detailed chapter on plant usage (8). These three chapters would have benefited from a more substantial account of climate history and a more thorough physical description of the primary plant species utilized for food that included their size, weight, and edible yield. Dividing the environment into separate zones makes description and comparison with other ecological writings easier but it does make for repetition in presentation. These zones are our scientific categories and they make it harder to see the environment as an integrated system of relationships between species or how native activities cut across zones.

Nevertheless, these chapters provide the analytical core of the book. Throughout the book, the analytic isolation of subsistence activities into discrete activities separately considered creates a fog of confusion around the pursuit of subsistence activities as a dynamic system of choices; a fog that is most obscure regarding the interrelationship of the activities of women and children with those of men.