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## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

Oliver La Farge and the American Indian: A Biography. By Robert A. Hecht.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5mj7w9j5>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 17(1)

### ISSN

0161-6463

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### Publication Date

1993

### DOI

10.17953

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sources on William Crawford's defeat and torture would both substantiate the narrative and link it to a wide range of related primary source materials. One of Seaver's footnotes that is retained refers to having heard second hand about a pamphlet published by Doctor John Knight, a survivor of Crawford's rout, who witnessed the execution of his commander. Knight's account is available in print, but the reader would not know that from this edition.

However, Namias as editor has chosen the approach of cleaning up the text rather than encumbering it with another round of editorial annotations, and one can certainly respect and appreciate that choice. In the end, the introduction, clear print, and generally attractive presentation make "this latest reincarnation of the Jemison saga" (p. x) a nice addition to the libraries of Iroquois scholars and others interested in issues of gender, ethnicity, and cross-cultural contacts in early American history.

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**Oliver La Farge and the American Indian: A Biography.** By Robert A. Hecht. Native American Resource Series No. 2. New Jersey and London: Scarecrow Press, Inc. 1991. 370 pages. \$42.50 cloth. \$25.00 paper.

"Oliver La Farge was not a Great man," writes noted Native American authority Robert A. Hecht in his scholarly, well-researched biography of a man who devoted much of his adult life to building respect for Indians. Born in New York City in 1901—the grandson of John La Farge, called "the father of mural painting in America"—young Oliver was named for the naval hero of the War of 1812, because the Perry line had joined the La Farge family tree through marriage.

La Farge was given every cultural and economic opportunity except exposure to happy parents. His father's drinking and womanizing resulted in his mother's desire for a divorce, so that the sensitive boy felt a lack of love during his formative years. As a result, he did not know how to display affection in his own personal relationships with his first wife and children. Only when La Farge started a second family in his fifties was he able to reveal his caring nature.

At Harvard, the young man studied ethnology and archaeology. His summer expeditions among the Anasazi ruins in the Southwest took him onto the Navajo Reservation and laid the groundwork for his 1930 Pulitzer Prize-winning first novel, *Laughing Boy*, which details the clash between Anglo and Native American cultures. The hero marries an acculturated woman who, as a young adult, has returned to reservation life to seek her Navajo roots. She becomes a skilled weaver, and they live happily for a time, but their idyllic existence is cut short when Slim Girl's earlier involvement with a white rancher results in jealous hatred and the woman's death in her husband's arms. The story combines romance with realism, portraying its characters partly as noble savages and partly as flawed, tragic lovers. The plight of the Navajo as an oppressed but proud people is evident but not central to the novel. La Farge wrote that the book is "not propaganda, nor an indictment of anything." In fact, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* packs more of an emotional punch than does *Laughing Boy* on the side of the victims of white brutality and domination.

La Farge served as president of both the National Association on Indian Affairs and its successor, the American Association on Indian Affairs, from 1933 to 1942. Throughout his life until about five years before his death, La Farge believed that the Indians would disappear as a separate ethnic group, entering the mainstream of American society; later, however, he was among those leading the fight for federal recognition of collective and individual rights, "development of Indian capability toward standing up for themselves and handling their own affairs, and their difficulties."

Not unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald, La Farge's early literary success did not continue. Several of his later published stories were soon forgotten, and his health deteriorated because of excessive drinking and smoking. When La Farge died in 1972, Edna Ferber called him "a man of distinguished family and high intellectual, artistic, and humanitarian achievement." Although Robert Hecht labels him unworthy of greatness, the insightful biographer concludes that La Farge "did have Genius in him" and that "his attitude toward Indians was caring, even loving."

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