

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chiefs and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879; with an epilogue, 1964-1974.
By Father Peter John Powell.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7nn787r7>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 7(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

1983

DOI

10.17953

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In sum, the amazing comprehensiveness and detail of scholarship displayed with respect to description of inter-tribal conflict, including the United States for the half-century covered in the book, are admirable. The writing, however, is made difficult and somewhat biased by its Cheyenne ethnocenteredness. But far more disturbing to this reviewer as a social science rationalist and student of comparative cultures is the conclusion that the author has presented to the Cheyennes, not only an explicit descriptive history of their chiefs and warrior societies; he has less obviously presented a religious tract in propagation of a particular faith.

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People of the Sacred Mountain: A History of the Northern Cheyenne Chief and Warrior Societies, 1830-1879; with an epilogue 1964-1974. By Father Peter John Powell. Harper and Row, 1981. 2 vols. 1441 pp. \$150. Cloth.

Father Powell's new book cannot be taken at face value. Frankly, it is not exactly what it claims to be--an authentic expression of Cheyenne culture written by a trusted friend in the interests of Indian people. To understand what the book truly is, however, we must first understand something about Father Powell's relationships with the Cheyennes and something about the high-pressure world of book publishing. And especially, to make sense of this book, we must identify the literary genre to which it belongs.

It is accurate, though unflattering, to describe this work as yet another "Big Indian Book," written in the same tradition as Frank Waters's Book of the Hopi or Brown and Willoya's Warriors of the Rainbow. As a group these books are based on three fundamental premises which have conspired to bring success to the genre. First, there is the idea that Indians are people with deep secrets which they usually do not tell White people. Second, there is the assertion that the author of the Big Indian Book (hereafter

BIB) is so trusted and respected by the Indians that they have decided to tell him their secrets. And third, it is frequently alleged that the author, for some high purpose, has decided to allow the secrets to come at last into print.

As a gimmick for selling books, the BIB formula has worked very well indeed, from Lighthall's Indian Folk Medicine Guide in 1883 right through the many editions of Ben Hunt's craft books. Indian secrets, especially religious ones, have turned out to be so eminently salable that some authors, frustrated in finding Indian secrets, have not hesitated to make them up. The most recent scandals of this sort have been Seven Arrows by Hyemeyosts Storm and Hanta Yo by Ruth Beebe Hill, not to mention Chief Red Fox by Cash Asher, which was made up in its entirety.

The second part of the BIB formula requires not only that Indian people have secrets, but that they have some trusted friend to tell them to, and that is where we must examine Father Powell's relations with the Cheyenne people, especially since he makes such a major point of having an Indian name and being a "Northern Cheyenne Chief." Concerning his Indian name, I can't resist quoting here the remark Cheyenne elder, Mary Inkanish, who in her biography Dance Around the Sun, refused to call him "Stone Forehead" as he would like. After watching him perform a mass in a motel room in Seiling, Oklahoma, during which he changed clothes to be his own acolyte, she insisted on calling him "Stone Bonehead." Concerning his chiefly status, I must also remark that this status, honorary at best, is not recognized in Oklahoma since the publication of his book Sweet Medicine. The late Arrow-Keeper, Ed Red Hat, as well as surviving Arrow Priests, have alleged that the pictures of the Sacred Arrows published in that book were taken surreptitiously by Father Powell, and without permission.

Among the Cheyennes malicious gossip about Father Powell abounds to the point that one cannot separate fact from fiction. However, it is very clear that a large number of Cheyenne are very hostile to him and want to have nothing to do with him. Twice in my own work I have had to deal with the hostility toward White researchers which he has helped engender. In 1975, working with the Southern

Cheyenne chiefs and priests, we began to collect genealogies from the descendants of people present at the Sand Creek Massacre to seek a long overdue claim from the federal government. Many Southern Cheyenne elders were reluctant to supply information, fearing that someone was writing a book at their expense but not for their benefit--a book like Sweet Medicine. Again in 1980 the Northern Cheyennes asked me to conduct interviews and collect documents in support of their claims to the Black Hills. Once again, elders were reluctant to cooperate, this time saying that they had just talked to Father Powell thinking he was involved in some kind of tribal history project, only to find out later that he was only writing a book "to sell," namely the present volumes. In both these episodes, it was only the persuasion of traditional chiefs, Laird Cometsevah in the South and William Tall Bull in the North, that enabled the projects to go forward.

Despite the publishers' pious claims and peculiar bookkeeping in their Native American Series, Harper and Row claims that their policy for this series of Indian books is to advance overhead and royalties until the book is published, after which time they recover the advance plus 10% of net sales, which they call a "nominal royalty." Also, they do not mention the sale of paperbacks, which for Seven Arrows, the first book of the series, amounted to 150,000 copies. Was that not "profit"?

Harper and Row claims to have contributed, so far, \$30,000 in grants to Native American projects. Among the ones listed in their newsletter are several that most people will applaud. They funded the purchase of a sacred site in Ohio for some local Shawnees and also bought food for an AIM meeting in Oklahoma. But they also seem to use the fund as seed money for their own publishing--for example to a Quechua Indian to finish a manuscript. For some reason, the publisher does not mention a gift of over \$2000 which the Southern Cheyenne priests say they received to help with ceremonies, and another \$15,000 received by certain Northerners.

Concerning the publishing series itself, which now comprises fourteen volumes, it got off with a bang of controversy when the first book of the program, Seven

Arrows, was condemned by the Northern and Southern Cheyenne Chiefs and Priests almost before it appeared in book stores. Rupert Costo of Wassaja then led a formidable movement of protest against the book, which is still unparalleled. It is interesting to note in retrospect that Father Powell refused to join this outcry--and now we see that his book has appeared in the series. I ask: Can this be mere coincidence, or is this the reward of those who opt out of publishing controversies?

Having placed this book within a more honest perspective, we can turn at last to an evaluation of the substance of Father Powell's work. And we must immediately exclaim that the two volumes are beautifully printed and bound, impressive in content, and worth owning if you have the money. Priced at \$150, there are 126 photographs, seldom or never seen, and 75 color reproductions of ledger book drawings by Native artists of the nineteenth century, also previously unpublished. However, if we had no other means of telling that the book was not intended for Cheyenne consumption, its price would tell us so. \$150 is more than the average monthly per capita income for any <sic> Cheyennes, north or south. I doubt that we will be seeing it on Cheyenne coffee tables.

The text of the book is, on the whole, disappointing. While Father Powell has done a thorough job of library and archival research, the volumes do not contain much information that is new. In fact, much of the information he needed for this book is unrecoverable, since the memories of modern elders can at best go back to the early part of the 20th century and not back to 1830 where his history begins.

Perhaps to compensate for this lack of new facts, Father Powell has embellished the historical narrative with things that probably happened or could have happened. He has made Cheyenne history much more readable than it has ever been before and he has put the whole history in one place, a thousand-page narrative spread over two volumes.

After twenty years of research, Father Powell probably knows more about Cheyenne documents and archival deposits than anyone living. It is tempting, therefore, to say that this work is valuable as a resource, if for no other reason.

However, it is apparent that Powell has covered up a lot of ambiguity and contradiction in the original documents in seeking to write a flowing narrative. Most often, we are not told the chain of reasoning by which a particular chief, for example, is correctly distinguished from two others of the same name. Father Powell fearlessly identifies Blue Horse, Red Bird and White Bull, for instance, without noting that many documents flatly contradict his identifications. Sometimes the narrative proceeds for several pages without any footnotes, leaving us wondering where this information came from, readable and entertaining though it might be. We don't know which part of the narrative is made up and which part he may have found in some dusty archive. The only glaring omissions I note from his references are the biography of Hoistah by S. M. Barrett, some field notes of Truman Michelson and the entirety of the Doris Duke Oral History Collection.

For the present volumes, Father Powell has utilized the Cheyenne writing system developed by the Bilingual Education Program in Montana. This might lead us to believe that his use of the language in this work was going to be very precise and knowledgeable. However, there is nothing in these volumes to indicate that Father Powell has a working knowledge of the Cheyenne language. He does not use singular forms where they belong, and he continues to use the mistranslated personal names applied by Army clerks. Most tragically, Father Powell does not seem to entertain the slightest suspicion that birds, animals and color are not named in Cheyenne the same way as they are in English.

I do not insist of course that an ethnological education is good for everybody. But it seems to me that, if a person undertakes to translate one of the important cultures of the world into a scholarly book in English, some knowledge of grammar and semantics is required. The discipline that Father Powell needs most desperately is called "ethnosemantics." If he had mastered its principles, he would have been alert to the fact that the Cheyenne classification of hawks and eagles, for example, is very different from that of the Audobon Society. The colors, too, are not only named from the spectrum quite differently but also have diminutive and superficial aspects which require translation.

Without knowing this I do not understand how Father Powell can translate personal names so confidently, since most men's names are drawn from colors, birds and animals. Because of his language deficiencies, Father Powell has not helped clarify Cheyenne culture in this regard at all but has instead helped to carve in stone the prevailing misconceptions.

Leaving aside for the moment, whatever inadequacies the book might have bibliographically or linguistically, and even leaving aside the ethical questions of fieldwork and the publishing business, there remains the question: What kind of history is Father Powell writing? In general the differences between what he is doing and what is done, for example, in the pages of Ethnohistory or by such writers as Waldo Wedel, Raymond Wood, or Melburn Thurman are very fundamental. Philosophically, the differences are between empiricism and idealism, science and the humanities, and perhaps faith and reason as well. In this review, of course, I cannot hope to deal with these kinds of questions. So let me make the issue more manageable. Let me only consider the most that Father Powell can hope to achieve, with the best possible techniques, using his singular approach to history.

Throughout his book, as in his previous writings, Father Powell hopes to understand Cheyenne history as played against the individual histories of their sacred ceremonial objects. Cheyenne fortunes are seen to rise or fall in accordance with the way that the Sacred Arrows and Buffalo Hat are treated by Cheyennes. Because these objects are abused periodically in Cheyenne history, the Nation seems to experience a few immediate victories but ultimately drifts toward an historically inevitable conclusion--defeat, captivity and removal. If Father Powell were a Presbyterian instead of an Anglican, one might be tempted to call his approach Predestination.

For example, in narrating the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Father Powell says: "Now the power of the Sacred Arrows had overcome him, and he and all his men lay in the dust here above the Little Big Horn, every one of them dead. Stone Forehead's warning had come true." Concerning the capture of the Sacred Arrows by the Pawnees, he says, "Only sorrow could come from such a desecration. And so

the People's sorrows continued to increase." And again, concerning the desecration of the Buffalo Hat, he says: "With Esevone mutilated, her holy body torn and bleeding, ever-increasing sorrows came to the Northern People."

Of course, historical inevitability is much easier to see in retrospect. Father Powell's hand-selected episodes of history seem consistent only if you look backwards in time, as a kind of *ex post facto* astrology or "ethnomancy." But it would be equally easy to select events from Cheyenne history, even religious events, which did not at all bode ill for the future of the Cheyennes. For example, following the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864, the soldier societies took charge of the Sacred Arrows, over the objections of the Chiefs, and held a Sun Dance in which the bands were organized by military groups, not hunting groups. This historic Sun Dance is preserved in a huge color drawing in the Museum of the American Indian. Following the ceremony the Cheyennes enjoyed an immensely successful attack on Julesburg during which they routed the Army and emptied the storehouses. One might then write the following passage, after the manner of Father Powell:

With the Holy Relics restored to their rightful protectors, the Sacred Soldier Chiefs, the entire tribe, reconciled at last to the necessity of war, met to renew their Spiritual Covenant. In response, the Almighty sent the sun and winds to bless their camp, and many young warriors made their pledges, danced, and sacrificed their bodies. . . . Later, on the trail toward Julesburg, they knew the certainty of their victory, for the powers of the many spirits flowed in their veins, invigorating their bodies. As they laid waste to the town and loaded their ponies with food and weapons, they knew that inevitably the White Spiders would be swept from the Plains, and God would restore the land to His People.

Of course the land was not restored to the Cheyennes, but there was a certain inevitability to the proceedings. With the end of the Civil War, strings of forts and thousands of American soldiers entered the Plains. By 1865 any

Cheyenne who could count noses would have to know that the Cheyenne nation had little time left as a free society and that the millions of Americans would soon own the Plains. And that was inevitable no matter how the Cheyennes treated their sacred objects. It was an inevitability of objective or material conditions, not of spiritual ones.

So Father Powell seems to have smuggled in, under the guise of Cheyenne religion, an ancient myth of the White man--manifest destiny. Although Father Powell has tried to look at the Cheyenne side of things, he has nonetheless managed to come up looking like a White man. This is one of the dangers of what anthropologists like to call the "If I were a horse . . ." school of ethnography. If you are educated in a university, no amount of introspection will ever tell you what it is like to be a horse. Therefore, when English anthropologists of the nineteenth century tried to envision what it was like to be a Samoan or a Zulu, from the safety of their armchairs in Oxford, the Samoans or Zulus always turned out to look suspiciously like Englishmen, albeit with a Native vocabulary.

In the same way Father Powell, despite the fact that he has spent a lot of time around Cheyenne ceremonies, does not basically understand what they are all about. In his various books, he has provided us only with a dictionary of Cheyenne religion, not a grammar. As a grammar he offers only a muddled version of Anglican ritual, in which Cheyennes are seen as imperfect Christians, conducting primitive Masses and Communion.

Father Powell has also failed to supply us with a Cheyenne grammar of history. Instead he supplies his own ethnocentric ideas about what episodes are significant, which he then weaves together into an embellished narrative that he himself finds agreeable. In addition to manifest destiny and predestination we also have his version of the doctrine of original sin as well as some visions and miracles. The original sin of course was the desecration of the sacred objects, from which the Cheyennes have never recovered. That is, he asks us to believe that Cheyennes today are poor and desperate, not because of broken treaties and genocide, but because of their own ritual

malfeasance. It seems to me this is an insulting thing to say about a brave Nation which has struggled for over a hundred years to preserve their territory, and against overwhelming odds! Which brings us to war miracles.

Punctuating the episode when Stone Forehead escaped through the U.S. Army in 1874, Father Powell reports as fact that the reason an approaching Army patrol overlooked the band of Cheyennes was that "Stone Forehead had transformed them into buffalo." Elsewhere we learn that Box Elder (should be "Sugar Maple") was a familiar of wolves and that White Bull could make people bulletproof. One looks in vain in these volumes for a more common-sense evaluation of military tactics and an explanation of why they were or were not successful at various times. But all we get is the assertion that sometimes the supernatural powers worked and sometimes they didn't. Surely there is more to be learned about Cheyenne warfare than that.

I suppose it would be too mundane to suggest that Cheyenne military success has something to do with the size of their ponies, the kind of feed they could get, the territorial requirements of buffalo-hunting or the capability of Cheyennes to make political alliances. And what about those external factors--American desires for specific kinds of land and particular resources? But as Father Powell writes history, the Americans are a kind of hostile fog surrounding the Cheyennes, with no particular motives save the killing of Cheyennes and the destruction of their religious objects. The Cheyennes are seen not as a practical people, defending their homeland by rational means, but as a group of religionists defending their holy relics against non-believers. In its general idiom and apocryphal style, the book reads more like the Adventures of St. Joan, or Sir Perceval and the Holy Grail, than like a reasonable history of normal human beings. Like James Fenimore Cooper, Father Powell asks us to believe that Indian people are qualitatively different from us, but different in ways which we find comfortable and predictable, given our long history of reading Big Indian Books.

The basic danger in writing history, of course, as in writing ethnography, is of presenting your own ethnocentric notions to the world as if they were objective truth. In

Father Powell's work it is harder to find his ethnocentric notions because they are masquerading as what Cheyennes believe. And since few of his readers have any independent knowledge of what Cheyennes actually believe, they must take his word for it. After all, he has an Indian name. And not surprisingly, the Cheyennes apparently believe just what we thought they might, which accounts in great part for the popularity of Father Powell's books.

Throughout his writings Father Powell has tried to convince us that he has exchanged his own ethnocentrism for an authentically Cheyenne perspective on the world. He believes in their miracles, the validity of their religion and their explanation of history. But even accepting that he has given us a completely authentic picture of Cheyenne culture, which he has not, what is it that we have, at best? Is Cheyenne ethnocentrism any better than our own? Is the ultimate goal of history merely to engage in intercultural diatribe, with each debater embracing some narrow tribal view or other, or is our goal to create a form of history that is universal and subject to verification. If we accept an empirical approach--material, demographic and ecological --it is my opinion that we can create a scientific history, with testable models and hypotheses which cannot be falsified. If we accept Father Powell's approach, juggling all kinds of uncriticized and unverifiable facts, impressions and sentiments all at once, we are only doing literature.

In the final pages of this work Father Powell has given us yet another personal narrative of modern Cheyenne religious events, after the manner of Sweet Medicine. Once again Father Powell has intruded himself into the most private affairs of the Cheyenne people and has snapped pictures and told the reading public all about it. I suppose that this kind of intrusion could be justified in some cases, depending on one's motives for doing it. But Father Powell's motives, so far as I know, are only to satisfy his own curiosity and the curiosity of the well-heeled reading public.

Father Powell is not alone among non-Indians in being invited to share the intimacies of Cheyenne culture. In Montana, Fathers Antoine and Hoffman of the St. Labre mission are also honorary chiefs. In the south no one is closer to Cheyenne people than Karl Schlesier, an anthropologist at Wichita State University. Karl is an

honorary Chief and the adopted son of the late Arrow-Keeper, Ed Red Hat. But Karl has never, to my knowledge, printed a single word concerning the private ceremonies he has seen. He has too much respect for the Cheyenne people to do that. And neither he nor the Catholic fathers have ever flaunted their status in Cheyenne society to the rest of us, as a method of selling books. So it is not that Father Powell is the only White person privy to the intimacies of Cheyenne religion, he is merely the only White person rude enough to write about it.

With the publication of Sweet Medicine in 1969 Father Powell mostly alienated himself from the Southern Cheyennes. With the publication of this book he may have alienated himself from the northerners as well. In any event, as I visited Lame Deer in the spring of 1982, I was told that Dull Knife Memorial College, run by the tribe, had refused to order the new book and was removing Sweet Medicine from the shelves. Although it is true that some members of a military society assisted Father Powell in the research for this book, I am told that they consider it to be strictly a business arrangement. So while Father Powell tells us about the sanctity and spiritual nature of the task he has attempted, Cheyenne soldiers tell me that they did it for the money.

What an irony it is that at the time Father Powell is receiving the National Book Award for history and is being lauded and honored by the White reading public as the "voice" of the Cheyenne people he should find himself cut off from Cheyenne society. While he might indeed become the lion of North Shore parties, it is not likely that Cheyenne traditionalists will trust him again, unless Harper and Row makes some worthwhile moves on their accounting ledgers. Frankly, I am glad to see the Cheyenne leaders being tough and pecuniary in their attitudes. It is bad enough that their lands and resources have already been stolen. But if their religion and privacy are to be invaded for profit, that profit should belong to Cheyennes, not to the writers and publishers of Big Indian Books.

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