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Book Reviews

LINCOLN AND THE INDIANS: CIVIL WAR POLICY AND POLITICS. By David A. Nichols. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978. 223 pp. \$16.00

Abraham Lincoln gets low marks for his handling of Indian affairs in this brief book by David A. Nichols. In the contest between politics as usual and reform in the Indian service Lincoln for the most part sided with the politicians. Nichols makes a good deal of the Indian System (always capitalized in his discussion), by which he means use of jobs in the Indian service as political patronage and for quick economic gain. This "institutionalized corruption" Lincoln failed to disrupt; in fact, as Nichols indicates, he went along with it quite comfortably and his attempts to deal with it were "fitful and ineffective" (p. 19). The President was the servant of the system.

In reaching these conclusions, Nichols covers topics which have been extensively treated by other historians. His justification for this is that previous writers have "compartmentalized Indian history in a fashion that distorts the proper place of Indian affairs in mainstream Civil War history" (p. 1). Although his own selection of topics does not differ substantially from that of earlier writers, his focus is on Lincoln's policies and politics and not on what was happening in the West. He discusses at some length the situation of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory, some of whom willingly joined the Confederacy, but many of whom were driven into the hands of the South by the failure of the Union to protect them. He notes the political maneuvering that accompanied the tragic condition of the refugees from Indian Territory in Kansas and Lincoln's vacillating about whether or not to use Indian troops. "The situation," Nichols says, "demanded firm leadership and Lincoln did not provide it" (p. 42).

A case study of the Indian System in action was the uprising of the Sioux Indians in Minnesota in 1862, the one event that drew Lincoln deeply into Indian matters. Corruption in the service led directly to the Indian outbreak, and the call for vengeance after the outbreak was put down and the demand for the summary execution of more than three hundred prisoners forced Lincoln to face the problem personally. Against strong pressures from Minnesotans, Lincoln examined the records of the military commission that had tried the Indians and rejected the great majority of its decisions. In the end, only thirty-eight Indians were hanged in the mass execution at Mankato, for Lincoln had succeeded in trading off for the lives of the Indians for promises of Indian land and money for depredation claims. This was Lincoln's best hour in Indian affairs, and Nichols finds his action in regard to the executions

"relatively humanitarian" (p. 117). Yet the overall evaluation of the affair is highly critical of Lincoln:

His humaneness in this must be matched against what he did (or failed to do) following the executions. He made a bargain permitting the removal of tribes from Minnesota, even the innocent Winnebagos. He ordered the permanent incarceration of the pardoned in conditions that led to more deaths than the hangings. His policies left the removed tribes in destitution, partly because of the corruption and mismanagement of officials in the Indian System. Lincoln sanctioned military missions designed to destroy as many Indians as possible in the region, and he acquiesced in sizable land grabs in Minnesota. He installed as secretary of the interior the man [John P. Usher] who cooperated so closely with the Minnesotans in all these matters (pp. 127-28).

Against the background of the politicization of the Indian service and the corruption it entailed, Nichols placed the rising cry for reform in Indian affairs—largely the insistent demands of two men, John Beeson, an itinerant reformer who had first come into public notice during the Indian wars in the Pacific Northwest during the 1850s, and Henry B. Whipple, Episcopal bishop of Minnesota. This pair bombarded the President with pleas for reform. Lincoln was forced to notice the protests and proposals, and he vaguely endorsed reform. Although Lincoln never actually carried out any of the reforms, Nichols sees in the period an important intellectual change, when new ideas were raised and corruption received national exposure. The intellectual foundations for the later "peace policy" of Grant's administration, he says, were laid during the Lincoln presidency.

At the end of the book, as a kind of epilogue, Nichols discusses the attitudes of white Americans of the Lincoln era toward the Indians, as a help toward understanding the policies of the day. The Indians' way of life was considered inferior, and the Indians were to be changed into "civilized" men through the doctrine of hard work and the glories of an agricultural existence. Although there was nothing unique about white attitudes during Lincoln's administration, Nichols' discussion reinforces the picture that is gradually emerging of the white image of the Indian.

Nichols has chosen to concentrate quite strictly on Lincoln and the Indians, rather than to attempt a broader history of Indian affairs during the Civil War. This concentration, however, has weaknesses, for, as Nichols admits, Lincoln in fact did not devote much time or thought to the Indians. His chief concern was to win the Civil War. "Lincoln had never really given Indian affairs high priority," Nichols concludes. "The refugees [in Kansas], the Minnesota war, and the executions had forced him out of his normal pattern. Once those matters were past the crisis point, he left them and the difficulties therein largely unsolved" (p. 161).

Nichols' book, despite its relatively narrow focus, must be added to

the growing list of well-documented, reasonably-argued studies of Indian policy in United States history.

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KEEPERS OF THE GAME: INDIAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE FUR TRADE. By Calvin Martin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. 237 pp. \$10.95

In *Keepers of the Game*, Calvin Martin has written a complex and provocative history of native American response to the fur trade. Martin begins with native world-views. He provides case studies which detail the ecological attitudes of northeastern Indians particularly the Canadian Micmac and Ojibwa and, generally, the Cree. He also discusses how such attitudes influenced Indian behavior in the development of the fur trade and their reaction to devastating post-contact diseases. Arguing persuasively that man-animal relations of personal status were at the center of native cosmologies, Martin hypothesizes less convincingly about the historic consequences of such relations. He argues that the fur trade both confirmed and provoked a simultaneous collapse of man-animal harmony and the deterioration of native social and religious beliefs.

Martin's book carries the hallmarks of historians' new-found fascination with Indian cultures, a curiosity now usually called ethnohistorical. First, Martin takes native American people on their own word. He utilizes a broad range of mythological, folkloric and ethnographical data in an effort to comprehend the Indian's experience from the inside-out. Second, Martin's extensive reading in such sources informs his interpretations of strictly historical evidence which usually demonstrates a severe Euroamerican bias toward Indian beliefs. Third, Martin has widely read the literature of anthropology and wildlife biology. He argues the need for all scholars to overcome the provincial interests which characterize contemporary academic specialization. In combining what he sees as the most salient features of the first three ethnohistorical cornerstones, Martin strives for a holistic voice. He brings them together in a single interpretation of native American attitudes to nature, the cultural changes which followed their eager participation in the fur trade and the devastating effects which attended. As a pioneering exploration in ethnohistory's grand attempt to achieve academic integration, *Keepers of the Game* will challenge students of native America for years to come.

Martin's sources may not be strong enough, nevertheless, to support his argument that destructive overtrapping resulted from the man-animal