

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival. By Harald E. Prins.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5b23s9wn>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 21(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

McGee, Harold

Publication Date

1997-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

squads reacted with beatings and shootings to enforce the Wilson-IRA government rule. The traditionalist then called in members of the American Indian Movement as their only hope, and from there the events led to the Wounded Knee occupation.

Despite the negative focus of the Alcatraz occupation and my other comments, *Like a Hurricane* is an important book. For the most part it is well researched, and even though it lacks balance, it is the only book that has been written that focuses on the three major occupations by Native American people of the twentieth century. I recommend this book for Native American studies programs, university libraries, and anyone interested in contemporary Native American issues.

Troy Johnson

California State University, Long Beach

The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival. By Harald E. Prins. Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996. 250 pages. \$16.00 paper.

The task of evaluating this book has not been an easy one. The principal reason for this is that the work is part of a monograph series "intended for use in the classroom" for "beginning and intermediate courses in the social sciences" (p. vii). In presenting contemporary anthropology to students in these courses, the editors of the series are "concerned with the ways in which human groups and communities are coping with the massive changes wrought in their physical and sociopolitical environments in recent decades. [They] are also concerned with the ways in which established cultures have solved life's problems" (p. vii). The author attempts to document some aspects of the "massive changes" that the Mi'kmaq have experienced, and he indicates some of their current "life's problems." But there is little or no attempt to identify the coping and problem-solving mechanisms that make Mi'kmaq culture the dynamic and viable culture it is.

The theory of culture on which the data hangs is presented only implicitly. The reader must intuit how the author conceptualizes the concept of culture and the processes that have made the Mi'kmaq successful in overcoming the threats to their societal and cultural continuity. This is a challenge beyond most beginning (inexperienced) students. Further-

more, because the author does not explicitly articulate his theoretical orientation, even readers who are familiar with interpretive theories will have difficulty as it is not always clear whether the ideas presented represent those of informants or of the author. An example of this is the author's discussions of "cultural resistance." The author describes the rejection of European spirituality by some Mi'kmaq as an attempt to "return" to real, or uncontaminated, aboriginal culture; yet there is the incorporation of "foreign" (pan-Indian) elements to "replace" the displaced Christian concepts (p. 202 ff.). Earlier, he suggested that the Mi'kmaq had "ignored" their own spiritual tradition to adopt practices from First Nations in western North America (p. 71). This implies a definition of "culture" that focuses on *content* (that is, trait inventories) rather than a definition which sees culture as a *process* (that is, rules for action). It is not clear whether this trait-oriented concept of culture is held by the author or the people he describes.

There are also some places in the book that are either misleading or incomplete. I shall only provide one or two examples here. The author states, "... Indians in Canada have effectively pressured the federal government into repudiating its long-held assimilation policies. National policy is now to form a multi-cultural society, which leaves some room for tribal nations such as the Mi'kmaq to move according to their own drumbeat" (p. 200). While the pressure of First Nations peoples has been significant in refining federal policy, this pressure has to be placed in the context of the actions of Quebec separatists and the ideological orientation of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. When discussing late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Mi'kmaq adaptation to "internal colonialism," the author states that they "found mental shelter in the realm of their collective imagination," and he sees that it is significant that the culture hero Klu'skap is first mentioned in the documentary record during this period. Yet this can be said for most other-than-human and mythical persons because it was not until the nineteenth century that European scholarship focused on such matters. The absence of a cultural practice in the historical record does not mean that it did not exist previous to the documentary evidence for its existence. The implication Prins makes here is that the Mi'kmaq resorted to fantasy when reality took a wrong turn. This suggests that mythology is largely a means for therapeutic escape from reality; I am not sure that is a message I want to have delivered to introductory

social science students.

When discussing Dummer's Treaty, in which he asserts that King George I of England was recognized as the "Rightful Possessor of the province of Nova Scotia" (p. 139), he fails to mention that the Mi'kmaq and other signatories were careful to add "in as ample a manner as we have formerly done to the most Christian King (i.e., the king of France)." Since they had not made any submission to the French king, they did not make submission to the English king, regardless of what the English thought of the matter. The Mi'kmaq and other Native signatories of this and other treaties were very careful not to relinquish their claims to lands which they considered to be under their control. Another example of incompleteness is when he fails to mention that the fifteenth article of the Treaty of Utrecht states that a commission will be convened to discuss which Indians are subjects and which are friends (allies) of the French and English respectively. Although attempts were made to establish such a commission, there is no documentary evidence that it ever met, and so the question of subject versus ally was never addressed by Europeans. However, it is clear that the Mi'kmaq have always perceived themselves as allies, rather than subjects, of European powers. Although it is perhaps too much to expect an author to discuss kinship in detail in a book that covers five hundred years of history, yet even a brief discussion of classificatory kinship terminology would have made the sections on the social and political structure of the aboriginal baseline more meaningful.

Also, there is the uncritical acceptance of secondary sources, Calvin Martin's theories about "wars" with the animals being one (p. 105). The acceptance of Silas Rand's reporting of the Mi'kmaq legend about the beginning of the Mi'kmaq-Kwetej war as an oral account of an historic event (p. 108) does not consider that Frank Speck recorded a similar story for conflict between the Mi'kmaq and the Beothuk, although the Speck work appears in the bibliography.

On a more positive note, the discussion of early Mi'kmaq visits to Europe is good (p. 50 ff.); it is an important aspect of Mi'kmaq experience during the contact period which has been largely ignored by other scholars. The statement that one needs to know the culture of the observers as well as the observed is stated better than it is executed, but it is important to declare it for the intended audience.

In summary, it is a disappointing book by a capable scholar.

It has the appearance of being something that was either produced in a rush or else hastily condensed from a larger work. It is not recommended for the classroom, though specialists should probably be aware of it.

Harold McGee
Saint Mary's University

On Behalf of the Wolf and the First Peoples. By Joseph Marshall III. Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 1995. 235 pages. \$13.95 paper.

Frankly, I had no positive expectations of this book when I agreed to review it. Because it is written by a man whose major preoccupation, when he's not working as a reporter for a non-Indian newspaper in Casper, Wyoming, is fashioning bows and arrows the "old time" way, I figured *On Behalf of the Wolf and the First Peoples* would be just another of the myriad do-it-yourself Indian tomes by the likes of Sun Bear, Ed McGaa, and Mary Summer Rain currently gorging the shelves of New Age book stores from coast to coast.

Well, I was wrong. Dead wrong. Joseph Marshall III, a Sicangu (Brûlé) Lakota from the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota, has crafted an astonishingly good volume, especially for a first effort. It is not that the collection of essays he's assembled cover new ground. It doesn't. But the author addresses his topics with such a quiet confidence and mature dignity that one is tempted to describe his writing as being truly elegant. At the very least, as Joe Bruchac observes in a jacket blurb, "history and poetry blend together" in Marshall's prose to provide an imminently rewarding and pleasurable read.

Moreover, the man really does have something to say, even when rehashing something as clichéd as the fact that the history taught in U.S. educational institutions to Indians and non-Indians alike is biased to the point of absurdity in favor of whites. He is not only able to weave in a genuinely delightful sequence of anecdotes told him by his grandfather and other elders—thus placing the alternative understandings posed by Native historical interpretation squarely on the board—but manages simultaneously to explain with an almost startling succinctness, eloquence, and simplicity the functional aspects of the system's continuously pounding establishmentarian propaganda into the heads of school children.