

Canada's treatment of the Metis and offering alternative interpretations; in particular, his description of the way in which the Metis lost their Manitoba land base should be read by every student of Western Canadian history. The book also suggests other possible rewarding areas of research. It is one thing to describe federal policy towards the Metis, but quite another to determine exactly how this policy affected the Metis. There need to be detailed studies of how Metis parishes in Manitoba responded to federal manipulations of the Manitoba Act. Canada and the Metis also, unfortunately, lacks balance; there is always the danger that a corrective, in seeking to revise past interpretations, will go too far the other way. Sprague concentrates almost exclusively on the relationship between the federal government and the Metis and is especially preoccupied with Macdonald's part. Other important factors, such as Riel's role in 1885, consequently do not receive the attention that they deserve. Sprague also pushes his evidence too far in places, and some of his assertions raise more questions than they answer. This is not a bad thing, though. If Canada and the Metis causes serious scholarly re-examination of other accepted assumptions about the Metis, then the history of Canada stands to benefit.

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NOTES

¹The James Jerome Hill Reference Library, J.J. Hill Papers, G. Stephen to J.J. Hill, 18 April 1885.

Marianne Boelscher, **The Curtain Within: Haida Social and Mythical Discourse**, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988.

Writing another book about the Haida is more than an ordinary challenge. In the popular view the Haida have an extraordinary standing--fierce warriors, intrepid ocean voyagers, unsurpassed artists. There is a grain of truth in each superlative, yet never the whole story. This book will not satisfy the readers looking for renewal of such romantic ideas. Nor will it please all

of the academics and all of the Haidas. But it does give us new information and insight, and it challenges old ideas.

Popular books on North American Indians too often provide one overpowering message--"Indians were great people; too bad they're gone." This confines them to the past and to books where they are manageable and forgettable!

Anthropology has been an active, albeit unintentional, participant in creating this popular image. It is exceptionally strong with respect to Northwest Coast cultures. Most Canadians today know something about classic sculpture and painting of the area; few know about the social and economic problems of contemporary coastal communities--plagued by unemployment, suicides, alcohol and drug abuse, amidst an abundance of natural wealth that has to a degree survived the ravages of industrial piracy. A major reason for this one-sided picture is the long-lasting interest of anthropology in comparative studies cast in the molds of the evolutionist and diffusionist models. In the first half of this century research was directed towards salvaging remaining bits of information about traditional cultures and shuffling the pieces about in search of answers to questions concerning origins and change on the grand scale. There has been much less interest in describing and understanding living Indian societies.

This has been an easy position for the discipline to maintain. When the focus of study is not in the present, the subjects are not around to say, "That's not the way it is." More and more, however, Indians today are saying to anthropologists, "If you are going to write about us, tell it as it is; write about real people as they are today." Commendably, Boelscher has tried to do this. Her purpose is to give us a glimpse of present life in Masset, the largest town on the Queen Charlotte Islands, and to show us how events and activities are linked to knowledge, ideas, language, and deep-rooted features of Haida thought.

Boelscher sets the scene with an outline of earlier ethnographic work on the Haida, her own fieldwork between 1979 and 1983, and a sketch of the modern-day Queen Charlotte Islands setting. From this point on she plunges into the fields of kinship

and social organization and the Haida way of conceptualizing and talking about themselves. A major part of her method is to approach the present by understanding the traditional culture as it was recorded by earlier ethnographers and is known by elders, particularly those who speak and understand Haida. In this she follows a conventional anthropological practice. Where she departs from much past work is in insisting that this system has meaning for on-going events where many individual Haidas do not speak their language and do not have the same knowledge of traditional ways as their elders. She makes a convincing case. It may be partly the high esteem with which knowledgeable Haida elders are held in their own communities and the influence they wield, but old values, meanings and people, count heavily among the Haida. It is clear that myths, legends, family history, and traditional property rights retain significance in ordinary life. And it is equally clear from this account that potlatching, with ceremonial namings, formal feasting, and speech making, continues as part of that routine, and for Haida, ordinary life. All this, which is derived from earlier time, is a vital part of modern life. And this too, Boelscher argues (p. 15) is a key to the survival of the people as Haidas. It is what has kept them intact through the perils of their recent history and holds them together in the crush of the larger world today.

Boelscher is solidly grounded in linguistics and has used this strength to advantage. She has collected texts in Haida, and with the aid of fluent speakers, has been able to review earlier anthropological work. Her work complements that of Swanton and Murdock very nicely. The intricacy of the potlatch and political organization of kinship groups and towns sketched out in the earlier works becomes more intelligible. Of particular help is her material on kinship and marriage. Here the issues come down to earth. The structuralist models such as that of Rosman and Rubel fall flat, exposed for their irrelevance to the state of human action in a real world.

It is in her account of rhetoric--of how people talk--that she makes her strongest contribution. The subject has received too

little attention by students of Indian culture. It is at once a field of artistic expression, a way of conveying knowledge, and a means of effecting social action. And it is often completely overlooked by ethnographers. Among the Haida, talk is critically appreciated by listeners and has expert practitioners. As Boelscher shows, Haida use a rich and elaborate style of talk, with puns, metaphors, and poetic allusion. The book title itself is taken from a metaphor used to denote the uncertain social boundaries, curtains, drawn between corporate kinship groups.

Most important in her discussion is the way deep rooted ideas about human existence are made part of everyday talk, as well as formal speech-making on ceremonious occasions. Particularly revealing is the chapter entitled "The Rhetoric of Rank and Reciprocity." There is an evident social tension generated by the co-existence of inequality in ranked political positions and exclusive ownership of property, on the one hand, and the levelling forces urged by kinship and common residence in face to face relations of the small community on the other. This tension is played out by subtle modes of talk which are at once self-effacing and self-aggrandizing, and even when expressed in colloquial English, not easily recognized or understood by outsiders.

Boelscher's account should alert us all to the need for much closer attention to **talk** in studies of contemporary social and political organization. But intrigued and informed as I was, I still found something lacking here. The talk itself. There are little bits, as words and phrases, throughout the account, but nowhere does she present the reader with enough verbatim text of talk. One is left again with rather more analysis than evidence. Let us hope that examples of the rich material will be forthcoming in the future. These should be particularly helpful to other ethnographers as indicators of the possibilities for research, and they are essential for the understanding that can only come from comparison.

It is, perhaps, this deficiency of texts which leads to what I found most disappointing in this work. The admirable intent, of

making this work relevant to understanding the present Haida experience, is not fully achieved. The burning issues of land claims, inequality of access to social programmes, lack of opportunity in employment, and the hard, overt partition of racial prejudice and discrimination which divides the White and Haida settlements at Masset itself, figure scarcely at all in this account. Once again it is as an abstraction that Indian culture is presented. To be fair, Boelscher recognizes this, admitting in her final pages that "...it does not explicitly touch upon many issues of current Haida concern" (p. 200). Readers looking for a full account of contemporary Haida life, should note this disclaimer.

Michael Kew

Joseph Jorgensen, Guest editor, **Special Issue: American Indian Governments in the Reagan Era**, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10, No. 2, 1986.

This special issue focusses on American Indian governments in the 1980s. The first article by J. Jorgensen provides a good introduction to federal Indian policies and United States Indian politics. He rightly presumes that many readers will neither have an extensive background about Indian governments in the United States nor about federal policies that have partially determined the position of Indians in the United States. He begins with a good review of late 18th- and early 19th-century Federal Indian policy. Thirteen pages later, Jorgensen reaches 1987. Admittedly it is a short piece but it is concise, well-written and identifies the relevant federal policies that have been enacted over the past two centuries. The reader could stop here and would have benefitted from the special issue.

Four case studies follow this introduction and provide empirical data which address some of the issues and claims made in the introduction. Each case study reflects well over two decades of research carried out by the author(s). The carefully crafted research that is presented in each of the articles includes an historical context in which to interpret the data and gain an indepth understanding of the issues.