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Just Too Much of an Indian: Bill Baker, Stalwart in a Fading Culture. By Thomas Vennum.

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the capacity to contribute to modern American art. Hutchinson compares a photograph of De Cora's art class at Carlisle with the ones previously discussed showing Reel's Native industries students, and in them she sees evidence of De Cora's more empathetic and meaningful learning environment.

As women of the time were able to pursue these new endeavors—as collectors and consumers of Indian objects, reformers advancing Indian education, and artists—they engaged with the prevailing dialogues of Native American modernism and primitivism, according to Hutchinson. However, the author's stated intention of examining the Indian craze as “a transcultural phenomenon that brought Indians and non-Indians together” and of addressing the “complexity of both sides of the artistic exchanges that made up the Indian craze” is not fulfilled (5). The perspective is somewhat narrow and mostly from the side of those consuming Native art; the Native artists who contributed to the Indian craze remain vaguely defined and without their own agency (with the obvious exception of the focus on De Cora). Still, Hutchinson presents an interesting, well-researched examination of specific kinds of historically situated relations between Native American art and mainstream American aesthetics. Although she is selective in the cases examined, this is a welcome broadening of the context surrounding these discourses.

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**Just Too Much of an Indian: Bill Baker, Stalwart in a Fading Culture.** By Thomas Vennum. LaPointe, WI: Just Too Much of an Indian Press, 2008. 392 pages. \$24.95 paper.

During William Baker's 1906 naming ceremony, he received the Ojibwe name Bineshi and a song: “*kisikaya babimwewe bineshi* (in the sky the sound of the bird is continually heard)” (141). More than a decade later, when Willie was a young teen, his father related the dream which his *we'e* (ceremonial namer) received from a Spirit Bird who sang: “You will always be hearing me even though I may be invisible to you” (140). As an adult, Baker felt passionately that Anishinaabe biographies should only be transmitted through the sound of the spoken word (318). Nevertheless, Thomas Vennum ironically fulfills yet inverts the message of his spiritual name: the former by immortalizing his life through writing his biography, and the latter by making the invisible sound of his spoken words visible in a written text. Given Baker's opinion of the written word, one wonders why he allowed Vennum to tape-record and write about his songs when they first met in 1969. Moreover, why and how did they develop the close working and personal relationship that lasted nearly two decades until he passed on in the mid-1980s? Baker's ambivalence toward the written word is but one of the many ironies and contradictions that characterize this story of his life and teachings.

Vennum's own description of his goals and strategies for writing Baker's biography are deceptively straightforward. He attempts to “describe his

stalwart interaction with Ojibwe culture, even as it fades around him" (xx). More specifically, he tries to "paint a picture" of Baker's traditional life, "characterize the disrupting forces," and present his "frustrated attempts to compromise with a new order" (xxi). This narrative, however, is much more than a simple biography. As the classification on the jacket suggests, this "Biography/History/Ethnology" cuts across genres. It contains firsthand descriptions of ceremonial procedures and adaptations to culture change that are characteristic of classic ethnographic autobiographies such as Paul Radin's *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* (1920) and Ruth Underhill's *Papago Woman* (1979). It also includes self-reflexive accounts of the ethical dilemmas of ethnographic fieldwork found in "auto-ethnographic memoirs" compiled in works such as Ron Emoff and David Henderson's edited volume, *Mementos, Artifacts and Hallucinations from the Ethnographer's Tent* (2002). Stylistically and substantially, the work has the most in common with contemporary experimental "narrative ethnographies" such as Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* (1981) and Barbara Tedlock's *The Beautiful and the Dangerous* (1992). Although the biographic focus is unusual for this genre, the work is a "narrative ethnography" insofar as its thesis, that Baker's "stalwart" attitude toward upholding traditions never wavered while they "faded" all around him, is carried by the description and narrative, not through theoretical explanations.

Blending exacting ethnographic detail with a touch of fiction at one extreme and a dry historical account at the other, Vennum is particularly effective when relating episodes in the first person as an eyewitness to scenes during the 1970s and early 1980s when he and Baker worked together on a number of ethnomusicological projects. Vennum makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of Baker's life. Conspicuous omissions include the year of his passing and more than cursory mention of his wives, children, and grandchildren. Rather, the episodes of this narrative are carefully selected to illustrate the character of the man in relation to Ojibwe traditions, as well as the times and places where his traditional attitudes and talents were formulated, expressed, and challenged. Whereas the work may disappoint if read as a straight biography, history, or ethnography, when read as a multivocal "narrative ethnography" of turbulent and changing times, the reader may better perceive and appreciate not only the life and "voice" of Bill Baker but also the subtle nuances and blunt contradictions of his sociocultural milieu. Laying bare the social, structural, and personal ingredients of a classic prime informant/ethnographer relationship, the book boldly clears a path for future reflexive narrative biographies that might complement the many excellent autobiographies and autoethnographies authored by indigenous people.

This book's most important contributions are twofold: (1) the detailed portrayals of 1970s reservation everyday and ceremonial life and (2) the account of complexity and contradiction in social relationships and cultural change that this level of detail enables. Vennum's vivid descriptive writing style seemingly resurrects the sights, smells, and sounds of reservation life from the mundane to the magnificent. Examples of the latter include scenes of naming

ceremonies and traditional powwows from the 1970s, a period in which ethnographies tended to focus on “acculturation” rather than traditional observances. Contemporaneous work included, for example, Spindler and Spindler’s *Dreamers without Power* (1971) on the Wisconsin Menominee (later published as *Dreamers with Power* [1984] when political tides had changed). As for the mundane, one of many scenes in Baker’s two-room home on the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Chippewa Reservation in Wisconsin may serve as an example. Seated around a table, four LCO elders and Vennum discuss issues surrounding the Winter Dam protest of 1971 (188–202). While weaving back and forth between historical background and “live” conversation, Vennum draws readers into the scene through palpable descriptions of Baker chewing and spitting tobacco, wiping his face and mouth with his handkerchief, and intermittently picking up and putting down the beadwork he is sewing on one of four drum tabs stacked neatly on the table. His pincushion tacked to the wall by his window becomes a familiar point of reference as Baker’s “curmudgeonly” personality comes to life, and one can almost hear the buzz of flies and smell the cigarette butts in the overflowing tin ashtray.

This scene provides the background to a visit to the dam site where the five men witness Eddie Benton with other youths and AIM members demonstrating. Significantly, however, it also provides the backdrop to an open-ended dialogue about social conflict among LCO elders, LCO youth, and “outsiders,” mainly “city Indians” and “Western Indians,” whom Baker resented for usurping his role of tradition bearer, as well as local inn proprietors and tourists, who also had stakes in the outcome of the dam protest. In the characteristic irony that pervades the text, Vennum ends the episode with one of Baker’s young nephews bestowing upon him two large northern pike he caught in the Chippewa Flowage, the artificial lake behind the Winter Dam that drowned the old town and cemetery in 1923 (216–17). Although Baker’s negative opinion of the dam and the activism of the protest are perfectly clear, there are no clear-cut “good guys” and “bad guys” or right or wrong positions in this scene. Rather, it is replete with all the messiness and incongruities of the real lives of the individuals who enacted it.

With like deftness, Vennum tackles ironies and contradictions in issues surrounding the commercialization of cultural identity in various “true story” episodes in which Indians and tourists “perform Indianness,” including Baker, despite his expressed disapproval. Most significantly, Vennum details a variety of issues concerning fieldwork and, in particular, the collection and display of heritage items for and in museums. Vennum relates Baker’s disapproval of the questionable collecting strategies of the amateur ethnographer or “enthusiast,” dubbed “Frank Bloomfield,” when haggling for a drum that Vennum later repatriated to an LCO elder (152–57; 177–78). Nevertheless, when upon hard times, Baker ponders selling his drum for the “best offer,” regardless of whether it is a private or museum purchase (303). Vennum also portrays ambivalent attitudes and actions related to ethnographic publications. Frances Densmore’s *Chippewa Music* (1910), for example, appears and reappears in the text as Vennum and Baker use it as a point of comparison in time and geographic distribution for song repertoires. Much like Baker

apparently resisted and suffered through the filming of *The Drummaker* in 1974, he balked at the idea of ethnographic publications. Yet, as LCO elder Gene Begay said of Vennum's return of Baker's big drum to LCO, Baker had given it to him, and "in honor of Bill no one has the right to challenge or change your decision" (374). In like manner, for his own reasons, Baker gave his stories and his songs to Vennum, who chose to honor him and them in this insightful and respectful narrative. Although Vennum's skill in reconstructing the early episodes of Baker's life is not as great as his depiction of the 1970s and early 1980s when he was present in the scenes, his portrait of this artistically talented and spiritually gifted Ojibwe elder at a crucial turning point in Anishinaabe history is well worth reading for the bold truthfulness of its blending of biographic, historical, and ethnographic accounts.

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**The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story.** By Elliott West. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 432 pages. \$27.95 cloth.

A good historian takes a small subject and places it in the context of the larger arena of national or global history. Elliott West has done that here, using what most have described as the Nez Perce "War" of 1877 (others have described it as a "tragedy" or "crisis") as a detailed case study in order to tie together two larger themes in American history: westward expansion, beginning in 1845 on the eve of the Mexican-American War, and the Civil War from its formal conclusion in 1865 to 1877, the end of formal "reconstruction" in the South. West wraps both together with the term *Greater Reconstruction*. By this he means the period bracketed between Lee's surrender in April 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia and Chief Joseph's surrender to O. O. Howard and Nelson Miles in October 1877 near Bear's Paw Mountain in Montana.

During these twelve years, according to West, paradoxically the nation became more inclusive of blacks and immigrants, all the while becoming more exclusive of cultural diversity, especially of its indigenous population. This era, he writes, "began in conquest and expanded promise. It unfolded through appalling bloodshed, liberation, consolidation, and cultural assault. It ended with the nation fighting its last Indian war against its most persistently loyal native ally" (319).

Well-known for his social histories of Anglo-America's westward expansion and for institutions on the frontier, West's *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (1998) was a successful entrée into Indian-white relations. In the present study, he tackles a subject with a much longer paper trail of documentary anthologies and interpretations, an epoch that ranks high in familiarity and importance to the general public, as well as to scholars. His bibliography is impressive and near comprehensive, and his explanation of works consulted is a good introduction for any student new to the Nez Perce struggle for sovereignty, freedom, and homeland. West relies