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The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie-Plains Willard H. Rollings

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missionary efforts. This is simply not true for the Minnesota and Wisconsin Ojibwa, and highly suspect for the other regions.

If gender was the central explanation for differential responses to missionization, it would be a truly momentous finding. Similarly, it would also be important to explain pervasive gender discord in twentieth-century Indian communities, if such relationships did in fact exist. However, the evidence amassed here is not persuasive in either case.

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In their The Imperial Osages (1983), published a decade ago, Gilbert Din and A. P. Nasatir described the bellicose and relentlessly expansionist activities of the Osage people under Spanish colonial rule. Willard Rollings softens this image, presenting a sympathetic portrait of the Osage as a people besieged on all sides by aggressive enemies, defending their resources and simultaneously adapting their political institutions. He has done exhaustive research in a wide array of secondary and primary sources (including the now-lost Nasatir Collection of translated documents relating to the Osage), and the book is ambitious in chronological and geographic scope, stretching from the proto-historical era when the Osage first arrived in the prairie/plains environment to their hegemonic decline and territorial contraction in the 1840s. Rollings argues that the very economic success the Osage experienced as “gatekeepers to the west”—securing control of a strategically located and resource-rich territory extending from Missouri and Arkansas to the Plains—ultimately led to “political chaos” (pp. 8, 11). Increased emphasis on hunting and trading by the horticultural Osage strained the traditional dual moiety leadership, and political cohesion was further undermined by the meddling of the Chouteau family.

Rollings offers the outlines of a plausible argument. The crisis in political authority that attended the dispersion of the Osage over a huge area undoubtedly contributed to their ultimate decline. However, this is not a “new” Indian history of dynamic internal political change (a la Robert Berkhofer), nor is it a study in changing environmental and economic adaptation (a la Richard
White or William Cronon), though Rollings endeavors to incorporate aspects of these approaches. Instead, he emphasizes the panorama of Osage external political relationships with their Indian neighbors, the Spanish, and the American government. Rollings includes lengthy and detailed descriptions of treaties with the U.S. government and warfare with the emigrant tribes in the early nineteenth century, for example. When he makes a foray into a discussion of the crisis in Osage politics and its causes in chapter six, however, his analysis is painfully complicated, confused, and highly conjectural; he has not significantly advanced knowledge about political schisms beyond that offered by earlier scholars, for he has tapped no new primary sources, nor developed a novel methodological approach to the old sources, which are largely Euro-American.

While Rollings succeeds as a chronicler and synthesizer, his shortcoming is explaining causation. Few persons with agency come to life, save the nefarious Chouteaus, who are given an altogether exaggerated influence over the destiny of the proud and powerful Osage. Promising a culturally sensitive account, his early chapters are topically organized depictions of Osage "lifeways," "economy," and "polity." In an evident attempt to establish an ethnographic baseline, he sacrifices historical analysis, for he presents a very static and monolithic image of Osage culture, economics, and politics. Rollings gives the reader idealized versions of political institutions and seasonal resource exploitation, but says virtually nothing about slave-raiding, horse-stealing, or middlemen activities as these became an increasing important part of Osage life in the eighteenth century, undoubtedly influencing the tribe's dramatic rise to regional hegemony. Other scholars have convincingly argued that the Osage initially stole horses for trade, rather than to engage in buffalo-hunting, and it was not until the Caddoan-speaking people were weakened from disease epidemics in 1780 that some of the Siouan peoples successfully moved onto the Plains as equestrian nomads.

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In concluding this biography of Captain John Percival, David F. Long raises the question of why no biography has