

On Evaluating Ethnographic Representations: The Case of the Okanagan of South Central British Columbia

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A number of ethnographers over the past century have written about the traditional social organization of the Okanagan of south central British Columbia. This article compares the accounts of four of these, one by James A. Teit, one by L.V.W. Walters, one by Verne Ray, and another by Peter Carstens. While the first three share much in common, the one by Carstens is strikingly different. The former, for example, depict a communitarian social structure with an emphasis on equality for everyone. Peter Carstens, on the other hand, describes it as a stratified society (comprised of chiefs, headmen, commoners, and slaves) with a strong emphasis on rank and prestige. The objective of the article is to show how ethnography is affected by personal bias and ideology, particularly when attempting to understand *otherness*. At a time in history when white representations are called into question by Native peoples themselves, and when they are being used against living peoples in judicial and other highly charged settings, this examination allows us to appreciate the strengths and the limits, the volatility of the ethnographic process itself.

Introduction

It is now over 100 years since anthropologists began studying British Columbia's First Nations peoples. Some of the names are well known: Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, Diamond Jenness, Marius Barbeau, James Teit, and Wilson Duff. Their myriad reports, monographs, articles and books today form a considerable legacy. For some groups, there exists more than one study. The Okanagan¹ of south central British Columbia, for instance, are depicted in a number of anthropological accounts that span the entire century. Anthropologist James A. Teit wrote about this group in the early 1900s.² Leslie Spier and Verne Ray included them in their studies of 1938 and 1939 respectively. And now, in 1991, in a very different era, comes Peter Carstairs, professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto.

Such a body of literature lends itself well to a comparative analysis, in particular an analysis of how each individual comes to terms with a very different form of social organization (that is, the dynamic that sustains the group as a community). In this article, I analyze each author's position of this, and then try to account for his or her points of difference. My main goal is to understand not just their depictions of the Okanagan, but what these depictions say about the authors themselves, about their biases in attempting to understand *otherness*. At a time in history when white representations are in question by Native people themselves, and when they are being used for or against living peoples in judicial and other highly charged settings, this examination allows us to appreciate the strengths and limits, the volatility of the ethnographic process itself.

My focus is the Okanagan of south central British Columbia. This group is composed of six bands—the Okanagan Band, near Vernon; the Westbank Band,

near the town of that name; the Penticton Band, also adjacent to the town of that name; Osoyoos, near the United States border; the Lower and Upper Similkameen Bands, located in the vicinity of the town of Keremeos. They speak a common language which has been classified as part of the larger Okanagan-Colville language group, which is itself composed of seven major dialect divisions. This includes the Southern Okanagan, along the lower Okanagan River; the Methow Okanagan, along the Methow River, Washington; the Sanpoil-Nespelem, along the Columbia River; the Colville, along the Colville Valley; and the Lakes, in the Columbia River, Arrow Lakes, Slocan Lake area (Hudson, 1990).

The Ethnographic Record, 1930-1939

James Teit

James Teit (1864-1922) was the first to make a systematic ethnographic study of the Okanagan. A Shetlander by birth, Teit emigrated in 1883 to Canada, where he settled at Spence's Bridge on the Thompson River, British Columbia, just north and west of the Okanagan area. Through his wife Lucy Antko, a member of the Cook's Ferry Band, Teit became fluent in the Ntlaka'pamux (Thompson) language and knowledgeable in their ways. In 1894 Teit formed a working alliance with one of the foremost figures in the field of anthropology, Franz Boas of Columbia University, New York. This led to a series of ethnographic publications on Plateau peoples both in Canada and in the U.S. Teit was also an activist on Indian affairs and, from 1908 until his death in 1922, collaborated with the Native leaders throughout the province in their efforts to resolve land and other problems.³

Teit's major ethnographic work was on the Ntlaka'pamux of his home community, Spence's Bridge. His publications on basketry, botany, and mythology focus primarily on this group. His ethnography of the Ntlaka'pamux, published in 1900, was praised by Boas himself as setting new standards in anthropology.⁴ Teit's field research on the Okanagan followed this work on the Ntlaka'pamux. Funded mainly by Homer Sargent of Pasadena, California, Teit gathered the data for his Okanagan study intermittently between the years 1904 and 1909. Sargent had taken part in big-game hunting expeditions in northern British Columbia that were led by Teit.

Although *The Okanagan* is not as full as Teit's monograph on the Ntlaka'pamux, nevertheless it is an excellent piece of work, especially for its time. As I have written elsewhere, Teit was a sympathetic ethnographer deeply committed to as fair and full a representation as was possible for an outsider (Wickwire, in press). His field research was a vocation which consumed most of his life. Consequently, he undertook Okanagan work not only in Okanagan territory, but also in his own community, where he had access to people of Okanagan ancestry, for example, Therese Keimatko of Douglas Lake, and Alex Kwikweitesket, of Vernon.⁵ He also drew on his close association with key Okanagan political leaders, such as Alexander Chelahitsa from Douglas Lake, to gain insight into traditional Okanagan ways.⁶ Following the mandate of Boas, Teit's objective was

to uncover as much as possible about the old ways, that is, to undertake research that was reconstructive.

Okanagan social organization: Teit's view. The social organization of the Okanagan⁷ according to Teit, was very similar to that of the Thompson (Ntlaka'pamux) and eastern Shuswap.⁸ In his view, it was a society based on egalitarianism where meeting the needs of each member of the group, regardless of age, sex, or occupation was paramount. Unlike the coastal peoples, the Okanagan had no hereditary nobility, no clans, no phratries, and no societies (Teit, 1930, p. 261). The basic unit was the community, a group of loosely connected families living in a shared local area. Teit refers to this as a *band*,⁹ but he points out that such a grouping was not fixed. Families were free to winter with one band and summer with another. Teit was told that in the old days, it was not uncommon to find bands comprised of several villages. More recently, he explained, there was a growing trend toward individual villages regarding themselves as a distinct entities, each with its own chief.

According to Teit, leadership was an important feature of community life, but, unlike its counterpart in Western society, it was not hierarchically defined, nor the domain of a select few. On the contrary, leadership was dispersed widely throughout the group. A variety of chiefs were designated according to their various abilities. Their roles were determined by the immediate needs of the group. As gathering, hunting, and fishing were among the key activities of the group, certain individuals were designated to take the lead in each of these tasks. Such individuals were the recognized chiefs of work parties. There were also chiefs of ceremonial activities, for example, a chief orator, and a chief of dances. Shamans were also considered important leaders, because of their vital role in the success of a hunting or a war party. None of these chiefly positions, however, was hereditary or permanent.

The positions of some chiefs, however, were more permanent than those mentioned above. These were the chiefs of religious dances and band affairs respectively. The former chiefs were the leaders in public praying, usually in the context of special dances; the latter chiefs were looked upon as the "fathers of the people" who gave advice on all internal matters of the band. The band chief according to Teit (1930):

exhorted the people to good conduct, and announced news personally or through criers. To some extent they regulated the seasonal pursuits of the people.... They gave decisions and admonitions in petty disputes and quarrels, and sometimes, when asked to arbitrate, they settled feuds between families.... Some of them had messengers or helpers, who acted generally in a persuasive way as peace officers. (pp. 262-263)

In addition to all of the above named chiefs was another who was recognized as the head chief of all the tribes, with the exception of possibly the Lakes people (who lived in the Arrow Lakes, Kootenai Lakes and Slocan Lakes regions of the province).

Chiefship was an important responsibility, but as Teit describes it this was not a position characterized by prestige or wealth. On the contrary, chiefs, especially

band chiefs, were to keep peace in the group and to provide a model of acceptable behavior. In Teit's words, it was their duty to "be hospitable, help the poor, show a good example, and give small feasts or presents to the people from time to time" (1930, p. 261). Teit noted that, for the past thirty-five years, chiefship had come strongly under the influence of both the Indian Department and the church (p. 262).

Teit was told that no permanent councils existed among the Okanagan. When there was important news to convey or important matters to consider, the chief or another prominent individual in the community notified a crier, whose role it was to notify the rest of the community of a council meeting. Such meetings were open to everyone in the group who also had a right to speak if they wished to do so.

This political egalitarianism translated as well to hunting, fishing, berrying, and root digging, which was free to all of the Okanagan people, although members of one band did not generally harvest roots or berries in another band's territory without first obtaining the consent from that band (Teit, 1930, p. 277). Only snares, deer fences, and deer nets were considered private property. Game was shared liberally by the hunters with all the members of the group, regardless of whether they went on the hunt. There was a considerable gift exchange of various foods among families during the winter months.

Teit was told that the Okanagans had been generally peaceful and enjoyed good relations with their neighbors. He noted only a couple of instances of aggression. One involved the driving of the Stuwix, the Athapaskan-speaking peoples out of the Similkameen Valley. The other involved skirmishes with the Shuswap some time around 1700. Such raids were undertaken in small groups led by a special war chief. Generally, however, Teit's historical reconstruction is one of a peaceful relationship toward their neighbors, even during the early years of white settlement (Teit, 1930, pp. 258-259).

The southern Okanagan: The view of L.V.W. Walters. In the summer of 1930, anthropologist Leslie Spier supervised a group of six graduate students, including L.V.W. Walters, in a major field study of the Okanagan bands who occupied the area from Methow in the south, to British Columbia, just north of the international border. Spier edited the notes gathered during this project and published them as a single ethnographic study in 1938. This is a colorful ethnography with references to specific individuals throughout, along with their verbatim accounts and stories. Although it deals primarily with the southern Okanagan, nevertheless, in L.V.W. Walters' chapter on Social Structure, the parallels with Teit's findings are striking and therefore worth considering here.

Walters, like Teit, described a distinctly egalitarian society devoid of any "feeling of class distinction," where "every individual is free to make his own decisions and to choose his own manner of existence within the limitations of the culture pattern of the group," (1938, p. 87). There was no conception of good birth with the possible exception of the band chief and his family, the recognition of which, as Walters was quick to point out, "does not approximate an attitude of caste," (p. 95). Persons considered to be poor, improvident, or lazy were not

abandoned by the group, but were cared for and provided with food without any expectation of return (p. 87). There were no social restrictions placed on marriage.

As among the northern Okanagan, the band, and not the tribe was the key social unit. Bands were relatively autonomous, consisting of a group of related families who usually wintered together. The composition was not fixed, however, as people were free to live with other friendly bands if they wished to do so (Walters, 1938, p. 87). Again too, Walters found that leaders (the hunting leader, the war leader, the dance leader, the house leader, and the curing doctor) were dispersed through the group according to ability. People attributed their special abilities in these areas to the powers imparted to them from the natural/spiritual world. Such spirit power, according to Walters, was "a potent force in Sinkaietk social organization" (p. 87). These chiefs were neither hereditary, nor necessarily permanent (p. 87).

The only exception was the band chief, whose position was hereditary. This was not strict heredity, however, as a chief could appoint someone other than his own son as chief if he wished to do so (Walters, 1938, p. 96). Although band chiefs were regarded as the most important persons in the group because of their moral influence, they were not necessarily wealthy. If they were wealthy, this was usually due to the gifts bestowed on them by people in their bands for their good works (p. 96). It was required of the chief and his family that they exemplify the virtues of the group, in other words, that they should not lie, steal, nor fight with their people. These chiefs had helpers, young men who assisted them in various ways, from running messages to enunciating the chief's speeches. In return for this service, these aides became as sons to the chief (p. 98).

In villages where there the band chief did not reside, a headman acted in his place. This man was not appointed by the band chief, but by the group for his special abilities, good judgment, and spiritual power, especially in directing communal hunting and fishing expeditions (Walters, 1938, p. 98). In most matters he acted freely without having to consult the band chief. In matters initiated by the band chief, such a headman was accountable to the band chief.

Serious matters which affected the group as a whole, such as personal disputes, settling differences (including the desire for revenge), and dealing with crises (including recent instances of starvation) were handled by a council composed of the band chief and all the old people of the band, including women, who, in Walter's terminology, were often regarded as chieftainesses (Walters, 1938, p. 98). Above all, explained Walters, respect for the decisions of the elders guided the social organization of the Okanagans: "This influence of the elders is the factor in Plateau organization that keeps peace and order. No younger person of good character ever disobeyed the command of any older person" (p. 91).

Of great interest, Walters included in her account some observations on the nature of chiefship by fur trader Alexander Ross. In the early 1800s Ross had noted that

The government ... is little more than an ideal system of control. The chieftainship descends from father to son: it is, however, merely a nominal superiority in most cases. Their general maxim is, that the Indians were born to be free, and that no man has a natural right to the obedience of another.... It

is wonderful how well the government works for the general good, and without any coercive power to back the will of the chief, he is seldom disobeyed. (Walters, 1938, p. 94)

On the subject of property and ownership, Walters found that food sites and tribal territory theoretically belonged to the tribe, but friendly non-Okanagan peoples were allowed the free use of it for hunting, fishing or food-gathering at any time (p. 91). The notion of thievery was practically nonexistent among them, noted Walters, "since any property may be had for the asking," (p. 91).

Walters was told that the southern Okanagan had been a peaceful people for at least several centuries, rarely initiating conflict. In fact, harsh words and unkindness appeared to be absent altogether (p. 74). According to Walters, they treated most Salish-speaking people in the Plateau as their friends (p. 125). Cases of fighting arose only to protect themselves from attacks by other more aggressive groups (p. 79). All wounded persons were usually cared for, regardless of which side they represented.

The Plateau peoples: Verne Ray's overview, 1939. In 1939, anthropologist Verne Ray, under the sponsorship of the University of Washington, published a study of cultural relations in the Plateau of northwestern American. The product of 10 years of research, based on visits to every Native group in the area, this is an important study that provides the first ever cultural profile of the Plateau area. Ray's conclusions not only corroborate the cultural profiles of both Teit and Walters for the northern and southern Okanagan, but show how the Okanagan fit a pattern typical of the larger Plateau area. He found, for example, that an emphasis on equality for everyone was an old and fundamental principle of life for the Plateau people (Ray, 1939, pp. 24, 30), and that both wealth and rank were virtually absent on the Plateau (p. 35). In keeping with this pattern, Ray concluded that in contrast to the coastal peoples, among the Plateau peoples there was an impressive emphasis on pacifism, particularly in the central regions (p. 35). Where there was evidence of warfare, Ray urged that it be conceived as the expanded raid, as opposed to the expanded or extended feud. Occasionally such raids flared into "a somewhat sustained group conflict," but these were in no way "tribal conflicts" (p. 39). War parties were small for the most part and associated more with individuals than with the group as a whole. His overall observation was that friendliness characterized the area, so much so that in the central regions, "the relations [among peoples] are so harmonious that the taking of slaves is unthinkable" (p. 34).

The Ethnographic Record of 1991: Peter Carstens

After a long hiatus, anthropologist Peter Carstens has reintroduced the issue of Okanagan ethnography with the publication of his new book *The Queen's People*. Unlike the work of his predecessors, however, the focus of Carstens' study is not the Okanagan at large, but rather one of its bands, the Okanagan Band, located near Vernon. Carstens' particular interest is reserve life: how reserves came to be and how these artificially created social environments affect the persons living in them. This interest grew out of his previous research conducted 30 years ago on black reserves in South Africa and Namibia (Carstens,

1991, p. xix). Carstens began his research on the Okanagan reserve in 1978, and his book represents approximately 12 months in the field, in addition to archival research. His objective was to understand the Okanagan in their contemporary sociological context.

Carstens' portrait of contemporary life on the Okanagan reserve is a bleak one revealing a people whom he sees to have been under the hegemonic spell of white people and their institutions since sometime in the mid-1860s. This hegemony has, to Carstens, colored all aspects of their lives ever since. Carstens found that the Okanagan live "guarded" lives, protecting jealously their private property under the delusion that they may one day become wealthy at the expense of a kinsman or neighbor (pp. 140, 143). He notes that they are preoccupied with "esteem, prestige and status," which pervades everything from political power and lifestyle to education. This affects daily life, he explains, to the point that visiting back and forth between homes is private and even secret, as people strive to attain higher social status (pp. 282-283). Carstens finds the community to be rife with factionalism, which he experienced personally. Thus, in Carstens' opinion, "the romantic myth portraying rural communities as close-knit collections of people enjoying warm personal relations and institutional completeness does not apply for the Okanagan 'community'" (p. 140).

Although his primary focus is the contemporary community, Carstens is also interested in historical/ethnographic reconstruction.¹⁰ Yet where his work overlaps with the work of Teit, Walters, and Ray, Carstens' survey of the records presents a surprisingly different image than that generated by the very authors—Teit, Walters and Ray—upon which he relies.

According to Carstens, the Okanagan lived in clusters of bands under the tutelage of a headman. Such bands, he explains, often coalesced, giving rise to what he calls *band confederacies* (p. 5). Carstens studied the division of power in the traditional Okanagan authority system (i.e., power dispersed through temporary subsidiary chiefs, shamans, and band chiefs) and concludes that it was the source of tension for band chiefs. As these chiefs were expected to lead rather than to rule, those who happened to be weak leaders had to rely on others for assistance. For this reason, explains Carstens, in order to be a successful Okanagan chief, and "to maintain his office without falling foul of ... rivals and lieutenants" (p. 14) one had to have great skill in the manipulation of social relationships. This was the source of considerable tension, leading to what Carstens describes as the "vacillating institution of headmanship or chiefship involving a complex of relations between people with influence and prestige and commoners and slaves" (p. 12).

In Carstens' view Okanagan social organization was not only stratified, but also marked by a preoccupation with wealth, rank, and war. "Far from shunning elitism," he explains, "the Okanagan fostered it with great fervour" (p. 23). Chiefs and headmen were "members of an elite" who could, by various means, such as speechifying and creating instant rituals "boost their personal esteem" (p. 15). Marriage itself was political, as families saw in it a strategy to "acquire more prestige" (p. 26). Even the reciprocal exchange of meals is interpreted by Carstens

in light of social stratification as an activity the commoners engaged in, and which acted as a leveling mechanism to distinguish them from other high-ranking peoples who gave feasts to draw attention to their superior social position (p. 26). Arguing too that anthropologists have for too long downplayed the economic value of land to hunter-gatherers, Carstens argues that the Okanagan were never casual occupiers of the land (p. 6). Rather, in their seasonal movements, they relied on the idea that they were the sole owners of their land, to which they were "jealously attached" (p. 54).

Discussions of warfare, battles, and weaponry figure prominently in Carstens' ethnographic description. He suggests that warfare was common to all groups (p. 28), and that in time of surplus the Okanagan engaged in "premeditated war" (p. 7). It was during warfare, he writes, that the Okanagan demonstrated their greatest unity, "taking on a tribal character when they united against a common enemy" (p. 21). Carstens notes that warfare is an important institution for understanding the "range and dimensions of political life and potential authority of an Okanagan chief" (p. 21). The wars Carstens describes are those in the early 1700s with the Shuswap that, he explains, were the most notorious and violent. One of the last of the traditional chiefs, Pelkamulox III, who died in 1822, is characterized by Carstens as a megalomaniac driven by ambition and building upon his military strength (p. 20). When by the mid-1860s, "whether they wished to or not," the Okanagan had fallen "under the hegemonic spell of white people and their institutions," they adapted almost naturally, their preexisting preoccupation with status and achievement now evident in their early dealings with the fur traders, where they were more attracted to luxury goods than to anything else.

Evaluating the Ethnographic Process.

I have presented summaries of four Okanagan ethnographic accounts. While those by Teit, Walter, and Ray share much in common, the one by Carstens is strikingly different. What Teit, Ray, and Walters depict as a communitarian social structure with an emphasis on equality for everyone, Carstens describes as a stratified society (comprised of chiefs, headmen, commoners, and slaves) with a strong emphasis on rank and prestige. Band chiefs, whom Teit and Walters describe as fathers of the people, whose main function was to set a good example and to exemplify the virtues of the group, are portrayed by Carstens as members of an elite with a great capacity for manipulating others to their own ends. On the one hand, Teit, Walters, and Ray describe a liberal attitude toward the use of land by outsiders; on the other, Carstens maintains that the Okanagan harbored a jealous concern for their land. The function of meal sharing and food exchange also differs greatly in the two sets of accounts. Where for Teit and Walters, such sharing was a basic principle of life, to Carstens it was a "leveling mechanism" setting commoners apart from high ranking people. While Teit, Walters, and Ray describe the Okanagan as a pacifist group, Carstens depicts them as quite war-like. Whereas Ray was reluctant even to use terminology such as *war*, preferring instead to use terms such as the *extended raid*, Carstens applies Western military

terminology liberally, with terms such as *war*, *military strength*, *foreign enemy*, even *megalomaniac*.

With such disparity in these two sets of accounts, it is important to consider not only why this is so, but to assess the validity of two distinct points of view regarding Okanagan social organization. Was it an ideal form of communitarianism, as three authors suggest? Or was it merely a form of competitive individualism, as Carstens implies? Such an understanding is of more than passing interest today where those who discover in traditional Native communities anything indicating a set of values and social processes “superior” to our own are increasingly dismissed as “romantic” and “nostalgic.” Carstens’ surprising reconstruction plays beautifully into this often antiromantic historical revisionism.

A starting point in the resolution of this problem is to examine the source material used by each author. Teit relied entirely on field research conducted during the first decade of this century. Although he does not name his consultants in the final published work, nevertheless it is revealed in his unpublished notes and in his correspondence with Franz Boas that he interviewed widely, not only among the Okanagan, but also among other plateau peoples in British Columbia, Washington, and Idaho. No other early ethnographer studied the plateau cultures in as much depth as did Teit. Teit’s political activism also influenced his anthropological work, earning him the trust and respect of Native leaders throughout the Interior plateau. Although his work was reconstructive, many of his consultants had in fact lived through the latter half of the 19th century, and therefore could describe the early contact period from their own experience. They were also able to reconstruct second hand the early 1800s based on what had been passed down to them directly by their parents and grandparents.

Walters’ account is similarly grounded in field evidence, which appears throughout the text in the form of Native names, short biographical sketches, and verbatim testimony. As with the consultants Teit interviewed, Walters’ consultants, as evidenced in her text, could reconstruct the old ways with great clarity. Ray’s *Cultural Relations* was based not only on his work on the Sanpoil and Nespelem (Ray, 1932), but on 10 years of research, including visits to every plateau group mentioned in his study.

Peter Carstens relied mainly on Teit as the primary source for his overview of traditional Okanagan society. But he combined this with his own interviews gathered over the course of 12 months in the field. He considered such field research to be valuable:

It was only after I had received some instruction in the traditions of the Okanagan from the people themselves and generally immersed myself in Okanagan life, that Teit’s often unimaginative ideographic writing began to provide the inspiration of enlightened ethnography. (Carstens, 1991, p. 3)

Herein lies the first obvious weakness in Carstens’ work. Although he comments on the value of his own field research, nowhere does he provide tangible evidence of this. At a time when the demand for the Native voice is loud and clear, Carstens provides no excerpts from or references to particular conversa-

tions recorded in his notes. Indeed, throughout his ethnographic and historical summary, no names of individuals in the community are given at all, nor the specific pieces of information they contributed to Carstens' study. Some individuals are mentioned in the Acknowledgments, for example, Mary Abel and Mary Powers, but Carstens gives no indication of how or where information from these two women was incorporated, if at all. Dan Logan, another member of the Okanagan community, is mentioned in the Acknowledgments as a talented genealogist and important chronicler of family and kin relationships, especially in the context of reserve factionalism and stratification. Are we to assume from this statement that Carstens' nonconventional interpretation of Okanagan social stratification and factionalism was influenced by Logan? Unless this is so, we are at a loss. After all, Carstens tells us that Teit was the primary source for the protohistoric period. Yet Carstens' account stands almost diametrically opposed to Teit's. This study is a serious misrepresentation of what Teit intended.

When trying to account for such difference in perspectives, we are forced to consider the potential impact of the author's ideology or bias. Teit spent most of his adult life among Native peoples. He hunted with them, he fought their political battles with them, and he traveled with them to Ottawa on three occasions to assist them in airing their grievances before the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. He had a deep respect for their lives, their language, and their history. He was, in short, in sympathy with the people, and his communitarian view reflects this. If his ideology influenced his research on Okanagan social structure, it took the form of a critique of his own culture and a belief that the Native view of the world and social relations represented something of considerably more substance and truth. Yet Teit's view was corroborated several decades later by others who were not of the same political persuasion.

Carstens, by contrast, studied the Okanagan from the vantage-point of an outside social scientist whose objective it was to report on the nature of community life on Native reserves. Unlike Teit, whose concern was to reconstruct and to convey to the outside world a dynamic that he carefully documented of a society distinct from anything in the West, Carstens is, quite clearly, driven by a predetermined, if unconscious, compulsion to dispel such notions as the "romantic noble-savage view" (p. 274). It is almost with glee that Carstens dismisses the mythical "mother's knee," "semi-academic, natural history view," that claims that:

in their original state Indians lived rich and satisfying lives ... a happy blend of the best qualities of the animal and the spiritual domain, admired for their knowledge of naturopathic medicine and their mystical familiarity with nature. (p. 289)

What Carstens advocates instead is a more "realistic" view—the Indian as peasant. Because of their dependence on the wealthy, dominant economic power, reserve societies are, he asserts, best portrayed as "peasant communities." Indeed, despite the rich ethnographic evidence to the contrary, Carstens goes so far as to assert that it is not Indianness per se that distinguishes the Okanagan from other British Columbians, but rather the fact that they are "reserve-dwellers" who "can

make few choices in their daily rounds as to how they should run their lives” (p. 276).

Yet Carstens is not similarly critical of his own perspective. For example, he appears to have closely allied himself to one major informant, the economically aggressive Dan Logan (p. 192ff.). Perhaps in consequence Carstens discovered a rampant factionalism in the Okanagan community that he experienced personally, as well as a significant striving among many for “esteem, prestige, and status.” Despite its ahistorical character and the obvious distortions in his own attitudes and experiences, Carstens’ work becomes a crusade, under the guise of social science, to debunk a culture that is different from his own, to destroy its otherness. Thus does Carstens’ theoretical perspective on community life reflect his own belief that few, if any, communities are “utopian havens of peace and good fellowship” (p. xvii). Instead, he asserts time and again, without evidence, that rural farm families generally have never enjoyed idyllic and peaceful lives (p. 140). Some communities, such as Indian reserves, he notes, “are riddled with factions, dissension, quarrelsomeness, poverty, sickness, not to mention the frustration of political impotence” (p. xvii).

What Carstens failed to recognize, however, was that these concerns were a reflection of his own ideology. His bleak portrayal of the Okanagan community, both past and present, stems from the fact that he himself did not believe in the integrity or romance of small communities. He saw no value in the investigation of otherness, in the pursuit of uniqueness of the Okanagan, or in the possible connections between the integrated community that Teit, Walters, and Ray portrayed, and the present-day institutions and beliefs.

This explains why there is so much disparity between the two sets of accounts. What Teit and Walters describe is the Okanagan world from the inside; Carstens, on the other hand, portrays it from the outside.

Here too my own experience comes in. Since 1977 I have spent a great deal of time in Okanagan and adjacent communities, including the Okanagan Reserve, and the community I know is not the one that Carstens portrays. What I have experienced through many years of visiting elders throughout the Plateau—people like Mary Abel, Mary Powers, Harry Robinson, Aimee August, Louis Phillips, Hilda Austin, and their families—is a very different world from Carstens’. It is the real world of daily life—the impact of births and deaths, and how these reaffirm one’s place in the larger Okanagan community that still stretches well into Washington State; the ongoing spiritual life of the people, still being expressed in all-night winterdances and sweathousing; rodeos, powwows; Native foods and medicines still shared liberally among households; and the persistence of berry-picking and an informal economy based on trading and giftgiving.

What we have in the Carstens account is ideology masquerading as ethnography and the result is the imposition of a white, male Western world view onto a culture that in fact does not fit that mold. This is a dangerous situation as only a few people can challenge the text: those who know the ethnographic sources that

are used selectively, and especially those who are sufficiently familiar with the Okanagan community to know how it may have been colored by Carstens himself.

In sum, Carstens' contribution is, ironically, exactly the opposite of what he intends: proof of the need to root out false objectivity, and a patronizing ideological self-righteousness, and an affirmation, now more than ever, of the necessity to recognize, respect, and work with the *other*.

Notes

¹Note that the spelling of *Okanagan* varies throughout this article. In Canada the spelling is *Okanagan*; in the United States it is *Okanagon*. James Teit, whose work is mentioned throughout this article, used the latter spelling.

²See Teit (1930). This work was edited by Franz Boas from Teit's field notes and was published eight years after the latter's death. Much of the fieldwork for the study was undertaken between 1904 and 1909.

³On the role of Teit in an early Native political movement, see Wickwire (n.d.).

⁴On the merits of this work, see Wickwire (in press).

⁵These names and others appear in Teit's detailed field notes on Okanagan songs. The originals are held by the Archives of the Canadian Ethnology Service, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Hull, Quebec.

⁶In *The Okanagan*, Teit includes a detailed genealogy spanning seven generations, and he acknowledges Alexander Chelahitsa and several others for this information.

⁷This summary is derived from Teit (1930, pp. 261-263).

⁸Teit refers here to "eastern" Shuswap to distinguish it from the "western" Shuswap, whose social organization was closer to the west coast than to the central Plateau.

⁹Today the term *band* has assumed many different meanings. As Teit uses the term, it simply describes a loose collection of families who sometimes, but not always, wintered and summered together.

¹⁰Eight of the book's 17 chapters are historical, from a description of the protohistoric period to the "political incorporation" and "assimilation" of chiefs from 1865 to the present. In this article I focus primarily on the content of the first chapter, "Traditional Okanagan Society and Institutions," and to a lesser extent, the second chapter, "The Beginnings of White Hegemony."

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