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The Religions of the American Indians. By Ake Hultkrantz./Native American Religions, An Introduction. By Sam D. Gill.

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### Author

Beemer, Margaret A.

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Jr., while the Institute of the American West and its parent institution, the Sun Valley Center, contributed significant funds to assist in the preparation of the photographs of Duck Valley scenes. Clearly there was wisdom in the Shoshone-Paiute decision to make McKinney tribal historian. This is a first rate tribal history.

*Albin J. Cofone*  
SUNY, Suffolk Community College

**The Religions of the American Indians.** By Ake Hultkrantz. Translated by Monica Setterwall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. xiv + 335 pp. Bibliography, index and illustrations. \$16.95 Cloth. \$5.95 Paper.

**Native American Religions, An Introduction.** By Sam D. Gill. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1981. xvi + 192 pp. Index and illustrations. \$10.95 Paper.

In introductory texts authors often perpetuate old misconceptions and stereotypes through their lack of familiarity with current scholarship outside their area of specialization. This problem is particularly acute in the study of tribal and peasant religions. Basic introductory books on religions are replete with the subtle racism of evolutionary hypotheses which are survivals of nineteenth century assumptions about the religious traditions of tribal Peoples. To counter this problem two historians have recently published texts which introduce the study of Native American religions to the beginning college student. These two books, *The Religions of the American Indians* by Ake Hultkrantz and *Native American Religions* by Sam D. Gill, reflect current successes and problems in the study of Indian religions.

*The Religions of the American Indians* is a revised edition and translation of Ake Hultkrantz's *De Amerikanska Indianernas Religioner* (1967). It is conceived by its author as a "comprehensive survey of indigenous American religions" (p. xii) including North, Meso and South America. The book has two main sections. The first discusses tribal religions and is organized around religious categories which have emerged from scholarly discus-

sion during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nine chapters of this section cover the supernatural, the concept of the high god, the world picture and deities of cosmogonic myths, gods and spirits of nature, totemism and belief in guardian spirits, medicine men and shamans, great tribal ceremonies, cult organizations, and the soul and life hereafter. This first section ends with a discussion of the history of Indian religions, including contemporary religious traditions.

In the second section of the book the author discusses the religions of what he calls "high" or "nuclear" cultures, that is, those cultures which have writing, metals, cities and centralized state government (p. xi). This dichotomy reflects the author's own cultural orientation in favor of elites, describing religious traditions of empires as "high" and that of people unable or disinclined to rule over others as "tribal" and therefore implicitly "low." Hultkrantz includes in this category of high cultures the classical tradition of the Incan, Mayan and Aztec Indians. He treats each of these three empire-building cultures in a separate chapter. His approach in this second section is more narrative and less theoretical, perhaps since the subject lies outside his own specialization. The book closes with an extensive bibliography and index.

The text is structured according to the scholarly interests of the past hundred and fifty years, rather than from a perspective of what is important in Indian religions themselves. At least half the categories that Hultkrantz uses originate in debates on the evolutionary development of religions. Serious questions concerning the usefulness of the text must be raised by Hultkrantz's presentation of serious errors and value judgments derived from Western evolution and romanticism. Only thinly disguised beneath the chapters and sections lies the bankrupt notion of the primitive versus the civilized. Shades of R. R. Marett, Wilhelm Schmidt, James Frazer and E. B. Tylor lurk in the chapter on the supernatural, the high god, nature deities, totemism and the soul.

Despite the author's statement to the contrary, at several points he confuses his own generally evolutionistic theorizing with facts about American Indian religions. For instance, Hultkrantz implicitly arranges religious traits along an unacceptable linear progression. He begins with hunters whose "uncomplicated social structure" is characterized by animal ceremonialism, shamans

and belief in a supreme being. He then proceeds to agrarian cultures, which naturally have agriculturally-oriented ceremonial cycles, priests and collective and complex societies. He concludes his description of a developmental progression of Indian cultures with "nuclear" or "high" cultures, identifying their distinguishing characteristics as writing, cities and still more complex societies.

This arrangement of religious traits reflects a century-old, highly disputed theoretical position that is dismissed by contemporary Indian Peoples, ethnohistorians and scholars of religions. By choosing this arrangement the author completely misses the issues which are genuinely important in Indian religion and history. Hultkrantz's text fails to discuss coherently the nature of Native American experience, as well as how religious experience was (let alone IS) important, thus compelling people to act and making life a meaningful endeavor. The author overlooks the intimacy between everyday and sacred activity. His portrayal of religious symbols resembles arbitrarily catalogued items in a museum.

A discussion of cosmology, shamanism, ceremonies and cult organization is essential for any text which introduces Indian religious traditions, but Hultkrantz treats these subjects in separate chapters. Unfortunately, these chapters often lack both clarity and accuracy. For instance, instead of discussing the diversity of Indian understandings of the origin of the universe in the chapter on cosmology, he presents a questionable discussion of culture heroes. Hultkrantz suggests that the culture hero is a fairy tale figure, a mere entertainment originating as "a deity who has been reduced to a literarily reworked ridiculous and obscene figure" (pp. 32-34). He says that the trickster's past "divine state" is reflected in his retaining his position in myth as creator of cultural institutions. Hultkrantz also suggests that the culture hero was a rival to the Supreme Being who, unlike the trickster, is "ethically sublime." This rivalry supposedly results in the culture hero's active competitions with the Creator (that is, the Supreme Being). According to Hultkrantz, the culture hero appears in this clash as clumsy, silly and deficient because he is weaker (and less "good"?) than the "ethically sublime" high god.

Hultkrantz's interpretation distorts Indian traditions beyond recognition. It emerges from the author's own particular religious

and intellectual inclinations. Hultkrantz's theory fits neatly into a missionary oriented, Judeo-Christian world view but very poorly into an Indian one. The idea of a supreme, ethically sublime god appeals so strongly to Hultkrantz (and many other Western scholars before him) that he has used this predominant Judeo-Christian symbol as the measure of Native American symbols. Indian tricksters, it would seem, have offended the ethical sensibilities of the author, so he cannot recognize the crucial symbolic importance of tricksters in Indian mythology and ritual. This is a very serious problem for an introductory text because tricksters are central in most American Indian religious traditions.

Careful scrutinization of other notions about historical developments in Indian religions will show the book is far from ideal for classroom use. Hultkrantz makes questionable pronouncements about from whence, when, how and why various religious forms emerge. In the first fifty pages of the book, for instance, he suggests (1) that the *deus otiosus* (creator god removed from the world) is produced through philosophical speculation (p. 15); (2) that intellectual analysis leads religious people to the conclusion that the high god is the "sovereign of the gods and spirits;" (3) that the high god is not "in the realm of myth at all" (p. 26, 32); (4) that ritual among hunting Peoples is weakly developed (p. 26); (5) and that their mythology lacks precision because of this fact (p. 27).

These statements reflect Hultkrantz's opinion that elites, particularly intellectual elites, comprise the main force that advances religion and culture. While he is entitled to his opinion, the fact that such a hypothesis contradicts much Native American religious experience, especially that of hunting-gathering Peoples, necessitates a particular wariness in deciding the ultimate usefulness of the text. Hultkrantz himself notes that in hunting and gathering societies non-reliance on specialists is stressed wherever possible. Each individual ideally has an immediate experience of the sacred, which gives her or him power to contribute to the community. If anything, Indian experience suggests that specialists are necessary but dangerous because their power so easily leads to corruption. The author unfortunately interprets this Indian disinclination toward specialization as evidence of an uncomplicated primitive social structure, rather than a deliberate reflection by Indians on the nature of human existence. The inappropriateness of such notions for an introductory text is

especially profound, since it will infect yet another generation with the notion that Native Americans are "primitives" who become advanced with increasing specialization and contact with White, "advanced" religious ideas.

In his discussion of history, Hultkrantz also observes that in the face of mounting religious crisis, many Indian Peoples developed "national opposition movements within a religious framework." Prophets led "revivals," which were sometimes characterized by "elements of messianism, a goal-oriented ethics, [and] an eschatological message," all of which the author says "seem to bear witness to a Christian background" (p. 151). It is unfortunate that Hultkrantz did not examine this subject of prophecy and prophetic movements in more detail, since it is a major spring of the continuing vitality in Native American religious traditions.

In contrast with Hultkrantz's book Sam D. Gill's *Native American Religions* succeeds because it achieves the radical conceptual reorientation needed to understand Native American religious traditions. Gill gives students both an interpretation based on Indian experience and sufficient basic information to think about the unique character of Native American religious tradition. He escorts the reader through different traditions, giving adequate guidance to make the various activities, world views and myths accessible to the college undergraduate.

Gill begins by appropriately insisting that readers need to reorient themselves before they can begin to understand Native American religious traditions. He points out how and why the usual stereotypes about Indian Peoples are invalid and suggests an approach based on Native American perspectives. He successfully reorients the reader without over whelming her or him with scholarly debate, which is particularly valuable in an introductory text. In this way Gill heeds the pleas of ethnohistorian theorists who plead for a view of Native Americans as they see themselves, rather than as they appear to outsiders.

One difficulty facing students of Native American religions is how to define and limit their subject. Among many non-Western Peoples the distinctions between "religion" and the rest of life are not strict. To solve this problem Gill suggests we define religion as "those images, actions and symbols that both express and define the extent and character of the world, especially . . . the cosmic framework in which human life finds meaning

and . . . fulfillment" (p. 11). Since these subjects permeate Native American life, the book examines not merely myths and rituals but also spatial orientation, subsistence activities and "art," e.g., masks, carvings, sand paintings, drama and dance. This opens up a universe more representative of Native American life than does an adherence to Eurocentric theological categories and organizing principles such as those upon which Hultkrantz's book is based. Gill's success is unparalleled; he shows how all these forms of religious symbolism structure the world and work to change and maintain it.

Gill's attempt to describe and explain Native American universes is much more successful than Hultkrantz's. Gill's discussion of cosmological beginnings includes myths, tricksters and the ways in which cosmic imagery permeates the everyday experience of Native Americans through such ordinary objects as architecture, pipes and baskets. Gill provides summaries of Zuni, Seneca and Navajo origin myths to give the reader a clear idea of the light in which each Native American People views itself. This approach is indispensable to an introductory text because it conveys to the reader the symbolic images which form diverse world views. In this way *Native American Religions* creates a context by allowing the symbols to speak directly to the reader.

Gill takes on another sensitive issue which is crucial to understanding tribal traditions: the role of non-literacy. He points out the distinctiveness of a world dominated by non-written communication, where the powers of thought and spoken words take on a particular importance. These modes of communications transform the Native American world, affecting personal and social orientations. Gill describes speech in this context as "fragile, impermanent and intimate" and each act of speaking as unique, requiring the active participation of both speaker and listener (pp. 44-45). He then discusses the role of the spoken word in the telling of myths and tales as well in the singing of sacred songs.

Another significant achievement rests in the book's emphasis on change as the vital element in religious traditions. Gill argues that change—that is, history—does not *deplete* religious traditions of their content, value or even their ethnic Indian character; rather change can and often does inform, interpret and maintain the vitality of religious traditions. In this, Gill flies in the face of the liberal/romantic view which dominates scholarly and popular

concepts of Indian Peoples and is so evident in Hultkrantz's book. This erroneous understanding says that Native Americans were Peoples whose cultures were frozen in a prehistoric stage and who would no longer be "real Indians" after they encountered White culture and began to "progress." By severely criticizing this concept *Native American Religions* accomplishes its most important task: it introduces Native American realities to overcome the prejudice and misconceptions which dominate popular thinking. Gill notes that Native Americans have always changed and will continue to do so. Change, he concludes, does not in itself constitute a threat to their continuing identity as distinct Peoples.

Gill also discusses the importance of history (or the relationship between tradition and change) in Native American religious traditions, providing as examples the Yaquis and the Peoples of the Rio Grande Pueblos and Plains. In spite of the author's direct recognition of the constructive role of change and history in Indian cultures and religions, his discussion of this subject is disappointingly weak. While Gill understands that change has occurred and is an important part of Native American traditions, he has not specifically studied that process and thus cannot provide us much help in understanding it. His discussions in this chapter lack the vitality and conviction demonstrated elsewhere in the text. This may be attributable to his dependence on the work of other scholars who do not share his understanding of the importance of religion and change in preserving rather than destroying Indian religious traditions. The defect reflects a prevalent problem in the study of Native American religions.

This does not detract from the fact that *Native American Religions* is the best introductory text on Native American religious traditions yet written and makes all previous texts obsolete. The author's recognition of change as central to the survival of Native Americans corrects the dominant scholarly hypotheses as well as the popular romantic attitude toward Native Americans. If Professor Gill contemplates a revised edition, a reconsideration of the role of prophets and other religious reformers would enhance his already considerable contribution to the study of Native American religions.

These two texts reflect the current accomplishments and failures of the study of Native American religions. Like Hultkrantz's text, the field still suffers from an inability to extricate itself



definitively from seductive evolutionary ideas. Sam Gill pushes us to dismiss these ideas by revealing not only their ethnocentric nature but also how they are ill-conceived and distort the character of Native American experience and symbolization. He shows that what would be seen as "primitive" traditions, for instance unwritten traditions, have their own sophisticated dynamics which we as outsiders are barely beginning to grasp. Implicit in evolutionary ideas lies the notion that when Indian Peoples change they "progress" and thereby become somehow less "Indian" [and more "civilized"]. This notion underlies not only most of Hultkrantz's work but also much important work by other scholars, despite disclaimers to the contrary. Therefore it is appropriate that Gill openly repudiates this popularly held misconception that change leads to a loss of "Indianness." This gesture points the field in the direction it needs to develop.

*Margaret A. Beemer*

University of California, Los Angeles

**Bilingualism and Language Contact: Spanish, English, and Native American Languages.** Edited by Florence Barkin, Elizabeth A. Brandt and Jacob Ornstein-Galicia. New York: Teachers College Press, 1982. 320 pp. \$24.95 Paper.

This collection of papers grew out of a 1978 conference held at the University of Texas at El Paso that sought to develop a new socio-linguistic perspective on the study of languages spoken in the Southwestern United States and adjacent Northern Mexico. The papers presented were supplemented by additional essays which provide a survey of bilingualism and linguistic diversity in the Spanish Borderlands. What distinguishes the book, according to the editors, is its focus on the processes, rather than the outcomes, of languages in contact, where linguistic variety serves to differentiate and maintain both group and individual distinctiveness.

The Borderlands are a linguistically rich and complex area within the United States where many Native American languages continue to flourish within a sociopolitical context that