

BOOK REVIEWS

Binnema, Theodore. *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 2001. 263 pps. ISBN 0-8-61-3361, Paper US\$29.95.

Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains derives from Theodore Binnema's doctoral dissertation in history from the University of Alberta. Binnema approaches his study by using primary documents, innovative secondary sources, and autobiographical interpretation (p. xi). The resulting book is interdisciplinary in nature, making extensive use of the geographical, historical, archaeological, ethnological, and ethnohistorical literature, as well as studies from grassland ecology, to trace the interactions of Aboriginal groups and Euroamericans in the study area.

In the Preface as well as the Introduction, Binnema is critical of the extant culturalist paradigm used in earlier studies, offering instead a volume which "is an exploration of alternatives to the culturalist preoccupations that marked much of twentieth century scholarship" (xiii). Binnema views intraethnicity and interethnicity as essential to life on the northwestern plains and promotes this perspective by examining trade, diplomacy and warfare in that region between A.D. 200 and 1806. However, Binnema's description of the culturalist paradigm is not fully developed nor does he explain his own approach beyond saying there is value in studies "that recognize the importance of relationships within and among ethnic groups" (p. 11) and which are against the notion of fixed boundaries between groups (p. 13). Also treated in an abbreviated fashion is the controversial anthropological construct, "tribe," which Binnema discards in favor of the "band" as best fitting the sociopolitical organization of the northwestern plains. Not only is this at odds with most plains literature but the definitive works of Fried (1967) and Service (1971) are not included in the discussion.

The first chapter examines the resource structure of the region. Binnema argues that the "exceptional bison habitat of the northwestern plains greatly influenced the region's human history" by attracting "Indigenous societies from all directions" (p. 35). He concurs with Bamforth (1988) that bison enjoyed more abundant forage on the

northwestern plains than in any other area of the plains and that the abundance of forage varied seasonally and annually in the region. His "bison hourglass" graph (p. 19) illustrates how bison numbers fluctuated during a typical year, as food supplies declined in the fall and winter. Binnema makes good use of the extant literature on grassland ecology to argue that forage quality is likely more important than abundance in determining the concentration of bison and thus the human population of the area. He provides, however, a limited discussion of the impacts of drought, prairie fires and ungulates on forage. Given the variable nature of the plains environment where drought is likely present in some region every year and where Altithermal and Scandic Period droughts affected human occupation and adaptation in the region, a more in-depth examination of the effects of drought on vegetation in particular would be useful.

Binnema introduces the reader to the seasonal cycles of bison and their human predators in the second chapter. A determinant of these cycles is the change in forage quantity and quality in three ecological zones, fescue/park/riverine, mesic (moist) mixed prairie, and xeric (dry) mixed prairie. A series of figures illustrate the movement of bison amongst these zones and the corresponding response of hunters. Drawing from the work of Arthur (1975), Morgan (1979) and others, Binnema adopts the view that bison movements are cyclical and predictable, a view that continues to be debated. He deftly avoids an environmental determinist label by acknowledging that "environment alone did not determine the course of human history" and by noting that humans "responded to the environment in different ways" (p. 54).

The prehistory of the northwestern plains is the subject of the third chapter. Beginning with the Besant and Avonlea Phases and proceeding through the Mortlach Phase, Old Woman's Phase and the One Gun Phase, Binnema relies on secondary sources (e.g. Reeves 1983, Schlesier 1994) and provides a highly speculative interpretation of the Late Prehistoric Period. As an archaeologist I am concerned with many parts of this chapter. In a quick overview of communal bison hunting (p. 61), the author ignores the Altithermal and its impact on bison hunting at sites such as Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump. His treatment of the Avonlea and Besant Phases suggest that he has adopted the "culturalist approach" which he earlier denigrated. He mentions the drought of the Scandic Period but fails to tie this to his model in any meaningful way (p. 65). Furthermore, his idea that the bow and arrow was absent from the Besant Phase ignores the presence of Samantha points which are presumed to have been arrow points. One source which Binnema could use to buttress his ideas about interethnicity and interethnicity is

Blakeslee's (1975) study of the Plains interband trade system.

Binnema hits his stride in the fourth through eighth chapters which detail the dawn of the fur trade, the dramatic depopulation owing to newly introduced diseases, and the changing coalitions, affiliations, and associations of Indigenous societies and fur traders (p. 15). Drawing from primary documents such as those in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Binnema provides abundant supporting evidence for his contention that the northwestern plains's past was far more complex than the historical documents suggest.

Common and Contested Ground is an apt title, evocative of the author's thesis, that interethnicity and intraethnicity shaped human interaction on the northwestern plains between A.D. 200 and 1806. His summary of exonyms by which Indian groups are known, the use of maps, the detailed treatment of human presence and interaction in the region, coupled with detailed endnotes make this book a useful addition to public and private libraries.

In closing one should heed Binnema's statement, "I understand the process of historical research and interpretation well enough to realize that this book does not represent a definitive and objective reconstruction of the past. Every work of scholarship is, in part, autobiography. I hope, however, to advance our understanding of an elusive past" (p. xiii).

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Coates, Ken and Robin Fisher, eds. *Out of the Background: Readings on Canadian Native History*. Toronto: Irwin Published, 1998. ISBN 0772527075, Paper CDN\$19.95.

Ten years have elapsed since this anthology was first published. As the editors point out, much has happened in Aboriginal Canada during that decade: Elijah Harper's contribution to the collapse of the Meech Lake Accord; the confrontation at Oka; the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; Justice Alan MacEachern's decision concerning the Gitskan We'etsewewten' the halting of major hydro-electric projects; and the removal of the residents of Davis Inlet, Labrador. Other issues involving Canadian Indian life have also come to the fore: the role of Native women; the cultural and spiritual ramifications of the interaction between Aboriginal and European cultures; disease and related environmental issues; and the aftermath of the residential school system.

Many of these issues are researched and discussed in the twenty

articles that make up this recent volume. Authors have contributed a range of writings that extend from the days of European arrival to the present. Although a high proportion of the compositions relate to the northern and western section of the country—a percentage justified by the editors as compensation for their exclusion from the previous volume—Aboriginal people from eastern and central Canada have not been overlooked. Accounts as diverse as the role of women in the fur trade, the marketing of an imaginary Indian, and the biography of a Cree elder from his drunken youth to his role as community leader provide insights into Aboriginal life that make no effort to trivialize the often harsh reality.

The editors acknowledge that this collection is designed to whet the appetite for further reading and research. A worthwhile and much needed project that they might in the near future wish to consider would be Aboriginal voices providing their perspective of events already discussed by non-Native writers. One such that comes to mind is the volume edited by Colin Calloway, *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America* (Boston, 1994).

A very useful selection of bibliographies, historiographical essays and additional writings provided at the end of the book adds to its value. Overall, the compilation would be a beneficial addition to libraries and the personal collections of those interested in Aboriginal Canadian history. As the editors explain, their “greatest hope (is) that this book contributes to a search for knowledge and awareness—the necessary aspects of that attempt to address the present and future needs of the First Nations of Canada.”

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Elledge, Kim (Editor) Peter Lang, Publisher. 2002. *Gay Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Myths from the Arapaho to the Zuni: An Anthology*. ISBN 0820452866, Paper CDN\$29.95

The title announces a collection of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender myths from Native North America. In the content list, however, the terms used on the cover have been substituted by the commonly used term ‘Two-Spirits.’ Whilst mentioning gay, lesbian, and

transgender in the title will seem appropriate for a collection that features tales of woman-to-woman intercourse, gender mixing, sodomy, and cross-dressing some readers may question the conflation between past and present forms of Indigenous contemporary identities and centuries old cosmologies.

Undoubtedly, the main merit of this anthology is the context it offers for further exploration. For instance, why do such anthologies appear today? To whom do they speak? And under what criteria are they being compiled?

The editor has chosen 29 myths about Two-Spirits from 21 tribes of the United States. The myths have been divided into seven sections according to a common theme such as 'Men Who Became Women,' 'Love Between Women,' 'Origins of the Two-Spirits,' and 'Pregnant Men' to name a few. Gender shifting and sexual acts prominently figure in all the myths. However, it would have been helpful to offer the reader a context for each of the elements that characterize each section (i.e. pregnant men, gender crossing) to avoid tempting analogies between them.

The collection contributes to the growing field of lesbian and gay scholarship.

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Gerso, Carole and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. *E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake: Collected Poems and Selected Prose*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. ISBN 0802036708, Cloth CDN\$65.00, ISBN 0802084974, Paper CDN\$25.95.

In 2000, these same editors collected some of Pauline Johnson's poetry under the title *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson*. At that time they argued that much of Johnson's poetry and prose had been neglected. This second volume, which includes over 165 poems and 20 items of prose, attempts to address that problem and is, as they argue, "more complete than any collection yet available."

While the quantity and topical scope of the writings in this edition

are admirable, it is the introductory chapter and endnotes which are the highlights. Johnson's personal history is interspersed with references from her writing, her compositions being interpreted against the backdrop of what she was experiencing in her daily life. For example, her upbringing as the daughter of a Mohawk chief whose family took pride in generations of traditional leadership and culture, and of an English-born mother whose ancestors included Quaker abolitionists, made her acutely aware of living within and between two very different worlds. Although not mentioned by the authors, the lessons learned from growing up in a house with two front entrances, one facing the Grand River reflecting her father's way of life and the other identical in style but looking out onto the road that reflected her mother's culture, must have made an impression on the young Johnson. As a Native woman attempting to create her own identity in late nineteenth-century Canada when male authority and Indian assimilation dominated, Johnson voiced her desire for recognition both as a Native female writer and as a member of Canadian society. The authors' attention to these details in Johnson's writing makes the introduction extremely valuable. Similarly, references in Johnson's writing to her interest in travel, sports, Canadian geography, Indian storytelling, romance and nature are more easily appreciated when encountered prior to reading her actual material. It is a pleasure to see the postage stamp issued in her honour in 1961 being critiqued for the mistakes in its composition that arose due to the lack of historical research prior to its printing. In addition, the copious notes at the end of the volume provide the detail needed to appreciate some of the finer points in Johnson's references within her writing. They also reveal the considerable exposure her compositions have had through being printed in a wide range of texts, magazines and newspapers since her death in Vancouver in 1913.

The authors indicate that this volume is "offered to Canadians of all origins, as well as to readers in other countries, in the same spirit of exchange and desire to further communication" that Johnson herself desired when first composing her writings. The book should certainly be included in the library of those interested in the study and appreciation of Native literature, women's history, and the interaction between differing cultures both past and present.

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Goulding, Warren. *Just Another Indian: A Serial Killer and Canada's Indifference*. Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2001. 219 pps. ISBN 1-894004-51-5, Paper CDN\$22.95.

The journalistic habit is to assign the designation of "issue" to the murder of Native people and, in particular, the murder of young Native women in Canada. This is an atrocity. A tour through the underside of many Canadian cities will at least arouse the suspicion that young Native women are in danger. But the paucity of reportage in both the print and electronic media suggests that the cool category of "issue" is as far as the media is prepared to go.

Goulding's finely documented investigation into the rape and murder of four Native women in western Canada reveals not only weak motivation on the part of the media in getting such "news" before the public, but also an indefensibly phlegmatic response from police authorities. Avoiding blanket condemnation, he separates a tangle of factors, scrupulously aligning and reweaving them to present an analysis of how the serial killer, John Martin Crawford could take the lives of four or more Native women with nary a peep of indignation save for the frustrated attempts by some victims' families to initiate action.

Having served less than a decade for his 1981 slaying of Mary Mane Serloin in Lethbridge, Alberta, Crawford was sentenced to 1996 to three concurrent life sentences for the murders of Shelley Napope, Eva Taysup, and Calinda Waterhen. But he may well have murdered more women. In addition to his detailed coverage of the investigation, trial and appeal, Goulding has included a chapter on Dakota medicine man, Clifford Youngbear. Youngbear's extraordinary insights into the disappearance of Shirley Lonethunder, another suspected Crawford victim, were accepted by police but then filed away in oblivion. Police have for years enlisted the aid of person of paranormal talents in murder investigations. The decision not to act on the insights of Youngbear reveals not only an unfortunate cultural bias, but ill-advised tactical restraint in a situation that demanded nothing less than absolute thoroughness.

A well-researched, powerful study of an unconscionably long-ignored national disgrace.

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Michelson, Karin and Mercy Doxtator. *Oneida-English / English-Oneida Dictionary*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. ISBN 0802035906, Cloth CDN\$150.00.

There should be a better word than dictionary for this masterpiece, for that word conjures up an image of a scholarly tome to which a writer turns when precision and accuracy are required. This compendium of knowledge contains so much more. As expressed by the authors in the preface, the book is indeed intended for exact spellings and meanings of words. But it is also designed for teachers who wish to convey the beauty of the language to their classes, for linguists interested in the formation of and interrelation between words, and for "people who simply want to brows through some of the entries or some of the appendices in order to see what the Oneida language is like."

A glimpse through the contents reveals the vast preparation that has gone into the volume. In the Oneida-English section, for example, quotations from tape recordings made at the homes of Oneida speakers are included when they assist in providing a clearer meaning of the word or concept being discussed. The complexity and beauty of the Oneida language becomes evident in the English-Oneida section; there are a dozen entries for the word "wash," for example, and within each are numerous variations depending on what it is that one is washing. For the grammatical purists there are tables indicating orthography and constructions regarding such items as aspect conjugation classes, derivational suffixes and base-initial modifications. And for someone like myself who has had the privilege of frequently hearing the Oneida language spoken at the Oneida First Nation of southwestern Ontario, the appendices are a pure joy. Words and phrases involve aspects of nature from animals to weather, interpersonal relations, body parts and grooming, furniture, tools and toys, even exclamations and slang.

The authors are extremely well-qualified. Michelson's interest in linguistics was nurtured by her father's production of two mohawk dictionaries, and her personal involvement with leaders and elders of the Oneida First Nation. She was hired by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario as director of the Centre for the Research and Teaching of Canadian Native Languages and was a frequent visitor to the home of Mercy Doxtator during the project's compilation. Doxtator is a resident member of the Oneida First Nation and is herself fluent in her language. Since 1974 she has been teaching in her community, at the Standing Stone elementary school and at the Oneida Language Centre, of which she has been the director. The final product of their labour of love serves as a shining example of two cul-

tures cooperating both for their mutual benefit and as an example to others who believe their language is at the core of their self-identity.

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Rekmans, Lorraine, Keith Lewis and Anabel Dwyer, eds. 2003. *This is My Homeland: Stories of the Effects of Nuclear Industries by People of the Serpent River First Nation and the North Shore of Lake Huron*. Cutler: Serpent River First Nation and Anishinabe Printing. xxiv + 123 p.; maps and photos; references.

"Here," said the spirit, "are the twelve million Americans killed in their native land..." "My God! why did you not leave these frightful bones to dry in the hemisphere where their bodies were born, and where they were consigned to so many different deaths? Why assemble here all these abominable monuments to barbarism and fanaticism?" "To instruct you" (Redman 1977, 189).

Voltaire was illustrating, rather than "instructing," on the genocide of Indigenous Peoples of the Americas by European colonials. He wrote the world as it was seen through the eyes of a European philosopher of the 1700s, to highlight the folly and misery of men. His words are nonetheless instructive today; in particular for the subject of the book under review. *This is My Homeland*, brings us to look upon the words of a disposed people on the north shore of Lake Huron (Ontario, Canada), affected by nuclear industries. Rather than build a monument, editors Lorraine Rekmans, Keith Lewis and Anabel Dwyer, brings forth the bones of the dead from the Serpent River First Nations, in a study of post modern decolonization. In reading we hear many voices. We are carried by the advocacy of struggle to become aware of our own chains of ignorance: to search for cultural strength, to understand the political-economy of mineral development, the environmental science of contamination, and the public and personal histories of government policy and neglect.

The book opens with two "in memory of" sections for Keith Robert Lewis and Henri Eugene Groulx. By the time you have read this brief book review, the effects and side effects of the cumulative and chronic/

acute exposure to contaminants will have killed many more. While the mines are mostly gone, there remains an insidious and silent spring. The book is painfully personal, written almost entirely from first person narrative, but also conveys a thoughtful historical narrative of the mining industry, copper and uranium around Elliot Lakes (p. vii-xxii).

There have been authors whose books assert many things about Aboriginal peoples, many written by Europeans and newcomers, some written by Aboriginal people themselves. *This is My Homeland* reflect several voices: Ojibwe and Canadian, man and women, elders and youth. It speaks without the "academic speak" and literary citations and research commonly found in university bookstores. While it stands as a complement to the authors to tell the story "as is," with minimal interpretations, this is also the book's major weakness.

Readers have no record of how the research was conducted, under what circumstances, what is different then to the publication now, were the tapes edited, who was spoken to/ who was not (and why), whose voices were erased? I have no doubt that it would be difficult to have everyone's views attached and reflected in any book. Criticism of the researcher's methodology aside, some additional support of the work carried out by Serpent River First Nation, i.e. testing car air filters following bolus events, could have been used to support the statements made by former employees, Chiefs and councillors. *This is My Homeland* speaks with an honesty that is difficult to ignore; however, as a case study in ethnography and oral history research, it demonstrates strengths and weaknesses of publishing interviews. This book was written for a general audience, not for university courses/teachers/students/research; however, it contains valuable lessons about research

in terms of studies and what have they accomplished—not a lot, in terms of putting to rest the fears that people have [about] the Serpent River watershed.... Whether the studies do any good for us, no, they don't do any good for us. (p. 12-13)

Research done to Aboriginal communities, regardless of attempts of responsible research results returned to communities, disempowers and can even, if careless, leave communities worse off than before research is conducted.

This book is at times as raw as the wound that has been gouged out of the land by the blunt development and uncertain decommissioning of the twelve uranium mines. The devastation has been rendered on the Serpent River basin and the Anishnabe who remain therein. The book's main message is a caution to development, to mitigation, to remediation; that it is always less expensive and cleaner not to make a mess in the

first place. Not all development and not all jobs are good, some economic development costs us dearly, and Canadian governments are helpless to portion out the suffering equally.

Books that take as their subject tropes of the noble savage and the natural ecologists (Ellington 2001, Krech 1999, Lepore 1998, Francis 1992), so many now that they have begun to spill from my library, are nicely balanced by *This is My Homeland*. While many authors have struggled; without a doubt, to explain and describe, analyze, to fully comprehend the link between people and land, such is not the case for Rekmans *et al.* *This is My Homeland*, easily demonstrates the extent of the relationship between a people and their land, not surprising when the people are allowed to speak for themselves. I know little of the specific details that are talked about in the book, I have never been a miner, I am limited to what I have heard, read and lived. What struck me most about the interviews with Serpent River First Nation Chief Earl Commanda, former Chief Gertrude Lewis, councilors Keith and Loreena Lewis, Elders, uranium miners, sulfuric-acid plant workers, members of the Elliot Lake Women's Group and Algoma-Manitoulin Nuclear Awareness Group, and long time residents Henri and Linda Groulx, is their concerns for the land.

While specific to history and geography, the views gathered in this book are mirrored in many of the Aboriginal Homes I have had the honour to visit. Where people live on the land, to whatever extent, there is a dependence on keeping the land healthy, as if one's own health, the health of one's family, depended on it. This does not translate into zero development or some kind of romanticism. What it hinges on is where people have a say in the trade-offs, costs and benefits, of development. Where the land is damaged, these are places where outsiders have made decisions, where people who live with development in their backyards have had little opportunity to influence decisions; this is where people are most lost and grieving (Harney 1995). In Aboriginal and other rural/northern communities, where people have had a say in negotiating the cost/benefits of development, the results are very different.

This book speaks of the loss of rights (mineral and human), the struggle through governmental processes (*Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*), as well as the long journey of mourning to reclaim the land and therefore the people (Assembly of First Nations, E.A.G.L.E. project, World Uranium hearings). It ought to be a prerequisite read for resource management student/teachers, environmental studies students/teachers, geology and engineering student/teachers, health professionals. It ought to be read by government and company officials. It will find a hearing among those who are marginalized by industrial development.

Within the slender pages there are organizers' strategies for collective action: stockholder's meetings (p. 16-17), larger environmental studies (p. 20), legislation (p. 20), and networking (p. 21).

Canadians have an opportunity, with *This is My Homeland*, to look upon a side of the nuclear industries, its "barbarism and fanaticism," which has led to such dramatic and cruel changes for the Anishinaabek at Serpent River. The rent for development has been paid in lives by the Ojibwe (Mole Lake) and Navajo to the south, the Dene (Deline) and Inuit (Voice Bay) to the north, in the South Pacific and northern Canada (NCP 2003). To have suffered the promises of jobs in exchange for the collapse of traditional ways and incomprehensible loss of ancestral lands is to suffer greatly.

There are few books that make it into wide circulation written by, therefore, from the perspective of First Nations. *This is My Homeland* was mostly written in 1999, as a deeply compelling collection, originally prepared by Serpent River First Nation for the Hauge Appeal for Peace Conference. Its writing was inspired by *Pacific Women Speak Out For Independence and Denuclearisation*. The journey to publication makes this book worth reading. As Voltaire reminds us, it is important to bear witness to those "slaughtered for their wealth," perhaps in hopes that it will shake the remote control from our hands and launch us from our recliners to reject our "cheap energy" (which always means someone else is paying the bill).

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