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Author

Fisher, Andrew H.

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White Man's Paper Trail: Grand Councils and Treaty-Making on the Central Plains. By Stan Hoig. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006. 256 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Treaties occupy an ambivalent position in American Indian history. Frequently forced upon tribes against their will—and even more frequently broken by the United States—they symbolize a bleak record of deceit, dispossession, and dishonor. At the same time, treaties embody solemn promises between nations and provide the legal foundation for contemporary expressions of tribal sovereignty. They are founding documents, akin to the US Constitution, which identifies them as the “supreme law of the land,” and some tribes still hold annual “Treaty Day” commemorations to honor the wisdom of their ancestors in concluding these agreements. *White Man's Paper Trail* acknowledges the paradoxical nature of Indian treaties but emphasizes their darker side and their connection to the Plains Indian wars of the nineteenth century. Taking issue with historian Francis Paul Prucha, who has argued that federal officials generally tried to deal honorably with the tribes, Stan Hoig contends that American motives were “essentially self-serving and activated by acquisitiveness” and that Indians “were victimized time and again through the white man's treaty making” (xiv–xv). Neither scholars nor general readers will be surprised by these conclusions, which Helen Hunt Jackson first reached more than a century ago, but Hoig does offer an engaging narrative of treaty councils on the Central Plains from 1815 to the cessation of treaty making in 1871.

A professor emeritus of journalism and the author of several popular accounts of Plains Indian history, Hoig largely confines his analysis to the opening and closing chapters of the book. In the introductory essay, he identifies four broad categories of Indian treaties: military support treaties (alliance), right-of-passage treaties (peace and friendship), assignment-of-territory treaties (cession), and restriction-of-territory treaties (supplementary treaties and agreements reducing original reservations). Although this classification scheme makes Indian treaties appear more standardized than they were in practice, his overview of the treaty-making process creates a rough framework for the sixteen descriptive chapters that follow. Starting with the early friendship pacts negotiated by Missouri territorial governor William Clark, Hoig chronicles the evolution of treaty making as the power of indigenous peoples waned in relation to the growing might of the United States (as well as the short-lived Republic of Texas and the Confederacy). By 1871, the crush of white settlement and the decimation of the buffalo had reduced the leverage of the fractious Plains peoples to the point that Congress could dispense with formal treaties. The federal government continued to make agreements with tribes, but the councils that produced them “became less and less ‘grand,’ losing the primitive beauty and glamour of early America” (180). They also failed to bring peace, as the violation of existing treaties sparked the climactic Indian Wars of the 1870s.

Hoig concludes his sweeping history of American duplicity and tribal declension with a series of curious and contradictory observations about the character of treaty making. Citing the bad faith and broken promises of US

officials, he calls the process of Indian dispossession “nothing less than a racial parallel to the practice of slave ownership” (181). This highly provocative and historically problematic statement goes unexplained, however, and Hoig promptly weakens his own arguments with an exculpatory declaration about the inevitability of it all. “Like democracy or even life itself,” he writes, “[treaty making] was far from perfect and often severely unfair. Yet who among us can suggest anything better?” (181). Native Americans certainly can—and did—but their perspective on these events rarely emerges from *White Man’s Paper Trail*. Even as he indicts the government’s “endless fallacies and indiscretions in the making and conduct of Indian treaties,” Hoig deems it unnecessary to consider Native oral traditions and oral history (182). As a result, the Indians in his account generally appear as passive victims and dupes of federal policy, in some cases “apparently oblivious to what had been signed away” (29) and in others having “only a hearsay concept of the legal contract they were making” (152).

Hoig’s description of tribal interpretations as mere “hearsay” reflects the literate bias of both the colonizers who wrote the treaties and the scholars who have studied their work. Although some of the latter have recognized the need to incorporate indigenous value systems and spiritual beliefs into analyses of treaty making, few have systematically investigated the significant role that aboriginal orality played in shaping and preserving Indian interpretations of the resulting contracts. As ethnohistorians such as Raymond DeMallie and Andrew Fisher have shown, tribal leaders with no functional knowledge of writing effectively remembered and regarded what was *said* in council as the embodiment of the treaty. They did not misunderstand the terms of these agreements; they simply understood them differently—in ways that made sense to them and were passed on through oral tradition. The courts have recognized this reality in the canons of construction, which at least nominally guide judicial interpretation of Indian treaties, but Hoig does not employ ethnohistorical methodology or engage more recent scholarship on this topic. Consequently, he neglects the substantial agency and intelligence Native peoples displayed in the negotiation and interpretation of their treaties.

For the same reason, Hoig misses the influence that making treaties had on the making of modern American Indian nations. Applying insights from anthropological and theoretical studies of ethnogenesis, historians such as Alexandra Harmon and Gregory Smoak have explored how treaties transformed existing identities and generated new ones by establishing confederated, reservation-based entities called *tribes*. Hoig follows conventional practice in taking these entities for granted, not unlike US treaty commissioners did in assigning tribal territories in the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie. Although such descriptive shorthand can be forgiven in a popular history (wherein many of the chapters are less than ten pages long), it becomes problematic when Hoig states that Plains Indians “suffered from a loose system of tribal governance” (183). Rather than presenting them on their own terms, this characterization gives the impression that indigenous conceptions of sovereignty were somehow deficient and therefore equally culpable for the ensuing violence of the Plains wars.

Similar problems with language arise from Hoig's descriptions of Native people. Although it is perfectly fair and accurate to note the depredations committed by restive Plains warriors, who often challenged the authority of their chiefs as well as the legitimacy of the treaties, glosses such as "marauding blood" and "predatory [bands]" tend to evoke popular stereotypes of Indian savagery (55). In his discussion of the Civil War in Indian Territory, Hoig declares that most whites "considered the Indian warrior, well noted for taking scalps of his victims, as too barbaric to serve as a civilized combatant" (115). This observation certainly captures a common contemporary attitude, yet it also neglects the long and well-documented history of Indian service in the American military as auxiliaries and scouts. More troubling still, Hoig's offhand reference to Indian scalping comes just one page after an oddly understated account of the Sand Creek Massacre, which fails to mention the atrocities perpetrated by Colonel Chivington's command. The cumulative effect—compounded by animalistic phrases such as "natural habitat" and "native haunts" (3)—is to create a dated and occasionally demeaning picture of Native Americans that clashes with Hoig's admirable intentions and earlier work on these same subjects.

White Man's Paper Trail is ultimately a disappointing effort from a scholar capable of much better. It offers an accessible survey of Indian affairs on the Central Plains, however, and it should be read within the larger context of Hoig's voluminous and often pathbreaking contributions to American Indian history. Books such as *The Sand Creek Massacre* (1974), *The Peace Chiefs of the Cheyennes* (1990), and *Perilous Pursuit* (2002) have helped define the contours of the "New Indian History" and overturn the celebratory, nationalistic narrative that once dominated accounts of westward expansion. With all the attention to Native American agency and empowerment in current scholarship, it never hurts to be reminded that "the United States of America cannot erase the stain of its Indian treaty misdeeds on its historical past" (180).

Andrew H. Fisher

The College of William and Mary