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Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains. By Howard L. Harrod. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995. 149 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.

This book is about the power that American Indian religions possess simultaneously to preserve social continuity and promote social change. Under the guise of religion, groups are capable of both becoming and remaining distinct peoples. Harrod admits that his larger purpose in viewing religion on the Northern Plains is to bring into coincidence the richness, depth, and cultural complexity of past societies as well as of their contemporary cultural heirs.

He recognizes that a problem exists from the past regarding sources, especially the continued reluctance of some historians outside Native American studies to accept the viability of oral "texts." Harrod uses a variety of materials that range from the observations of early travelers, explorers, and fur traders writing in the languages of Europe, to the large body of work in this century by cultural anthropologists and archaeologists. In addition, he masterfully incorporates oral traditions.

Despite the obvious biases of fur traders, explorers, and travelers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their observations nevertheless were firsthand. They remain important sources for retrieving—or rather salvaging—historical data on Native American religious traditions and rituals. There is no assurance that Indian voices can always be clearly heard in such secondary accounts, but the use of these accounts is critical. As the author shows time and again, European and Euro-American observers produced the only written records from which ethnohistorians can recreate earlier cultural expressions of Indian societies. In *Becoming and Remaining a People*, readers will discover how, in the hands of a skilled ethnohistorian, such texts can animate studies of Native American cultures.

Unlike eighteenth- and nineteenth-century observers, anthropologists and archaeologists have frequently informed their observations about religious traditions and rituals within a theoretical perspective. Such studies do not always focus sufficient attention on the internal meanings of religious systems nor bring clearly into view the relationship between religious meanings and social change or continuity. Nevertheless, what anthropologists recorded in the area of religious traditions and practices was often descriptively rich. Although it is conspicuous by its absence in the

bibliography, readers familiar with the subject will detect echoes of Loretta Fowler in *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings* (1987). Since its publication, that work has influenced the way scholars approach cultural identity—and the ways that identity has been and continues to be symbolized among the people of the Northern Plains.

Harrod argues that there was often a convergence between Northern Plains memories recorded in the early twentieth century and observations reported in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This, more than anything else in the work, can be used to demonstrate convincingly that oral traditions and practices (or the memory of them) are not as suspect as they might seem to less experienced researchers. “Communities of memory” in Northern Plains societies, as Harrod evocatively explains, conserved tradition but also possessed the creative capacity to reinterpret traditions and practices. Oral/aural cultures may as easily innovate as they conserve. The very memories of a people were mediated, often in reinterpreted form, within Indian communities. The evidence for such an interpretive process is even stronger when one remembers that very few Indians interviewed by cultural anthropologists in the early part of this century would have possessed knowledge of earlier written sources; but they would have possessed deep knowledge of their oral traditions and practices—and this is just the point. Northern Plains societies organized knowledge and experience into shared structures of meaning. Upon this the creative imagination of the people worked, thereby producing both the continuities and the discontinuities that were observed and recorded by the cultural anthropologists.

Harrod begins with a lengthy discussion of the history of anthropology on the Northern Plains, mainly in this century. Although anthropologists concentrated their efforts to describe social change, they did not, according to the author, give sufficient attention to religion as a factor that produces social change and yet contributes to social continuity. Harrod hopes to remedy this by focusing considerable attention on religion as an engine for both continuity and change. The “symbolic universe” constituted by religious traditions and ritual processes became an essential source of social and individual identity. In the following six chapters, Harrod reconstructs the long religious development of two village cultures on the Missouri River, the Mandan and the Hidatsa. It is a fine synthesis that easily provides the essential data otherwise available only in much larger works, such as Roy W.

Meyer's still important, though often overlooked, *The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri* (1977). Harrod (in chapter 4) extends the discussion to examine the major religious organization and ritual processes that functioned to create and maintain the social identity of the Mandan and the Hidatsa. He next explores how the two groups, and by extension other people of the Northern Plains, remained distinct peoples, often in the face of considerable pressure from other Indian groups and outsiders.

In his penultimate chapter (chapter 6), Harrod changes focus a little. He demonstrates how the Crow, separated from the Hidatsa, developed their own special identity; and how the Cheyenne, migrants from east of the Missouri, moved west and became mobile, tipi-dwelling buffalo hunters. Harrod identifies sources in religious tradition and ritual that were essential for understanding the social transformations that enveloped these two groups. Although the social processes involved in the movement of the Crow and the Cheyenne toward their newer identities as nomadic hunting peoples involved complex changes, Harrod suggests that they can best be understood within the larger context of religious traditions.

The last chapter reiterates Harrod's well-constructed thesis that religion was central to achieving a particular cultural identity as well as initiating changes in it. He concludes with some general—and very welcome—comparisons with Euro-American society. Too often historians fail to consider the centrality of religion in Native American cultures but will speak to exhaustion about the religious antecedents of modern American culture.

The central theme that holds this relatively brief work together is that the religions of North American Indians on the Northern Plains were, and are, expressions of a general human capacity for religious experience; yet each of these religions developed in a manner that gave the Indians' oral traditions and ritual practices a form and content that kept them distinct from other religions in the region (usually termed *environment* by the author), whether Indian or European. Although it is almost obligatory to say so, it is no less true: Whereas the appearance of Europeans affected, and continues to affect, these Native American religions, Indians were not then, nor are they now, passive spectators in the process. There continues to be an Indian perspective at work, producing both social continuity and social difference. Native American groups for generations have incorporated new religious elements either from Europeans or from other Indian

groups; but they have not done so without actively reinterpreting traditions and rituals, reshaping them to fit their own needs. Development of any specific religious dimension among a particular people was grounded in the creative imagination of that people as it constructed, maintained, and reconstructed its cultural landscape.

With his emphasis on the twentieth century, Harrod goes beyond Lee Irwin's *The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains* (1994), which focuses mainly on world-process in nineteenth-century Plains Indian cultures. Yet Harrod, like Irwin, depends on the willingness of readers, in reviewing the ancient and contemporary sources presented in the text, to make connections among the mythological, visionary, and ritual dynamics of complex social worlds. In *The Dream Seekers*, Irwin demonstrates that religion (in this context carried in dreams) became a fundamental, creative source for cultural change and innovation. Not only were groups' experiences strengthened, but new patterns of individual and collective behavior were created. Harrod's work builds on these ideas.

Harrod (Vanderbilt University) is the author of additional texts on Native American religions: *Renewing the World: Plains Indians' Religion and Morality* (1987) and *Mission among the Blackfeet* (1971). His latest work should prove of interest to instructors in northern American history, anthropology, and religious studies. Its availability in a relatively inexpensive paperback, along with its considerable scholarly merit, makes it suitable for course adoptions.

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Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. By Andrew Armitage. Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 1995. 286 pages. \$20.95 paper.

The definition of assimilation, according to *Collins Gem English Dictionary*, is threefold: to learn and understand; to make similar; and to absorb into the system. Andrew Armitage's book provides a very detailed look at assimilation policies in the three commonwealth countries of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, all of which ultimately opt for the last two aspects of the definition.