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The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume 3: Transcontinental America, 1850-1915. By D. W. Meinig.

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This work is essential for young American Indian teenagers in that it gives them a sense of history, and alerts them to the work being done in the present, so that they might have a future secure in the traditions of their respective tribes.

On the other hand, *People of the Seventh Fire* should also be mandatory reading for all people in search of their authentic ethnic, spiritual, and political identities. The issues that these individuals bring to the table are issues that all people—no matter where in the world—must someday confront. They are issues of childhood, adulthood, and the search for place within society without losing sight of one's responsibility, vocation, and right to be treated with respect regardless of difference in religious, ethnic, cultural, or historical epistemology.

Dagmar Thorpe has pieced together a mosaic of painful yet joyous experiences of rediscovery and renewal of one's faith in life, process, and the creator as a provider. Together these accounts demonstrate that as individuals challenge, recommit, and change themselves, so too do entire communities begin to transform. For Native America this is a book about the spirit and its ability to endure, replant, and grow once more.

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**The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume 3: Transcontinental America, 1850–1915.** By D. W. Meinig. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 457 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

This third volume, *Transcontinental America 1850–1915*, of Meinig's vast treatise needs to be examined carefully by those seriously interested in Native American studies. The first two volumes, *Atlantic America 1492–1800* and *Continental America 1800–1867*, show that Meinig's work was essentially a socio-cultural history with an emphasis on cultural geography, rather lacking in economic and environmental depth, in what was an extremely well-organized and -illustrated search for patterns in an immense set of historical and geographic facts.

Conceptually, Meinig's sociocultural approach seemed to have all the politically correct ethnic attitudes, but his actual text vacillates and is ultimately Anglo-centric. He reports on some Native American cultures but shows neither depth of understanding nor real empathy for any of them. He leaves us with the sense that few Native North American cultures were really important. So, tragically, we still need recourse to popular literature, such as Alvin M. Josephy, Jr.'s *500 Nations* (1994) for anything like an accurate gestalt of the significant diversity of these cultures. Meinig seems uncomfortable with using the term *culture*, using the more primitive *peoples* to describe minority groups. In terms of Meinig's own stated aims, he failed to give a full report on Native American cultural connections to the geography, to "the shaping of America." We can still learn more about the contributions of Native American

cultures to the “shaping of America” from a popular book such as Jack Weatherford’s *Indian Givers* (1988) than we can from Meinig’s attempted geographic history synthesis.

Meinig’s shortcomings in cultural empathy in the first two volumes were not limited to Native American cultures. His treatment of specific source cultures in Africa was even more deficient, if indeed it may be said that he even considered them, though he did develop substantial material on the “Afro-American world,” including but not limited to North America. Even his treatment of Southern European cultures showed his inability to empathize with any of them. Even the French and Dutch cultures appear alien. Everything is seen through British and Anglo-American eyes, for Meinig evidently reads only the English language. His bibliography has scant references from French, mostly translations into English, and practically none in other languages.

What then did Meinig do in his third effort, covering the California Gold Rush to US entry into World War I? Obviously, the geography has shifted to a Western focus. The Native American cultures selected are different. Meinig gives more attention, though superficially, to Hispanic American culture. The Chinese and Japanese, as individual immigrants, are also discussed, but not understood in any cultural depth. The dominant Anglo bias remains.

Symptomatic is Meinig’s treatment of Panama in this volume (he had discussed it as a strategic link in his first two volumes). In *Transcontinental America*, Panama is accorded the entire final chapter, together with a bibliography of more than thirty books. In truth, however, Meinig has very little to add to David McCullough’s masterful *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870–1914* (1977). That book pays more attention to Panamanian cultures, even though its emphasis is elsewhere. Beyond McCullough, Meinig could have looked at Panamanian cultures more fully had he read Jaén Suárez’s *La Población del Istmo de Panamá: Estudio de Geohistoria* (1998), a work that makes an attempt at a geographic history synthesis for a limited geographic area parallel to Meinig’s.

It is in the North American west, however, that Meinig’s treatment of ethnic minorities as objects must ultimately be judged. In his third volume, he brings in more cultures (over thirty). There is an extensive discussion of the Indians of California, which Meinig completes without naming a single Native culture, thus excluding all mention of the geo-historically important Penutian and Hokan language groups, neglecting important parts of the Athabascan and Uto-Aztecan groups, and missing the point that Algonquian speakers extended into Northern California. Arizona’s Native cultures almost entirely escape mention, except for the Apache and Navajo, who are discussed as if they were entirely in New Mexico. He continues to show only superficial knowledge of individual Native cultures, and manages to exclude whole linguistic families.

His approach has, however, deepened somewhat. In discussing the states bordering Mexico, he goes beyond expected vague patterns. Similarly, in the general treatment of Hispanic Americans in his second volume, Meinig goes to more specific discussions of the situations in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas. While all the ethnic minority cultures remain

object-cultures, not subject-cultures, and while there is still scant empathy with any of them, Meinig has improved in his treatment of this group.

Even in this third volume, Meinig has far to go to become an even-handed cultural historian. That becomes clear from his eloquent treatment of the Mormons and other Euro-centric minorities, with whom he emphasizes more easily. The various Native North American cultures and Hispanic Americans remain "them," not (part of) "us."

Meinig's treatise is essentially a historical work of North America, especially from the seventeenth century onward, accompanied by a multiplicity of good maps and convincing geographic pattern-finding. It is a treatise that cannot be neglected. The entire treatise is weak on physical and economic geographies, so it must be judged as general sociocultural history. Ethnicity has to be central to that narrative, and Meinig is quite strong on ethnic divisions among the Europeans. The crucial test, however, is how well he deals with the non-European peoples of North America: the indigenous cultures and the partly imported cultures from Africa and Hispanic America. Reviewed here is the third volume, covering 1850 to 1915. In it, Meinig does not pass the test easily because of his lack of empathy with the other cultures, although he comes closer in this third volume than in the first two.

Beyond this, it must be said that Meinig, fundamentally, is too limited a scholar to have been entrusted with such a vast and sensitive project. Writing about the history of an entire hemisphere, as Meinig attempts to do, with evident access only to English-language sources is quite absurd. Much of the best writing on the history of eastern Canada and the Caribbean remains in the French language, and most of the best historical and geographic writing on the Americas south of the United States-Mexico border remains in the Spanish and Portuguese. There is also plenty of good historical writing on the Americas in German and Dutch. This obvious fact is sure to be said loudly and clearly in commentaries on Meinig's work by historians familiar with the literature in those European languages.

None of this is to denigrate Meinig's very real accomplishment in initiating this broad-scope geographical history of North America. What it does make clear is that the next generation of scholars will still have plenty of work to do. The full picture of the interweaving of individual cultures that shaped America is not yet before us.

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