

Review Article

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Handbook of North American Indians: Northwest Coast (volume 7), edited by Wayne Suttles. Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990. Pp. xv, 777. \$47.50 U.S.

Publication of *Handbook of North American Indians: Volume 7, Northwest Coast* is an important event for anthropologists of the Northwest Coast and provides an appropriate occasion to comment on the anthropology of the region. Problems relating to the topics of gender, inequality, demography, and ethnographic authority are particularly vexing in thinking about the practice of anthropology on the Coast and in reviewing the book.

Volume 7 is the ninth in a series intended eventually to contain twenty volumes dealing with native people north of Mexico. The series is divided into ten volumes dealing with culture areas, two volumes of biographical dictionaries, and one each dealing with Indians in contemporary society; the environment; origins and population; technology and visual arts; languages; and an index. These volumes have been released sporadically since 1971. Volume 2, *Indians in Contemporary Society*, has not yet been released, so it is impossible to judge how well the volumes will work together in providing a picture of the specifics of contemporary life. Volume 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, was released in 1988, but must cover so much ground that it is not consistently useful in supplementing volume 7 by answering particular questions that arise about the Northwest Coast. There is, for example, only a very brief mention of the film *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* under a biography of Edward Curtis. It is not clear that the handbooks, taken as a set, will provide information detailed enough to be useful as an authoritative reference collection, although volume 7 has proven frequently useful in handling specifics of the Northwest Coast.

Nevertheless, publication details demonstrate that volume 7 is a significant achievement. Volume editor Wayne Suttles, general editor William

C. Sturtevant, and a planning committee of nine notable researchers working on the Northwest Coast have produced a work of 777 pages divided into 58 chapters written by 59 authors and containing hundreds of pictures. The work has five sections: Introduction, History of Research, History of Contact, The Peoples, and Special Topics.

The authors are primarily anthropologists, but not exclusively so. Several are historians (Cole, Darling, and Beckham), one an art historian (Jonaitis). At least nine of the contributors carry on applied research on behalf of tribal and band governments or as employees on a contract basis, an important indicator of co-operative involvement of natives and scholars. Unfortunately, only three native people have contributed chapters (Webster, Worl, and Booth) and their contributions total only eighteen pages.

Each of the handbooks is intended to be authoritative, and volume 7 is no exception. This book summarizes much of the anthropological research done on the Northwest Coast, beginning with the work of Franz Boas more than a century ago. A paradoxical quality of the handbook makes gaining a clear understanding of the research on the coast difficult: many of the very best scholars working on the Northwest Coast have contributed chapters and yet too frequently the chapters do not present a good picture even of their own work. Indeed, much of the interesting and useful contemporary work in the Northwest Coast is absent or given short shrift. It can even be argued that the handbook stands as a monument to a bygone anthropology and a summary of the efforts to reconstruct aboriginal culture. In this sense, the handbook, which perhaps is intended as a starting point for understanding a particular people or issue, is also an ending point. The handbook makes one wonder if there is research being carried out that contributes to the larger interests of the discipline of anthropology. I will try to show that there is, but there are also important gaps which limit the contribution of the anthropology of the region to the discipline as a whole.

To get at these issues I pose several related questions: Who is the audience, and how well does this volume serve their needs? What does the volume tell us about the relationship between native people and anthropologists? How well does the volume fulfil the vision of editor Suttles as expressed in his Introduction?

Three overlapping sets of people are likely users of the volume: anthropologists, associated professionals working with native communities, and native people themselves. I will focus on the utility of this book for the first two groups. Anthropologists whose research interests are centred in the Northwest Coast will find this volume invaluable for the bibliography,

short summary articles written by leading scholars, photographs and maps, the availability of diverse material in one place, and the picture it provides of the history and nature of research in the area. Perhaps the greatest feature of the handbook is the photography. I counted 511 photographs, many of which provide a vitality and immediacy that is missing in the text, even though most of these are pictures of objects, not people. There is a long history of photography of native people in the region, and the volume provides a useful compilation of collections (pp. 95-97). Contemporary photographers such as Jensen, a contributor to the handbook, and scholars writing about photography such as Marr (1989) and Blackman (1981) help make photography an area in which there is successful co-operation between the academic and native communities in documenting native life.

The problem lies with the utility of the handbook for anthropologists whose work is situated outside of the Northwest Coast. They will find that some of the important contemporary issues of concern to anthropologists are not represented in the volume. Volume 7 provides, for example, no insight into the 30 to 40 per cent of Northwest Coast native people who live in urban centres, even though Hansen (1978), Mooney (1976), and Mitchell (1976), for example, have taken up this topic and as long ago as 1949 Smith wrote *Indians of the Urban Northwest*. The handbook employs none of the recent insights concerning gender, ignores important methods of contemporary demographic analysis, and largely ignores internal colonialist approaches to analysis. There is no real sociology of the native people of the Northwest Coast revealed here. One has little sense of the connection between the work described within and research elsewhere.

Perhaps the most important of the lapses concerns gender. There are standard descriptions of the division of labour by sex and discussions of life cycle, but there is no hint within the handbook of gender variability or of how these societies define men and women. Rather, a polar system of male and female is assumed. There is no discussion of the work done on the Northwest Coast that does deal specifically with gender, especially work dealing with colonization and gender (Klein 1980). Indeed, the only reference that might be taken to deal with gender variability is this concerning the Kwakwaka'wakw: "... a man declared his son's foot or half of his body to be a woman, and a fictitious marriage was arranged and performed with a man to whom the privileges were then transferred" (Coderre: 368). The descriptions of berdache provided, for example, in 1941 within Ford's *Smoke from Their Fires: The Life of a Kwakiutl Chief* do not work their way into the volume.

Even more important, perhaps, is the pervasive gender bias in the handbook. Frequently, cryptic passages undermine the credibility of their authors. For example, we are told without further comment that "Upper Coquille wives were sometimes driven to suicide by their husbands, who then had to pay fines" (Miller and Seaburg: 585). Concerning the Takelma, "The village sweathouse, a rectangular, earth-covered structure usually large enough for six men, was owned by one of the wealthier men. Women, denied access to the men's sweathouse, used a temporary structure of sticks and blankets" (p. 591). This last passage created for me an image of envious women standing outside the entrance to the smokehouse, forced to make do with inadequate shelter. But I do not accept that this is a meaningful description. It is hard to decipher the real issues in this case, and both passages trivialize women and provide little sense of women's reality. A final example from this same chapter is, "To be respectable a woman had to be purchased in marriage" (p. 585). There is now a sufficient literature that provides a more useful understanding of bride price. Gender bias in original accounts of native society is perpetuated here.

These passages give a frightening view of how cultures are known. One wonders if the above conclusions were derived from observations of people, and, if they were, how many examples of such "behaviour" were necessary to establish this as culturally appropriate behaviour in the mind of the anthropologist. It seems more likely that no one actually observed any of this but rather that these details are based on some sort of local lore, now transformed into anthropological account.

In another chapter, "History of the Early Period," there is a description of the increase of polygamy because of the increased wealth of the early fur-trading period. Women are described in this context only in that their economic value increased because of the importance of their labour, their utility in extending ranking men's political influence through marriage to other natives and to white traders, and income derived from prostitution (Cole and Darling: 130). This sort of passage takes us back to the old days of regarding women as passive non-participants, a view that has been rightfully criticized (Green 1980). One also wonders why, if women faced this sort of changed circumstances, the authors concluded that "the fur trade, on the other hand, had been generally beneficial and stimulating in its effects" (p. 119) and that change "did not revolutionize Indian society" (p. 133). Cole and Darling seem to be focusing on the issue of "directed change" versus "non-directed change" and this proves to be misleading. Non-directed changes can be significant.

There have been many female anthropologists who have carried out fieldwork on the Northwest Coast, both in the early days of research and more recently. These include, among many others, Gunther, Garfield, Smith, De Laguna, Collins, Snyder, Blackman, Stearns, and Boelscher. If anything, work in the Northwest Coast, as in the case of the American Southwest, is notable for the inclusion rather than the exclusion of female scholars. Several have produced work aimed specifically at depicting the lives of women, especially the work of Blackman. In some cases, female researchers have reflected the same Euro-centrism which characterizes much of Northwest Coast literature in applying such concepts as prostitution, the sale of wives, or barrenness, without clarifying how native people viewed the conditions purportedly described by such terms. In the work on the Northwest Coast the problem is not simply that male observers brought male biases to their work. Instead the problem is a different, perhaps more difficult one. In much of the handbook, one is unsure whether native people themselves regularly practised the rejection of wives who produced no offspring, or if the idea of "barrenness" simply reflects the perspective of the writer depicting native society. A summary of the literature of the Northwest Coast ought not to suffer from the problems of biased language and lack of conceptual clarity that are evident in the handbook.

Another area in which the handbook reports little overlap with contemporary theory is demography. The handbook contains an interesting chapter on demographic history, 1774-1874, by Robert Boyd. This chapter is very useful in pulling together a great deal of information about population and disease history in both the pre and post-contact periods. Very good maps accompany this work. Other chapters use sex-ratios as indicators of warfare. But beyond this there is very little attempt in other chapters to employ demographic data to cast light on kinship systems, inheritance patterns, land tenure or leadership, as is done elsewhere in studies of native North Americans. Martin (1984), for example, dealt with all of these variables in examining Havasupai cultural change in light of average age differences between husbands and wives, and fathers and children. Others have usefully examined family cycling by use of demographic variables. This sort of analysis is absent from the handbook and, one would believe, research in the area. Our understanding of Nuu-chah-nulth primogeniture, for example, might benefit from such analysis. One is left to imagine by default that an apparent convergence towards European systems of residence, described in several chapters, is simply the result of European imposition. Other factors at play are left unexamined, ironically, as non-native Canadian and American residence practices themselves shift in

response to new conditions, and sometimes appear as solutions that are similar to those found within native communities. Such analysis is largely absent in the Northwest Coast literature and also the handbook.

Although Suttles lists social inequality as a major research topic in the Northwest Coast, this has to do with arguments over whether the societies were rank- or class-based, whether slaves were economically important, and concerned how status differences arose (Suttles and Jonaitis: 87). These are interesting issues, but scholars interested in broader topics such as world systems approaches or internal colonialism models will not find much of interest in the volume. Such approaches do inform the work of some researchers in the Northwest, and Boxberger's (1986) study of Lummi fisheries is an example. Knight's (1978) analysis of Indian labour in B.C. is referenced, as is Boxberger's work, but this sort of research is not central to the handbook. Both of these studies show the ways in which the native economy is engaged within a larger economic system, and how this influences the lives of everyday people.

Evidence of conflict between natives and whites seems consciously edited out of the volume, although there are exceptions. Perhaps it is simply the format of the handbook series that leaves little room for this topic. This is a shame because absence of a record of conflict leaves out a critical portion of the record of the last two hundred years and because it makes anthropologists appear complacent or to be contributors in the systematic efforts to dismantle native communities. It is also a shortcoming because readers of the handbook will want to understand more precisely why native people approach the immense political and legal issues facing them in the ways that they do. It is especially disappointing because experts such as Lane and Beckham might have been given extra space to write about these critical issues.

Stearns, in her chapter on the Haida, Beckham, writing on the history of western Oregon since 1846, and Renker and Gunther, writing on the Makah, were among those whose chapters contained analysis of conflict. The Stearns chapter is notable for an explicit effort to set Haida reality within the context of the world economy and for showing the interplay of social and demographic variables in producing the subordinate position the Haida find themselves in. Stearns also made use of the fact that some Haida live in the United States and some in Canada, so that differences in contact history result in differences in Haida communities today. This approach, which might have been applied to Coast Salish and Tsimshian communities as well, seems to derive from the fact that Stearns focused on understanding the circumstances created by internal colonialism. This

chapter still does not give a human face to the Haida, however. Speck's (1987) work on the politics of medical care does provide a powerful glimpse of everyday life, but her book is neither mentioned in the text nor cited in the bibliography.

The eleven-page chapter on the history of western Washington since 1846 by Cesare Marino stands in contrast to the chapter by Beckham on a similar topic and presents a history that is not peopled with breathing humans. The chapter deals inadequately with problems native people faced in moving onto reservations with others with whom they were unfamiliar or were enemies; with the devastating effect of compulsory attendance at residential schools had on family life; with the circumstances faced by those whose allotments were rescinded; with the government efforts to impose the terms of the Indian Reorganization Act on tribes who voted to reject it; with the conflicts over fish between native communities and with the state government following the Boldt decision; or with the awkward and degraded circumstances faced by tribes who were "derecognized" by the federal government. This is not to say that these topics are not raised; indeed, some of them are. The problem is that little idea of the native view or reaction to these circumstances is given, and consequently the lives of these people are unexamined. Again, we are left with an image of passive, unresponsive native people who lack means to protect their ways of life. Ample evidence shows this not to be the case, and native responses should not be left out.

There are many chapters in which conflict is inappropriately absent. A chapter on the history of museums, astonishingly, gives no picture of the sometimes barbaric methods by which some collections were obtained, despite the publication of Cole's (1985) important and empathetic work on this topic. Even a chapter on mythology omits the themes of social class conflict, conflict between men and women, and young and old, as Snyder (1964) showed was characteristic of Skagit mythology. Instead of providing a picture of the vitality of mythology and the use of such imagery as destruction, defecation, creation on a grand scale, epic eating, and strange but meaningful contacts between humans and non-humans, we are told in conclusion that "the mythologies of Indian people of the Northwest Coast are a source of a lasting contribution to the imaginative life of all for whom its landscape and history come to have meaning" (Hymes: 601).

It is possible that reluctance to specify the causes and results of ethnic and racial conflict for native communities is a consequence of the identification of anthropologists with the apparatus of the state and the economy by native people. Suttles notes that much of the scholarship on the North-

west Coast is done without benefit of fieldwork, perhaps as a result of the difficulties anthropologists have in freeing themselves from this identification. It is ironic that the general avoidance of the appearance of conflict within the handbook may well help cement this impression in the minds of natives or those sharing in this image of anthropologists. It is especially ironic that anthropologists represent the discipline as disinterested in one of the fundamental features of life in a time when anthropologists have devoted so much attention to exactly such problems of representation (Clifford 1987, Rosaldo 1990). It suggests an exaggerated gap between Northwest Coast research and the mainstream of contemporary anthropology.

The second of the three questions posed was: what can allied professionals working in native communities make of the handbook? I question whether such professionals would benefit a great deal from these chapters. Medical personnel find useful such material as discussions of how contemporary family life is organized (giving an idea of who appropriate care-givers might be); what the traditional and contemporary categories of disease causation are (and therefore an idea of culturally appropriate sequences of intervention), or how political life is organized (thereby providing ideas as to who might be helpful in spreading an innovation). Studies of such topics are done in Northwest Coast communities, sometimes by anthropologists, and they provide some of the most fruitful information about these communities. They are largely uncited in the handbook, unfortunately. Despite the struggle for space, important publications which routinely run articles on native people might have been included. One example is *The Provider*, published by the Indian Health Service, a branch of the United States Public Health Service.

The dilemma faced by medical personnel in using the handbook to understand present-day communities and personal behaviour is likely faced by other professionals. It is difficult to find material suitable for psychologists, for example. Anthropology, as represented in this volume, has not found a way to be particularly useful, other than in litigation and linguistic programs, and in the preservation of cultural material such as photographs.

The volume can also be judged by how well it achieved its stated goals. Suttles provides an account of these goals, and I think they are good ones. Among other issues, Suttles writes that the book should not focus on the past at the expense of the present (p. 80); he rejects the notion of subareal cultural superiority, that is, that some of the cultures of the Northwest Coast were "climax" cultures and the others derivative (p. 12); he calls for the development of the analysis of regional systems (social net-

works) (p. 12); and he describes the variability in the environment and calls for an ecological approach (p. 85). I have commented already on the issue of the focus on the past, and find this volume to be a definitive statement of the work in cultural reconstruction, with the present largely left out. Suttles' call for a closer examination of the environment has been answered and is apparent in many chapters in the handbook. His call for the analysis of regional systems has been largely ignored in Northwest Coast research, although Hadja (1984), Miller (1989), and Onat (1984) present various formal models to accomplish this goal. This issue is an important one because the development of methodology to examine regional systems can be important in replacing antiquated and misleading theoretical evolutionary schemes of political development (usually typologies based on too small a set of variables) which are sometimes applied indiscriminately to the Northwest Coast. This is important in the representation of native society by anthropologists in litigation. One can argue that because of the real-life impact this is at least as important as anything else done by anthropologists in the area. Suttles and Elmendorf, who have long shared this interest in regional systems, were especially careful to provide within their chapters the sort of data necessary to construct such systems.

Suttles' long-time interest in showing the importance of local cultural development, instead of a view of the coast as dominated by cultural centres whose traits diffused elsewhere, is valuable, and one would hope that this would mean that the volume would reflect such balance. Unfortunately this is not the case, and the organizational format is partly to blame. The organization by language means that there is a short chapter on the extinct Chemakum, about whom relatively little is known, but all the other people of the Puget Sound are jammed together in a single chapter. All the northern and southern Lushootseed speakers and the Twana are described in seventeen pages. Elmendorf's excellent work on the Twana dominates in these pages, and the ancestors of the present day Swinomish, Skagit, Tulalip, Duwamish, Nisqually, Puyallup, and Skykomish, among others, are reduced to a few lines each. Boyd's demographic analysis (p. 136) shows this region to have been one of the most heavily populated in the aboriginal period, and there are many thousands alive today. Furthermore, tribes from this region are called "remote" (p. 132). It is not clear in what sense this might be the case, or how it can be the case if local cultural development is important.

There is some question about the balance of the volume. There is a thirty-one page chapter on the analysis of art, but little about the lives of thousands of present day Northwest Coast people, including urban natives.

There are 7.7 pages of discussion of canoe types, and many photographs, but no discussion of gender variability. There are hundreds of references to Boas, but too frequently other sources are anonymous, as in "an informant said." The actions of government are clarified, but not those of native people. Rigid norms are presented, but not the ways in which people circumvent them and use them to advantage.

There are errors of commission. Cole and Darling (p. 133) write that potlatching in western Washington was in disuse by 1850, although Snyder (1964) and Collins (1978), among others, present evidence of it persisting into this century. This error stems from an incomplete reading of Gibbs (1877). He wrote in reference to potlatches that "these great affairs have gradually fallen into disuse among those tribes most nearly associated with the whites, but still take place among the more remote, as the Klallam, Lummi, etc.; *on a smaller scale, however, they are everywhere practised.*" (emphasis mine). Because of the importance of the give-away, it is no small error to suggest that it had disappeared; indeed, this suggests a major alteration that had not occurred. Cole and Darling also write that "missionary activity was not a significant factor in Indian-White relations during the early period" (p. 133), apparently taking as their measure the number of converts. However, the creation of a category of leader who transformed native political life by relying on contact with missionaries is surely an important development, and is overlooked (Collins 1978).

Outdated names for tribes are used, when the contemporary usages would have made the handbook more influential and progressive. There are also other minor errors, such as citations which appear in the text and not in the bibliography (e.g., Barsh 1979), and two spellings of Clallam are used, one in the map and one in the text. Outdated categories are employed, giving the book the feel of an inventory of traits. Captions for maps, photographs, and illustrations are maddeningly difficult to follow. Many maps are difficult to use unless one is familiar with the location; inset maps to provide perspective are missing. These flaws are not major, given the immense size of the book.

Even in light of various technical and theoretical difficulties, many no fault of the authors or editors, the fundamental flaw of the book is that the lives of real people do not emerge from these pages and do not emerge frequently enough in the anthropology of the Northwest Coast. The handbook's reliance on normative, rule-bound accounts, I think, is largely responsible for creating this lifeless appearance, although why anthropologists rely on such accounts may be of more significance than the fact of the

existence of such accounts. This is perhaps another indication of the tenuous relationship between scholars and the communities they study.

The modes of analysis of social organization of the Northwest Coast most prominent in the handbook are those which lend themselves to an emphasis on rule-bound behaviour. This is true both of the ecological analysis which relies on ideal types as starting points (concepts such as bilateral or matrilineal systems), as well as structural analysis based on analysis of marriage, residence or other "rules," as is typified by the work of Rosman and Rubel (1971). Other approaches which present a sense of human agency do not fit easily into the format. Such approaches include processual analyses which present the strategies of individual actors or of classes of actors and those approaches which show multiple preferences in a statistical sense. Research has been carried out which points to the existence of ways in which formal rules can be systematically circumvented in a manner analogous to F. G. Bailey's (1969) idea of normative and pragmatic rules. Boelscher (1989) has produced the most recent of these accounts, although her work and some of the others developing the same issues still provide little sense of everyday life.

The handbook's normative accounts of the native societies inadvertently read like parodies in some cases and, one suspects, will leave many members of societies so depicted in puzzlement. One is struck by the distance from the subject and the dehumanization produced by employing this sort of classic ethnographic authority. Strangely, the timidity of these conflictless descriptions is equally striking. A middle ground might have been struck and description in the classic mode balanced with other modes of expression within the volume. Perhaps supplementary chapters might have included native collaborative biography of the sort produced by Blackman and in this way native culture approximated from a number of angles.

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