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**A Doctor among the Oglala Sioux Tribe: The Letters of Robert H. Ruby, 1953–1954.** By Robert H. Ruby. Edited and with an introduction by Cary C. Collins and Charles V. Mutschler. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 448 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

This volume contains letters written by Dr. Robert Ruby during the time he served as a physician and hospital administrator on a Sioux reservation in the mid-1950s, and constitutes what he called his “Pine Ridge diary” (ix). As did many physicians of his generation, Ruby decided to take a position with the Indian Health Service (IHS) as an alternative to active military duty in the Korean War. He and his new bride, Jeanne, arrived at Pine Ridge in August 1953 and left in December 1954. These letters to his sister originally served as notes and ethnographic background materials for a monograph (*The Oglala Sioux*) that he first self-published in 1955. That book was the beginning of a publishing career that has spanned nearly a half-century. Most of Ruby’s books have been coauthored by John A. Brown, and most are biographical accounts of Indian individuals or histories of tribal communities in the Pacific Northwest.

Ruby’s letters provide a fascinating, almost voyeuristic, look into life on Pine Ridge during the period that marked the change in Indian policy from John Collier’s New Deal to the beginning of termination. The book is divided into chapters that coincide with the months he and Jeanne lived and worked at Pine Ridge (including the eventual arrival of their infant daughter Edna). Topics include dealing with the bureaucracy, learning aspects of Native culture, and life in a small face-to-face community. Ruby arrives as an enthusiastic young doctor, eager to provide the best medical service he can amid daunting conditions of inadequate funding and bureaucratic fumbling. We see him make friends (and enemies) with members of the tribe and members of the administration. We can feel his growing frustration with the inane demands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), on the one hand, and the Indians’ resistance to modernization and assimilation, on the other.

Throughout, Ruby reflects on his own values and attitudes toward the Sioux; these reflections—sometimes unconscious, sometimes blatant—about what he is observing and experiencing place him squarely in the mainstream of the then-dominant white American attitude toward the “Indian Problem.” He believes in assimilation, thinks the Indians need to develop a work ethic, and is concerned about the way they cling to “superstitions,” yet he admires their creativity, honors their heritage, and seems genuinely to like and respect many of the individuals with whom he lives and works.

The descriptions of the inner workings of the IHS “on the ground” would sometimes be laughable if the lives and health of people were not at stake. Ruby constantly tries to protect his budget from being siphoned off by other

BIA departments. Cars disappear, refrigerators are “borrowed,” requests for routine maintenance are ignored, and strangers show up on the payroll. “Everyone in the Bureau Office wants to sponge off of Health funds. . . . The Area Office said we are paying the salaries of two laborers who are not at the hospital and whom I have not seen. . . . Today one of the Ford cars belonging to the hospital was returned . . . [our field nurse] said it was mysterious as to where it came from. . . . But the typewriter has not found its way back, nor the furniture bought by hospital funds” (31–32).

Ruby’s gifts as an amateur ethnographer emerge in detailed descriptions of his participation in several Native healing ceremonies known as *yuwipi*, which include hand-drawn sketches. He even managed to be invited to participate in two different denominations of the Native American Church. He captures rituals in such a way that the reader can feel the depth of the spiritual power experienced by the participants. The richness of the descriptions is all the more remarkable because Ruby characterized rituals that interfered with his ability to deliver sound medical care to his patients as “superstitions.”

Ruby is clearly aware of the grinding poverty on Pine Ridge and has sympathy for the people. But he frequently loses patience at what he sees as their irresponsibility, drunkenness, violence, and unwillingness to work in order to “advance.” After the welfare caseworker tells him about a woman who used her husband’s disability payments to buy and resell liquor, he writes in exasperation, “These people are corkers. Give them money and they spend it right away. Saving money or acquiring material things doesn’t appeal to them” (71). He repeatedly asks employed Indians to pay for their treatment at the hospital and is continually annoyed when they refuse to do so. Although he quotes the widespread Sioux saying, “Let the Black Hills pay for it,” he shows no sign of understanding the larger implications of sovereignty and treaty rights.

While at Pine Ridge, Ruby became acquainted with Ben Reifel, who was just starting his tenure as superintendent of the reservation and who would later serve as Republican US congressman for South Dakota. “What a man,” Ruby writes admiringly. “What a giant of a fellow. What a person. Thank God for him” (97). It is from Reifel that Ruby learns of the newly forming policy now known as termination, and he also attended a conference where the director of the area office explained the new “withdrawal” policy: “Mr. Roberts said that where state and local services were available, such as schools, the federal government does not owe the Indians schooling. Since 1924 Indians have become citizens of the United States, and the Constitution does not allow special privileges or discrimination. They are individuals with the same rights as others. . . . There is a need for public assistance in the United States but not for a race of people” (165–66). Ruby became convinced that termination, or withdrawal as it was called then, was the only way to solve the many

problems besetting Indians on Pine Ridge. Concluding *The Oglala Sioux*, the book he wrote after leaving Pine Ridge, Ruby praises Reifel and sets out the principles of termination, declaring “some say the Indian should not be ‘assimilated’ into society but should be left to his peculiar environment and ‘tribal rule.’ Such policies would keep the Indian in an aboriginal state, which is hardly fair to the Indian” (112).

Pine Ridge has had its share of chroniclers, historians, anthropologists, and activists. This book fills a chronological gap between Gordon MacGregor’s *Warriors without Weapons* (1946) and Murray Wax’s *Formal Education in an American Indian Community* (1964); if followed by Vine Deloria’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1970), a reader can build a multifaceted picture of vastly diverging perspectives of the reservation in the mid-twentieth century. MacGregor was an official in the Indian Service and a professionally trained anthropologist; his research, undertaken while he was commissioner of Indian Affairs, was intended to “suggest how the effectiveness of Indian administration may be increased” (9). Wax, also a professional anthropologist, conducted his study under the auspices of the US Office of Education in a deliberate bid to work independently of the BIA, while John Leonard’s book review describes Deloria as “a Sioux, an ex-Marine, an ex-divinity student, a soon-to-be lawyer, a savage wit” (i).

Together, these four books document a shift in social theory as well as a shift in Indian policy. From an assimilationist stance, MacGregor and Ruby see traditional Sioux culture as a barrier, holding Indians back and keeping them in poverty and dependency. Their views presage the “culture of poverty” theory as outlined by Oscar Lewis in 1966 in *La Vida*, which holds that Indians have developed a psychological and cultural profile of dependency and despair. Similarly, MacGregor writes, “the unfriendly environment [of Pine Ridge], which offers so little opportunity or satisfaction, retards the growth of personality and prevents it from becoming positive, rich, and mature. Life is lived on the defensive” (*Warriors without Weapons*, 209). These views can be compared with the tone of Ruby’s letters: “The Indians, it seems to me, are demoralized. At one time they had a strict set of morals that were admirable though not applicable to today. . . . These people have to develop new concepts. They are confused and are in a changing set of social values. They are reticent to accept the modern practices being forced upon them” (163–64). For MacGregor, the antidote is education in white-oriented schools, albeit using aspects of indigenous culture to support the curriculum; for Ruby, the answer is termination of treaty rights and “dependency,” which ultimately would lead to a complete change with full assimilation into the dominant culture.

Wax, writing after the civil rights movement, is a vociferous critic of the culture of poverty theory, which he calls the “vacuum ideology.” Wax argues

that Sioux children do not lack culture: what they and their families lack is power, that is, the power to run their own program to suit their own needs. Wax's analysis provides a transition from the ill-fated and ill-named "termination" policy to the emerging "self-determination" policy. Deloria's self-described "manifesto" launches self-determination with a vengeance. In his scathing attack on anthropologists, the BIA, churches, and other Indian "friends," Deloria calls for "retribalization," and as he predicted, the landmark legislation of the 1970s, including the Indian Child Welfare Act, Indian Education Act, and Indian Self-Determination Act, all set the stage for transferring the locus of power from top-down, white-run organizations to newly organized Indian-controlled communities, reservation and urban.

Ruby's *A Doctor among the Oglala Sioux* is a valuable source for scholars interested in the history of service in the BIA or in white attitudes toward Indians during the 1950s when major policy shifts were being undertaken. The introduction in particular contains a gem, a concise history of Indian health policy as it relates to one reservation from the nineteenth century to the present. It could stand alone if included in a course on the history of Indian policy, medical anthropology, or general public policy.

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**For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960–1990.** By Betsy Konefal. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010. 264 pages. \$28.95 paper.

Fascinated by a newspaper photograph of Mayans protesting military violence that appeared on July 30, 1978 in *El Gráfico*, a Guatemalan daily, historian Betsy Konefal set off on a journey, one that ultimately guided the research informing her book *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960–1990*. The protests were in response to the killing of at least thirty-five people and the injury of dozens more when the army opened fire on hundreds of Q'eqchi' Maya in the town of Panzos in Alta Verapaz. Occurring just a few months later, this public protest against the government and military was extremely risky. As documented by the United Nations and the Catholic Church, the military committed acts of genocide over the next few years en route to destroying hundreds of Mayan communities. Konefal's search for the Mayan activists who appeared in the photograph resulted in a detailed study of the myriad ways the Maya understood the root causes of official violence and how they responded to it.