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An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast. By Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin.

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**Author**

Harkin, Michael E.

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some rather specialized articles on archeology, linguistics, and religion. These include discussions of the prehistoric occupants of the Lac Temiscouata area (south of the St. Lawrence River), New Brunswick, and Maine; origins of the Michif language (a unique mixture of French and Cree); asymmetries between compounding and noun incorporation in Plains Cree; and a structural analysis of Midewiwin chants.

This writer wishes he could refer potential readers to a lengthy editorial introduction in the book under review. Alas, there is none. Nor is there biographical information about the twenty-six contributors, or an index. The volume amounts to a hodgepodge of essays presented in no apparent order and with no integrative analysis about (1) the obvious vitality of Algonquian studies, (2) the themes that run throughout these essays, (3) the significance of the authors' findings, or (4) the needs and opportunities for future research. Yet, for the determined student of Indian culture and history, there is gold to be panned in this frustrating riverbed, and it is to Cowan's credit that source references for each of the essays were retained.

*Edmund J. Danziger, Jr.*  
Bowling Green State University

**An Iron Hand upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast.** By Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990. 248 pages. \$26.95 cloth.

Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin have produced a well-researched, readable, and at times entertaining book on the potlatch law and its sporadic enforcement against British Columbia Indians. It is the first generally available work about an important chapter in the history of British Columbia Indian governmental relations.

The potlatch law, in reality a clause retained in the Indian Act from 1885 to 1951 banning the potlatch and the *tamananawas* dance, has a tortuous history, reflecting shifting legal, political, economic, and cultural currents in British Columbia and the dominion. For instance, a range of official attitudes within and without the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, extending from the desire to see all vestiges of traditional native culture forcibly terminated to sympathy and active defense of the potlatch and related institutions, affected its implementation or lack thereof. One Anglican missionary, whose

position gave his opinions semiofficial status, found Kwakiutl winter dances to be Eliadian emanations of the sacred; at the same time, Indian agent William Halliday was enforcing the law among the Kwakiutl with considerable prejudice.

In such a situation, an institutional history can very well boil down to a history of key individuals. It is on this level that Cole's and Chaikin's book is at its strongest. It was very interesting to learn, for example, that the deputy minister for Indian affairs (the person with real power in the ministry), Duncan Campbell Scott, who oversaw and largely instigated persecution of the Kwakiutl in the teens and twenties, was at one time considered by Rupert Brooke to be Canada's greatest poet and wrote poignant if somewhat outdated odes on noble but doomed and disappearing Indians. This is rich stuff: a belated Canadian Victorian poet whose humane yet pessimistic vision led directly to the floodtide of paternalism in federal native policy! Or imagine the psychodynamics (unexplored by the authors) of George DeBeck, father, and Edwin DeBeck, son. The former, Indian agent to the Kwakiutl from 1902 to 1906, was second to none in his hatred for the potlatch. The latter, as attorney and advocate, tirelessly defended the Kwakiutl and lobbied Scott for abolition of the onerous law.

The official channels of correspondence were the main media for the circulation of information and ideas that determined the de facto policy towards British Columbia natives. External declarations—such as Franz Boas's famous letter to the province describing the potlatch (erroneously, in my opinion) as a banking system—had some impact on the general political climate; however, it was the specific, official interactions among the three levels of policymakers—the local agency (agents indeed made, as well as enforced, policy, especially in the remote agencies), the superintendency in Victoria, and the ministry in Ottawa—that constituted policy. One explanation for the law's being honored in the breach for all but a decade of its existence is that all three levels had to be lined up behind a policy of enforcement. For many years, provincial superintendent Arthur Vowell cautioned his agents against enforcing the law, which he viewed with considerable misgiving. Not until World War I and the state of national emergency were the ducks sufficiently in a row to allow for successful prosecution, and then only the Kwakiutl felt its sting.

The story of Dan Cranmer's potlatch is too well known from other sources (such as the U'mista Society's fine film *Potlatch: A Strict Law Bids Us Dance*) to bear repeating here. Nor do the authors

spend a great deal of time recounting it; Halliday's several prosecutions take up only one of eleven chapters. Some procedural questions (essentially, the fact that Halliday was both prosecutor and judge) are discussed briefly, and a synopsis of the acquisition of artifacts (also discussed in Cole's book, *Captured Heritage*) is presented. The authors are, I think, correct in their insistence on presenting the larger picture both temporally and perspectively and avoiding the aura of a morality play that has infused accounts from both sides (Daisy Sewid-Smith's *Prosecution or Persecution* and Halliday's memoir, for example). That a significant segment of the native population, possibly a majority, was opposed to the potlatch as burdensome and even immoral is very plausible because of the high degree of missionary indoctrination, especially among the younger generation. This assessment is supported by evidence that the potlatch did in fact reach a nadir and, in some places, disappeared altogether in the 1930s and 1940s when that younger generation achieved ascendancy—all without the intervention of the agents or the application of the potlatch law. The "progressive" elements of native society, such as the Native Brotherhood, were unconcerned with the potlatch law as a political issue and, if anything, were hostile towards the potlatch itself.

Cole and Chaikin do not fall into the common authorial trap of exaggerating the importance of their subject. If anything, they downplay its significance, citing the provocative fact that in Alaska, where there was not only no potlatch law but no bureaucracy, the potlatch did appear to vanish temporarily at one point. Moreover, in the areas of British Columbia that were spared prosecution, the potlatch also seemed to become defunct. I think, however, that one must accept such facts critically; the kind of historical scholarship pursued by Cole and Chaikin is not suited to shedding light on what was going on in actual native communities, apart from Alert Bay. It is, from the point of view of these communities, an external account, although a valuable one. It should be read in combination with the growing body of ethnographically informed ethnohistorical literature on Northwest Coast cultures, such as that produced by Kan on the Tlingit and Blackman on the Haida.

It is, in other words, possible to underestimate the significance of the potlatch law, if not in terms of its legal importance, then as the most explicit formulation of the ethnocidal ideology that was felt in every Indian community in British Columbia. Why did so many native people turn their backs on the potlatch, which, by the

1920s, had come to embody virtually the entirety of traditional ceremonial culture? The question of hegemony—so obvious to one doing ethnohistorical research—is not even raised. The authors appear to be very complacent about the forced changes imposed by Euro-Canadian society on British Columbia Indians. Because one cannot, after all, countenance cannibalism and child marriage, and because the intentions of Indian Affairs officials, missionaries, politicians, and teachers were good, the authors give these agents of ethnocide a sympathetic reading. In my view, it is not immediately obvious that the *hamatsa* was an unmitigated evil rather than a profound manifestation of the sacred. In any case, even if we, as enlightened moderns, may dislike the way the nineteenth-century Kwakiutl treated young women or war captives, it hardly follows that we can judge Kwakiutl culture as a whole and find it wanting. The tender sensibilities that found the *hamatsa* so horrible condoned and even approved of sending young men to die by the hundreds of thousands in France at the same time that the Kwakiutl were being prosecuted for giving away sacks of flour.

In ethical terms, one must ask whether the large-scale atrocities of a society affect that society's ability to make moral judgments of others. My argument with the authors is not, finally, over the actual position they take but with the fact that they appear to have arrived at it uncritically. Surely somewhere in the Byzantine workings of the potlatch law in the half-century the authors consider there is some room for a critical perspective. The critical reader will find the tone of the book too often simply affirmative.

Anthropologists will find the book frustrating in detail. Little care is taken with the ethnic groups under discussion. Some of this is merely annoying, such as two different incorrect spellings of Oowekeeno. Some is rather more serious. The map at the front shockingly implies that the Bella Bella (Heiltsuk) are Haisla or Haisla-speakers. The use of outdated and slightly offensive ethnonyms (Nootka, Kwakiutl) is defended because it is used in the sources, but there is no justification at all for the phrase *Southern Kwakiutl*, implying that the Heiltsuk, Haisla, and Oowekeeno are merely *Northern Kwakiutl*, which is nonsense. The Oowekeeno seem to be lumped in with the Southern Kwakiutl which, given the linguistic boundary between Kwakwaka and Oowekyala, is even worse. Another complaint is that the term *siwash* is derogatory and yet is repeated from source material without comment; even a footnote would have brought home the

point that an element of racism was present in those making Indian policy.

In sum, Cole's and Chaikin's book will stand as the definitive account of the potlatch law and as an important contribution to the literature on Canadian Indian policy. Unfortunately, it cannot be said to contribute significantly to an understanding of Northwest Coast native peoples.

*Michael E. Harkin*  
Montana State University

**Religion and Hopi Life in the Twentieth Century.** By John D. Loftin. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991. 192 pages. \$19.95 cloth.

John Loftin writes in his introduction, "Hopi religious experience now emanates from the paradoxical tension between myth and history, synchrony and diachrony, continuity and change," and he continues, "I have organized the whole book around this paradox" (p. xvii). Indeed, paradox is a significant element in Hopi thought, as Loftin represents it, as well as a significant element in Loftin's mode of representation.

Loftin is a lawyer and a historian of religion. To the former it is tempting to attribute his care with language, to the latter his theoretical perspective. Although Loftin did field research over six summers, 1980-85, this is more an analysis of texts, written and oral, than a description of religious activities.

Loftin's book is divided almost equally into two parts. In part I, Loftin describes "the traditional, mythic dimensions of Hopi religion, which are experienced as atemporal and eternal" (p. xvi). In part II, his concern is with historical changes, especially the changes that were forced on the Hopi by the dominant European-American society in the twentieth century. The result is the first book-length study of Hopi religion as religion. The author's concern is with the basic premises on which Hopi religion is predicated and the categories and distinctions in terms of which Hopi religious orientation to the world is conceptualized and experienced. Aside from a detailed description of Powamuya, popularly known as the Bean Dance, Loftin does not provide specific information about the Hopi ritual calendar or the "religious specialists"—information that has characterized most twentieth-century efforts to rep-