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**The Urban Indian Experience in America.** By Donald L. Fixico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. 288 pages. \$35.00 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

Urban Indian experience is a very old phenomenon. American Indians had a highly glorified urban culture as it was found by the European pioneers in the last decade of the fifteenth century. There were big cities in Cahokia, located across the Mississippi River from the present-day city of St. Louis, Moundville, Alabama, and Pueblo Bonita, New Mexico. Native achievements in art, craft, music and dance, food, medicine, family life, and community had been remarkable. Donald L. Fixico opens his book *The Urban Indian Experience* by giving tribute to this ancient reality (p. ix); however, the focus of the book is urban Indian experience since the relocation program following World War II.

In contrast to Fixico, many writers, including historians and urban sociologists, ignore the fact that there had been flourishing cities in the United States in ancient times. For instance, Nancy Kleniewski, in her book *Cities, Change and Conflict: A Political Economy of Urban Life*, makes the remark that, "Additionally, the founding of the American cities was so late, compared to that of the cities of Europe or Asia, that most have had continuous settlement and have a stream of records, maps, and historical accounts that reveal exactly what the towns and cities were like throughout their existence" (Kleniewski, *Cities Change and Conflict*, p. 91). Fixico, on the other hand, takes as an important starting point flourishing American Indian culture on this continent in ancient times.

In 1830 and the following years, federal government policy was to send Indians to reservations, but after World War II, the policy was reversed. The government adopted a program of relocation of the American Indians. This was an effort of the government to assist Indians in finding jobs and helping them improve their economic and social situation. Because of this relocation policy a steady stream of Indians migrated to various cities across the nation, marking a crucial turning point in American Indian history.

Fixico's excellent study on the urbanization of American Indians takes shape from extensive information collected through firsthand observation, interviews, oral history, and historical sources. For the relocatees, life and work among non-Indians was their first urban experience. The relocation was a threatening culture shock that caused traumatic anxiety (p. 14). The city felt a strange place to them. Traffic rules, stoplights, elevators, and telephones were new to them. Indians were embarrassed to ask for assistance and, for example, even though they knew a telephone number they were ashamed to ask how to dial. In the eyes of the relocatees, it was too much to contend with the noise, tension, and hectic pace of city life. Insecurity and fear ruled many Indians, making them feel lost and inferior to the majority population of white Americans. And along with their non-Indian neighbors they encountered big-city problems such as unemployment, inflation, and crime. A switch from rural ethos to a new set of problems of urban mainstream culture resulted in social alienation, community prejudice, and racism.

Fixico investigates how American Indians discovered that their minority identity conflicted with assimilation into a mainstream that involved living

alongside urban whites. They found they were on a level with other immigrants arriving from all over the world, struggling to find new homes or gainful employment.

The success of the book is that Fixico could collect stories of numerous relocatees across the country and convey their urban struggle in a lively way. Along with their new experience of urbanization, they faced an identity crisis. Life as envisioned under the relocation programs was not always the reality as Indians attempted to assimilate into the mainstream culture. "Many Indians in the city experienced discomfort and insecurity as a minority in the mainstream urban environment" (p. 177). The federal officials hoped relocation would assimilate Indians into urban neighborhoods of the dominant society. But the result was opposite. The Indians felt isolation, loneliness, and estrangement that frequently led to school dropout, alcoholism, broken marriages, crime, and suicide.

The American Indian experience is a sociocultural transition from a familiar communalism to what for them was a foreign individualism (p. 3). The Indians who relocated to the city encountered a new frontier, an alien culture, and unforeseen challenges. The individualistic basis of American urban culture left Native peoples feeling socially and psychologically alienated.

Fixico's study stresses the importance of Indian tribal ethics, which advocates community and collective responsibility, in relation to Native urban adjustment. Tribal members were trained in communal values from childhood. Mutual assistance were the watchwords of the Indian community. They cared for the aged, infirm, sick, and young. Hospitality was a sacred obligation and the Indians' generosity toward the needy often surpassed that of even the modern civilized communities. So paramount was this law of hospitality that even an enemy who came without threats was given food and shelter.

According to Fixico, those government officials who favored relocation programs claimed that the only way reservation Indians could survive was to become self-sufficient and assimilated; that is, to adopt the values and behavior of whites, including the ethic of a secular, money-motivated culture. In the urban setting everything has a materialistic value, and this impacts human relationships. Attempting to assimilate into the materialistic culture, relocatees' children were trained in schools to respect white values. In the process, they came to feel like strangers within their own family. This reorientation involved forfeiting the cherished traditions and traits of Indians and converting themselves and their children into a different type. If they looked back to their tribal life—the lands were common to all, they ate together from one large dish, and they lived in a community of peace, love, and great harmony—urbanism seemed to turn everything upside down.

It appears that Fixico takes for granted a frequently accepted notion that American urban society represented the most advanced civilization in the world (p. 9). But there is the broader question left unanswered: Is the modern American urban culture the ideal form of human civilization? In the discussion, Fixico points to the urban Indians in California who occupied Alcatraz Island as a reflection of their bitterness toward Anglo-Americans and their culture (p. 180). The book opens an eye both to those who are studying

world cultures as well as to those who wish to recognize and respect the noble cultural heritage of American Indians.

It should be pointed out that in the twentieth century there were other attempts to resist a too-hasty acceptance of “modern civilization.” One was the movement of Mahatma Gandhi. He established communities in South Africa and India. Gandhi’s central focus was community development—not individual achievement—a characteristic fundamental to tribal communities of North America. According to Gandhi, modern civilization damaged traditional communities. As the tribes worshipped nature, so Gandhi encouraged spiritual training by prayer and meditation.

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