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Book Reviews

The American Indian: Prehistory to the Present. By Arrell Morgan Gibson. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1980. 618 pp. \$14.95.

Professor Arrell Gibson of the University of Oklahoma has attempted to present a comprehensive portrait of the history of native peoples in what is now the United States. His thesis is that Indian cultures, evolving for 50,000 years in North America, have made many contributions to humankind as a whole, and have been a significant factor in the history of the United States. To a large extent, he has succeeded in his task of providing an updated, comprehensive, interdisciplinary text that will appeal to students. This reviewer has used this book as the text in two recent classes on American Indian History. In both classes, the book was well received by students, with comments like "clearly written," "kept my interest," and "fascinating."

This is not to suggest that there are not specific weaknesses of the book, and numerous changes could improve a future edition. But the major strength of this text, besides its readability, is its coverage of pre-columbian cultures, the frontier era affecting both eastern and western Indians, and the post-frontier experience.

For the earliest times, Gibson synthesizes archaeological and ethnographic knowledge to present the history of Native Americans before the arrival of Europeans. Despite his unfortunate use of the term "prehistory" (implying that Indians had no history before 1492), this reviewer was pleased that pre-columbian Indians did not come across as static unchanging primitives. Instead, the author emphasizes the evolution of their ways of life over the centuries, and the wide diversity of cultures by 1492.

In the four chapters dealing with the aboriginal segment, Gibson introduces the student to native economics, sociology, linguistics, political systems, philosophy and religion.

Gibson's ethnographic introduction is good for students who have never had anthropology, but there are aspects of aboriginal culture which could be made clearer. He is weak explaining the crucial importance of kinship in non-state-level societies, especially for systems of native law and punishment. There is not enough on the economic importance of women; the Iroquois were not alone in considering women's status highly. There is no mention of the homosexual berdache, who also had high status (in association with shamanism) among many groups. Aboriginal forms of slavery are distorted. There is hardly any mention of important cultural diffusion from the complex cultures of Mexico to the Southwest and the Southeast.

Chapters 5-16 deal with the frontier era. Gibson provides fairly good coverage of comparative colonial relations of Indians with Spanish, French, Dutch, Russian, and British imperialists, but he overemphasizes the power of the Europeans over the Indian nations. While Gibson recognizes the importance of disease in weakening Indian resistance, he does not explain why Indians were so susceptible to Old World diseases. He relies on the outdated figure of only one and a half million for aboriginal population, while more recent demographers have estimated the pre-disease population at nearly ten times that number.

The frontier section of the book is by far the longest, and Gibson reflects the traditional emphasis of historians on Indian-white conflicts. It is in this section that condensing could be done. There are far too many names-and-dates, especially of whites who were involved in Indian affairs. This section is more a history of European dealings with Indians, rather than of Indian history itself. Gibson organizes Chapters 5-9 according to each colonial power, with the result being an emphasis on native reactions to white actions rather than stressing the complex diplomatic power-plays of Indian nations. The chronological division of later chapters makes sense for the context of United States history, but there could have been better divisions than 1776, 1800, or 1861. More appropriate chronological dividing points could be made (for example, at the Pontiac War, the end of the Tecumseh Confederacy, the completion of the eastern removals, the 1868 treaties) that would keep the focus of the book on Indian actions rather than government policy.

It would have been better to use more quotes from natives, to get the Indian view of things, rather than list names of soldiers, missionaries, and officials. Gibson sometimes provides so much information that the most important factors are obscured. For example, much space is spent on Civil War battles, without emphasis on the factionalism among the "Civilized Tribes" which so weakened them after 1865. With the lack of quotation of Indian viewpoints, it is difficult to understand the motivation of those leaders who resisted United States colonialism.

The final six chapters cover the post-frontier era. Gibson does an excellent job on the impact of allotment, but it could have been more effective if maps had been included. There are only two maps for the post-1854 years, and the gradual loss of lands through treaty renegotiation, allotment, and congressional action remains unclear. Rather than use earlier maps of United States "claims" to Indian lands, it would have been better to use treaty land-cession maps.

The important role of the non-enforcement of treaties is not emphasized as much as it should be, with the result being a vague notion that most Indians were militarily defeated rather than pressured into giving up their lands and self-government by economic dependency and legal maneuvering. The crucial role of Supreme Court decisions in gradually establishing United States control over Indians is largely unrecognized.

For the twentieth century, the text gives fairly good coverage, but its weaknesses reflect the weaknesses of the field in general. Attention is sometimes too focused on federal policymakers rather than on the Indians themselves. Remnants of eastern natives are hardly mentioned, and relations among Indians are slighted. There is need for more discussion of the social history of reservations. At the 1973 Wounded Knee protest, Gibson focuses on opposition to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and ignores the fact that the protest was initially directed against the Pine Ridge tribal chairman. This approach misses an opportunity to explore the problems of the IRA tribal governments in imposing "majority rule" over a factionalized population that traditionally operated by consensus. He misunderstands the impact of the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act in weakening tribal self-government, and in general does not emphasize enough the continued importance of treaty guarantees as the legal basis for current Indian sovereignty.

What we have in this book is basically an excellent text, written by one of the best qualified scholars in the nation, that rightly

emphasizes the evils of white repression of Indians but without sounding propagandistic. While some of the details of Indian-white conflicts in the frontier era need to be condensed, there is a need for adding more of an Indian viewpoint.

Especially for the last one hundred years, there are plenty of native oral and written sources that could be quoted to provide the true spirit of a native perspective. Why quote a white "expert" when there are plenty of articulate Indians who deal with the same topic from direct experience? More quotations by Indians would also enliven the text, and help students get the feel of the Indian worldview. With its current limitations, this book should probably not be assigned unless it is accompanied by Indian-authored readings.

Despite the weaknesses, which will hopefully be corrected in a future edition, Gibson has written a balanced overview of Native American archaeology, ethnography, and post-contact history. It will be recognized as one of the best existing texts in the field.

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People of the Totem: The Indians of the Pacific Northwest. By Norman Bancroft-Hunt and Werner Forman. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1979. 128 pp. \$14.95.

Peoples of the Coast: The Indians of the Pacific Northwest. By George Woodcock. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977. 223 pp. \$18.95.

These two books probably represent the extremes in contemporary publications about Native American culture and art production. Bancroft-Hunt and Forman's *People of the Totem* is an attractive introduction to the native peoples of the Northwest Coast. The book was nicely bound and beautifully printed (in Italy), and all 131 photographs are in color. This is really two books. Bancroft-Hunt's text is rather overshadowed by Forman's photographs, which have extensive captions of unspecified authorship. The text is divided into six chapters: Introduction, The Societies, The Potlatch, The Supernatural, Myth and Cosmology, and Dance and Ceremony. Anyone courageous enough to attempt such a general