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REVIEWS



Chief Thunderwater: An Unexpected Indian in Unexpected Places. By Gerald F. Reid. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021. 200 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Given the disturbing frequency with which “Pretendians”—individuals posing as Native Americans—have been outed as frauds, particularly in the academy, Gerald F. Reid’s splendid new book assumes an unexpected timeliness in the sense that his research upends prior assumptions about his biographical subject’s identity. During his life (1865–1950), Oghema-Niagara, also known as Chief Thunderwater, claimed Sauk and Seneca ancestry. Reid’s study is a model of careful and thorough scholarship, sifting a broad array of evidence and remaining conscious of its limits. The author’s findings support the validity of Thunderwater’s claim and, in the vein of the case studies in Philip J. Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places*, illuminate how Thunderwater made a life during complex and challenging times.

The book opens with a summary of existing knowledge prior to Reid’s own research on Oghema-Niagara, who had been portrayed as an African American impostor and con artist who swindled members of several Haudenosaunee communities in Canada out of considerable sums of money in support of phony Indigenous activist organizations during the early twentieth century. The author then carefully unpacks the history of that narrative and demonstrates how it is wrong in nearly every respect. We learn that actually much of the evidentiary support leading to the perception that Chief Thunderwater was a fraud had been created by officers in Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs, who were determined to discredit Oghema-Niagara’s brand of activism by any means necessary.

Reid’s book testifies to the value of going back to read original sources with a skeptical eye. In addition to a close reading of Thunderwater’s surviving personal papers, Reid assesses a wide range of other sources (including newspapers, census records, and government documents) to make his case for the legitimacy of Thunderwater’s Indigenous ancestry. Born to a Sauk mother and a Seneca father, Thunderwater descended from the nineteenth-century Sauk peace chief Keokuk, but also retained close ties to the Senecas and other Haudenosaunee nations over the course of his itinerant life. Following a career as an entertainer in Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West shows, Thunderwater established a home in in Cleveland, Ohio where, after 1910, he supported himself primarily through the sale of herbal medicines while also engaging in a public career as a local humanitarian and an outspoken advocate of Indigenous rights.

Thunderwater’s life path in many ways illustrated the challenges and opportunities of modernity for Indigenous peoples who opted for lives in urban North America. Reid does not deny that Thunderwater at times monetized his Native identity, but in lieu of detailed financial records, concludes that Thunderwater sought public recognition

and influence rather than pecuniary gain. Reid emphasizes two especially interesting aspects of Thunderwater's life: he often assisted Native people needing medical or legal assistance and frequently opened his home to Native people visiting Cleveland, thereby supporting the kind of mobility undertaken by many Native people (including himself) at that time.

The strength of Reid's monograph lies with the author's detailed knowledge of the complex, but often highly illuminating contents of the Library and Archives Canada's Record Group 10, Department of Indian Affairs. In these copious administrative files, Reid locates the evidence that revises our understanding of Thunderwater's movement and its significance. Moved by a speech of New York attorney George P. Decker at Onondaga in 1914, Oghema-Niagara embarked on a program of encouraging "confederate action" among Haudenosaunee communities (77). According to Reid, Thunderwater tapped into a then-dormant strain of nationalism present in Canadian Haudenosaunee communities, many of whose members had been fighting the imposition of elective councils by the Canadian government after the passage of the 1869 Enfranchisement Act (subsequent revisions of which came to be known as the "Indian Act"). Noting that this strain of nationalism was far more prevalent in Haudenosaunee communities north of the United States–Canada border than south of it, Reid demonstrates how Thunderwater commenced his efforts at Akwesasne in 1914, and then moved on during the next two years to Tyendinaga, Kahnawake, and Grand River. "Thunderwaterism," in Reid's view, embodied not only opposition to the assimilationist agenda of the Indian Act, but also the reassertion of collective Haudenosaunee identity, political autonomy, and the revival of the clan-based, hereditary Six Nations Confederacy leadership (150).

In fascinating detail, Reid recounts the ways in which the surveillance of these Haudenosaunee communities by the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs (CDIA) operated to uphold the colonial priorities of the Canadian settler state during the early twentieth century. Very quickly after his arrival in Canada, Thunderwater registered in official CDIA correspondence as an outside agitator whose message posed a serious threat to the department's program of eradicating traditional Haudenosaunee governance. Duncan Campbell Scott, the Canadian Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, took a personal interest in collecting political "dirt" on Thunderwater and working to thwart his initiatives—most notably, an intriguing 1918 effort by Thunderwater and his supporters to incorporate his organization, the Council of the Tribes, by an act of Parliament in Canada.

Once enthusiasm for the Thunderwater Movement subsided among Canadian Haudenosaunee communities by 1922, Thunderwater turned his efforts to a variety of economic initiatives stateside. Reid untangles a thicket of evidence to offer a compelling narrative of Thunderwater's compromises and struggles, which culminated in his efforts to secure damages from two Louisville, Kentucky newspapers in a 1928 libel lawsuit. Here, in a geographical context outside of Canada and with no substantive bearing on domestic Canadian politics, Reid recounts how the legacy of Scott's earlier "dirty tricks" campaign against Thunderwater (91) came to full fruition as Canadian authorities collaborated enthusiastically with the newspapers' attorneys to smear his

reputation as an African American imposter, con man, and alleged child abuser. These efforts, combined with the actions of a judge lacking sympathy for Native people, resulted in a hung jury and the dismissal of Thunderwater's case against the newspapers that impugned his character.

Reid's book sheds important new light on an understudied chapter of Haudenosaunee history. He credits Thunderwater for playing a key role in revitalizing the nascent Haudenosaunee nationalism of the late nineteenth century in Canada and identifies his movement as providing a vital bridge between that prior era and the subsequent versions of twentieth-century activism supporting Haudenosaunee sovereignty. Reid acknowledges that Thunderwater's attempt to incorporate the Council of the Tribes via Canadian Parliamentary legislation in 1918 represented "one of the most important expressions" of the Thunderwater Movement (151), but does not explain the possible implications of that initiative had it succeeded. That minor criticism aside, this book is highly recommended as an accessible, compelling account of a fascinating individual's life.

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A Coalition of Lineages: The Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians. By Duane Champagne and Carole Goldberg. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2021. 408 pages. \$24.95 paper; \$150.00 electronic.

American Indian studies, as a transdisciplinary field, has significantly contributed to our understanding of Native pasts, presents, and futures. The work of Duane Champagne, sociologist and professor emeritus in American Indian studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), has been vital to the development of American Indian studies, as has that of Carole Goldberg, distinguished professor of law emerita at UCLA. Champagne is known for his work on cultural and social change and the continuity of Indigenous nations, and Goldberg as a leading scholar of federal Indian law and tribal law. The two have been integral to the growing field of American Indian studies for decades at UCLA and their legacy will continue to be felt for decades to come. In *A Coalition of Lineages*, which chronicles the history of the band from creation to their contemporary governance, Champagne and Goldberg's expertise combines, along with that of their research team, to analyze the history of the Indians interned by the Catholic missionaries and Spanish soldiers at Mission San Fernando Rey de España, as well as their descendants.

At fewer than 250 pages, the book offers a quick overview of thousands of years of history before contact in addition to nearly 225 years after the colonial mission was founded within their traditional territory. Champagne and Goldberg have written a robust and accessible summary of the tribe's history and continuity for a general audience of non-experts in the fields of American Indian, California Indian, and mission studies, including a well-crafted argument that the Fernandeano Tataviam