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White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802-1892. By William E. Unrau. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996. 180 pages. \$25.00 cloth.

The belief that Native Americans harbored an inherent, natural weakness for liquor forms one of the cornerstones of the folklore of the American West. According to this wisdom, Indians inherited a genetic predisposition to alcoholism which was exploited by whites to defraud Native people of land and other wealth. In his new work, *White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802-1892*, historian William Unrau refutes this idea by arguing that the way in which alcohol was used by Indians mimicked its use in white society. Drunkenness and inebriety formed a common daily experience among white America, and was actually promoted and encouraged by the policies of the United States government and military. In Unrau's view, the abuse of alcohol by Native people was neither surprising nor unexpected; indeed, it constituted an integral facet of the way of life that whites insisted Indians emulate.

Whiskey became the national beverage of choice, especially on the frontier, as Unrau states, because water, milk, and other liquids were inconsistent in quality and availability. Whiskey was American-made, did not spoil, was important in aiding digestion, and could be easily transported. Most important, whiskey making provided a ready market for the corn crops grown in increasing quantities throughout the West, providing isolated rural farmers with an important cash crop. Thus, several factors combined to create a strong demand for whiskey in nineteenth-century America. Unrau also argues that whites did not deliberately or conspiratorially use liquor as a tool to take unfair advantage of Indians in land and treaty negotiations. He attributes the abuse of alcohol among Native people, and its deleterious effects on their societies, as a consequence of cultural confluence, rather than some dark design on the part of Euro-Americans.

In this work, Unrau focuses on legislative and institutional attempts to control the alcohol trade in Indian Country—a nebulous and imprecise geographical area whose boundaries were constantly changing during the nineteenth century. Aside from the difficulties encountered in attempting to restrict trade in a legally indeterminate locale, Unrau also points out that United States authorities had difficulty determining just who was an

Indian. "Blood," lifestyle, dress, appearance, and education, among other factors, defined "Indianness" to white officials, who also assigned numerical percentages to indicate the legal category of an individual, which defined the political, legal, and economic rights allowed that person. Thus, geographical, cultural, and racial factors conspired to frustrate legislative attempts at controlling the Indian trade in liquor.

The prevalence of alcohol abuse in white society was caused, in part, by the promotion of its use by the United States military, government, and business, as Unrau sees it. In many industries, whiskey formed a portion of real wages. It was doled out daily to workers to induce them to perform dull, repetitive, and often dangerous labor. The military also issued whiskey as a part of daily rations for much of the nineteenth century, devising strategies for restricting and controlling drunkenness. The sponsorship and provision of alcohol as a part of the daily routine by industry and government, then, reinforced its use in white society, especially on the American frontier. Traders flocked to the outskirts of nearly every military post in the West, thus offering an unregulated, uninterrupted supply of whiskey for those who wanted it. The close proximity of many indigenous societies to these posts assured Native exposure to alcohol both as a product of trade and to its use as an integral part of the white culture into which they were told to assimilate. Unrau explains that Indians "accommodated" white society's use of alcohol by emulating the dominant society's use of it. Excessive use of alcohol by Native people, according to this view, may even have constituted a form of protest against the white imposition of prohibition among Indians. Prohibition of liquor sales to Indians (but not to whites) served to stigmatize Native people as being incompetent to manage their own affairs. Unrau maintains that by participating in the sale and consumption of alcohol, Native people expressed their defiance of the dominant white society.

Prohibition in Indian Country was unworkable in Unrau's view. Despite the benevolent intentions of many of those in American government and society, alcohol abuse among Indians was an inevitable result of their contact with hard-drinking American society. *White Man's Wicked Water* offers no new theories about alcohol abuse among whites or Native Americans. The author consciously avoids addressing the cultural and psychological aspects of this problem, confining his analysis primarily to legislative and institutional manifesta-

tions of U.S. Indian policy. This approach results in a narrow focus which excludes consideration of cultural factors that contributed to complex issues involved in the alcohol trade in the nineteenth century. It confines the author to a somewhat superficial approach that does not reflect the fundamental importance of issues of culture and power that were involved in this struggle. Unrau thereby misses the basic ideological conflict inherent in U.S. Indian policy. The United States tried to rationalize its conquest and subjugation of Native peoples by posing as their benefactor and guardian. It strove to maintain the fiction that it could act as "guardian" of Native people, protecting them from white exploitation, while simultaneously providing the legal, political, and cultural framework that made this exploitation possible. The same actors who promoted the American philosophy of conquest thus postured as the "protector" of their own victims. By not identifying the system of oppression that operated under the guise of a benevolent parent, the author succumbs to the same self-deception that allowed the cynicism fundamental to this hypocrisy to operate. Thus, Unrau lends legitimacy and credibility to this system by examining its aberrant results as though there were any question of the predictable and fatal outcome. In restricting his analysis of the alcohol trade in Indian Country to legislative and institutional questions, Unrau also misses the opportunity to explore the contradictions inherent in the attempt by the federal government simultaneously to restrict and promote trade, and in other relations of power between the United States and Native groups.

Unrau almost completely excludes Native people from a voice in his analysis. For example, although the Five Civilized Tribes are referred to several times in this work, Unrau never presents their perspective, which is available from many sources. It would have been useful to examine Native leaders' attempts to repulse the flood of alcohol into their nations, compared with the efforts of the United States and its representatives. For example, as early as 1801, the Choctaw Nation insisted on a provision in its treaty with the United States which would exclude all liquor from their country. Many other Native groups similarly took measures to institute and enforce prohibition, but these efforts go unnoticed by the author. Last, Unrau never successfully refutes the conclusion of many scholars that alcohol was deliberately and extensively used by whites as a tool to weaken and defraud Native people. It has been conclu-

sively demonstrated elsewhere that U.S. treaty commissioners and other agents routinely encouraged the use of alcohol before and during treaty negotiations for land cessions, in order to take unfair advantage of the Indians' inebriation.

One of the strengths of this work includes Unrau's unflinching examination of questionable legal, economic, and political activities that defeated the federal government's efforts to keep alcohol out of Indian Country. Unrau carefully catalogues the legislative initiatives and responses that failed to control the introduction of liquor among Native peoples. He points out that this failure occurred largely due to the greed of white traders and the spasmodic responses of the U.S. military and government. Although Unrau omits the viewpoint of Native peoples in his work, he does an excellent job of elucidating the legal and political contortions that characterized white efforts to control the traffic in alcohol. Belief in the creed of entrepreneurial free enterprise and the insatiable quest for the huge profits that rewarded successful elusion of prohibition conspired to defeat governmental and legislative efforts at control. Unrau gives us a close-up view of these efforts and their ineffectiveness. This work will therefore provide a valuable starting point and guide to the legal records, treaties, and official reports in future research on this complex topic.

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Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache. By Keith H. Basso. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. 171 pages. \$40.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

I have written a number of book reviews in my academic career, but perhaps never have I been asked to review one that gave me such pleasure when I read it. This book won the Western States Book Award for Creative Nonfiction. Certainly the reason it did is because Basso's ethnographic prose is so vivid that while reading the narrative it seems almost as if you were in the community of Cibecue, perhaps sitting in the yard of Basso's consultant, the late Nick Thompson, and you can see Nick: "He is smoking a Salem cigarette and studying with undisguised approval the shoes on his feet—a new pair of bright blue Nike running shoes trimmed in incandescent orange. He is also wearing a pair of faded green trousers, a bat-