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You Can't Get There from Here: The Mystique of North American Plains Indians' Culture and Philosophy. By John Friesen.

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themes in her analysis of Blackfoot women. Her work is now being critiqued by a female Blackfoot academic, and I am pleased to know that more native people are attempting this process. It is only when collections of this sort find their way into classes being taught by native academics that we can truly assess their contributions to native women and power. Thus it is noteworthy that the afterword is written by JoAllyn Archambault, Lakota anthropologist, and her former colleague at the Smithsonian Institution, Daniel Maltz. Although the question of "voice" always comes up in relation to dual writings about American Indians and Alaska Natives, the clarity of their assessment is another added bonus to this book.

As yet another collection of writings on indigenous women, this book is useful. Although wishing for an analytical thematic structure to hold the disparate selections together, I found the papers to be ethnographically sound, presenting evidences of the effects of colonialism and resultant feminine adaptive strategies. This book would be a powerful teaching tool if each essay were paired with a feminine life history. Had more space been allowed, this would have been done.

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You Can't Get There from Here: The Mystique of North American Plains Indians' Culture and Philosophy. By John Friesen. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1995. 147 pages.

In the investment banking business, a customer requests a quote from a market-maker for a specific instrument or product. When a trader's quote reflects an obvious bias rather than the "fair value" of the instrument, we say that the trader has an ax to grind. This practice is readily acknowledged and, indeed, even expected by those requesting the quote. Having an ax to grind is part of the protocol of trading. However, in matters of scholarship, such a protocol is unacceptable. Although an author may be presenting a particular point of view, he or she should attempt to support this point of view with well-reasoned arguments founded on demonstrable evidence. Doing otherwise results in propaganda rather than scholarship.

As I read *You Can't Get There from Here*, I could not help but think that Friesen had a real ax to grind. I agree with his view that a serious and careful investigation of Native American thought and culture is the only way to achieve a high degree of cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect. I cannot, however, accept his basic presupposition and the methodology he uses to support his study. Although Friesen's aim may be true, his motives are biased, and the resulting scholarship manifests this prejudice. In the end, he fails to produce a serious work that contributes to a better understanding of the Native American experience. Instead, the author produces a political treatise that makes a misunderstanding of his subject inescapable. To make matters even worse, this political tract (in typical fashion) takes the form of a classical straw man argument whereby Friesen puts forth a specious statement as a fact and attempts to support this claim with fallacious reasoning (demonstrated by his use of hasty generalizations, prejudicial language, and a disregard for contrary factual evidence).

He begins the text by stating that "the basic presupposition of this book is that the underlying rationale of many traditional Aboriginal ways is fundamentally incomprehensible to the uninitiated" (p. ix). Friesen presents as a statement of fact that nonnative thinkers cannot genuinely understand the Native American experience because a priori they are not properly qualified. In fact, any attempt to achieve such an understanding is "a waste of time" unless one acquires a "new perspective, perhaps a special vision" (p. x). This new perspective is required because "First Nations' thinking is unique. . . . [I]t differs in *kind and quality*, not merely in degree from European-derived models" (p. 117, emphasis in original). Hence, the title of the book: The nonnative thinker cannot get "there" (to authentic understanding of the Native American experience) from "here" (the thinker's current Eurocentric mindset).

Friesen supports these views with seven "arguments" (one per chapter). The first chapter attempts to establish the legitimacy of Native American culture by citing the duration, architecture, and technology of three cultures from the Southwestern region of the United States twelve thousand years ago. The second chapter offers a history of the interaction between Native Americans and Europeans. The third is a description of Native American philosophy. The fourth delineates the importance of the oral tradition. The fifth offers a case study of the Stoney tribe in Morley, Alberta,

while the final two arguments defend the position that Native American planning and thinking are radically different from all other types.

Friesen's presupposition that the Native American experience is incomprehensible to the nonnative thinker is not a fact but rather a dogmatic assertion that cannot be adequately supported by evidence. The Native American experience may be different from other human experiences, but it is still a human experience and as such is not off limits or incomprehensible to the nonnative thinker. The Native American experience is not different in "kind and quality" from all other human experience because Native Americans are fundamentally, essentially humans. Native Americans may manifest the human condition—human "be-ing"—differently from nonnatives, but they are fundamentally human, and the constitutive structures of their being as human are the same as that of nonnatives. By presenting the initial presupposition as fact, the author forces the reader to accept the position that Native Americans are so different as to be totally Other, and this position is beyond support. The author mistakes bona fide differences in the Native American experience—the Native American condition—for difference in the human condition and sets the stage for his straw man argument.

The author struggles to support his initial claim by the above-mentioned seven arguments, but the weakness of his presuppositions makes genuine support impossible. As a result, his arguments are specious. By this I do not mean that he offers factually incorrect statements. Rather, he offers few statements of fact at all. Instead, he makes sweeping generalizations that are not factually supported (or supportable for that matter) and selective examples that are based on a biased sample. Below are some examples:

"Too busy to negotiate, the conquerors simply occupied the land with never a worry about possibly having to confirm their claims through legislation" (p. 22). [All conquerors acted this way? How can he know what all conquerors thought? In England, France, and Spain, political and religious leaders discussed at length the nature of their claims and what sort of political jurisdiction Native American rulers had under natural and national law if they were not Christian. This discussion led to religious justifications for the conquests, including Pope Paul III's papal bull of 1537, *Sublimis Deus*.]

"Indian legends are unique. They are truly *Indian* stories. . ." (p. 63, emphasis in original). [Friesen does not explain what this means, nor does he consider the accepted academic literature on the archetypal nature of legends and myths.]

"Native American people were deeply spiritual people" (p. 28). [Any more so than other people? And if so, how? And what of the Europeans? The author would like us to believe that the European immigration to North America was driven by economic and not religious and spiritual beliefs.]

"European cultures tend to place great importance on institutionalized religion which is best delineated in terms of elaborately-decorated [sic] physical structures, strictured procedures and an inflexible hierarchy of professional practitioners. Contrast this perspective with the Aboriginal format and there are hardly any points by which meaningfully to compare the two systems" (p. 36). [This is another straw man argument. Friesen fails to point out the obvious similarities: Native American religions also incorporate decorative religious objects (e.g., the Lakota pipe and bag), strictured procedures (the Lakota Sun Dance), and a rigid hierarchy of practitioners (the Lakota clan structure). All religions must have ways of separating the sacred from the profane, setting limitations on behavior, and ordaining practitioners who serve to demarcate the spiritual world from the mundane.]

"Though the European perspective does not lack spiritual vocabulary, it is not necessarily *premised* on spiritual metaphysical beliefs" (p. 112, emphasis in original). [Does not Western thought fundamentally arise out of a Christian-Judaic metaphysical tradition?]

To make such sweeping claims, Friesen first does two things: First, he creates stereotypes of both Native Americans and Europeans. In doing so, he commits the cardinal sin he accuses other nonnative scholars of committing: He treats Indians as a homogenous group, having one transhistorical culture (hence his continuous reference to "the Native American experience"). He fails to make clear the differences among tribes and people; at best he talks about American Indians and Canadian Indians. Second, he ignores a body of scholarship that undermines his efforts. This is particularly evident when he discusses the early interactions between the European invaders and the Native Americans. In-

stead of examining the sociopolitical context for the Europeans' actions, he assigns a general purpose for these actions: These invaders (and their progeny) were driven purely by the pursuit of imperialistic and economic gains (p. 22). Such a generalization fails completely. To understand these actions fully—as tragic as they may be—requires a level of scholarship the author is not ready to present because it would certainly weaken, if not destroy, his arguments. Such scholarship would reveal that, like all people, the Europeans' ideological and scientific paradigm gave rise to a normative standard for action. This paradigm shaped all their thinking and acting. Rather than offering a rigorous account of this paradigm, Friesen uses hindsight to castigate the Europeans.

To support his hasty conclusions, Friesen employs a technique found in many political tracts: He uses prejudicial language. At one point in the text, Friesen writes, "Language is clearly linked with underlying presuppositions" (p. 26). There is no question that the language used in the text manifests Friesen's presuppositions. His language serves to reinforce his view of the value and superiority of Native American culture and thought, and the depravity and exploitative nature of European culture. Friesen constantly refers to Europeans as "invaders" whose goal is to "subdue the earth" (p. 36). This is but one example of his bias. As any logician knows, nothing strengthens a straw man argument like an ad hominem, but words are no substitute for scholarship. In addition, Friesen should have been more diligent in his use of language in general. There is no excuse for using terms like *past history* or describing Native Americans as "very unique" (p. 110).

Friesen's goal is admirable, but he cannot achieve it. The text never does promote a better understanding of Native American culture and thought. In fact, it does just the opposite. This is especially problematic because the text is designed to be an educational text. Students who read this book will come away with the belief that, unless they are privy to a certain vision, an understanding of the Native American experience is beyond their ability. Moreover, they will be left with a stereotypical view of Europeans and Native Americans. They also will come away with a politicized understanding of European-Native American relations. Finally, students will be left with the impression that an author's motivations can supersede his or her duty to present a fair and well-reasoned argument. Students would be better served by undertaking their own comparative study of both the Native

American and the European experiences and examining the original texts (both European and Indian) and scholarly commentaries.

In the end, the author does achieve one goal: "When these arguments have been studied, my intention is that the reader will come away *no more* enlightened about Native American Aboriginal ways. . ." (p. ix, emphasis in original). The text itself is perhaps the best proof of Friesen's initial presupposition: We cannot get there from here, if "here" is this text.

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