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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Nch'i-Wana "The Big River" Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land. By Eugene Hunn.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1zb2m4nh>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 15(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

1991-06-01

DOI

10.17953

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Nch'i-Wana "The Big River" Mid-Columbia Indians and Their Land. By Eugene Hunn. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990. 378 pages. \$30.00 cloth.

Nch'i-Wana is a description of the economic, social, and ceremonial basis of the Sahaptin-speaking Indian people who inhabited the Columbia River region in the Plateau area of eastern Oregon and Washington states. It is the outcome of a thirteen-year collaboration between the author and James Selam, a Sahaptin elder. The complex personal and introspective relations between the two are a constant feature of the text and contribute to a high level of readability and interest. Most anthropologists will likely reflect on other similar relations in the Plateau. (I myself collaborated with the late Harry Robinson, an Okanagan elder.) Hunn also raises the important issue of how much information should be given to the outside world. Will knowledge about the complexities of the Indian world positively influence the dominant industrial society toward Indians?

This is a book about cultural relations in the Plateau, specifically among Sahaptin-speaking people along the Columbia and Yakima rivers. The title of the book is derived from the Sahaptin name for the Columbia River: Nch'i-Wana, "the big river." Hunn makes the river and its watershed the focus of both the Indian people and the ethnography. The river has shaped the Sahaptin world; Hunn calls it the "experience of the Columbia River Basin ecosystem" (p. 6). An ecological perspective dominates the presentation and analysis.

Hunn presents the information in several parts. In chapter 1, he describes his path to the study, which owed a lot to a meeting in October 1976 with Selam. Chapter 2 outlines the archeological evidence for the occupation and use of the region and presents ethnohistorical data on the impact of the horse, depopulation, the fur trade, missionaries, treaties, and Indian responses to pressures from American political and economic hegemony. Hunn suggests that during the fur trade, the Plateau Indians were more spectators than participants, became disillusioned with the missionaries and their religions, and responded to American incursions with a range of attitudes, from intransigence through indecision to cooperation.

In chapter 3, Hunn explains the complexities of the Sahaptin language, emphasizing both the structure of the language and

how language expresses and codes cultural phenomena. Hunn takes the reader through levels of meaning and presents excerpts for the reader to "appreciate." This chapter is not simply an "add-on"; Hunn makes the language the entry point into the material developed in later chapters and stresses the point that some concepts are best expressed in indigenous terms. Not clear, though, is the extent to which the ecological and ceremonial language and terms are known by all members of the society, and the kind of information that is used by the general population as the basis of action. In chapter 4, "Ecology," Hunn uses Sahap-tin terms to present information on seasonal activities, ecological and geographical knowledge, and the place of the Columbia River Indian people in the larger ecosystem. More specific data on resources is provided in chapter 5, "Animal and Plant Resources," with—not surprisingly—extensive documentation on fish and fishing. Social and political organization are described in chapter 6, "Society." Hunn also compares his findings with what he sees as misrepresentations of Plateau culture in popular histories.

Hunn interprets exchange using an ecological approach: Social strategies involving marriage ensure access to resources; the norm of reciprocity also ensures access. Hunn stresses that while there have been substantial economic and social changes, some "ethical principles," such as food sharing, continue to guide behavior. These practices have been the subject of court cases in British Columbia. Hunn's attempt to reconcile an image of Plateau society as egalitarian and democratic with documentation of slavery (which he says is intrusive) is noteworthy (pp. 225–27) and undoubtedly will be debated. Certainly the control of the means of production, especially fishing sites, created both the condition of inequality and the need (because of recurrent fluctuations) for ensuring sharing.

Chapter 7, "Religion," deals with the spiritual and ceremonial life of the mid-Columbia River groups. Topics include the vision quest and the emergence of prophets as the people attempted to deal with a population shattered by epidemics and United States expansion. The politics of Indian-United States relations are described in chapter 8, "Treaties." Hunn also describes contemporary life on reservations and presents diabetes as the latest biological assault on Plateau Indians. Fishing rights, court cases,

and the impact of Columbia River dams and industrialization on Indian fisheries are included.

Several appendixes round out the book. These contain animal and plant terms, medicinal plants, kinship terms, and the 1855 Yakima Treaty.

Hunn's study places the Sahaptin-speaking people in two contexts: Ecologically, they are participants in a riverine system and have adapted to the structure of the resource base in the region; historically, as the region became incorporated into expanding European and, later, American economic and political systems, the Indian people had to deal with devastating epidemics and restrictions on traditional economic and ceremonial activities. Like the Okanagan groups to the north, the Sahaptin-speaking people found that dams and government restrictions reduced access to key resources (especially fish), and ceremonies atrophied because of government suppression and a loss of the material focus.

While Hunn's book describes the extent of ecological knowledge, there is a sense that much has already been lost and that only a few people remain who command the traditional range of information. Similar situations are found in British Columbia, where conflicts between Indian fishing rights and government regulatory rights are commonplace. Water diversion projects in the headwaters of the Fraser River have pitted Indian tribal councils against corporate and state interests. Hunn's material is a powerful example of the kinds of ecological knowledge that have *not* been used in the management of riverine resources. The use of indigenous knowledge as the basis for management needs to be pursued.

While my own work has primarily been with Athapaskan and Salishan-speaking groups in the Plateau region, I have long wondered about groups further down the Columbia River. *Nch'i-Wana* fills an important gap. This is one of the most readable ethnographies I have encountered; it will be of interest to Plateau specialists, ecological anthropologists, and those who have an interest in indigenous uses and management of resources. *Nch'i-Wana* is an engaging story of a river and its people.

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