

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Moose-Deer Island People: A History of the Native People of Fort Resolution. By David M. Smith.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7fk4j2hn>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 8(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Asch, Michael

Publication Date

1984-09-01

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/>

analysis. Nevertheless, Lloyd and Tabb provide an excellent basis for elementary understanding of Marxism.

In conclusion, *Marxism and Native Americans* is a disappointing book. The title implies that a thorough analysis will be made of Marxism and American Indian societies that will bring new ideas and principles to this underdeveloped area of thought. The book fails seriously in its suggested aim.

Howard Adams
University of California, Davis

Moose-Deer Island People: A History of the Native People of Fort Resolution. By David M. Smith. Ottawa, Ontario: National Museum of Man, 1982. 202 pp. NP Paper.

Despite pioneering efforts by such scholars as Cornelius Osgood, John Honigmann and Richard Sloboden, it was really not until June Helm's efforts beginning in the late 1950s and continuing through to the present that the analysis of the cultural life of the Northern Athabaskans of the Mackenzie Drainage (or Dene) moved beyond speculative musings. Helm's research, in a sentence, pointed to the richness and sophistication of Dene responses to environmental and economic inputs and made plain that their bilateralness and socioterritorial organization was less a "broken-down" structure (like patrilocality) and more an adaptation in its own right.

Those of us who have followed Helm, at least chronologically, have for the most part built and enriched her analyses, rather than recast them as many thought that they had. Of the 'building' and 'refinishing', the most crucial shift perhaps concerns the organization of a post-contact chronology. In her analysis, the period from 1820 to 1940s was considered as a single time of incremental change. I would think now that it is commonly accepted that there were likely two periods: an early fur trade era that lasted from 1820 until 1870 or, in parts, until World War I and which was characterized by the continued reliance on hunting; and a later period (in which trapping was more important) that lasted until Dene moved into towns in the 1950s.

David Smith's excellent ethnography of the Dene and Métis who are defined as the Moose-Deer Island House people (or the Native people of Fort Resolution) provides enrichment to this

portrait of Dene ethnohistory. In this monograph Smith traces in fine detail the course of economic and social events and their relationship to Dene life through four distinct phases: the aboriginal baseline; the early contact traditional phase of 1786 to 1890; the late contact-traditional phase from 1890 to 1950 and the micro-urban phase (or the period which began with the collapse of the fur trade in the 1950s).

Each section of the monograph provides new information derived either from his fieldwork which ended in 1972 or from archival sources. Especially important in the aboriginal baseline section is the information that Smith provides on kinship, medicine, curing and religion. His data on the early fur-trade era is rich in detail on the economy of the local Dene and confirms the idea that it was traders who, in their daily lives, depended more on Native people rather than vice versa. Of particular note here (and in later sections) is his discussion on the Métis. It is, to my mind, the finest such description now available on the subject of Dene/Métis relations as well as on the rise of Métis as a social category in Dene society. The detailed description of the late fur-trade era confirms that the Dene did not become significantly dependent on trapping until the 1920s and provides a thorough discussion on the particular economic orientations of two important local bands with highly different adaptations.

Also of great value is his discussion of post 1950s life. Here Smith carefully outlines his own observations during fieldwork. He indicates the gamut of problems that the Dene living at Fort Resolution experienced and the extent to which some of them (in particular the attempts to stop caribou hunting) were caused by the intrusion of white political and social orientations into the region. He concludes quite appropriately that

Given the rapid industrialization of the north today, it should come as no surprise that Indian and Métis rights groups quickly developed and quickly gained the support of the majority of native people. For history documents that, whatever the short-term advantage of earlier economic developments, the long term consequence was for native life to become less viable. Given the radical developments pending in the north today in the realm of resource development, native rights groups literally struggle for cultural survival. (p. 173)

This latter section, while true enough in the experience of this reviewer, is perhaps weakened by the lack of any indication either at the outset of the monograph or in its conclusion that the Dene in more recent years have worked hard to overcome these difficulties. This work includes the successful halting of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in the mid-1970s, the initiating of aboriginal rights claims and the singular input that the Dene have made toward the development of self-governing structures (with protection for aboriginal rights) in the western region of the Northwest Territories (soon to be reorganized, perhaps under the name "Denendeh," as a provincial-type jurisdiction). Smith did not need to conclude his monograph by mentioning the development of political rights groups. However, having done so, I believe it would have been useful to the reader had he also made mention of the course of events subsequent to the 1972 date which closes his ethnography.

But this is just a quibble. The book enriches greatly our knowledge of Dene post-contact history and, despite a prose which is thick at times, presents the data in an emanently useful form. For the generalist as well as specialist it provides new information on Dene life that is of extreme value. It is, in short, an essential contribution to the literature on Northern Athabaskan ethnohistory.

Michael Asch
University of Alberta

The Rock Art of the North American Indians: The Imprint of Man. By Campbell Grant. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 62 pp. \$19.95 Cloth.

Campbell Grant, one of the leading students and a pioneer of rock art in North America, has written a primer on the rock art of North American Indians. This volume is useful for the beginning student of rock art because of its succinctness and useful organization of data. The author begins with a history of research and rock art, which began in the 1600s in North America, and reviews some of the major work done to 1980. This is a helpful review of the major works and some of the major interpretations of rock art throughout the last 300 years. This review is unfortunately brief, as are the categories of description presented in