UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development. By Sebastian Felix Braun.

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5dz9r51x

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 34(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Kamper, David

Publication Date

2010-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

Reviews 171

research can damage, interrupt, and displace a community. Sacagawea scholars now wait for future Shoshone scholars to respond to Johnson, providing even more in-depth answers and personal reflections on the subject.

Selene G. Phillips University of Louisville

Buffalo Inc.: American Indians and Economic Development. By Sebastian Felix Braun. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. 280 pages. \$39.95 cloth.

Duane Champagne has suggested the potential for capitalism to take hold in American Indian communities in a way that is significantly different from the way it generally operates in American society as a whole. Calling it "tribal capitalism," Champagne asserts that this particularly indigenous version of economic development is not dedicated to individual accumulation the way capitalism conventionally is, but rather to the collective good of a tribal community. This communal good comes in terms of collectivized financial success to be shared throughout a community, mainly in terms of civic projects and social welfare, and in terms of the support of tribal sovereignty and the sustaining of cultural values. Dean Howard Smith, along with Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt, also urge tribal communities to bring indigenous cultural values to the fore of discussions about appropriate and responsible tribal economic development. However, much of the work on tribal capitalism is either theoretical or prescriptive policy suggestions. Few book-length studies exist about how tribal capitalism works in practice in indigenous communities—even fewer that are not based on studies of gaming enterprises.

Braun's Buffalo Inc. provides an excellent example of what tribal capitalism looks like on the ground: its practicalities, successes, and challenges. Braun has conducted a highly thorough, ethnography-based case study of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe's effort to establish a buffalo herd for the joint goals of economic development and cultural revitalization. His analysis of the critical connection between these two goals gives us an opportunity to see how well tribal capitalism can work and what its internal and external impediments are. Braun's main focus is on Pte Hca Ka, Inc., the Cheyenne River Sioux tribally sponsored buffalo-raising operation. He clearly has intimate experience with this operation through extensive fieldwork, ethnographic interviews with Pte Hca Ka's managers and employees, and his work for the operation. However, his book does much more than provide an ethnographic account of the administration of a tribal enterprise. He contextualizes Pte Hca Ka in terms of responsible tribal economic development and the revival of cultural identity in order to consider several issues: the broader economic and ecological challenges facing tribal (and non-Indian rural) communities of the northern plains; the role of cultural revitalization and cultural identity in decolonization efforts; culturally based notions of ecological "sustainability" and "conservation"; and how indigenous communities embroiled in settler colonialism can envision and practice self-sufficiency within dominant capitalist societies.

Broken into fourteen chapters, this book does many things at once, but in the first few chapters Braun provides an historical overview of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation and the tribe's political economic history. Throughout these chapters he also considers the ecological history of buffalos in North America and the cultural history of Northern Plains people's interaction with and cultural interpretation of buffalos. Here he provides a detailed understanding of not just the bison's role in northern plain's ecology but also how the growth of industrial farming and cattle ranching affects and compares to the buffalo's ecological relations. Moreover, these early chapters also include an explanation of the centrality of buffalos to Lakota culture and contemporary cultural identity. Perhaps the most valuable part of this discussion is the way that Braun describes the Lakota interpretation of their relationship with buffalos and their belief that buffalos have their own culture, a culture from which the Lakota can learn social values by interacting with the buffalo. Braun does an equally fine job of not essentializing Lakota culture in regards to the buffalo by providing a sophisticated conversation of the way that buffalo play a symbolic role in the contemporary formulations of cultural identity that can serve discrete political goals of decolonization through revitalizing the sociocultural and physical health of Lakota communities.

The middle chapters of Buffalo Inc. look more closely at the cultural and administrative foundations of Pte Hca Ka and the eventual political and cultural conflicts that led to the tribal enterprise's dissolution. In these chapters Braun discusses how Pte Hca Ka was explicitly established with the joint goals of economic development and cultural revitalization in mind. Making sure that buffalos were present in the life of the Cheyenne River Sioux people was just as critical, if not more so, to the enterprise's founders as was the goal of turning a profit. In practice this was illustrated through the way that Pte Hca Ka grew and managed the herd. Unlike the non-Indian managers of other nontribal bison herds, Pte Hca Ka used Lakota cultural knowledge in order to determine the way that the buffalo were raised, corralled, and slaughtered. These chapters also detail the way that, through Pte Hca Ka's growth and economic success, it became embroiled in tribal politics. Originally sheltered from the day-to-day administration of the tribal government, Pte Hca Ka came under more direct tribal governmental control when it had trouble financing an expansion of the herd's grazing land. Eventually, internal political forces, a collapse in the national market for bison meat, and some tribal members' desire to separate the buffalo-raising operation from cultural practices—making it a purely economic endeavor—led to the dissolution of Pte Hca Ka through the complete liquidation of the herd.

The final few chapters of the book use the Pte Hca Ka experience to comment on cultural interpretations of sustainability, conservation, and economic development. Like many others before him, Braun reasserts the notion that when analyzing American Indian economic development we must consider the economic and the cultural simultaneously. He reminds us that "because culture is always a system, cultural concerns influence economic relationships and choices and vice versa," and these mutual influences are constantly in flux and negotiation so that trying to consider tribal economic

Reviews 173

development in "American Indian terms . . . is a function of history and not simply an essentialized revitalization of historic cultural values" (210). Therefore, when we consider tribal economic development projects—like Pte Hca Ka—we must do much more than just consider the financial success and failure. Braun has done just that in his well-thought-out and well-argued book, which is an excellent addition to our understanding of tribal economic development.

David Kamper San Diego State University

Celebration: Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian—Dancing on the Land. By Rosita Worl with a foreword by Byron I. Mallott, essays by Maria Williams and Robert Davidson, and photographs by Bill Hess. Edited by Kathy Dye. Juneau, AK, and Seattle: Sealaska Heritage Institute and University of Washington Press, 2008. 152 pages. \$40.00 cloth.

This book is a compilation of essays and photographs capturing the early stages of Sealaska Corporation's attempt to "educate the youth about their culture" (16). Worl explains that the newly formed Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) began a small regionwide gathering of clans in order to showcase its region's cultures and treasured clan objects known as *at'óow*. The SHI elders soon started to see this event as being similar to a traditional ceremonial *ku.éex*', or invite. Thus, what began as a celebration of cultures through song and dance would ultimately become a venue to revitalize local interest in the ancestral cultures and languages. With the first three-day event drawing a little more than two hundred attendees, it now boasts more than forty clans and two thousand people from all over Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii, and Canada, and with invited guests from New Zealand, participating in a five-day international celebration.

The foreword, preface, and acknowledgments confirm the power of honoring ancestors for their lives. The commonalties among each serve to recognize the power of preserving traditions and history despite the atrocities encountered through the colonial and current governmental reigns. Singing and dancing serve as foundational elements to the tribes along the Alaska southeast coast and are keys to understanding some of the complex inter- and intratribal expressions of their existence. This book documents some of those who have contributed to the celebration by their presence, pride in their culture, and efforts to maintain cultural continuity and affirm their unending sovereignty.

There are some surprises in this book, and though most of the content—112 pages of 152—is photographs, the accompanying text reveals much about honoring ancestors, coastal tribal art and products, cultural survival and adaptation, masks, and the significance of celebrations. As a historical collection of photographs about the celebration, its significance is evident in the pride manifested in each picture from the very genesis of the event