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The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras . By Roy W. Meyer.

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In any event, it is long past time that Native American authors who have achieved a literary/intellectual stature such as that which can be rightfully claimed by Vine Deloria, Jr., receive the uncontested right to publish the fruits of their efforts. This is no more than the essential courtesy accorded Euroamericans occupying comparable academic and social positions. Until the day arrives when such a situation becomes normal reality, all Indian writers will face an ongoing dilemma of either writing in veins approved by a non-Indian publishing status quo or effectively being frozen out of print.

For all its defects then, *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* is an important book. In insisting upon his right to offer up a manuscript on any subject he chose, and in offering it as validly Indian writing simply because an Indian wrote it, Deloria took on a fight for all of us. In this sense at least, the fate of this book speaks to the situation of all Native American writers, scholars and intellectuals everywhere.

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**The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras.** By Roy W. Meyer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977. 354 pp. \$14.95.

In the words of Roy W. Meyer, *The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri* is intended as a chronological outline of the "major events and trends in the history of the Three Tribes from as far back as archaeological evidence reveals their presence in the Missouri valley, down to the time of writing" (p. xii). Because any work must be evaluated within the parameters of its stated goals, I would have to state at the start that Meyer's book is success. The reader who started this book, knowing nothing about the history of the Three Affiliated Tribes as seen by non-Indians, upon finishing it, would certainly have an excellent idea of the historical events which affected their lives.

Employing a methodology which is multidisciplinary, by a careful union of historical, archaeological, and ethnological informa-

tion, Meyer traces the history of the Three Affiliated Tribes from their earliest days as pre-contact horticulturalists to their most recent days as an uprooted but recovering people following the construction of the Garrison Dam. The writing of a history of three once distinct cultural entities that only became mixed after centuries of interaction is clearly a difficult task which Meyer has performed admirably. The use of archaeological data for the construction of the lifeways and history of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara before 1850 shows that Meyer is an enlightened historian who has learned to go beyond documentary sources in his research. Since much of the archaeological effort in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s was concentrated on the Missouri River in North and South Dakota (ironically because the construction of the large dams would destroy the very lands inhabited by the people to be studied), any author would have been truly shortsighted to ignore this vast body of usable data. Meyer's use of archaeological and ethnological information to illustrate the spatial and cultural organization of the Three Affiliated Tribes adds much to his historical outline and rounds out a history that most historians a few years ago would have thought began with Lewis and Clark.

One aspect of this work that makes the book particularly valuable is the author's sensitivity to the problems encountered by non-Indians who attempt to write Indian history. This is a problem that Meyer explicitly discusses in the "Preface," and it is clear that he attempts to guard against interjecting prejudice throughout his study. His sensitivity to the past and to the reliability of non-Indian historical sources is obvious in his discussions, for example, of the utility of Tabeau's comments on the Arikara, since Tabeau was a trader bent on making a living from the trade-hardened Arikara price negotiators; the perception of the transfer of "power" from Euro-American traders to women who had sexual relations with them in exchange for what these Euro-Americans regarded as mere trifles; the role of women in Indian society, who were clearly more than just the beasts of burden they were thought to be by Euro-American observers; and in recognizing the faulty memory and cultural misinterpretations by such men as Francis Chardon. Clearly, Meyer has studied the culture and history of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara carefully and scholarly with an eye towards ferreting out the inconsistencies in the available historical record.

Nonetheless, there are minor problems with the work that must be pointed out. One of the most important deficiencies is in Meyer's consideration of these three Indian groups as distinct tribes throughout their existence. Recent scholarship, largely led by Morton Fried (*The Notion of Tribe* [Menlo Park, CA: Cummings, 1975]), has suggested that the "tribe," as a concept denoting distinct political, economic, and social values, may in fact be a construct created by Euro-American observers based on a model of the Germanic tribes. The reevaluation of the tribal concept has specific importance to the Arikara, for example, who, as recent research suggests, were organized into a number of politically autonomous and linguistically diverse bands until at least the mid-nineteenth century. The presence of Arikara bands has been a particular problem to ethno-historians studying early contact period records and maps and for archaeologists attempting to relate the physical evidence from archaeological sites to distinct Arikara bands. As a result, it is perhaps oversimplistic to discuss the Arikara as a distinct tribe until probably after the 1830s when the bands began to live as one unit as a result of depopulation. While the identification of bands is very important to understanding the Arikara, it is probably true that Meyer could not discuss each band separately simply because they are not presently well understood.

Another less important flaw in the book, which also concerns the Arikara, is Meyer's puzzling use of the term "Ree" when discussing Arikara attacks on Euro-American traders. The term "Ree," which apparently was a shortened version of the native name, was one of the many names used by fur traders and travelers in the Upper Missouri region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This term has been forever accorded a place in contemporary scholarship by such fur trade historians as Dale L. Morgan, and its use is consistent with eighteenth and nineteenth century Euro-American usage. Nonetheless, its usage in scholarly works has derogatory connotations, and in fact, Meyer employs the term only when discussing Arikara-Euro-American conflicts. This usage has a subtle way of introducing bias into Meyer's narrative; a fact which is regrettable in the light of his otherwise successful attempts to keep this attitude out of his history.

Readers who are not deeply interested in the problems of twentieth century native Americans will probably have difficulty reading the last half of the book because it is an often complicated account of intertribal rivalries and of often well-intentioned inter-

ference by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This is an unfortunate fact since, as Meyer points out, these years have been perhaps the most important in the history of the Three Affiliated Tribes. Meyer is adept at focusing on the issue of the construction of the Garrison Dam and in showing the effects that this dam and reservoir have had on altering the lives of the already displaced Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara living in North Dakota. Meyer describes the relationships between the tribal councils and the BIA in a seemingly critical and objective manner. It is difficult but important reading and draws into focus Meyer's belief that the history of the Three Affiliated Tribes is largely a history of Indian-white relations.

Meyer's otherwise excellent book is somewhat marred by many of the passages in the "Epilogue," some of which suggest that he continues to perpetuate the "Noble Savage" myth so expertly described and evaluated most recently by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. (*The White Man's Indian* [New York: Vintage, 1978]). Meyer reflects with sadness, for example, that if the ghost of Karl Bodmer were to visit the Fort Clark area today, he could not paint the "earth lodges on the skyline, and two women with bullboats beside the water" (p. 263), due to the damming of the Missouri River. While it is regrettable that the great majority of the former villages and the ancestral homeland of the Three Affiliated Tribes are now forever covered with artificially-pooled water, and that the native vegetation of the Missouri River has been altered for all time, it is also true that Bodmer's time was a difficult one for the three groups that included a breakdown in traditional social organization, village agglomeration, depopulation, and disease. In all fairness, Meyer does mention the 1837 epidemics in contrast to the idyllic paintings of Bodmer, but his comments still contain the tacit air of wistfulness for a bygone age.

Even though I have pointed out many of what I think are errors in Meyer's history of the Three Affiliated Tribes, I do not feel that Meyer has made any factual errors or has tried to misrepresent the facts. I believe that this book provides an important addition to the growing body of literature on the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara and will be used by serious scholars for many years to come. It is a large book virtually packed with all sorts of valuable data, and the thorough bibliography allows the interested reader to go beyond this historical overview. Meyer's work is a source-

book that should be useful in one way or another to all those interested in Native American history.

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