

## Culture



**James F. PENDERGAST, *The Origin of Maple Sugar*, Syllogeus, 36, Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, National Museum of Natural Sciences, 1982. 80 pp.**

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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

James F. PENDERGAST, *The Origin of Maple Sugar*, Syllogeus, 36, Ottawa, National Museums of Canada, National Museum of Natural Sciences, 1982. 80 pp.

By M.A. Shelvey  
University of Western Ontario

James Pendergast synthesizes and interprets historical sources from 1536 to the present on the origin of maple sugar. His argument for the prehistoric origin of maple sugar stands upon, (a) an early report describing a quantity of sap collected ; (b) the centrality and ubiquity of the maple in ceremony and myth for Iroquoian and Algonquian speakers ; and (c) 17th Century learned European descriptions of the maple sugar process. In 1685 Royal Society members in London were given a short account of Canadian maple sugar making.

The author's "compulsion to compile a definitive body of data" began in 1973 when he encountered disagreement by describing a St. Lawrence Iroquois archaeological site as a prehistoric sugar camp. His essay usefully compiles references and interpretations in this old controversy.

The Jesuit historian, Father Charlevoix, provoked the question of origins in 1744 :

It is very probable the Indians who are perfectly well-acquainted with all the virtues of their plants, have at all times, as well as at this day, made constant use of this liquor sap. But it is certain, they were ignorant of the art of making sugar from it, which we have since learnt them.

His conclusion was taken up by others, including Lewis Henry Morgan, who thought European invention more plausible "from the want of suitable vessels among them [Iroquois] for boiling."

There is abundant ceramic evidence that the Indians did not need metal pots to bring maple sap to boiling point. James Pendergast's historical proof of the indigenous origin of maple sugar revolves around a neglected 1557 text by Franciscan Thevet which described a certain captain, probably Jacques Cartier, collecting "four or five large pots [of sap] in an hour". A quantity of maple sap left to freeze or evaporate would naturally render maple sugar so that, "there can be little doubt that those in the Canada region could not long have handled the

large quantities of sap described by Thevet as early as 1535 without learning to make sugar."

The author makes a distinction between written descriptions about the collection of sap and references to actual sugar making. By putting these together, along with traditional stories and archaeological findings, he makes a thorough statement for the indigenous origin of maple sugar.

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Jamake HIGHWATER, *The Primal Mind : Vision and Reality in Indian America*, New York, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981. 234 pp., \$17.50 (cloth).

By Marjorie Halpin  
University of British Columbia

In this book, Highwater presents himself as a new cultural mutant — the Intellectual Savage. "Mine was the first generation for whom the Western type of intelligence became a pervasive tool rather than a vehicle for assimilation and ethnic suicide" (p. 11). Born to a French Canadian Blackfoot mother and a non-traditional Eastern Cherokee father in northern Montana, Highwater has written some ten other books and novels on native art, dance, music, and ritual — in which the New Noble Savage emerges as the perennial outsider and keeper of the spiritual consciousness of the race. It is an audacious demonstration of cultural imperialism in reverse.

In *The Primal Mind*, Highwater ventures a generalized description of his mother's heritage in terms of a basic metaphysics of Indian reality — Image, Time, Place, Motion, Sound, Identity — which is generated out of the Native's common experience of *pure vision* :

Surely it is an experience almost entirely outside the focus of Western mentality. The intellectual finesse of scholars has been capable of naming it, but are people of the West in any way capable of really *knowing* the process by which this purity of vision and this intense awareness of things unto themselves become manifested in an artist and in his work of art (p. 59) ?

Unfortunately, "Those whose experience has been destroyed are inevitably faced with an urge to destroy" (p. 204), and the book unfolds as an attack