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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9h2143g1>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 36(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2012-03-01

DOI

10.17953

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Unknown Huichol: Shamans and Immortals, Allies against Chaos. By Jay Courtney Fikes. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2010. 281 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

Jay Courtney Fikes's *Unknown Huichol* places him at an interesting conjunction in the debate on Native American spirituality in light of Western "science" and "rationalism." As a self-described "hybrid anthropologist," Fikes defends the validity of mystical thought versus an anthropological mainstream that he believes is often woefully ethnocentric, yet long ago he debunked Carlos Castaneda's work as fiction.

Fikes assembles his critique with the traditional tools of the discipline. Educated as a social anthropologist, he is a careful observer, and supports his work with dates and other references, even as he rejects the participant-observer duality. Using methods familiar to other anthropologists, he tape-records rituals as allowed by his hosts, with every account precisely described and dated. Fikes believes that "my extra measure of participation in studying with Huichol shamans exemplifies a hybrid anthropology more vigorous and discerning than research compiled by classical participant-observers" (15).

The difference is that Fikes accepts the shamans' paranormal power, often takes part in their rituals, and has been invited to live with some of their families. He also consumes peyote when conditions warrant. Fikes has been fashioning his own version of social anthropology for close to four decades, carving a path that, as he writes, has been modeled for him by Huichol shamans and roadmen of the Native American Church. He knew Reuben Snake very well up to his death in 1993, and authored his biography, *Your Humble Serpent*.

In addition to the conflict regarding the participant-observer methodology, Fikes straddles another boundary, between skepticism and belief. He instructs fellow researchers: "my research has depended on two caveats that may be useful for any anthropologist who intends to do research with shamans. First, maintain skepticism about what other social anthropologists report," and secondly, "maintain humility about the limits of what one may know about what shamans claim to know" (34).

Huichol shamans originally were part-time religious practitioners in hunting-gathering societies; according to Fikes, "healer, singer, and *cahuitero* are distinct levels of religious practice among traditional Huichols" (9). Carl Humholtz, first among ethnographers who studied the Huichols, found nineteen or twenty aboriginal temples, which served as ceremonial centers. The Huichols have practiced an active ritual cycle since about AD 200, and they remain among the most traditionally oriented of Native peoples in Mexico, although they have woven some Christian elements (including Jesus Christ) into some of their rituals. Their ritual cycle honors several ancestor-deities

who personify natural phenomena, such as Rain Mothers and Sun Fathers, seeking their aid for health and sustenance.

Fikes devotes some attention to a more mainstream anthropologist who derided him as a “heretic” for professing belief in spirits. He asks how a self-professed social scientist could use such a word, commenting “branding me as a heretic implies that anthropologists adhere to dogma” (13). Similarly, parts of this book depart from standard anthropology in that they are acutely autobiographical. Fikes took his first anthropology course at the University of California at San Diego in 1970, and was first drawn to Mexican shamans by reading Castaneda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1969). *Don Juan* also played a role in Fikes’s decision to abandon the participant-observer methodology. This seems ironic considering his subsequent relationship to the author (see Fikes’s *Carlos Castaneda: Academic Opportunism and the Psychedelic Sixties*, 1993). His debunking of Castaneda’s work, which he describes as “pseudo-ethnography” (32), actually began after Fikes set out to follow in Castaneda’s footsteps. The young researcher quickly enriched his field research by traveling to Oaxaca, seeking psychedelic mushrooms. After taking them, he crossed paths with a black jaguar, an experience that he recalls forty years later as “a bit scary” (21).

Fikes incisively describes the struggle that began between his own scientific training and Huichol beliefs once he began learning from Huichol shamans. He struggled with his own ethnocentrism as a Huichol shaman summoned the spirit of a deceased woman through a blue fly, a medium common in Huichol ceremonies. What follows is an intriguing report by a person who came to know his shamanistic hosts very well. This struggle resolved as he internalized their faith in spirits. Fikes thus comes to accept their paranormal abilities. He then takes his analyses a step further by urging Western academia to accept everyone’s paranormal abilities. He believes that Huichol ways of knowing have universal application (34).

Much of the book comprises description of Huichol shamanistic beliefs and practices, done with an intimacy that comes from long experience and close association, most notably with Jeronimo Bonales, who, before his death in 1981, gave Fikes a Huichol name (73). The account contains detailed (sometimes wrenching) accounts of the effects of sorcery, the use of paranormal powers to do harm, “the ultimate abomination” (106), and the worst way to die. In this way, the Huichols account for evil and misfortune—from damage to crops and cattle to prevention of childbirth and discord between spouses, as well as suicide, alcoholism, and failing grades in school.

The shamans also have a role in calling upon the ancestor-deities to maintain an ecological balance that is aptly described by Fikes, from the timely arrival of rain to nourish crops, as well as the proper balance of sun and rainfall to maintain human, plant, and animal life. The Huichols’ climate is

dry enough that a good water hole is often likened to a womb. The growth of a deer's antlers is understood as an index of ecological health and human prosperity (152). All of this and more are celebrated by the Huichols as part of a life cycle of renewal.

All told, Fikes's account is a fascinating and instructive journey whether or not one accepts his premises. It will surely reignite some intellectual brushfires within anthropology and Native American studies.

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Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools, 1940–2000. By Stephen Kent Amerman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 280 pages. \$40.00 cloth.

An often-forgotten perspective in the range of American Indian education literature is the experiences of those Natives who attend school in large cities. Traditionally, scholarship in the area of urban Indian education has been slim and slanted toward a non-Indian perspective. Part of the notable Indigenous Education Series by the University of Nebraska Press, the book *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools* attempts to fill this qualitative gap in urban Indian education literature. Focusing on the educational experiences of American Indian populations in Phoenix, Arizona between the 1940s through the 2000s, Stephen Kent Amerman frames an intimate look into the opinions and beliefs of Native families resident in and attending school in this large urban area. The author quietly juxtaposes the common conceptual understanding of reservation boarding schools with the structure and goals of the urban public school system using comparative references. The work maintains a clear focus on the intricacies of the local politics in Phoenix schools and historical discrimination toward minority groups, together with the agency and social and cultural resilience of American Indian students and parents.

The oral histories of the participants form the foundation and guide the book's parameters as the author delves into the life experiences of twelve members of the Phoenix Indian community, interweaving issues of urbanization, multicultural classrooms, off-reservation educational pedagogy, Southwest tribes, and Indian activism. Dynamic and diverse in personal and professional experiences, age and tribal citizenship, the interviewees provide a stratified understanding of Phoenix schools and urban Indian issues across six decades and from multiple perspectives.

Although the oral histories of the interviewees add rich content, the historical research methodologies of the book frequently pose unique challenges.