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Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984. By Loretta Fowler.

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adding that material to an earlier account of Palouse misfortunes there provides convenient access to information relating to that somewhat neglected subject. Repetition of material concerning Palouse and other independent Nez Perce bands that wound up in Oklahoma is unavoidable when their adventures are dealt with in separate chapters. A fully integrated presentation would require consolidation of accounts prepared by different authors.

Each chapter is organized as part of a consistent interpretation of an important feature of northwestern Indian history. Presented in a national context, this volume offers more than an ordinarily useful account. Nez Perce people who preferred to retain their traditional culture had a more difficult time getting release from their Oklahoma captivity than did those who were willing to acculturate with Idaho's reservation bands. Reasons for their resettlement at Colville instead of in Idaho are covered adequately. Most Nez Perce histories have paid less attention to later developments covered in this volume. In its conclusion, it summarizes subsequent developments that merit additional investigation needed to clarify later Nez Perce history. A transition is provided to explain an important subsequent era that needs further attention by specialists, including those who have made this welcome contribution to Indian history.

*Merle Wells*

Idaho State Historical Society

**Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778–1984.** By Loretta Fowler. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. 301 pp. \$35.00 Cloth, \$14.95 Paper.

Even though the Indians have lived on reservations for over a century, researchers have only recently begun to analyze this important period in Native American history. Not only are these investigations identifying cultural continuities and changes over the past one hundred years, but they are discovering that many of the forces that affected the tribes before the reservation era continue to influence their lives today. In addition, more scholars are recognizing that the Indians were not passive victims of white policies but attempted to deal with these foreign actions within the contexts of a dynamic culture. In her book, *Shared*

*Symbols, Contested Meanings*, Loretta Fowler examines the symbols and values that have characterized Gros Ventre society, and she documents their changing meanings over the past two centuries.

Researching a tribe's cultural history is not new to Ms. Fowler, for she received the Erminie Wheeler-Voegelin prize from the American Society for Ethnohistory for her previous book, *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978*. In writing *Shared Symbols*, she embarked on an exhaustive study of primary and secondary records and conducted many oral interviews, especially during her six years of visits to the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana. Her resulting ethnohistorical work on the Gros Ventre employs recent anthropological research models and methodologies, including the use of folk history. Because three studies are presently being conducted on the Assiniboines, joint occupants of the reservation, Fowler's book does not include an extensive investigation of this tribe other than to document their influence on Gros Ventre cultural change.

In scrutinizing their culture since 1778, Fowler evaluates the Gros Ventres' shifting and, at times, conflicting views of their history and religious symbols. Claiming that the reservation's agents have generally considered the tribe's willingness to accept white acculturative practices, the author examines the effects of this "progressive" attitude on cultural loss and revival, identity, and social evolution. Essentially, she demonstrates that the Gros Ventres have tried to maintain control of their destinies during a century of rapid economic and social changes precipitated by white policies.

Throughout the book, the author assesses cultural change by focusing on certain characteristics, such as the Sacred Flat Pipe and Feather Pipe rituals, relationships among various age groups, and the Gros Ventres' desire for primacy and prominence on the reservation. After an overview of tribal life before the reservation era, Fowler traces the cultural revisions that the tribe experienced after the creation of the Fort Belknap Reservation in the 1870s. She implies that they accepted many of the whites' acculturative demands and acted "civilized" in order to obtain key appointments to the agency's Business Council and police force, thereby obtaining control of the reservation in their competition with the Assiniboine. By the early 1900s, many of the tribe's religious ceremonies had fallen into disuse.

Soon after the turn of the century, the Gros Ventres began to seek self-determination in order to end the agents' corruption, to halt land and resource losses, and to control the Assiniboines and the whites who resided on the reservation. Initially, the tribe viewed allotment and the New Deal's Reorganization Act as means of achieving this objective. However, they soon realized that allotment eroded the little remaining control that they exerted over their land, and the Gros Ventres resented the IRA's emphasis on an Indian community rather than a separate tribal identity. The termination era dashed any remaining hopes of self-determination and cultural survival by promoting Indian emigration from the reservation and by further decreasing the tribe's control of its resources. These trends were reversed with the advent of the 1960s social programs, which provided jobs on Fort Belknap and encouraged Indians to practice their traditions. Not only did many Native Americans move back to the reservation, but the role of the Business Council was expanded, and Gros Ventres were appointed to many decision-making positions, including the superintendent and the tribal attorney.

Several problems have accompanied the cultural revival of the 1960s and 1970s. Besides the disagreements over the issues of mixed-blood tribal membership and tribal power versus individual rights, the elders and the younger generation conflict over the meaning of traditions and history. Most Gros Ventres concur that many of the tribe's traditions, including the Flat Pipe ceremony, were forgotten in the 1940s, but the elders believe the Great Spirit ordained this loss while the younger members blame the elders for being careless. The youths, divided between the "educational" clique which emphasizes tribalism and the "militant" faction that focuses more on a pan-Indian identity, contend that the revival of traditions is necessary in order to cope with modern problems. Yet, the elders express their concern that former ceremonies are not reenacted correctly and resent their displacement as the teachers and leaders of the tribe's traditions and social practices.

A century of social disruption eventually culminated in increased self-determination, cultural revival, and conflicting views of shared traditions. Fowler concludes that the Gros Ventres have controlled the cultural changes in order to make them meaningful and acceptable. She also notes that the Gros Ventres and the Assiniboines still possess separate cultures, and that each group's

differing view of the past actually reaffirms their uniqueness. Thus, the Gros Ventres have not been passive victims of white reservation policies but active participants in the shaping of their future.

This last point is the book's primary strength. The traditional historical and anthropological study implied that the various Indian tribes were helpless victims of white actions for the past four hundred years. However, as many recent works have proven, the Native Americans dealt with white aggression and assimilation policies within the contexts of their cultures. As Fowler demonstrates in her well-written and extensively documented book, the Gros Ventres attempted to control the radical social and economic changes that they experienced on the reservation while trying to preserve their traditions and self-determination. Like most North American tribes, the Gros Ventres have not "gone the way of the buffalo" but have maintained their identity as a people with a unique history and culture.

In providing an informed perspective of the tribe's history over the past two hundred years, Fowler does not simply recount nineteenth century Indian-white battles but instead offers an increased understanding of some of the cultural forces that continue to shape the Gros Ventres' lives today. Unfortunately, she does not extend this analysis to all of the problems that presently exist on the reservation, such as resource control, alcoholism, lack of capital, and legal questions. Offering an historical and cultural perspective of these issues would have increased the practical use of this study in helping resolve these questions.

Because *Shared Symbols* presents a new perspective on the Gros Ventres' history and examines twentieth century events, especially over the last twenty years, it is an important addition to the anthropological and historical fields. In the first chapter, Fowler compares and contrasts her work with previous studies of the tribe written by Michael Foley, David Rodnick, and Edward Barry. These dated studies view the tribe's history from the perspective of white governmental policies, as opposed to Fowler's emphasis upon a cultural approach. The tribes have also published two collections of oral histories which portray the Indians' views of their pasts. Since *Shared Symbols* deals with a people's actions over a two century period, some of the subject matter is necessarily treated in a general manner. Thus, future works will undoubtedly provide more details on specific historical episodes.

Two areas of the book require further study. First, Fowler labels the Gros Ventres as "progressive" because of their willingness to accept new ways. In addition to never completely defining this relative and value-laden term, she appears to ignore many of the Fort Belknap agents' complaints about the Indians' refusal to accept white practices. Second, while the author states that an equally exhaustive survey of the Assiniboines' culture was beyond the scope of her research, conducting such a study would appear to be necessary in order to understand all of the reasons for the transitions in the Gros Ventres' culture, especially since members of the two tribes have intermarried and experienced the same events for more than one hundred years.

Despite these omissions and the occasional clinical approach to her study, Loretta Fowler's *Shared Symbols* is an excellent portrayal of the Gros Ventres' history. Besides the many positive contributions that this study offers, the book reminds us of the great diversity which continues to characterize Indian cultures today. These historical differences must be recognized and appreciated in order to understand contemporary Indian actions.

*Michael Massie*

South Pass City State Historic Site

**A Cultural Geography of the North American Indian.** Edited by Thomas E. Ross and Tyrel G. Moore. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987. xiv & 331 pp. \$29.50 Cloth.

Although geography primarily focuses on the environment, human geographers do direct their attention to the relationships of specific peoples or cultures to given environments. Much of the small yet poignant contribution of geographers to the study of the American Indian reflects the larger concerns of human or cultural geographers, who variously apply the landscape approach or the historic-geographic or the interdisciplinary tools of cultural ecology. However, only in recent years has the profession given much attention to ethnicity, including the American Indian, and a small cadre of colleagues participate in a Native American interest group of the Association of American Geographers. It is perhaps safe to say that those of us who focus on the Indian have considerable preparation in anthropology and often utilize their