Plateau

Deward E. Walker, Jr., editor

Volume 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians*
Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998. 791 pp. Illus., maps. US$61 cloth.

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IN 1965, THE SMITHSONIAN Institution launched a proposal for a twenty-volume *Handbook of North American Indians* under the direction of anthropologist William C. Sturtevant. This was an ambitious project intended to present an "encyclopedic summary of what is known about the prehistory, history, and cultures of the aboriginal peoples of North America north of the urban civilizations of central Mexico" (xiii). Last year, it released Volume 12 in the series, *Plateau*. According to its editor, Deward E. Walker, Jr., Volume 12 was a long time in the making (iv). He first began accepting draft submissions from invited authors in May 1972, just over a year after the first planning session for this volume held in Reno, Nevada, in March 1971. With a team of editors, he then spent nine years, from 1990 to 1997, moulding this volume to its current form – forty-three essays by forty-one authors, totalling 790 pages (iv).

The core of Volume 12 is a series of nineteen summary overviews of individual plateau cultures. Each overview is similar in style, design, and length, and follows roughly the same list of topical subheads – "environment," "territory," "origins," "culture" (which is further subdivided into subsistence, technology, clothing and adornment, social and political organization, kinship, life cycle, and religion), "history," "synonymy," and "sources." Contributors, according to Walker, were told explicitly to "avoid the present tense, where possible" (xv), which accounts for the prevalence of past tense throughout, along with statements such as: "the following cultural description is ... intended to describe the culture as of the mid-nineteenth century" (284). Only in the "history" sections were authors given some liberty to cover current issues. Most adhered closely to this formula. Indeed some, such as David H. French and Kathrine S. French ("Wasco, Wishram and Cascades"), took this to an extreme, including only one paragraph on recent historical change (374). Others, for example, Helen Schuster ("Yakima and Neigbouring Groups"), included a more substantial "history" chapter, perhaps to counter the effect of such an editorial convention. The bibliographic summaries at the end of each cultural overview provide a state-of-the-art historical/ethnographic guide to the entire plateau region. There is no better reference tool for this large region under a single cover.

"Synonymy" is one of the more interesting topics covered in the cultural summaries. Walker describes "synonymy" as a description of the various names applied to the Indigenous cultural groups. Volume 12 offers some excellent historical, linguistic, and ethnographic data on this topic for each plateau group. As outsiders (traders, travellers, missionaries, and others) encountered various plateau peoples and their neighbours, they often had difficulty pronouncing their names. Volume 12 explains the origin of such terms as "Thompson," "Pend d'Oreille," "Nez Percé," "Flathead," and "Colville."

It is curious, however, given their interest in synonymy, that the editors and authors of Volume 12 opted for foreign, often anglicized, terms over Indigenous names. David Wyatt, for example, used the term "Thompson" even though he knew that this term had been replaced locally by the term "Nlaka'pamux." Marianne Boelscher similarly used the term "Shuswap" throughout her essay, even though she knew that the people about whom she wrote preferred to be called "Secwepemc."

In addition to these nineteen individual cultural overviews are chapters on a variety of special topics, ranging from archaeology, demography, religious movements, music, and mythology to basketry, ethnobiology, rock art, trade networks, and fishing. Several of these, for example, Robert Boyd's "Demographic History Until 1990," and Deward Walker's and Helen Schuster's "Religious Movements," offer a refreshing break from the historical focus of the volume. Others, such as "Ethnobiology and Subsistence," by Eugene Hunn, Nancy Turner, and David French, are rich with specialized ethnographic detail. "Mythology," by Rodney Frey and Dell Hymes, offers an intimate study of plateau storytelling traditions, including a detailed analysis of a single Kalispel myth.

Although Volume 12 is a "must-have" for anyone interested in Indigenous North America, it has one serious flaw. It ignores entirely the postmodernist turn in the social sciences. Over the past fifteen years, critical theorists such as James Clifford and George Marcus (*Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 1984), Johannes Fabian (*Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 1983), Edward Said (*Orientalism*, 1978), and others have systematically deconstructed the central tenets of social scientific research – participant/observation, data collecting, and cultural description. At the core of their critique is salvage ethnography, the assumption that "the other society is weak and *needs* to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future)" (Clifford and Marcus, 113). Clifford noted some years ago that "few anthropologists today would embrace the object of ethnography in the terms in which it was enunciated in Franz Boas's time, as a last-chance rescue operation" (113). And yet, Volume 12, released in 1998 by one of North America's leading anthropological research centres, does just this. It is salvage ethnography written in the classic realist style; that is, "an author-proclaimed description and something of an explanation for certain specific, bounded, observed (or nearly observed) cultural practices" (John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*, 1988, 45). In contrast to most recent works of anthropology, there are no Indigenous authors represented in this volume; there is no questioning of the authority of its textual material; and there is no experimentation with different styles of textual presentation. That any anthropological work today, but especially one of the stature of the Smithsonian's Volume 12, can ignore an intellectual movement as pervasive as the postmodernism of the 1980s and 1990s is somewhat surprising. One explanation is that Volume 12 experienced a time-warp. Written material was dutifully submitted in the 1970s, after which it was put on hold until given the green light for publication some time in 1990. If this is the scenario, then it is not surprising that it exudes a 1970s, rather than a 1990s, feel.

Despite this shortcoming, Volume 12, *Plateau,* is an important work. It is richly illustrated with a range of maps, photographs, sketches, and drawings, many of which have not appeared elsewhere.

The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History

Christopher Bracken

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. 276 pp.
Illus., maps. US$16.95 paper.

Hamatsa: The Enigma of Cannibalism on the Pacific Northwest Coast

Jim McDowell

Vancouver: Ronsdale, 1997. 299 pp. Illus. $17.95 paper.

By Margery Fee
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GIVING A GIFT is always a tricky proposition; we all know the perils of the redundant gift, the too expensive or too cheap gift, the gift we really wanted ourselves. Giving is a site of social anxiety: if the gifts given to us by commercial enterprises are called "free gifts," then what are the other kind – those given by friends and relatives – called? In what way are they not free, since a gift, by definition, is given without expectation of repayment? Yet we know better, for the people we give gifts to, in fact, are those who give gifts to us. If we give in expectation of return, then, strictly speaking, our gift is not a gift but part of a social economy. Perhaps the "pure gift" does not exist at all? Christopher Bracken examines the clash between European concepts of the gift and those of the First Nations of the west coast of British Columbia – a clash that marked the conquest and colonial oppression of the area.

Accounts of Aboriginal gift-giving practices on the west coast of British Columbia influenced European thought. The Chinook jargon word, "potlatch," which derived from the Nuu-chah-nulth word for gift, was used by Europeans on the coast as a name for their construction of Aboriginal ceremonies in which blankets, food, clothing, and other items were given away to confirm status. The potlatch entered European discourses about the gift, which centred on the impossible