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Plateau Indians and the Quest for Spiritual Power, 1700–1850. By Larry Cebula. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. 189 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

Historian Larry Cebula has provided an articulate and in-depth understanding of a critical era in Plateau Indian-white relations, the period between 1700 to 1850. Epidemics of catastrophic proportion were occurring, decimating the lives and lifeways of Indian communities. The horse and trade goods were rapidly making their way into and indelibly altering the patterns of Indian society—and fur traders and missionaries were intruding into the area. Cebula seeks to understand these momentous events from an Indian perspective, with the novel and appropriate premise that they triggered a religious reaction: “To the natives of the Columbia Plateau, the arrival of whites was primarily a *spiritual* event” (p. 3). The tribes turned to religion to understand the fur trade and the missionary, and, in so doing, they altered their indigenous religious traditions. Out of their responses to white contact, Cebula describes and illuminates two prominent emergent religious movements, the Columbia religion and the prophet dances. This is an era that has often been overlooked by other scholars, and I know of no other publication that covers this period in Plateau Indian history.

The work opens with an introduction to the aboriginal spirit world of the Plateau Indians in the first chapter that establishes a foundation from which to appreciate the forthcoming historical events. In the second chapter Cebula considers the “protohistoric” period, roughly 1700 to 1810, during which the prophet dance emerged. Cebula adds considerable research in clarifying the origins of this ceremony. I was delighted to see that he defines “information” as one of the critical items exchanged in an ever-changing and expanding trade network of this early period. As Cebula writes, “Plateau peoples also underwent a revolution in knowledge during the protohistoric period” (p. 41). Indian elders have long attributed to their ancestors tremendous knowledge of a geographical world far beyond their homeland ranges, and an understanding of the whites, their way of life, and their potential as trade partners, long before their arrival.

In the third chapter, Cebula explores the fur trade era. Unlike other scholars, he argues that there was a significant and primarily “spiritual” response to the trade by the Plateau peoples. As he states, “I argue the Indians use the fur trade as a window into white society, incorporating their observations into their own evolving faith” (p. 4).

In the fourth chapter Cebula articulates the growth and decline of a syncretic religious movement far too unrepresented in the literature of the Plateau, what he terms the Columbia religion (following the terminology of the 1830s fur trader, John McLean). “This was a revivalist faith that swept the Plateau on the eve of the mission period,” a blend of “new knowledge and traditional elements” (p. 4). His analysis of this movement is as insightful as it is original.

The final chapter outlines the Indian response to the arrival of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the 1830s and 1840s, “from initial enthusiasm

to violent rejection (p. 4). Cebula disagrees with the prevailing and simplistic dichotomy in the scholarly literature that the Catholic missions were “good,” that is, were more flexible and thus more successful, while the Protestant missions were “bad,” more rigid, less tolerant, and thus less successful. Cebula demonstrates that neither group of missionaries made much “real progress in converting the Indian before 1850” (p. 5). As the Flatheads and Nez Perce had traveled to St. Louis in 1827 to secure an additional “source of spiritual power so strong that it would restore the aboriginal world of their fathers,” it was also the Indian who in the 1840s rejected Christianity, having “not proven useful” (pp. 124–26). As Cebula contends, the main reason for the missionary failure was not primarily any deficiencies on the part of the missionaries nor even their transgressions, but rather their inability to meet the expectations of the Indian. Cebula ends this chapter with the story of the hangings of the Cayuse judged guilty for the deaths of the missionaries, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman. In this chapter I appreciated the author’s clear articulation of the fundamental differences in the missionary roles of the Catholics and Protestants, and their varied approaches and tactics used in attempting to convert the Indian.

In the concluding chapter, Cebula both provides a broad overview of the territory covered in the preceding chapters, and summarizes the story of the important life of Spokane Garry. Much of Garry’s life paralleled the ebb and flow of the events of this important period in Plateau Indian-white relations. Adding Garry’s story was a most appropriate and fitting ending to *Plateau Indians and the Quest for Spiritual Power*.

Cebula’s work acknowledges the active and affirming roles in the Indian response to the massive onslaught of white-derived challenges and changes. The author succeeds in presenting the Indian as far from a passive victim. The book provides repeated examples of individuals and tribal movements that show Indians to be intelligent, calculating, and forceful agents who held (at least in this period) the upper hand in their own destiny.

As in his critique of Leslie Spier, one of the pioneer researchers of the Plateau Indians, Cebula does not hesitate to challenge long-established interpretations, substantiating his claims with logical arguments and solid research.

The author’s style is clear and accessible. His in-depth research, based on both well-known and obscure primary and secondary archival sources, anchors his overall presentation and helps substantiate his essential arguments. While providing background and context to the major persons and characters of this time era, Cebula also presents the “big picture.” He brings tremendous clarity to the myriad of cross-currents within the dynamics of Plateau Indian society, derived from both white and Indian society, during this critical time period.

I have only one criticism of the book: It did not cover a larger time frame, the historic period following 1850, during which the impact of war, treaties, and the missionaries was indeed most momentous for the Plateau peoples. This was an era of new Indian leaders and religious movements that resisted and rejected the white man. But as Cebula says, “that, as they say, is another

story" (p. 5). *Plateau Indians and the Quest for Spiritual Power* has established Larry Cebula as one of the premier scholars of Plateau Indian-white historical relations, with a high standard of research, originality, and presentation. I look forward to reading his next work.

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Pow Wows, Fat Cats, and Other Indian Tales. By E. Donald Two-Rivers. Topeka: Mammoth Publications/Woodley Memorial Press, 2003. 75 pages. \$12.00 paper.

A few months ago in these pages, I reviewed *Absentee Indians and Other Poems* by Kimberly Blaeser, an Ojibway author who lives in Wisconsin. A prominent element in Blaeser's strong collection was the homesickness of being an urban Ojibway living separated from the family and community of the Ojibway native lands. Had I known of Two-River's latest collection then, it would have been advantageous to have reviewed the collections together. Aside from style, Blaeser and Two-Rivers share a number of characteristics: both have Ojibway heritage, both live in Wisconsin, and both explore the life of an urban Indian. Stylistically, however, the two authors diverge and the contrast ends. The poems of Two-Rivers have an urban edge. He writes streetwise poems of protest and red pride not entirely dissimilar to themes of his earlier short dramas in *Briefcase Warriors* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2001). Unlike poetry that works through images and metaphors, the voice-dominant work of Two-Rivers cuts through a fog of false ideologies in an attempt to discern truth by revealing its opposite.

In "Old Dog Soldier," Two-Rivers quickly sets the tone for his collection: "I'll not speak / in vision talk tongue / with eyes cast to the ground / . . . / What you'll hear might make you squirm" (p. 1). And it does. As the collection moves forward from early childhood recollections to pieces set in Chicago, the poems pepper themselves with images and references to urban blight, homelessness, drunkenness, drugs, poverty, and prostitution. "Chicago's big shoulders are sagging," writes Two-Rivers in "Big Shoulders Sagging," then tells how "Ghosts of working men wander / aimlessly in valleys of depression" (p. 28). Unlike Carl Sandburg's paean to the industrial worker in "Chicago," Two-Rivers embraces the dispirited and down-and-out. The characters that populate his collection are often swallowed up by the city: "Neil Young said it true," he writes in "Ghost Dancer's Story," "Every junkie's like a setting sun" (p. 32). Even women are not exempt from the city's problems, as "Always Took His To Go" demonstrates in writing about a woman "rolled dead / into the rivers of depravation, / lured by a Southside pimp / bragging of twenty whores / and an orchid-colored Cadillac" (p. 39).

The aesthetics of Two-Rivers seem to borrow heavily from Neil Young, a distortion effect accompanied by an abrasive voice. His style represents an interesting mix, perhaps something akin to Simon Ortiz meeting Adrian Louis.