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Peer reviewed

## Review Essay

### The Tribal History—An Obsolete Paradigm

James A. Clifton

Because it is one of the better—perhaps the best recent example—of the genre, Edmund J. Danziger's newly published *The Chippewas of Lake Superior*<sup>1</sup> can serve as a point of departure for an assessment of that peculiarly American historiographic form known as the tribal history. In this slim volume, as we will see, Danziger pushes to their utmost limits the basic assumptions, methods, and rationalizations of this traditional approach to the scholarly task of unraveling the sense and patterns of the past of Native American societies. In so doing he clearly revealed the fundamental limitations and defects of the model adopted to structure this inquiry. These striking weaknesses, it must be emphasized, are deficiencies of what Thomas B. Kuhn calls a "normal paradigm," not the person.<sup>2</sup> They express the failure of the long established customary set of ideas, restrictions, presuppositions, and techniques that mark the tribal history as a distinctive genre now grown obsolete. Hence these comments must be read as a critique of the tribal history paradigm, not of any particular author who is intellectually trapped by its form and style.

As Kuhn observes in his study of the evolution of science and scholarship, the historical development of a branch of disciplined knowledge is more a thing of fits and starts than a continuously steady accumulation of demonstrated facts and tested propositions.<sup>3</sup> Such development, he argues cogently, proceeds by sequential phases of normal and revolutionary science. The normal phase of scholarship—of which the tribal history is but one long established variety—is built upon a basic underlying paradigm that structures and restricts the efforts of scholars in the discipline.

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This paradigm consists of recurrent standard styles in the use of ideas, observations, and methods. Although explicit rationales, rules, and theories characterize the more formalized branches of normal scholarship, these are found with great infrequency in the tribal history—and Danziger's study of the Lake Superior Chippewa is no exception to this generalization—as if the practitioners were little concerned with how they are supposed to pursue their craft.

The absence of a disciplined, conscious, awareness and of open debate on the limitations of methods and ideas in the presentation of tribal histories is the most telling mark of the obsolete status of this scholarly paradigm. Since they seem to be mastered by uncritical imitation of the works of predecessors and contemporaries, the established parameters of the tribal history act efficiently as a set of scholarly blinders, blocking out even the possibility of perceiving contradictions, inadequacies, omissions, and outright errors of fact and interpretation. Similarly, each instance of a tribal history is not addressed to others creatively, creatively, or comparatively as a fruitful contribution to developing knowledge of Native American histories. Instead the work is performed and the results issued on the basis of a gap-filling rationale—because no comparable study has been issued in recent generations—with each example issued in intellectual isolation from every other, done as a kind of training exercise as if the practitioners had abandoned hope of ever systematically improving knowledge and of attaining understandings that were general and true of the histories of the Native American societies.<sup>4</sup>

Although historical study of Native American peoples might well be recognized as one of the most difficult branches of the discipline, in practice the tribal history is treated as one of the least demanding varieties of historical scholarship. In no other field of modern history, for example, would a professional be allowed, much less encouraged, to embark upon the study of a culturally different society without an initial deep immersion in the language and culture of the people who are the subject of the investigation. Yet historians of native North American peoples are forever setting out to do just this, and Danziger's study of the Chippewa is no exception.

The failure to acquire even a basic familiarity with the language makes the historian of tribes into an uncritical dependent on secondary sources and casual informants for any effort to translate into meaningful English historical Chippewa names, phrasings,

and thinking. Additionally, this deficiency of preparation effectively cuts the researcher off from a whole body of available, useful, and usable information, making of the tribal history a work based upon other's translations. The effects of this are expressed in a variety of ways, all of which together block the historian from access to contemporaneous Native American understandings and perceptions of situations and events.

In rare attempts to render some Chippewa term or another into English, Danziger, for example, regularly goes awry. Attempting to render what the Chippewa called the Dakota speakers to the west of them (p. 36), for Na-dou-esse or Nadouesioux (actually, na·towe·siw) he elects a folk (i.e., an incorrect) etymology, "snake in the grass," lifted out of an uncritical local history source (p. 223, n.45), when he might have easily recognized this as an obvious American slang phrase. Actually, with this ethnic label, the Chippewa, like their Algonquian neighbors, at some time in their history denoted the Sioux as a group speaking a different language, marked by the diminutive ending *-siw* as less important than the Iroquoians to the east, and they called a certain species of snake after their name for the Sioux, not the reverse. Similarly, Danziger translates O-jib-i-weg (i.e. *Očipwe*) as "Those Who Make Pictographs," again basing his effort on an uncritical secondary source (p. 220, n.2), this time bolstered with an ad hoc rationalization basing this mistranslation on the pictographs in Midewiwin scrolls (p. 7), apparently not understanding that originally *Očipwe* referred narrowly and solely to one of the small local ancestral groups who made a distinctive kind of puckered moccasin seam.

Danziger's unfamiliarity with the language and culture may also be at the root of his reluctance to identify historical Chippewa actors by name, since this would require some linguistic skill in sorting out the widely variant French and English spellings, much less the tough work of sound translation. Except for a very rare reference to a prominent leader such as Flat Mouth or Minavavana, or more frequent references to powerful cultural marginals such as the Warren family of traders and intercultural brokers, we have to wait until the mid-twentieth century to learn the identities of many Chippewa, and then they are the modern representatives of reservation power structures. Although Danziger's index is loaded with names and references to many French, British, and American agents, there are barely a half-dozen Chippewa names contained therein. Thus the tens of thousands of individual Chippewa who contributed to and who were influenced by this society's historical

experience remain anonymous and unremarked, concealed behind page after page of anecdotal generalizations. This is an important clue to the actual thrust of the tribal history, which far more concerns what various kinds of European-Americans did to, for, and about, Native Americans than it does what any Native Americans thought and did themselves.

Such failure to repeatedly specify which particular Chippewa did what to whom means that the authors of tribal histories cannot successfully plumb the distinctive motivations or cognitive styles of the peoples whose histories they are supposedly studying. It means that the historical Chippewa, as a distinctive variety of human-kind, are never quite brought to life in such efforts to reconstruct their experiences, and are never enlivened as full-scale participants in their own history. It means that the narrative is inherently one-sided, overloaded in the direction of Euro-American motives, aspirations, and doings. And it means that the ground is left fertile for intrusion by the most shallow variety of conventional images of Native Americans.

Several standard devices are employed regularly by the authors of the normal tribal history to cover this lack of adequate understanding of the language and culture of the peoples studied, and Danziger employs most of them with effect. Not being familiar with the Chippewas' own nomenclature, much less the styles and varieties of their thinking, one tactic is to employ that impoverished, bichromatic American vocabulary of Indian affairs that became popular by the middle of the past century. Thus Danziger's pages are littered with references to papooses, squaws, white men, red men, braves, medicine men, mixed-bloods, and the like, always casually and uncritically used, as if these stereotypic terms had some sort of useful technical denotations.

In the effort to write something interesting concerning the lives of Native American peoples, in the tribal history these trite terms are typically combined into larger clichés. In the instance of Danziger's efforts, we find the Chippewa harvesting the land rather than mutilating "mother earth," and "worshipping" Lake Superior (p. 6). They are the "denizens of the forests" (p. 9) who did not live in "highly structured" societies (p. 10), and who preferred to approach the supernatural world as free individuals, not collectively (p. 17), although they did go to war to release the pent-up bitterness created by powerful medicine men, while before hand the "shrieking warriors" danced themselves into a "delirium of valor"

to the accompaniment of "pounding drums."<sup>5</sup>

The third well-worn tactic of the normal tribal history used by Danziger is to assemble a body of such hackneyed phrases into an introductory chapter on the "traditional culture" of the society studied. Typically, such chapters dispose of the changing complexities and subtleties of a whole Native American culture in twenty pages or less. Added on to the beginning of the book, they are not systematically integrated with or related to the historical narrative that follows. One reason for this is that historians of tribes seldom indicate awareness of how one institution is related to another, nor do they offer much sophisticated insight into the dynamics of cultural adaptations. Actually, these chapters do not express any original research for they are little more than partial digests of a fraction of the available anthropological literature on the society; digests that do not distinguish what was hypothetical from what is well demonstrated, or the minor cultural variant from a major focus, or the obsolete and superseded interpretation from the most recent tested formulations. Because the historian of tribes is little concerned with institutional priorities or processes of change, the reader is left little prepared for the narrative that follows. Indeed, in that powerful mythic image still favored by historians of tribes, this "traditional culture" is defined as something durably unchanging—until it was overrun by "white men." Danziger baldly asserts that antique fallacy when he states that, prior to the arrival of the first French, Chippewa "traditional culture" had been "static" for two millennia, thereby demonstrating full ignorance of the last thirty years of archaeological study in the region and effectively denying the Chippewa their own history of efforts to cope creatively with a changing social and physical environment before "the Europeans came and catapulted them into the Age of Iron" (p. 25).

Such efforts as this to encapsulate the cultures of native North American societies in a few glamorized, stereotypic paragraphs are not intended, of course, as serious background to an effort to see Chippewa history in terms of the contributions and involvements of Chippewa individuals, motivations, institutions, and value orientations. They are little more than the prescribed prelude to one of those standard morality plays most favored by American academicians, a drama centered on a classic confrontation between good and evil, with the Chippewa, in this instance, displayed as conventionally romanticized noble savages. The authors of these greatly over-simplified and too often confused

and contradictory paragraphs are engaged in stage setting, carrying out one imperative of the paradigm of the normal tribal history. In Danziger's case, his own profound bias as well as his misunderstanding is revealed most clearly in a preliminary analogy where he tells his reader that "traditional Chippewa culture" differs from the modern American industrial life just as does the contemporary back-packer's bivouac from life in downtown Duluth. While such a historically and culturally blurred analogy may reveal the covert basis of an author's identification with his subject, it does not suggest must insight into ancestral Chippewa cultural styles, nor does it offer systematic understanding of what has transpired since. The modern backpacker seeking solace in the well organized and only half-spoiled wilderness, of course, is dependent on and symptom of, not the source of, the industrial age; he is one small measure of what has happened to the Chippewa and their environment in the past three hundred years, with as little in common with an ancestral, self-sufficient, Chippewa subsistence hunter as with any person on earth.

The obligatory first chapters on "traditional cultures" are, roughly, the historian's equivalent of the older anthropological device of the reconstructed historical ethnography which also, wittingly or not, seemed to treat ancient Native American societies as static and tradition bound. However, they lack the methodological checks and balances of modern historical ethnographies as well as the richness of their social and cultural characterizations. Such efforts as that of Danziger's to depict a static pre-contact Chippewa culture are actually ahistoric composites, with elements originating in different historical periods stuck together uncritically, end-on-end. In Danziger's case, although he asserts in one place that Chippewa "traditional culture" was driven off balance by its first confrontation with the "Iron Age" (p. 25), his main thesis is that these static traditions persisted relatively unchanged until the Treaty of 1854 (pp. 3-5), while in other places he wants his readers to believe that the core of Chippewa values and styles have endured to the present day (p. ix).

Such a juxtaposition of cultural elements and institutional forms which developed in different historical epochs under the rubric of "traditional culture" does not make for systematic understanding of the processes of social and cultural change that greatly have marked Native American histories. Specifically, such preconceptions do not prepare the historian for interpreting such fragmentary

evidence as comes his way. Further, the device again indicates that, whatever the tribal history may be about, it is not an adequate social, cultural, political, or economic history of a particular Native American society.

In the case of the Chippewa study, for instance, the author regularly attributes to the mythopoeic "traditional era" institutions and forms known to represent this people's own later efforts to cope with the changing circumstances of their lives. An example is the Midewiwin, an emergent post-contact religious institution that Danziger ambiguously classifies as one of a type with other cultural revitalization movements such as that of the Shawnee prophet a century and a half later, and the even later Long House religion of the Iroquois. Such errors—of ambiguous over-generalization—do not display much sophisticated understanding of the origins, the nature, and the varieties of revitalization movements. Indeed, Danziger completely missed one of the most interesting of all the emergent Chippewa religious institutions, the much documented late-nineteenth century Dream Dance religion. Had he recognized and appreciated the importance of this Chippewa institutional innovation he might have had to qualify his major thesis. In the Chippewas' own perceptions, it was not the Treaty of 1854 that was the most "pivotal event" in their history, but the concerted policy of concentrating them on a few reservations a full generation later. This grave stress was measured and marked by their creation in 1876 of this new religion, The Dream Dance, a pan-tribal movement marshalling collective magic in a last-ditch effort aimed at driving Americans out of the northern Wisconsin and Minnesota forests.

If the employment of over-simplified, ahistoric composite stereotypes of "traditional cultures" is inadequate to the task of viewing sequential developments and historical processes in the light of Native American contributions, what of the presentation of the involvements of agents of other societies who were also parties to these complex transactions? We must appreciate that the proper writing of Native American histories cannot proceed without equally sensitive understanding of the variable values and changing institutions of other societies with whom societies like the Chippewa interacted over the centuries.

Although Danziger commendably attempts to sketch the entire history of the Chippewa down to 1975 (other tribal histories favor a convenient earlier cut-off date), one of the genuine weaknesses



of his effort lies in his treatment of the French and British regimes in the period 1641 through 1815. His understanding of the contact institutions and policies of New France, for instance, is hardly an improvement on his handling of the Chippewa social life. All of the French economic agents, for example, are regularly, non-distinctively, and anachronistically referred to as "*coureurs de bois* or *voyageurs*," indicating that the author had not taken the trouble to learn the social and historical differences between these roles and institutions much less the differences between them and a *fermier* and an *engagé*, or a *manger du lard* and an *habitant*.

Not being systematically aware of the changing roles and institutions of the societies with whom the Chippewa interacted, the author is prone to hasty and inadequately researched generalizations concerning their relationships. Indeed, noting the profound biases expressed in the opening pages, the author of this tribal history would have had difficulty in avoiding this classic historiographic error. But the treatments of the French and British regimes are based almost entirely upon secondary sources—general histories, regional histories, state histories, local histories, and the like, only occasionally enlivened by gleanings from the *Jesuit Relations* or the *Wisconsin Historical Society Collections*. For a professional historian whose aim was to depict a people for whom the fur trade was such a critical factor in their lives for so very long, a reader might properly anticipate that the author would have prepared himself thoroughly on this topic. Yet Danziger's bibliography, surprisingly, contains not a single reference to the massive outpouring of classic scholarly essays and books available on the French and British fur trade.

This uncritical and uncorrected overreliance on older secondary sources must render suspect many of the author's generalizations about the specific impact of New France and Great Britain upon the Chippewa, as well as putting question marks behind a number of his alleged "facts." Moreover, by not resolving or correcting the differences between these secondary sources, the author leaves himself prone to internal contradictions in his own narrative. For example, based on one source, Danziger tells us that the first ancestral Chippewa contracted by the French were likely westward expanding hunters only recently settled near Sault Ste. Marie (p. 26), whereas only a few pages earlier he made the Sault Ste. Marie region the several-thousand-year-old homeland of that "static" Chippewa culture. Similarly, in one place he notes that the vast migration of Chippewa bands into new territories came in conse-

quence of their involvement with the French (p. 23), while a few pages later he generalizes that New France minimized "uprooting of Indian tribes" (p. 39), which conclusion certainly would not have squared with the declared policies and the activities of a Perrot, a du Luth, or a Cadillac.

A similar contradiction is apparent in the oft repeated statement that British prices for furs were higher than those of the French, a point supported by data tabulated for 1720 in one place (p. 38), but an assertion undermined by a later tabulation of British prices in the post-conquest era which shows that their prices then were sixteen times those they themselves had charged forty-five years earlier, and four times those of the French in that earlier period, a historical development certainly worthy of commentary, comparison, and the extraction of a conclusive if such tabulations are to be taken seriously as valid indicators of economic policies and not just ad hoc illustrations.

The author's over dependency on older secondary sources also leads him to statements about neighboring tribes that have long been recognized as simple errors of fact. Thus the Mesquakie (Fox), for example, were not prehistoric inhabitants of Northern Wisconsin as the author suggests (p. 33) but were post-contact migrants from southern Michigan; none of the Central Algonquian tribes such as the Fox, Potawatomi, Sauk, or Kickapoo were engaged by the French as "fur trappers" (p. 34) until a decade or more after they had departed Michigan; and it was Tionontate, Neutral, and Odawa war parties that drove them out of Michigan in the 1640s, not the New York Iroquois.

Like other historians of tribes, Danziger has periods where his efforts approach and perhaps match the standards of excellence fixed for the histories of cultures other than Native American. His "period" is the American era, beginning in 1815. Here his research is far more directed at the assembly and assessment of primary sources than is true of his efforts for earlier centuries. Basically, however, his narrative in the chapters dealing with the American period are based mainly upon the most readily available American sources (e.g., documents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and some original personal narratives), supplemented by the use of a more limited number of secondary materials and a dozen or so casual interviews collected from reservation leaders in June and July of 1975.

In preparing his narrative, Danziger, for this period and like other historians of tribes, employs practically none of the varied,

rich body of available primary sources that have come to mark high standard social or cultural histories of other societies—iconographic and cartographic records, for example, linguistic materials, artifacts and material culture, art forms, or personal documents. Indeed, by ignoring even readily available documentary sources (e.g., the French and British materials easily accessible in Canadian archives) he misses entire demographic, political, and economic dimensions of the Southwestern Chippewa experience both before and after 1815. Thus he does not seem to recognize that several groups of Southwestern Chippewa—such as the Potaganeses band from Drummond Island—departed American territory forever after 1816; and he does not recognize the importance to these Chippewa of their annual visitations to British posts, or the dramatic impact upon them of the radical change in British Indian policy in 1837. Nor does he take into account the substantial migration into Upper Canada of many from the Michigan and Wisconsin villages after that date. This is a particular serious gap in the basic research since British Indian agents were meticulous about verbatim recording of the speeches of “Visiting Indians,” much more so than their American counterparts, and the views and sentiments expressed by migrant and visiting Chippewa contain a rich body of contemporaneous primary documentation which is simply not available in American sources.

However, even when dealing with those primary documents used, historians of tribes seem to be exceedingly reluctant to analyse them for Native American views, tactics, sentiments, and strategies in dealing with Americans. Again, Danziger is no exception to this generalization. Except for an occasional quotation, he does not systematically present, analyze, or critically examine much of what is available in the way of specific descriptions of Chippewa behavior or records of their views and attitudes. This is especially damaging in the case of the Southwestern Chippewa as compared with other Native American groups in the Upper Great Lakes, for records of their doings and sayings happen to be particularly rich.

For example, one very important document, which Danziger seemingly missed completely as he does not cite it, consists of one of those rare bilingual petitions, this one dated 1864, dictated in Chippewa, and then translated into clumsy English in parallel columns by the same scribe-interpreter, Joseph Gurnoe. Subsequently acquired by George P. Warren, who was released from the Union Army to act as the Chippewa delegation’s interpreter while in

Washington, it was finally delivered into the hands of Lyman Draper for safe-keeping at the Wisconsin Historical Society.<sup>6</sup> This document, which sets down the consensus views of an assembly of southwestern Chippewa leaders on their own history of treaty dealings with the United States as of 1864, when combined with other available materials, presents an unusual window into the Chippewa side of treaty transactions, offering a view of how they conducted themselves and what they anticipated getting from such negotiations.

With respect to the Treaty of 1837, for instance, in 1864 the Wisconsin Chippewa leaders recalled that, from their side of the negotiating table, they had agreed to sell to the United States only the standing pine timber on part of their lands, "from the usual height of cutting a tree, upward to the top," reserving for themselves the "roots of the tree" (i.e., in Chippewa botanical theory the source of the new growth), all the deciduous timber stands, the lands on which these stood, and all the waterways of the area. This twenty-seven year old recollection is supported and further enriched by the unusually detailed journal of the 1837 Chippewa treaty.<sup>7</sup> Throughout this negotiation the President's representative, Governor Henry Dodge, repeatedly assured the Chippewa that all the Americans wished to purchase was their "pine lands;" but once these reassurances and specifications had been filtered through an interpreter, the assembled Chippewa delegation obviously heard something different from what Governor Dodge intended.

At the conclusion of the 1837 treaty, Maghegabo, the spokesman selected by the Chippewa, rose and issued an interesting statement, accompanied by several highly symbolic gestures. He said: "Of all the country that we wish to grant you we wish to hold on to a tree where we get our living; and to reserve the streams where we drink the waters that give us life. . . the chiefs will now show you the tree we want to reserve. This is it. . ." Then Maghegabo laid an Oak bough on the table, over the treaty, in front of Governor Dodge, adding, "It is a different kind of tree from the one you wish to get from us." Clearly, in Chippewa thinking, the Americans had come to purchase what today would be called the "first-cut" from the pine forests, and the Indians were reserving the lands, the waters, and the deciduous forests for themselves. Indeed, since these Chippewa had exceedingly little use for the pine forests, it is probable they believed they were getting a bargain.

However, this was neither the American intent nor their understanding of what was being transacted. Indeed, in the margin of

the journal the treaty scribe, Verplanck Van Antwerp, noted his reaction to the curious reference to the reserved "tree." Obviously the interpreter had made an error in translation, he thought, although he inferred that perhaps the Chippewa wanted to reserve certain usufruct rights.

What we seem to have in this incident is a classic example of intercultural miscommunication, not force or fraud, as well as a clear perception of a distinctive Chippewa style. In the normal tribal history, however, efforts to penetrate the biases of documents written by Euro-Americans are few and far between. In consequence of this, the specific aims, reactions, motives and thought patterns of historical Native American agents, if not ignored completely, are glossed over in brief summaries.

If histories of tribes do not bother systematically to analyse and present contemporaneous Native American understandings, perceptions, and participation in events and situations, and if in effect they are basically writing chronicles of what European American agents did to or about native peoples, we might properly expect that these scholars would subject the American side of the equation to very careful scrutiny and analysis. Again, in the instance of Danziger's study, this development should have been most evident in the five chapters dealing with the American era where his background knowledge is the strongest and his personal research more original.

Instead, what we find in these chapters are pages heavily loaded with hundreds of pieces of information culled from the records of the federal government, fragments of information that have not been adequately subjected to normal historiographic standards of criticism, analysis, or synthesis. For the most part, the pronouncements of actors since 1816, American or Chippewa, are taken at face value, as if each one meant exactly what he or she said. In brief, much of this material consists of raw, undigested information that has not been converted into meaningful facts or interpretations by the application of disciplined inquiry and cross-checking. Indeed, upon reading these chapters and comparing them with the original documents from which the information was lifted, what we find are essentially summaries, often with the exact wording, the same adjectives and emphasis, and even the same verb tenses preserved as in the originals.

Sometimes contemporary usage intrudes strongly upon these historical summaries. One such example is Danziger's regularly repeated use of the acronym "BIA" for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

BIA, of course, is the only three letter four letter word in the lexicon of contemporary Native American leaders. The way the author regularly employs this acronym, with a tone ranging from mild opprobrium to utter disgust, strongly suggests that his usage reflects his strong identification with his subjects, carried to the point of casual use of their phrasings. Unfortunately for a professional historian, Danziger is incautious in the use of references to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, writing of such an organization decades before contemporaries so identified the Office of Indian Affairs or the Indian Office. Together with this anachronistic usage, Danziger similarly projects contemporary attitudes towards the Bureau into the past, generally attributing to the "BIA" powers of policy making, for example, that this department has never enjoyed. In contrast, whatever contemporary Native American leaders may say of the "BIA", they are perfectly aware that Indian policy is formulated in other branches of government, a mystery that this author apparently has not mastered.

Overall, an assessment of the normal tribal history so far might well lead to the interpretation that scholars who embark upon such efforts are commonly allowed to employ a double standard of historiographic method and interpretation. Somehow, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the historian's treasured techniques and standards of documentary criticism and validation are set aside in favor of unevaluated and unanalysed summaries of sources, which seems to make of the tribal history a mirror reflecting their biases and prejudices. In the instance of this study, this methodological weakness applies to both American and Chippewa materials, particularly the latter, and especially so to purportedly authentic Chippewa oral sources. Danziger makes heavy use, for example, of the so-called "traditional" histories of the Chippewa and kindred peoples that became such a publishing event in the mid-part of the past century, without raising any questions about their accuracy, validity, or authenticity. He does not recognize, for example, that George Copway's *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, which he lists as a first-hand account (p. 248), was for the most part copied word for word, comma for comma, and typographical error for typographical error out of official reports of the British Indian Department and the reports of the Select Committee of the Provincial Parliament of Upper Canada. Nor does he raise any critical questions about other such "first-hand" accounts, apparently overcome by the phrase "traditional history" in their titles, not understanding that these were

generally inspired by and published under the auspices of missionary organizations or ladies-aide societies.

As seems to be the norm for the tribal history, Danziger similarly uncritically handles public pronouncements of Chippewa leaders, whether historical or more recent. In one example, he quotes a Chippewa leader in 1942 as saying we are standing "shoulder to shoulder with our white brothers as we did with George' Washington at Valley Forge and in every war for liberty" (p. 155). In this and similar instances, assertions are repeated without evaluation of their context or sense, this one apparently in support of the author's conclusion that the Chippewa were enjoying "freedom" in the period 1934-1964. A professional historian surely might have scrutinized this grandiose, jingoist claim carefully, for while it is entirely possible that the speaker and his kinfolk might well have had one or more ancestors who spent the winter at Valley Forge, they were certainly not Chippewa. A professional historian also surely must understand that this assertion hardly captures the essence of Chippewa participation in the North American colonial and expansionist state wars. Unfortunately, what Danziger does here is hardly more than to enshrine the kinds of statements elicited by public relations people for their own purposes.

One of the most debilitating uses of oral "evidence" is employed by Danziger in his opening pages to set the tune of his monograph. Based on one of his several personal interviews with modern Chippewa leaders, he quotes one as saying that Indians believe there was more than one Hitler: "several presidents of the United States have been Hitlers" (p. ix). Recognizing the style of argumentation favored by some modern reservation leaders, we can appreciate the purpose of such an outrageous piece of exaggerated rhetoric, and might anticipate that a professional historian—especially one noted for his own sterling work on an important era in the formation of United States Indian policies<sup>8</sup>—might have commented critically on this statement. If he actually believed that the Indian policies of a Lincoln or a Grant, or even a Jackson or a Nixon, were validly comparable to the minority group policies of Adolph Hitler, he might have said so himself and taken responsibility for the claim rather than to issue it from the mouth of a modern reservation leader with his blessing.

Instead, Danziger uses such guilt-evoking assertions to build up his rationalization for writing the tribal history. Basically, this consists of the claim that "for centuries the Indian had no channel of communication with the dominant society; White Americans

were too cocksure that the destruction of the Indians' woodland way of life was justified" (p. ix). Apparently, Danziger wants his readers to believe that this is an epoch marking breakthrough, a pioneering effort to open up a means of communications between Native Americans and others where none existed previously. In this respect, again, the author simply has not done his historical homework, or else for other purposes he has simply ignored much of what is known about relationships between Native and other Americans over the course of the past centuries. Moreover, if basic historical American attitudes toward the treatment of Indians can be captured in a few words, certainly "guilt-ridden" and not "cocksure" might be the adjective of choice. As authors of tribal histories ought to know, many contemporary reservation leaders are perfectly well aware of the private, public, and institutionalized shame that pervades American attitudes towards Native American peoples, and some are regularly willing to exult that chink in the character armor of Americans for their own purposes. Had the author been critical of the materials he obtained in his personal interviews, he might have recognized that he was being manipulated, that one leader was confronting the newly arrived visitor with a sharp effort to disarm his critical faculties and to enlist his sympathies.

In Danziger's phrasing, therefore, the tribal history is rationalized as a kind of restitution fantasy. The authors of tribal histories, he seems to assert, are laboring to open up a channel of communication between Indians and Americans where none exists. Moreover, they are doing this so that Americans can see themselves "more clearly" (p. x). If this is the case, then the authors of the normal tribal history may well be perceived as having sold out their most fundamental obligation to see the truth in the past as clearly as possible in favor of a new role, that of the house historian. In the thinking of some commentators, this new role is viewed as espousing a new and novel historicist morality.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the historian of tribes seems to be acting as a self-appointed advocate of the Indian cause, employing his version of the past deliberately to mould attitudes in the present. Whether moral or not, this is certainly politicized history, and until a clear line is drawn separating adequately-researched historical narrative from public relations flackery, the readers of the tribal history will need to be cautious.

However, the claim to be opening up a channel of communication between Indians and Americans where none has existed simply will not stand the test of careful historical examination of the rela-



tionships between peoples like the Chippewa and Americans over the centuries. To believe this, the author would have to ignore much of his own research and what he himself has written, for in this study of the Chippewa we find page after page of descriptions of multiple means of open communication. Delegations and petitions to the President, the Congress, and even the BIA; essays, books, pamphlets, and reports in the tens of thousands representing several long standing genre from the Indian Hero biography to the study of Native American religion; numerous uses of the mass media from newspapers to television; a variety of national lobbying organizations and Indian aide groups; constitutional provisions, a complex body of Federal Indian law, and batteries of skillful, dedicated attorneys representing Indian interests; and missionary groups and other self-appointed helpers of the Indian. These and many other effective channels of communication have long existed linking together Indians and other Americans—for better or for worse. Indeed, to be convinced of such a claim, Danziger would have to assume that for more than two centuries the Chippewa themselves were entirely incapable of representing their own interests and presenting their case. But the clear historical record simply will not support such a position.

Instead of opening up lines of communication, it seems evident that the author of this tribal history has committed two of the most elementary methodological sins of social inquiry, one of which is perhaps excusable in a professional historian who is a novice in the field of dealing with living communities, the other not so. As we have seen, it seems apparent that the author, by simply summarizing the phrases in his documentary sources without adequately assessing them for worth or validity, has allowed himself to be imprisoned by the biases and prejudices of his primary sources. In common with other historians of tribes he has not worked through these distortions so as to grasp larger truths behind them and to confront the specific sense and meaning of the Chippewa past. In this sense, whatever the tribal history may be, it is not first-class historical narrative or analysis as judged by contemporary standards.

Allowing himself to become imprisoned by the biases of modern as well as historical sources is the second methodological failing revealed here. In fairness to the author, however, we must recognize that a several year total immersion in the flatulent annual reports of the Bureau of Indian Affairs would have made a dedicated Indian supporter out of Andrew Jackson. Nonetheless, pre-

disposed to a premature empathetic identification with his subjects, during his summer of 1975 visitations to several Chippewa reservations, the author evidently allowed himself to be captured by his informants. This is the social science sin that can be excused in a historian since it is the fate of most newcomers to the reservation scene upon first meeting skillful, powerfully effective Native American leaders. What outsiders like Danziger do not appreciate is that they are dealing with leaders long experienced in the fine art of exploiting any available human resource, particularly talented in the techniques of enlisting the emotional and intellectual sympathies of visitors. Therefore, in the end, it seems that the authors of tribal histories offer us sympathy without sharp, clear understanding, and sympathy alone is not sufficient to the task of uncovering the complexities of the past of Native American societies.

One of the more curious weaknesses in the form and style of the tribal history has been the lack of the development of a sophisticated set of useful and appropriate methods. Instead, tribal histories are still being published one after the other as they have been for generations, all cut from the same basic methodological cloth, all shaped by the same warp and woof of powerful images and preconceptions. In this respect American practitioners stand in profound contrast to their counterparts in Great Britain and France, who have steadily been advancing standards of excellence, developing new concepts and techniques, and consistently improving the quality of their analyses and narratives. Unfortunately, American practitioners of the craft hardly seem aware of much less drawing benefits from such developments—Danziger, for one, does not so much as cite a recent authority on the methodology of analysing and interpreting tribal history sources.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, our assessment of the normal tribal history has emphasized its rigidly conventional and its inadequate styles and methods; its overreliance upon the left-overs of nineteenth century preoccupations and stereotypic images of Indians; its extremely limited variety of source materials; its inability to handle certain kinds of sources—especially oral—with any degree of sophistication; its lack of technical ideas and its failure to develop new techniques of inquiry and analysis; its employment of ethnocentric (called “common-sense”) frames of interpretation; its tendency to devolve into political rhetoric; its rather naive efforts to assume a “helping role” on behalf of contemporary Indians; its over emphasis on what the French, British, and Americans did to Indians at the expense of systematic consideration of what Indians were doing for them-

selves; its assumptions about "static" Native American traditional cultures; and its failure to penetrate the complex realities that were the Native Americans' own experience of involvement in their history. These points, together, support the conclusion that, as a standardized normal paradigm for gaining systematic knowledge about the past, the tribal history has faltered and failed.

This is not to suggest, of course, that tribal histories will cease being published in the near future. As is well known, an inadequate, faulty paradigm can limp along for generations and even centuries without collapsing entirely. Indeed, if there is anything "static" in tribal history, it is in the writing and not the creation of it. So long as presses such as those at the University of Oklahoma labor to produce pre-packaged versions of this genre, so long as the producers themselves draw personal profit from their writing and are free of criticism of their product, so long as the profession responsible remains unwilling to engage in systematic critical efforts at upgrading the standards of the paradigm, and so long as the American reading public—long fed on a diet of junk-food concerning Indians—knows no better, the tribal history will endure, but with only the semblance and not the substance of sound scholarship.

Fortunately, for those interested in an alternative perspective on the past of Native American societies, for several decades now what Thomas B. Kuhn would call a "revolutionary paradigm" has been building. Called ethnohistory and inherently an interdisciplinary approach unfettered by the standards and preoccupations of any one academic department, this fresh new paradigm is busily and openly confronting the nagging problems left unresolved by the normal tribal history. Ethnohistory, in contrast to the tribal history, is chronically engaged in self-conscious criticism of techniques and styles, is busily developing powerful new conceptual schemes and research strategies appropriate to the issues and to the kinds of information available, and is uncovering whole new realms of data heretofore left untouched. The participants in the development of this new paradigm, drawn from a variety of backgrounds such as history, social anthropology, cultural geography, historical archaeology, linguistics, and others, are currently locked in a fruitful and creative if sometimes controversial embrace, engaged in bringing the best of late twentieth century social science thinking—not the intellectual leavings of the nineteenth century—to the difficult but rewarding task of uncovering Native American histories.

In stark contrast to the conventional tribal history are a number of recent ethnohistorical monographs. These include such sparkling works as Conrad E. Heidenreich's *Huronian: A History and Geography of the Huron Indians, 1600-1650*; Arthur J. Ray and Donald B. Freeman's "Give Us Good Measure": *An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763*, and Ray's own earlier *Indians in the Fur Trade*; A.F.C. Wallace's *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*; Bruce Trigger's *The Children of Aataentsic*; and Charles Hudson's *The Southeastern Indians*. Together, these and other ethnohistorical studies more than adequately demonstrate the power of this new paradigm for the study of Native American History. While they all demand a great deal more of readers in the way of intellectual effort, mainly because they employ sophisticated analytic frames rather than shop-worn stereotypes, the gain in substantive insight and knowledge more than adequately compensates for the additional effort.<sup>11</sup>

## NOTES

1. Edmund J. Danziger, *The Chippewas of Lake Superior* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979).

2. Thomas B. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For a synopsis of Kuhn's views in the context of a striking example of the emergent ethnohistorical approach applied to the study of American communities, see A.F.C. Wallace, *Rockdale* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), pp. 477-85.

3. Kuhn, pp. 42-43.

4. See Patricia K. Ourada, *The Menominee Indians: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), pp. ix-xvi; and R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. ix-x. These volumes similarly reflect the weaknesses of the tribal history genre, although the quality of Edmund's scholarship and analysis is far above that of Ourada's. Edmunds, for instance, makes a serious effort to unravel Potawatomi language names so as to sharply identify some key personalities in the drama he narrates.

5. For good discussions of recent historians' use of the noble savage image and of misleading comparisons between the life styles of foraging bands and industrial states, see Bruce Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic* 2 vols. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1976), I: 13-14; and John Price, *Native Studies: American and Canadian Indians* (Toronto: McGraw-Ryerson, 1978), pp. 200-225.

6. See "Chippewa Indians—Statement of the Treaties between the Chippewa

Indians and the United States from 1825-1864 from the Chippewa Standpoint," Archives of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

7. Verplanck Van Antwerp, "Journal of the Treaty of St. Peter's," 1837, National Archives and Records Service, Microfilm T494, Roll 3.

8. Edmund J. Danziger, Jr., *Indians and Bureaucrats: Administering the Reservation Policy During the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

9. For some thoughts about the new moral emphasis in history as applied to Native Americans, see Wilcomb E. Washburn, "A Moral History of Indian-White Relations: Needs and Opportunities for Study," *Ethnohistory* 4(1957): 47-61; and James Axtell, "Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint," unpublished paper read at the annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory, Chicago, 1977.

10. For example, see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1965), and his "Culture Through Time," in R. Naroll and R. Cohen, eds., *A Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); G. Belandier, "La Situation Coloniale: Approche Theorique," *Cahiers Inter-Nationaux de Sociologie* 11(1951): 44-79; and D. P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

11. For one of the clearest statements of the purpose, nature, and components of the contemporary ethnohistorical approach, see William N. Fenton, "Huronian: An Essay in Proper Ethnohistory," *American Anthropologist* 80 (1978): 923-35.