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Peer reviewed

Review Essay

The Enduring Native American: Books for the Young Adult

JOHN BREGENZER and LEROY V. EID

The Abenaki. By Colin G. Calloway. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 112 pages. \$16.95 Paper.

The Catawbas. By James H. Merrell. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 112 pages. \$16.95 Paper.

The Narragansett. By William S. Simmons. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 112 pages. \$16.95 Paper.

The Pima-Maricopa. By Henry F. Dobyns. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 112 pages. \$16.95 Paper.

The Yuma. By Robert L. Bee. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989. 112 pages. \$16.95 Paper.

Anyone interested in increasing understanding of North American Indians should be grateful to Chelsea House Publishers for the high standards they are setting in their series for young adults, *Indians of North America*. Currently projected at 53 volumes total, *Indians of North America* is broadly conceived. The series will range from the Eskimo to the Tarahumara, the Aztec, and the Maya. Not all volumes will deal with specific groups. Volumes are scheduled on American Indian Literature, the Archaeology

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of North America, Federal Indian Policy, Urban Indians, and Women in American Indian Society.

The five volumes, three by anthropologists and two by historians, provide a glimpse of current practice in these two academic disciplines near the end of the twentieth century. Anthropology is said to be undergoing a crisis of objectivity. Yet anthropologists appear to be as divided now over the goals of their discipline as Kroeber and Boas were in 1935 over the issue of history and science in anthropology.

History is said to be becoming more social as it has pretty much given up pointing to "great men" as the prime movers of great events. While history has often been called the study of "dead politics," the two historians represented here have very interesting things to say about the social and cultural background of contemporary Indian politics. It seems that anthropologists and historians are shedding their image of themselves as beings outside history. There is a greater willingness to examine and become involved in contemporary politics.

Here the anthropologists often paint with both a broader and a finer brush than the historians. The historian Calloway devotes only one sentence at the start of chapter 1 to prehistory: "For at least 10,000 years and perhaps as many as 20,000 years before the Europeans ventured to the New World ['new' to whom?], Indians [Columbus' mistake] occupied the northeastern parts of the United States." Calloway concludes his book, "But as long as they stay unified as a people and receive fair treatment from national and local government, the Abenaki will meet new challenges, just as they have for hundreds of years." There's a certain amount of short-term view in that summary. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Native American will survive somehow no matter what. By way of contrast, the anthropologist Simmons explains over two pages in his first chapter how the Narragansett are part of a sequence of cultural periods extending back at least 20,000 years to the Paleo-Indian. A little later in his book, Simmons goes into minute detail on burial customs.

It would be unfair to accuse an anthropologist of doing poor history or an historian of doing poor anthropology. Perhaps there are still hybrids like Oscar Lewis, who drew on his undergraduate major in history to produce renowned ethnography. Most anthropologists, however, are still worrying the relationships between economics, social organization, and ideology in an attempt

to figure out how culture works (they call themselves "cultural anthropologists," after all). Most historians are almost exclusively interested in interpreting important events at various levels: economic, social, political, and intellectual. The scholarly enterprises are still mostly distinct. Nevertheless, joint enterprises, like this series, at least evidence a valuable interdisciplinary networking.

In any case, the authors of these first five volumes command immense respect. All are proven experts, and some represent levels of achievement that few scholars even dream of reaching. The editor, Frank W. Porter III, possesses an impressive scholarly record combined with wide administrative experience. Porter has provided extraordinarily strong editorial management. Every volume's text starts precisely on page 13 and ends exactly on page 103. Each of the five volumes has on its cover an interesting color photo of an appropriate artifact. For example, *The Abenaki* shows a Micmac quilled box, while *The Catawbas* shows a Catawba vase with Indian head handles. Each book contains an eight-page section of more color photos of artifacts. Inside each cover is a map showing the location and environs of the group. Interesting black-and-white photos, engravings, drawings, or maps are found on almost every page. Each volume has a few textual inserts. For example, in *The Abenaki* there is an "Origin of Corn story" from *Tales of the North American Indians* (1929) as well as a list of Abenaki Place Names from *Indian Place Names of New England* (1962). Each volume concludes with a bibliography and short list of important facts, a two-page glossary that is actually interesting to read, and a three-page index which is more than adequate for these short 100-page books.

The Narragansett follows the pattern of the series in devoting the first two chapters to the origins and way of life prior to the arrival of Europeans and "history." Located in what is now Rhode Island, the Narragansett had a ruling family, greater and lesser chiefs, corresponding to a religious world of greater and lesser gods. One of the southern New England groups they ruled over were the Indians who occupied the territory taken by the Pilgrims in 1620.

The Narragansett seem to be major contributors to the pan-Indian movement starting in 1936 with a monthly magazine called *Narragansett Dawn* (page 78). In the 1970s they constructed an "Indian village alongside the reconstructed English Pilgrim settlement . . . a clear announcement to the American public that

New England Indians were an essential part of the American past as well as an active part of the present'' (page 80). For the many people interested in what happened to the Indians the Pilgrims encountered, this is a valuable book.

James Merrell's *The Catawbas* rephrases and brings up to the present his recently published historical monograph, *The Indians' New World*. The first quarter of *The Catawbas* reviews the history of the Piedmont Area in the millenia before the coming of the Spanish. These Europeans found the way of life of the Catawbas both baffling and flourishing. Faced with the challenges of the Mississippian Culture and then with that of the Euro-American world, the Catawbas, Merrell insists, became adept at learning when to change a policy, technique, or argument. The larger part of *The Catawbas* reviews the long but increasingly one-sided Catawbas-Euro-American interchange. Successive decimation of the tribe by disease, increasing tribal dependence on American trade items, the death of the American Revolution generation, and the removal ethos of the Jacksonian period all combined to convince the reluctant Catawbas to sell their land. No sooner, though, was the 144,000-acre Carolina reservation sold in 1840 than the state of Carolina had to buy 630 acres of land for the disgruntled Catawbas minority. Traditional values and skills eroded on this minuscule square-mile reservation as the majority became Mormons by 1900 and challenged the old ways. Intra-tribal conflict became even more obvious after the Catawbas in the 1930s finally got what they had wanted since 1782—federal recognition. Thirty years later, and after several decades of increasingly bitter factionalism, the Catawbas repeated the 1840 scenario. Sixty percent agreed to the termination of the federal reservation while the minority retreated in their trailers to the old 630-acre Carolina reservation.

While his book is titled *The Yuma*, anthropologist Robert Bee very appropriately insists on always calling this Colorado River group by their own name, the Quechan. This philological point is not irrelevant, for these Indians are not in any way compromisers such as the Catawbas. Quechans may live across from "Yuma" City, and the strategic river pass they controlled for centuries against Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and American armies may be called "Yuma" crossing, but these uncompromising fighters insist on being called the Quechan. As Bee learned from over two

decades of contact with this feisty people, when not fighting external enemies, the Quechan battle each other over positions of power. The nadir of the tribe probably occurred in 1945 when a man got elected to the tribal council with just one single vote cast.

The first half of *The Yuma* concerns the importance of war for the Quechan in controlling the only pass across the lower Colorado River. The Quechan first eliminated rival groups and then resisted (almost always successfully) the demands of the Spanish. The Mexicans never gained control of the area. In 1851–52, the Americans finally dominated the area. The second half of Bee's account footnotes American bureaucratic manipulation of an intransigently opposed but factionalized Quechan nation. Only for the past generation have native and bureaucratic energies been focused on ameliorating the terrible poverty of the reservation. The story ends with the tribe in possession of 25,000 court-given acres but for which the government will not allot irrigation water to permit the land to bloom once again.

Water, or more precisely, the struggle to find enough, summarizes several centuries of Pima-Maricopa history according to anthropologist Henry F. Dobyns in *The Pima-Maricopa*. The earliest chapters, with their pictures of a prosperous and industrious Pima-Maricopa confederation, explain how in 1862 they came to possess 143,000 pounds of wheat to sell on short notice to Union troops who were on their way to fight in Texas. Dobyns succeeds in showing that the Pima-Maricopa were (as the summary quotation on the jacket of the book reports the surprise of a Forty-niner) "surpassing many of the Christian nations in agriculture and little behind them in many useful arts." The first half of this book also documents the long-standing feud with the Apaches. Americans as diverse as the Forty-niners, Arizona miners, and American soldiers came to rely on Pima-Maricopa military support. Adding to the credibility of Dobyns' account is the fact that among the 35 books he has authored or coauthored are works on the traditional Indian enemies of the Pima-Maricopa.

The second half of this book pinpoints the harmful activities of unscrupulous land speculators and bureaucrats unwilling to allot precious water. Although Christianity has driven out the older native religious traditions, the Presbyterians, in particular, receive high praise for their efforts supporting tribal water rights. While the Pima-Maricopa have a past record of cooperating with

non-Indian neighbors, local conditions increasingly isolate them. The irrigation issue is so central and divisive in the water-poor Southwest that the Pima-Maricopa increasingly feel the cultural divide even as in most externals (intermarriage excepted) they approach non-Indian norms.

"Abenaki" means "'people of the Dawnland' or simply 'easterners.'" The Abenaki live in northern New England and adjoining parts of Canada. Historian Colin G. Calloway's 90-page discussion of them divides between a discussion of the way of life in chapters one and two and a chronology of coping with non-Indians in chapters three through six. In chapter one, "The People of the Dawnland," we learn of the Abenaki gathering economy and their rich mythological world. While a certain amount of simplification must take place in a text that quickly covers so long a period of time, it is the ideal culture rather than the real one that is being discussed in such statements as, "The Abenaki killed only as much game as they needed—they never hunted for sport . . ." (page 19). Never? Clearly the Native Americans had an enormous respect for wild life, but oral tales of ill luck dogging the steps of even great hunters show that they failed at times to follow the customs of respect toward the animal world. Likewise, Calloway writes that "A hunter who killed a deer or bear apologized to the animal's spirit, disposed of the bones properly, and did not waste any of the meat" (page 19). Couldn't it be possible that (even before the coming of the whites) sometime somebody worried that maybe meat had been wasted? Calloway's account is open to the same charge of indulging in facile generalizations that critics have leveled against Calvin Martin's exposition of similar views in his *Keepers of the Game*.

Chapter two, "Society, Art, and Culture," is devoted to a discussion of the life cycle followed by a discussion of their arts and crafts. At the start of the chronology of coping we learn that "the greatest danger to the Abenaki came not from armies of men but from European diseases, manufactured goods, and missionary Christians" (page 41). There were huge epidemics in the seventeenth century. The Abenaki adapted to the fur trade, which ended abruptly. The Abenaki sided with the French missionaries, to their historical detriment.

Calloway is at his best in discussing recent history. We learn that the Cleveland Spiders baseball team was renamed the Cleveland Indians in honor of player Louis Francis Sockalexis, of the

Penobscot branch of the Abenaki. Of course, in a text aimed at young adults, Sockalexis has his picture. We see the heart-wrenching picture of "Dark Cloud" surviving the extreme Indian poverty during the Great Depression by working a carnival sideshow, humiliated in Plains Indian headdress. Most fascinating of all, we are treated to a detailed account of how the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Abenaki won a legal battle over two-thirds of the land in the State of Maine. The \$81.5 million they were granted by President Jimmy Carter in 1980 has been put to good use repurchasing 300,000 acres of forestland, \$1,000 per year to each family, buying and then selling a cement company at a great profit, and doing many other things to develop their communities. These Indians know how (to quote the text) "to play the game."

The editor, Frank W. Porter III, has the same five-page introduction at the front of each of the five volumes. Respect for each tribe and each author calls for a focused and pertinent editorial comment for each volume. No apparent reason sanctions the constant reprinting of Porter's summary of Indian-White relations in five, let alone 53, projected volumes. While there is much evidence of Indian networking on matters social and sartorial, most of the five authors, for example, do not illustrate in their narratives the "collective identity felt by Indians today" that Porter emphasizes. Moreover, the Porter introduction lacks a coherent argument. The introduction, for example, starts with a quotation of John Steinbeck saying that the white man's good intentions are the problem, while the last paragraph preaches the pessimistic view that as long as Indians have land and resources they will be under attack by greedy neighbors. Neither good intentions nor consuming greed seems to be the heart of the problem. The Pima-Maricopa and Abenaki clearly do not subscribe to the idea that mortal conflict is inevitable in human affairs. All five tribes show some symbiotic interchange with their non-Indian neighbors.

Nevertheless, the title of Porter's essay nicely encapsulates two great themes of Indian history—conflict and survival. In these five volumes, the conflict theme is played less frequently than the survival theme. Perhaps the authors (like Porter) feel past authors have overworked the idea of Indians being relentlessly crushed under an unfeeling Western technological juggernaut. The details of contemporary Indian survival emerge front and center in

the last third of each of these five volumes. This emphasis on recent years is the real strength of this series. This emphasis fulfills an academic need even as it makes the texts palatable for its intended readership of young adults. Survival means, all too often these days, scheming to escape poverty. The Pima-Maricopa learn English, work hard, and migrate or commute to where the jobs are. While the 1980s have been bad years, the Quechan escaped dire poverty in the 1970s. Most of the Catawbas who were successful cut their reservation ties in the 1960s, while the less successful clung to the pride that accompanies even the smallest of reservations. Narragansett communal life continued unabated (if unnoticed) after the 1879 selling of their land. Even though only the Abenaki (and only part of them) are a financial success story, none of the tribes seems to have that culture of poverty that makes economic and spiritual uplift impossible.

Dobyns, who is noted for his insistence that historians paint a realistic picture of Indians, emphasizes that the Pima-Maricopa (like the non-Indian population) go where jobs are to be found. If there is one conceptual weakness in the series as now projected, it is in the insignificance accorded to the urban experience, particularly the urban experience of Indians who are not within commuter distance of their tribes. The majority of today's Indians live in urban areas, and many in areas which most inhabitants find (in the words of Dobyns) "a social and economic environment that is every bit as harsh as the desert." A series that does not want (to quote Porter) to "think of American Indians as curious vestiges of a distant past" needs to find a way to make the modern urban experience central to a good part of the narrative. If these texts would lead their younger readers to feel an urge to seek out the local (urban in most cases) Indian organization, the texts would be achieving their goal of increasing an understanding of real Indians. If they lead their younger readers only to look for some boy scout experience of war drums and bead work, the text is no more relevant than those leading to Medieval Fair days.

However, there is no reason to think that these five books will bring anything other than acclaim to their authors and their publisher. Readers will look forward to further volumes in the series. The analyses of North American Indians embodied in these volumes will increase understanding of both the great variety

of Indian community experiences over time and the more general themes of conflict and survival in Native American history. The Indians discussed in this series do not exhibit ways of life that must be recorded before they perish, as anthropologists thought earlier in this century, but peoples and cultures of amazing endurance.