

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Reconfigurations of Native North America: An Anthology of New Perspectives. Edited by John R. Wunder and Kurt E. Kinbacher.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0wx7t3hx>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 35(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Miller, Douglas K.

Publication Date

2011-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

be double-edged: on the one hand, achieving economic independence and, on the other, linking Native sovereignty to international markets.

Given that indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development of resources on their territories as recognized by the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) to which Canada is a recent signatory, First Nations may be the best hope in assisting Canadian society as a whole to develop diverse and sustainable economic-development strategies amidst the continuing and insatiable hunger for natural-resource extraction pervasive throughout the country. *Power Struggles* makes a valuable contribution in helping present potential socioeconomic and environmental impacts of energy development while acknowledging the inherent weaknesses of the complete reliance on natural-resource extraction.

Karim-Aly Kassam
Cornell University

Reconfigurations of Native North America: An Anthology of New Perspectives. Edited by John R. Wunder and Kurt E. Kinbacher. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Pres, 2009. 470 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

In *Reconfigurations of Native North America*, editors John R. Wunder and Kurt E. Kinbacher assemble seventeen essays dealing with the past, present, and future of Native peoples in North America. The task of developing a unified theme from such potentially vast material presents challenges; and although the selections included here all make useful contributions in their own way, a final analytical unity proves elusive.

The editors divide the book into five thematic sections. In the first section, "Comparative Historical and Cultural Perspectives," they suggest that a comparative approach to studying Native people is one necessary step in the process of reconfiguring Native North America. Although their insistence that the field of Native history offers little in the way of comparative work is a bit of an exaggeration, their call for greater contributions from scholars who are willing to transcend international borders in their analyses deserves credit. Wunder includes his own essay, which contrasts nineteenth-century treaty making in the United States with that of Canada. His use of popular American Indian leaders like Chief Joseph and Red Cloud (whom he mistakenly identifies as Hunkpapa) is a bit predictable. More interesting is his caution against contemporary Indian tribes using historical treaties as a future model for political negotiation with nation-states. A second essay in

this section by Finnish scholar Riku Hämäläinen about bear ceremonialism is somewhat rudimentary in its overview of some Native people's relationship to animals. But, to his credit, when discussing animal power, medicine, and Native cosmology, he does so in matter-of-fact terms that avoid making moral judgments about his Indian protagonists.

Section 2, "The Literary Indigenous Voice," includes three intriguing essays that develop a common analysis of literature by Native authors. Of the three, Mark Shackleton's essay about Coyote stands out. He argues that non-Native writers who have mistakenly cast Coyote as someone to fear—when the traditional figure really only resorted to trickery—have abused and misappropriated the trickster to the point of being unrecognizable. In the same section, Patrice Hollrah's examination of female characters and sexuality in Sherman Alexie's work raises important questions about some Native communities' attitudes toward homosexuality. Unfortunately, while propping up Alexie's views on homophobia, Hollrah fails to criticize some of the popular author's own hypocritical promotion of gay and lesbian stereotypes. Certainly Alexie is aiming for humor, but his suggestion that all gays and lesbians are artists with passive dispositions does not necessarily help their cause.

Section 3 argues that scholars of indigenous people often miss connections between the past and present. However, although each of the five essays included in this section discusses either the Native past or the Native present, none of them brings the two concepts together in any coherent fashion. This demonstrates just how loosely some thematic sections are tied together. That criticism aside, Peter C. Messer's essay on American Indians in the Early Republic is perhaps the volume's strongest contribution. He discusses how the changing image of Indians in work by historians during the American Revolution's aftermath reflected larger notions of an evolving national political agenda as both policy makers and the American public distanced themselves from notions of a radical, democratic revolution while instead moving toward "a more modest call for individual reform" (115). His well-written essay is useful for Indian history specialists and scholars of the American Revolution and the Early Republic. Ritva Levo-Henriksson's entry about contemporary Hopi Indians' use of the Internet is slightly misguided. Based on a series of interviews conducted with twenty-four Hopis during 1996, she establishes a "two-worlds" framework that fails to give the Hopi tribe's relationship to the non-Indian world enough credit for being fluid. One might argue that her assumption that Indians' experience with technology is somehow exceptional only reawakens outmoded notions of Indianness somehow being in conflict with modernity.

In the introduction to section 4, "Nation and Identity," the editors argue that scholars have largely overlooked the evolution of Indian nationhood

because the “recognition of national consciousness is not a desirable trait for colonial settler societies to consider among Native peoples, nor is it a likely topic found among national histories of aggressive colonial powers” (195). This generalized criticism suggests that all scholars are agents of colonial settler societies. But a number of contemporary scholars have taken up the topics of Native ethnogenesis and tribal-identity formation. Nevertheless, the essays included here comprise one of the strongest, most coherent thematic sections of the book. Sami Lakomäki answers Alexandra Harmon’s call for more studies about American Indian self-identification with a thoroughly researched essay regarding Shawnee ethnic and political organization across a period of three hundred years. Susan A. Miller’s essay draws upon the words of nineteenth-century Seminole leaders in order to explain how Seminole diplomatic discourse provides new insight into the tribe’s cosmology. Rounding out this section, Gerhard J. Ens and Joe Sawchuk contribute two impressive essays about the political status of the Métis Indians in Canada.

The final section, “The People,” consists of two notable essays. In “Scales of Aboriginal Citizenship in Canada,” Patricia Burke Wood highlights the difficult challenges that colonized indigenous peoples face when they attempt to establish an equal political relationship with their respective colonizers. She uses the example of the Canadian Tsuu T’ina Reserve’s relationship to the city of Calgary in order to discuss this paradox, while paying particular attention to the role that notions of Aboriginal citizenship play in negotiating the terms of that relationship. Throughout the course of her essay, she raises important questions about Indian inclusion in public space and events. In the book’s final essay, Peter Iverson discusses how the field of twentieth-century Indian history has expanded and evolved since he first entered the discipline during the late 1960s. Scholars at that time, he recalls, seemed to work according to “Ten Commandments for Unsatisfying American Indian Histories,” which included a stubborn unwillingness to involve Native people in their work in meaningful ways or to work on topics relevant to contemporary Native societies. More satisfied with the field today, Iverson assures readers that “historians are starting to figure it out. They are starting to understand that some approaches are not only more appropriate but also more accurate” (283). Most compelling is his observation that social scientists tend to favor narratives of dysfunction over narratives of success, an idea deserving of further consideration.

The essayists of *Reconfigurations of Native North America* come from many diverse locations, and their approaches are equally diverse. Wunder and Kinbacher gathered these papers from a conference on North American Indians that the Renvall Institute at the University of Helsinki sponsored in 2002. The unique perspectives that scholars from places as geographically distant from North America as Finland and Denmark introduce are refreshing

and encouraging. However, the cumulative work begs a number of questions: What are the implications of having the discourse on Native people from North America expand to include scholars from across the ocean? What might a growing interest in Native North Americans among non-North Americans mean for the future of the field? On a more practical level, what kind of sources do they use? What do they choose to discuss? The editors might have done more to bring some of these questions to the fore.

Although Kinbacher's conclusion (playfully titled "Beginnings") succinctly outlines the book's overarching value, the editors could have tried harder to establish a coherent theme. It is never quite clear what they are trying to reconfigure or why anything needs to be reconfigured in the first place. Moreover, given the wide range of topics and quality of scholarship, the book's intended audience is not entirely clear. Ultimately, the strength of the book rises and falls with the quality of its individual essays. In this case, the sum is perhaps weaker than the individual parts.

Douglas K. Miller
University of Oklahoma

Turning Adversity to Advantage: A History of the Lipan Apaches of Texas and Northern Mexico, 1700–1900. By Nancy McGown Minor. Lanham, MD: University Press of America. 242 pages. \$59.95 cloth; \$34.00 paper.

In this book, Nancy McGown Minor, tribal historian of the Lipan Apache Tribe of Texas, conscientiously attempts to reconstruct the vicissitudes of the different Lipan bands and related Apache groups that roamed across the South Plains and northeastern Mexico prior to 1900. Throughout the book, but most significantly in the last few chapters, the author carries out a painstaking effort to trace the particular stories of Lipan bands in order to establish their actual connections with several contemporary groups whose members claim Lipan ancestry.

The first two-thirds of the book narrate the changing relationship between the Lipans and the Spanish of Texas and northeastern Mexico, a relationship that was significantly conditioned by the relentless southward expansion of the Comanche Indians across the central and south plains at the expense of the Lipans and other Eastern Apache groups throughout the eighteenth century. As a consequence of the Comanche encroachment, the Lipans lost control of most of the south plains by 1760. Minor chronicles Lipan raids against Hispanic settlements in detail. Seemingly, Lipan behavior toward the Spanish-controlled communities and peoples of colonial Texas depended largely on