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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Being Dakota: Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton. By Amos E. Oneroad and Alanson B. Skinner.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1xg1d7kk>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 27(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2003-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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Reviews

Being Dakota: Tales and Traditions of the Sisseton and Wahpeton. By Amos E. Oneroad and Alanson B. Skinner. Edited by Laura L. Anderson. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003. 214 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

“Truth is. Truth must be, will be discerned eventually, by everybody’” (p. 37). Amos Oneroad made this statement in one of his sermons in 1915. The truth is that information about the Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakota at the turn of the twentieth century was sketchy; both Oneroad and Alanson Skinner joined forces to create a thorough and detailed book covering the culture and customs of the Eastern Dakota people. Today we see the truth: both men had the vision to collaborate on a manuscript that would catalog not only mythology and folklore, but also material culture, religious concepts, and individual lives. Sadly, the manuscript was never finished because Skinner died in a tragic car accident that Oneroad barely survived.

Laura Anderson found the manuscript and added a superb introduction that chronicles the intersection of these two men’s lives. Within the introduction, Anderson’s footnotes further illuminate aspects of Dakota history and culture. But the real story is the friendship that Oneroad and Skinner shared and their dedication to preserving cultural information: “Their partnership was based upon trust, respect, and a broad and liberal comprehension of culture. The fine work they produced, reflecting this unusual closeness, is a belated bequest to people of both cultures” (p. 52).

They met in New York City in 1913, seemingly by chance, when Oneroad was studying at the Bible Teacher’s Training School and the School of Divinity at Columbia University. Oneroad had in-depth knowledge and contacts that he wanted to share, while Skinner envisioned a large-scale project that would cover the spectrum of Dakota culture and tradition. Even though Oneroad and Skinner came from two far different cultures, the reader recognizes their trust for one another within the stories themselves, which are multilayered and realistically told.

What survives in *Being Dakota* is a large section of text devoted to Eastern Dakota ethnology, including helpful descriptions of war honors, war charms, hunting medicines, berdaches, puberty, and dwellings. However, the most

important contribution stands in the nineteen stories that feature Iktomi, the Dakota trickster character. These stories differ from most Iktomi stories in that they are told verbatim, without editing out the obscene parts:

Once, when Iktomi was travelling along a trail he came to a lodge whence smoke issued from the top. He stopped and listened, and he could hear two women (raccoons) talking within. Then he took one of his testicles and tossed it through the smoke hole, and listened again. One of the women said, "Cousin, I am going to eat that plum" and she took it up and bit it in two and swallowed it. (pp. 132–133)

Although some readers might find these references offensive or bawdy, others will realize the fuller picture, the breadth of the humor, the deeper meaning, and the insight into how most American Indian stories are modified to fit certain audience expectations. The reader feels the authenticity of these stories—and the need to question the editing process of all American Indian stories.

Being Dakota is a rare find, a book based on a manuscript that was not even half-completed, but adds valuable information about the Sisseton and Wahpeton to the wealth of books and articles already in print. Oneroad's and Skinner's friendship lies at the center, with the highly valuable cultural information and the stories emanating outward. *Being Dakota* surprises and challenges its readers' expectations and widens their cultural knowledge about the Eastern Dakota—and that makes the book worth having.

Paul Brooke
Grand View College

Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa. By Charles M. Hudson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 222 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

As a student and longtime associate of Charles Hudson, I have a close affinity with this book, and readers should be forewarned that I am a favorably biased reader of *Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa*. *Conversations* takes us to a unique place—the place where “the reach of archaeology and history ends” (p. xi). Hudson explains in his preface that has modeled *Conversations* after the anthropological classic *Conversations with Ogotemmili* (1965), in which anthropologist Marcel Griaule relays a series of conversations he had with the Dogon wise man, OgotemmLli, who revealed to Griaule the “inner nature of the Dogon world” (p. xiv). *Conversations*, then, is not so much historical fiction as it is a philosophical treatment of the worldview of the Southeastern Indian chiefdoms during the sixteenth century.

Using Griaule as a model, Hudson gives us a series of fictional conversations between a Spanish priest, Domingo de la Anunciación, and a Coosa wise man, the Raven. De La Anunciación is based on a real Spanish friar who was