

statistics actually help constitute that pathology rather than simply describe it. None of the essays look closely at the ways in which they themselves construct Aboriginal people as essentially unwell and, thus, contribute to the ennui that surrounds discussions of First Nations health.

Fortunately, much of the rest of the book, which deals with ways in which First Nations are dealing with continuing health problems, is more culturally aware, more focused on doing rather than surveying. Hopkinson, Stephenson, and Turner provide a welcome hands-on description of the Nuxalk Nation's work to restore the availability of traditional foods to its people. Allan Wade's article on resistance knowledge and therapy focuses on the practical efforts to heal the trauma of residential schooling experiences without utilizing the disempowering concepts and techniques of traditional psychotherapy. The best chapter is Simon Read's, documenting the remarkable efforts and successes of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation as it gradually takes control over its health care system. He writes in a forthright manner about the ways in which internalized colonialism and

continued government parsimony and control inhibit First Nations efforts at creating Aboriginally centred, yet hybridized, autonomous health care systems. This chapter and that on the Cowichan experience of health care provision take us beyond bemoaning poor health and into the arena of action.

In 1993, John O'Neill, the rapporteur of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Round Table on Aboriginal Health and Social Issues, identified several themes of that discussion. He entitled theme number seven as "Practice Before Policy (or, Just Do It!)." In doing so, he noted First Nations frustration with the rate of change, with the emphasis in non-Native health science on quantifying dysfunction, with the inability of non-Native health care providers to see the "positive lifestyles and values" in Aboriginal communities. *A Persistent Spirit* exemplifies both what is good and what is bad in the field of First Nations health studies, for it continues the trends that O'Neill so appropriately condemned yet also points the way towards Aboriginally centred studies that study, promote, and enable healing.

Tsimshian Culture: A Light Through the Ages

Jay Miller

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 202 pp. Illus. us\$45 cloth.

BY JONATHAN R. DEAN, *University of Chicago*

Jay Miller's latest contribution is a welcome addition to the literature on the Tsimshian peoples of the northern British Columbia coast. His familiarity with the community of

Hartley Bay and his extensive work in the area allows him to approach this topic with an unforced intimacy. Miller begins with the puzzle of how to model Tsimshian society. He credits a

student at Prince Rupert with giving him the idea of diagramming the culture, which he then developed into a "tree of light": an axis ascending from the matrilineal House to Heaven and light. Over time other structures were appended onto Tsimshian society, including the crest system, the *naxnox* ("wonders"), and the *halait* (roughly, "power") privileges. By drawing on a number of *adawx* ("sacred histories") Miller examines how the theme of light binds these features to the Tsimshian culture even as they remain functionally distinct from one another. The structure of this book generally follows this topology of Tsimshian society, ascending the "tree of light" towards Heaven. Along each of these branches the Tsimshian appear to follow the rule of four, as in four crests, four *naxnox* domains, and four major *halaits* (as well as four house corners and four legitimate faiths), each in turn grouped into dual pairs. For anyone who has attempted to puzzle through Tsimshian social structure, Miller's work is concise and penetrating.

In particular, Miller's unified treatment of *halait*, *naxnox*, and crests is illuminating. These three aspects of Tsimshian spirituality have long posed a riddle to Euro-American observers, and his adept handling of their distinctive purposes and origins will make the complexities of the Tsimshian belief system much more accessible to readers. As Miller notes, the *naxnox* have largely been supplanted by Christian beliefs, while the *halait* persists both in the traditional form and in the form of gifts that set persons apart (referring here to Marie-Françoise Guédon's excellent essay on the Tsimshian world-view). The crest system remains vital as well.

Through the examination of oral tradition, and the recounting of his

own and others' observations, Miller emphasizes the persistence of Tsimshian culture. With roots in the area dating as far back as 10,000 years BP, the present-day Tsimshian and their ancestors have clearly been resilient, maintaining cultural continuity while continuing to adopt and adapt foreign beliefs and materials – as in the use of a saxophone in place of the "traditional" drum at a Hartley Bay feast. Other topics that Miller introduces in an explicitly Tsimshian context are crystals, for their unique properties in reflecting light, and masks, which allow the wearer to display and to master powers. The topic of crystals is particularly intriguing, and one hopes Miller will uncover more information and develop this in greater detail in the future, given the close association between crystals and light (and therefore Heaven).

A succinct examination of the history of the post-contact period includes the Fort Simpson fur trade and the missionary movement, which began with the arrival of William Duncan in 1857. Miller concludes that "Christianity has now assumed many of the aspects of the traditional religion, but except for the loss of masking and certain other artistic expressions of spirituality, the fundamentals remain ... Ancient logic stands firm when Tsimshian raise their voices to sing 'Jesus is the light of the world.'" Miller also includes a bibliographical essay on the scholarship of the Tsimshian, all of which might profitably be consulted by interested readers.

There is little to fault in this work, although some readers may find the Gispaxlo'ots chiefs Ligeex somewhat over-exposed. Within the corpus of Tsimshian oral tradition there are many significant nobles, many of whose exploits are also documented in Euro-

Canadian records. It might have been preferable to detail a broader spectrum of Tsimshian chiefly practices and accomplishments. The author's examination of the sale of Ligeex's monopoly (and subsequent potlatch) in 1866 may give rise to some discussion, as there appears to be no mention of either in the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) records or Duncan's writings of the 1860s. Duncan did attempt to sell

his store to the HBC in 1866, although the offer was declined because of the many restrictions he placed on the subsequent operation of the venture. However, the Ligeexes are manifestly vital actors within both Tsimshian *adawx* and Euro-Canadian scholarship.

This is a significant book and an important contribution to the field, and it will be valued for its innovative analysis of Tsimshian culture "through the ages."

The Heiltsuks: Dialogues of Culture and History on the Northwest Coast

Michael E. Harkin

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press in cooperation with the American Indian Studies Research Institute, Indiana University, 1997. 195 pp. Maps. US\$40 cloth.

BY MARGARET SEGUIN ANDERSON
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The dust jacket on this volume informs readers that "what Marshall Sahlins has done for the Hawaiians, Michael Harkin has done for the Heiltsuks," and indeed the book inside the cover is very much in the tradition of theoretically minded anthropology. It is thoroughly researched and careful of the details of the presentation of Native cultures, but its real topic is disciplinary theory. In this case the theory that Harkin explores very effectively melds and extends several strands of postmodern theory to argue that cultures, specifically the cultures of the nineteenth-century and contemporary Heiltsuks, should be seen as a series of dialogic discourses about power, playing out the dialectic between uncontrolled exogenic forces and the intrinsic ordering principles

of society. This argument is presented through a chapter reconstructing the culture of the Heiltsuks in the nineteenth century and one summarizing the current contexts of the Heiltsuks, followed by three chapters on theory ("Narrative, Time and the Lifeworld," "Contact Narratives," "Dialectic and Dialogue") and three chapters applying that theory to specific Heiltsuk cultural discourses: bodies, souls and goods. A short final section highlights conclusions about "Worlds in Collision." The various chapters are quite self-contained, and in fact three of them were previously published as articles. The remarkable total absence of photographs of Heiltsuk people, places, or artefacts in the volume is not surprising if it is understood that its main thrust is theoretical.