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Constructing Lives, Quincy Newell’s first book, is a significant addition to the new wave of books on the California missions that use digitized Franciscan mission records as quantitative evidence. This important new methodology, pioneered by Randall Milliken and others, has yielded many important insights about Native political organization, heterogeneous mission populations, and timing of conversion. Newell reproduces a version of Milliken’s map of precontact tribal areas of the San Francisco Bay region in her book (p. 171), but takes issue with his thesis in Time of Little Choice (Menlo Park, CA, 1995). Native Californians at Mission San Francisco continued to exercise choice once baptized, she argues: Native responses to Catholicism were “partial, contingent, and variegated” (p. 177). Not only did the priests accommodate to Native labor rhythms and residential preferences within the mission environment but also found it necessary to permit baptized Indians frequent absences (paseos) to gather food. Newell marshals convincing proof that many furloughs away from the mission were deliberately
timed to coincide with births and deaths, indicating only a partial commitment to Catholicism and a preference for Native life-passage ceremonies.

Newell employs anthropological “thick description” to underline the complexity of the cultural encounter. She reconstructs contrasting indigenous precontact Coastanoan Indian culture (insofar as this is possible) to that introduced by eighteenth-century Spanish colonists. While primarily concerned with changing kinship patterns, her analysis includes many aspects of material culture as well as ideology: rituals, foods, artistic designs, gift giving, housing, gender roles, and labor patterns. She compares the more egalitarian gender patterns and lineage organizations of Natives with the hierarchical authority structures introduced by the Franciscans. The author concludes that the Spanish successfully imposed a nuclear family organization but says the Natives utilized the compadrinazgo (godparenting) institution to repair their damaged family networks. Avoiding moral judgments, she invokes the idea of Double Mistaken Identity to underline the gulf of misunderstandings between indigenous people and the Spanish.

One strength of Constructing Lives is its framing within contemporary scholarship on colonialism and gender. The book is a careful case study contextualized within the current literature on settler-indigenous relations in the larger Spanish colonial world. Like other current works, Newell says colonial power was weaker than earlier scholars projected and indigenous agency more pronounced: the Spanish intent to convert Natives was never fully realized, the result being a syncretic blend of indigenous spirituality and Catholicism. The tragedy of Native demographic collapse of mission Indian populations is noted, but she steers her interpretations to more controversial debates: Were the San Franciscan mission alcaldes village headmen? Was mission labor “slavery”? Her findings are inclusive on the former and negative on the latter (p. 73). Where her evidentiary base is thin, she draws information from studies of other places in Spanish colonial America and Native California. To her credit, Newell persistently attempts to foreground Native people by using their indigenous names, reconstituting kinship networks, and eliciting what little personal information that can be found about individuals’ lives from the mission records. Unfortunately, her small population sample and the dearth of primary sources on pre- and early-contact Coastanoan experience and perspective are limiting: Newell frequently resorts to speculation about motives that offer little that is substantive or original. In a strong concluding chapter, “The Varieties of Religious Experience,” Newell argues some Natives fully embraced Catholicism while others demonstrated considerable ambivalence. She candid admits that the existing sources do not provide explanations for why Native people had these different responses.

Like Steven Hackel’s Children of Coyote (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005), Newell’s book adds texture and nuance to the understanding of the California mission experience, transcending rancorous political debates pivoting on victimiza-
tion that have previously characterized work on this subject. A good read, *Constructing Lives* is carefully researched, balanced in its judgments, and persuasive in its major argument.

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Michael F. Steltenkamp’s stated intention is to make a full portrait of the life of Nicholas Black Elk (1863–1950) accessible in one volume (p. xix). To this end, he rewrites the material found in his previous book, *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala* (Norman, OK, 1993), which focuses on Black Elk’s years as a catechist. Steltenkamp also provides some historical background, summarizes Joseph Brown’s *The Sacred Pipe* (Norman, OK, 1953), and fleshes out Black Elk’s biography. He also includes some good photographs that were not included in the previous book, a brief chronology of Black Elk’s life, and a “Note on Sources.”

Although Steltenkamp seems to have moved toward recognizing that Black Elk’s “visions were, ultimately, neither parochially Lakota or insularly Catholic” (p. 123), there is no doubt that he is still very concerned to produce a Black Elk who remained a “fervent catechist until the end” (p. 223). As in the previous work, he regards the testimony obtained through his interviews with Lucy Looks Twice, Black Elk’s daughter, as an irrefutable bedrock on which to base his interpretation: “Instead of me projecting a bias onto Black Elk’s experience, I simply recounted what was reported to me by those who knew him best” (p. xviii).

Steltenkamp, unfortunately, is willing to cut a few corners to get where he wants to go. In this book, as in the previous one, Looks Twice’s account of her father’s “conversion” is pivotal. According to Looks Twice, it was effected by the ejection of Black Elk by Joseph Lindebner, S.J., from a tipi where he was performing a healing ritual. In the previous book, Looks Twice says, “My father never talked about that incident,” 1 which at least strongly suggests that this is her story, not her father’s. In this book, although Steltenkamp admits that “Black Elk’s conversion might not have occurred in the manner he described to his daughter” (p. 94), it has become Black Elk’s story. Black Elk’s actual—and contradictory—story of a priest who was thrown from his horse and killed after interfering with one of his rituals is discounted as “probably not what Black Elk would have seriously asserted in 1931” (p. 92).

Similarly, it is important to Steltenkamp to play down Black Elk’s continuing commitment to the nativist cultural ideals of the Ghost Dance and his

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