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Catherine A. LUTZ and Jane L. COLLINS, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; 309 pages, $19.95 US (paper)

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Editor Frank Manning's introductory essay on the theme of "reversible resistance" neatly picks up a large number of threads that run through the book, as he outlines the duality of acceptance and rejection with which Canadians meet the pervasive influence of American cultural products. We reconstitute and recontextualize those products, mixing in such Canadian features as state capitalism, social democracy, middle class morality, regional identities, official multiculturalism, the True North, our parliamentary system, institutionalized compromises, and international neutrality. Manning correctly points out that our popular culture shares a predicament with the whole of Canadian society, and that is its precarious relationship with the most powerful image system of the twentieth century.

Countering that image system by setting up barriers so that we may hear our own voices is not restricting information, but adding to it, asserts former chairman of TVOntario Bernard Ostry. Expanding on this, Bruce Feldthusen notes that our system operates under a pair of external realities, the proximity of U.S. stations, and the commercial approach to broadcasting here at home, that work in ways opposed to our cultural and public service broadcasting goals. He suggests that cultural nationalists, intellectual and artistic communities who have organized and lobbied effectively in the past, should work towards the creation of a non-commercial public broadcaster which would provide public goods in the form of cultural and public service programs not available on the private networks. G. Stuart Adam cautions against this approach, suggesting instead that cultural nationalists should focus on education systems and curricula, since those are more important in transmitting our social and political heritage.

If it is some kind of "homogenization" that is feared from the influence of mass culture, John J. MacAloon urges us to dismiss that worry and seek rather to recover and analyse the patterned differences that exist between contemporary popular cultures. He builds a convincing case for using Olympic sports as a paradigm for understanding the construction of the Other, and shows how Canadian and American interpretations of each other's sport cultures may also inform their interpretations of the significance of Free Trade for each other. On this political note, Thelma McCormack is to be congratulated for taking the discipline to task for being so casual with regard to participation in important hearings such as the Fraser Committee on Pornography and Prostitution, and the Meese Commission in the U.S.: the deafening silence reflects badly on the professional community. She also accurately points to the lack of an informed representation of feminist research and feminist thinking about popular culture in this volume.

In terms of production values, the book is handsomely laid out in friendly, readable 10/12 Baskerville. The endnotes are clear (and contain the majority of the book's very few typos) and their running heads usefully refer back to the text's pages. A random check of the index shows it to be accurate. On the whole, this stimulating and provocative volume is worthy of the memory of Frank Manning, "the brains behind the operation."

Catherine A. LUTZ and Jane L. COLLINS, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; 309 pages, $19.95 US (paper).

By Rebecca B. Bateman

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Many of us who became social scientists got our start by reading *National Geographic*, so it is especially appropriate that two of our number, anthropologist Catherine Lutz and sociologist Jane Collins, have undertaken a deconstruction of this cultural icon. The photographs of the *Geographic*, the authors contend, are much more than simply straightforward portrayals of the world, but rather constitute a very potent and culturally valued form of media shaping North American understandings of and responses to the outside world (pp.xii-xiii). Based on a collection of hundreds of ethnographic photographs that appeared in the *Geographic* between 1950 and 1986, Lutz and Collins examine not only the end products themselves, but also the inner workings of the *National Geographic* in terms of the editorial decisions that determine what finally gets published, and the methods employed by *Geographic* photographers to obtain those famous pictures.

Founded in 1888, the National Geographic Society traces its origins to an era when peoples and materials from the colonized areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were displayed (along with North American aboriginal peoples) to curious crowds in museums, expositions, and world fairs (pp.20; 25-26). Similarly, the photographs of *National Geo-*

graphic brought exotic peoples and places to North American coffee tables. Guidelines directed that "only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided," thereby largely expunging the overtly hostile or racist portrayals that too often characterized the public displays (pp.26-27).

However, such a commitment to the avoidance of controversy resulted in a publication that has historically largely avoided images depicting poverty, colonial oppression, and racism. By assuring its readers of the advantages of modernization and the inevitable adoption of western values by "less civilized" peoples, the "*National Geographic* helped white, upwardly mobile Americans to locate themselves in a changing world, to come to terms with their whiteness and relative privilege, and to deal with anxieties about their class position, both national and international" (p.38). Portrayals of the exotic other were carefully balanced by an underlying message of the commonality of the human experience — under the skin (of whatever hue) we are more alike than different.

It is this "classic humanism" which comes under particular scrutiny and criticism by Lutz and Collins. Drawing upon the arguments of Roland Barthes in particular, the authors advocate the replacement of a "classic" with a more "progressive" humanism that, rather than postulating a core of universal human nature underneath "thin veneers of difference," instead seeks to examine "what is purported to be natural and universal" in order to discover "History," and "at last to establish Nature itself as historical" (p.61). The authors assert that the superficial "humanizing" of others is a more fallacious and potentially dangerous undertaking than "the empathetic probing of different lifeways, experiences and interests" (p.283).

This kind of "progressive" argument is problematic, I think, since in our post-Cold War world, historical arguments have been used to justify any number of atrocities ("ethnic cleansing" immediately comes to mind). As Stephen Greenblatt, in another review of this book, has pointed out (*The New Yorker*, October 11, 1993, p.120), it is often the most brutally oppressive governments that evoke history and difference by claiming that concepts of fairness and justice should be measured against regional particularities and cultural, historical, and religious differences. Perhaps in this world of increasing ethnic divisions, there is still a place for a notion of a common humanity that transcends such distinctions.

As part of their study, Lutz and Collins asked a sample of fifty-five white adults to evaluate a collection of (uncaptioned) *Geographic* photographs. Several of the interviewees stated that the pictures made them think beyond their own little worlds, to develop a certain empathy for the people portrayed, to express a concern for their welfare. True, a lot of their comments reflect the respondents' prejudices and cultural values, but in general, their statements indicate that reading *National Geographic* makes them more aware of a larger world of which they are a part, and may even encourage them to find out more about that world and their place in it. In this respect, despite its general avoidance of controversy, its rootedness in western ideology, and its neglect of historical differences, *National Geographic* fulfills an important function for millions of culturally isolated North Americans.

Donald W. ATTWOOD, *Raising Cane: The Political Economy of Sugar in Western India*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1992; 366 pages.

By Robert S. Anderson

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Three great themes course through this book — sugar, irrigation, and economic cooperation. Sugar — "sweet malefactor" as one distinguished historian called it — summons visions of barons, big estates, slaves, world trade, geopolitics. Irrigation attracted attention long before Witfogel and long since; if you have walked along the rice irrigation systems of highland Yunnan, or the farming valleys of California, you know irrigation is fundamental to culture and economy. Cooperation haunts all economic development activists, and the unending contest of the paradigms of competition vs cooperation fills our bookshelves and cafes. It is not, however, just speculation; economic cooperation has definite consequences seen at every level of society.

Attwood skillfully weaves these three themes together in a fascinating account of an "anomaly" in the sugar world, where indigenous factors in the rocky hinterland of Bombay (hit by the recent earthquake) have made irrigation, sugar and economic cooperation the key factors in a remarkable process, leading (he says) to the edge of a transformation.