

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

American Indian Identity: Today's Changing Perspectives. Edited by Clifford E. Trafzer.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6bd4f7qf>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 10(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Grinde, Donald A., Jr.

Publication Date

1986-06-01

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/>

on settlement patterns and contributed to rapid culture change, although the Navajos continue to maintain their cultural cohesiveness and social solidarity.

The Baileys provide a rather comprehensive description of Navajo life in the reservation period. In contrast to works by Donald Parman and Peter Iverson, who focus on tribal leaders, the Baileys are concerned with broad developments that affected the people, who they find to be resilient and adaptive but who escaped the complete domination that characterized relations between the federal government and most other tribes. Isolation, the size and growth of the Navajo population, economic prosperity, and the nature of Navajo institutions all reduced the impact of federal programs for assimilation and enabled the Navajos to maintain a remarkable degree of cultural continuity.

The authors not only provide a significant amount of information about Navajo life in the reservation period but they also offer a thoughtful analysis of Navajo history and of the forces that caused change. They give less importance to agriculture in Navajo life than did W. W. Hill, and they devote relatively little attention to the development of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and its potential significance to the Navajo Nation. The ethnohistorical fieldwork of Garrick Bailey also was limited to one section of Navajo country, but to do otherwise would have been an impossible task. However, work in twentieth century Bureau of Indian Affairs records would appear to be essential for such a study. It does not appear that Navajo agency records in the National Archives and federal records centers at Laguna Niguel and Denver have been used by the authors. Nevertheless the Baileys have produced an informative and thoughtful book that will become the standard introduction to Navajo history in the American period.

Richard N. Ellis
Fort Lewis College

American Indian Identity: Today's Changing Perspectives.
Edited by Clifford E. Trafzer. San Diego: San Diego State University, American Indian Studies, 1985. 84 pp. \$6.95 Paper.

This book of essays deserves special attention because it attempts to illustrate contemporary American Indian life in a readable and informative format. Essentially, it strives to give meaning to the values that function in Native American life on and off the reservation. Since this book is primarily the reflections of Native American scholars and professionals on the nature of American Indian existence in the last twenty years, it is invaluable for its insights and statements from the American Indian viewpoint. A primary focus of the book is on the varieties of American Indian adaptations in the last generation. Hence, the book is a collection of interpretive and impressionistic essays that blend scholarly insight and experience with regards to such diverse topics as Native American war shields, changing styles of dress, and a summary of Native American Studies' role in the contemporary university environment. In general, the book updates earlier works such as Levine and Lurie, eds., *The American Indian Today* and Josephy's *Red Power*, and it is an excellent addition to that genre of scholarly works that seeks to delve into the nature of American Indian identity.

A prevailing thread throughout the collected essays is that American Indians are changing and will continue to do so as long as new political, social and economic problems are presented to the tribal people of North America. From the start, Indian people have been misunderstood. The editor points out that Christopher Columbus believed the inhabitants of America to be related to those of India's mainland. Although Columbus was proven wrong, the term "Indian" stuck. Thus, from initial contact with Europeans, the question of Indian identity was raised.

Professor R. David Edmunds' essay deals with the issue of "progressives" vs. "traditionalists" in Indian communities within the United States. He points out that Indian cultures are always changing and adapting. Thus, he maintains that change is a hallmark of Indian life and that one of the principle avenues of change is education. In the second essay Professor Donald Fixico asserts that Indian identity was changed by the westward movement and that many Indians have been attracted to western music, cowboy boots, and rodeos since this lifestyle gives Indians a broader identity in the American experience.

In the "Twentieth Century Horse," Professor Clifford Trafzer asserts that the pickup truck has become an integral part of reservation life since it facilitates transportation and communication.

Trafzer implies that this process is an adaptation and not a profound change in Indian lifestyles. In his intriguing essay on Comanche shields, Christopher Bentley suggests that Indians in the past and the present tied their identities to natural elements in the universe. Indians recognized this relationship to the forces of creation through shields and other symbolic items. Bentley details the origin, construction and use of shields among the Comanche. In "The Road to Middle Class America," Michelene Fixico states that white college students in the 1960s and 1970s drifted away from the values of the dominant society while Indian students returned to "traditional" values. In the last generation, Indians increased their awareness of family and tribe while striving for middle class values and increased economic opportunity. The implication is that values relating to Indian identity can be maintained in a modern context.

Carol Hampton's essay on "Tribal Esteem and the American Indian Historian" examines the intellectual obligation that Indian historians have to enrich Indian history by using oral and written accounts in their research and publications so that knowledge can be advanced. At the same time, she points out the problems of obtaining sacred and religious data that should not be published without the consent of the tribe. She states that Indian historians should not betray such trust and that such data should be left to the anthropologists for study. Finally, Carter Blue Clark delves into American Indian studies' role in the university. Professor Clark points out that Indians had no universities and thus no American Indian Studies programs at white contact. He asserts that this is one of the reasons that Indian studies does not fit into any academic mold. He maintains that American Indians are unique and so is their discipline. He feels that Indian studies will persist and continue to enlighten and educate all students about the diverse and rich cultures that constitute American Indian life. Faculty, students, and American Indian community members must cooperate to perpetuate the study of Native Americans.

The overall themes in this book appear in most of the essays. Certainly, change and adaptation in the face of European pressures dominate the book. The work is a reflection of the problems that all Indian historians face, and thus the book will stand as a statement of American Indian intellectuals in the 1980s on the

problems that they and their people confronted. In the end, the work tells us as much about perceptions of American Indian intellectuals as it does about the themes of cultural adaptations that they chose to discuss. American Indians and American Indian intellectuals can be better understood through a perusal of this collection of essays. It is an ideal book to assign in an undergraduate course in American Indian Studies and some Indian history courses. It will provoke discussion and enhance understanding on both the abstract and experiential levels.

Donald A. Grinde, Jr.
California Polytechnic State University

A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada. By E. Brian Titley. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986. 245 pp. \$29.95 Cloth.

There is a story, probably apocryphal, about the minimalist composer Philip Glass that is relevant to the biography of Duncan Campbell Scott. After a premiere performance of one of Glass's compositions at a New York concert hall, a society matron enters a cab and, upon noticing the identification licence of the driver, says, "Young man, do you know you have the same name as a famous musician?" Like Glass, Scott was an artist. Like Glass, Scott found it necessary to engage in other work to maintain a comfortable life-style. However, unlike Glass, Scott's "other work" was to have greater impact on more people over a longer period of time than did his poetry.

E. Brian Titley has chosen to concentrate on Scott's activities as an employee of the Indian Department between the years 1880 and 1932 rather than attempt to produce a definitive biography of the poet/civil servant. Wisely, he has not attempted to integrate Scott's poetry and his policy making. Titley argues convincingly that Scott kept his artistic and administrative activities separate and that there is sufficient information from Departmental sources to ascertain his attitudes about Indians and how to deal with them. Given the length of Scott's tenure in the Department, the book serves as an examination of the Department's operation for a half century.