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Turning the Power: Indian Boarding Schools, Native American Anthropologists, and the Race to Preserve Indigenous Cultures. By Nathan Sowry. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2025. 358 pages. \$65.00 hardcover; \$65.00 e-book.

The archive of American anthropology is crowded with well-known collectors, curators, and theorists; the Native people who made their work possible usually appear only in passing, if at all. Nathan Sowry's *Turning the Power* is an effort to reverse that proportion. It follows ten Native men and women who moved through mission and boarding schools and into the world of salvage anthropology between the late nineteenth century and the interwar years. The book is openly reparative in purpose, but it does more than restore names to the margin. It asks what happened when institutions built for assimilation produced people able to document, broker, contest, and sometimes sell the very cultures those institutions meant to erase.

Sowry's central claim is direct. Boarding schools, for all their violence, unintentionally produced ideal anthropological collaborators and some of those collaborators used English literacy, institutional training, and access to white patronage to preserve cultural knowledge rather than surrender it. Read beside David Wallace Adams's *Education for Extinction* (1995)—which remains the essential study of the schools themselves—Sowry's book shifts the story forward into the afterlife of that education. Read beside Margaret Bruchac's *Savage Kin* (2018)—its closest companion in the literature on undercredited Native intermediaries—Sowry's contribution is less theoretical than archival. He brings together ten figures who have rarely been treated in one frame and reconstructs their lives from correspondence, school newspapers, museum records, legal documents, publications, recordings, and artwork. The result is an empirically strong book whose value does not depend on novelty of concept.

It also succeeds where a collective biography can easily fail. These are not ten detached case studies. Dorsey, Wissler, Fletcher, Mooney, Skinner, Boas, Pratt, and Putnam recur across the chapters as employers, sponsors, gatekeepers, and beneficiaries. The Native subjects are also linked, most notably through the friendship between Richard Davis and Cleaver Warden that began at Carlisle. By the book's middle chapters Sowry has shown that he is tracing a cohort, not merely assembling parallel lives. That matters, because the book's broadest historical point depends on interconnection: early American anthropology did not simply consult Native people at the edges of its work; it was built through durable relationships with them and often on labor for which they received partial credit at best.

Several chapters make that point with real force. D. C. Duvall's mail-based fieldwork for Wissler (much of it conducted in Pikuni Blackfeet and translated by Duvall himself) suggests how much foundational ethnographic knowledge was produced by Native people working at a distance while white scholars consolidated authorship.

James Murie emerges as perhaps the most accomplished professional in the book, committed to producing work better than what had already been written on Native peoples. Cleaver Warden offers the clearest instance of anthropology converted into political use, where he took the authority and contacts earned through fieldwork into Congress in 1918 to defend religious freedom and helped found the Native American Church of Oklahoma. Meanwhile, Richard Davis shows that collaboration could be tactical rather than submissive. His invitation to Dorsey to witness the 1905 Southern Tsistsistas/Suhtai Sun Dance was not simply an act of documentation; rather, it used the anthropologist's presence as cover for a ceremony under pressure from federal authorities and missionaries. These are substantial recoveries and they support Sowry's insistence that Native collaborators did far more than relay information.

Yet the book's best evidence keeps straining against its governing phrase. "Turning the power" works well for Warden and, in a different register, for Davis. It works far less well once the book moves from protection into brokerage, and then from brokerage into extraction. Duvall's collecting was experienced by some in his community not as preservation but as spiritual violation. John Satterlee, the darkest figure in the book, recruited children into boarding schools, policed his own reservation, and excavated Menominee graves while also serving museums as a collector and interpreter. Louis Shotridge pushed further still. He pursued the Klukwan Whale House despite explicit community refusal, acquired a sacred clan helmet over the objections of elderly clan women, and removed the remains of Tlingit healers for the University Museum in Philadelphia. By that point the title phrase has stopped clarifying very much. The record Sowry assembles describes a spectrum running from protection to coercive extraction, and the book never quite finds the language to discern fully among those positions.

What is striking is that Sowry briefly possesses that language. In the Satterlee chapter he introduces the idea of "reciprocal exploitation." Anthropologists used Native knowledge for professional gain, while Native collaborators used anthropologists for wages, influence, and sometimes cultural or political ends. That formulation is sharper than the title concept because it preserves inequality while acknowledging agency. It explains far more about the book's middle chapters than the redemptive idea that collaborators simply converted oppression into empowerment. But reciprocal exploitation appears too late and disappears too soon. The conclusion returns instead to the safer language of tragedy and contradiction. It names the collaborators as neither heroes nor villains, which is fair enough, but it does not give the reader a framework strong enough to distinguish Warden's defence of religious freedom from Shotridge's removal of ancestral remains.

A second critique emerges in the conclusion where Sowry introduces the people who refused to collaborate at all. These "silent voices" are among the book's most important presences, especially the Osage Nation elder who objected that selling old things would mean ceasing to be Indian. That remark proposes a rival theory of preservation: not documentation, not transfer, but refusal. Had that counterposition been built into the book's opening argument, each collaborator's choices would have appeared against a sharper ethical horizon. Introduced only at the end, it reads more

as an acknowledgment than as a structuring challenge. The same pattern appears in the book's treatment of gender. Sowry is frank from the outset that only one sustained female subject appears. Florence Shotridge is genuinely recovered as a fieldworker and cultural expert, yet she remains joined to her husband's chapter, dies halfway through it, and is followed by Louis's much-darker collecting career. The imbalance is admitted, partly softened, but not overcome.

These criticisms matter because the book is so often better than its own frame. Sowry does not romanticize. He records Murie's extractive language, Jones' colonial attitudes in the Philippines, Satterlee's grave digging, and Shotridge's conduct against community resistance. He also offers several findings that stay with the reader. Satterlee's insistence that members of the museum staff make tobacco offerings to collected medicine bundles stands out as an early case of Indigenous-directed museum stewardship. The repatriation arc that closes the book, including the return of the Snail House in 2017 and Tlingit shaman remains in 2019, gives historical depth to ongoing debates more often discussed only in the present tense. In that respect, *Turning the Power* should be read not only beside Bruchac and Adams but also beside Douglas Cole's work on Northwest Coast collecting and Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), whose indictment of anthropology as predatory hovers behind many of these pages.

Sowry has written a valuable and often arresting book. Its contribution is chiefly archival and interpretive rather than conceptual, but that is no small thing. It restores undercredited Native actors to the making of American anthropology, shows that their relationships to salvage work ranged from strategic use to destructive complicity, and links those histories to the present through repatriation. It also leaves clear paths for future work on refusal, on women whose labor entered the record through male relatives, and on the afterlives of these collections in Native communities. If the book never fully masters the contradiction at its center, it at least refuses to hide it, and that refusal gives the project its seriousness.

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