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Rethinking American Indian History. Edited by Donald L. Fixico. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997. 139 pages. \$30.00 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

"Rethinking American Indian History" is perhaps too bold a title for a book that does more reiterating than rethinking. For those already acquainted with the historical scholarship on American Indians since the 1970s, most of the articles in this book will provide few new interpretations. In his introductory essay, Donald Fixico describes how a new generation of scholars, using a more sensitive approach and relying upon "different sources of research data," have liberated American Indian history from "earlier scholars" who "wrote colorfully about bloody Indian wars or courageous native patriots fighting to save their people." "Introducing this revisionist approach," explains Fixico, "is the purpose of this book" (p. 3). Such an objective is honorable. However, since revisionism has thrived for more than thirty years, the book is about twenty years behind its ambitious title. Its historiographic essays describe (as older collections have already done) the turn from ethnocentric narratives of conquest to the gradual (but still incomplete) incorporation of Native perspectives, but they offer little insight into more recent developments in the field.

However, the slim volume, which consists of papers originally presented at two conferences at Western Michigan University on "New Scholarship about the West and American Indians" and "Methodologies and American Indian History," serves as a good introduction to the historiography of the field. Many of its essays, such as those by Fixico and Glenda Riley, provide very helpful bibliographies. A few of the articles also live up to the ambitious claim of "rethinking American Indian history." Pieces by James Axtell, Richard White, and Angela Cavender Wilson especially offer fresh insights into the methodologies and ethics of writing Indian history.

In the book's first chapter, James Axtell explains how scholars can use ethnohistorical tools to get "inside" Native American history and culture (p. 13). Ethnohistory, in Axtell's commendably straightforward definition, is the process of using historical and ethnological methods to understand cultural change and continuity in a given society. He thankfully eschews earlier, pejorative definitions that saw ethnohistory as simply the study of "primitive" cultures, stressing that ethnohistory is at foremost a *method* that need not analyze only non-Western peoples—it is "perfectly capable of shedding light on the cultural history of state societies, industrialized societies, colonizing societies, and capitalist societies in regions all over the globe" (p. 13).

Having said that, Axtell concentrates on Native America, offering scholars an ambitious prescription for "get[ting] inside the heads" and "break[ing] the code" of American Indian cultures (p. 14). According to Axtell, ethnohistorians must strive to learn the languages of the cultures they study with the aim of gaining entrance into the "epistemology, ontology, and mental universe of the their subjects"; they must take a critical and culturally sensitive approach to written documentation, measuring it against "ethnological knowledge gained from the study of the group or similar groups"; they must seek out Native descendents of their historical subjects in order to gain a win-

dow into the past and understand “traditional habits of mind and constructions of reality”; and, perhaps most importantly, they must move beyond traditional written sources and draw on Indian oral traditions, histories, and memories, as well as artifacts, maps, and other academic disciplines such as the environmental sciences and ethnomusicology in order to “succeed in recreating the world they really lived in” (pp. 13–19).

Axtell challenges Calvin Martin’s belief that historians of American Indians need to “get out of history” altogether in order to understand the mythic, non-linear world of Native peoples. Criticizing Martin’s romantic and essentialized notions is still a cottage industry in the field of American Indian history, but his comments here seem a bit misplaced, for Axtell, like Martin, suggests that ethnohistorians, if they only try hard enough, can actually “know what they [American Indians] imagined reality to be and their own particular place and role in it” (p. 13). His prescription—to “use deep research and empathy to see other people as they saw themselves ... [and] also use hindsight and objectifying scholarship to see them as they could not see themselves, as only we can”—seems every bit as grandiose and presumptuous as Martin’s belief that Western historians can step outside their own worldviews and truly *understand* Native American cosmologies (p. 23). To be fair, Axtell is only mapping out a more culturally sensitive and thorough approach to writing American Indian history, and in this regard he does an admirable job. However, as long as Native American history is still enfolded within the logic and structure of Western historiography, I remain critical of the notion, held by Axtell *and* Martin, that historians can capture the lived worldview of their Native subjects. Perhaps scholars should set their sights on more realistic goals, such as using Axtell’s methodological guidelines to more accurately reconstruct the social *history* of Native America, as has been attempted for African Americans, Euro-Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

Many scholars today are increasingly questioning the relevance of a separate methodology called ethnohistory when it is now quite common for social historians to rely on ethnographic sources and for anthropologists to draw from written documentation. Given this methodological cross-pollination, how is “ethnohistory” any different from “history,” and doesn’t the separation only reinforce the ethnocentric and ghettoizing notion that “true history” is reserved for Western societies while ethnohistory is the domain of tribal or “primitive” peoples? Axtell addresses these criticisms but does not offer very convincing answers. Nevertheless, budding ethnohistorians will find in Axtell’s essay a challenging appeal for a more responsible and exhaustive Indian history.

William T. Hagan’s chapter on “The New Indian History” is far less thought-provoking and somewhat more puzzling in its organization and purpose. His article is designed to prove that the “New Indian History evolved over the last four decades—antedating the New Western History—and is now firmly in place” (p. 40). Hagan does a fine job with the first part of his thesis: he shows how the New Indian History “was born in the discussions of ethnohistory that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s,” beginning with the demand for historical scholarship on American Indians created by the Indian Claims Commission (1946) and gaining momentum with the founding of the journal

Ethnohistory, the American Society for Ethnohistory, and the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian (pp. 30–34).

Hagan's other purpose—proving that the New Indian History antedated the New Western History—seems unnecessary and irrelevant. He makes the New Western History (with its attention to Native American persistence in the American West) into a straw man to be knocked over by his revelation of the earlier origins of “Indian-centered history” (p. 32). But do the proponents of the New Western History really claim that they are the first to offer up history that includes a Native American perspective? Understandably, Hagan's article was written for a conference on “New Scholarship About the West and American Indians,” but his concern with the New Western historians is more distracting than illuminating. Moreover, Hagan's cursory review of “New Indian” histories published since 1987 (the publication date of Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest*) seems, as he admits, a bit “arbitrary” (p. 34). For an historiographic essay, his discussion is too bland and his bibliography too light to be of much help to those interested in exploring the New Indian History in depth.

Two articles in this collection explore Native American women's history. In “The Historiography of American Indian and Other Western Women,” Glenda Riley chronicles the gradual incorporation of western women's voices (not limited to Native Americans) into historical scholarship. She shows how the practitioners of women's history, working with limited sources and bucking a skeptical academic establishment, only gradually began exploring the multicultural diversity of western women, and even more gradually did they begin treating women as historical agents who “exercised will, force, or power” (p. 51). Riley applauds more complex treatments of western women, especially those which examine the variations of “class, race, ethnicity, religion, and occupation” (p. 48). However, she decries the balkanization of scholarship and, as an antidote to this trend, urges historians to look for “the qualities that unify whites and blacks, men and women, Anglos and Indians, English and Spanish speakers, and other categories of people as human beings, as Americans, and as westerners” (p. 56). She also raises other important problems with Native women's history which could equally be applied to any branch of social history: for instance, has the desire to ascribe power and agency to Native Americans unintentionally deemphasized the oppressive and destructive nature of European colonization?

Theda Perdue, in “Writing the Ethnohistory of Native Women,” also seeks to illuminate how historians can uncover women's roles in Native societies and determine “what sort of impact gender and perceptions of gender may have had on shaping native societies and interaction between natives and non-natives” (p. 73). Unfortunately, Perdue does not offer much direction for those seeking to incorporate gender, and her methodological road map falls short of Axtell's in terms of warning aspiring scholars of the hazards or obstacles they can expect to encounter along the way. After acknowledging the ubiquitous problem of trying to excavate gender with existing documentation (and previous scholarship) that is extremely ethnocentric and “androcentric,” Perdue suggests that we might locate gender in kinship, economic rela-

tions, and “extraordinary women”—those who crossed gender barriers and succeeded in politics, diplomatic relations, and warfare, thereby underscoring gender as socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined. She urges us forward, noting that “gender is the most basic form of social organization” and also the least studied aspect of history. Unfortunately, scholars will find few new insights here, and little to guide them as they enter what is still an empirical, theoretical, and methodological frontier (p. 83).

Richard White, on the other hand, offers some concrete methodological advice for those seeking to write the environmental history of Native Americans. In “Indian Peoples and the Natural World: Asking the Right Questions,” White centers his discussion around two questions: how do historians come to know how Indians in the past conceived the natural world, and how do they reconstruct Indian interactions with the natural world? The first step is to ask questions that are not ahistorical. Asking if “Indians were environmentalists,” contends White, is no different from asking “if Indians could drive on the wrong side of the road before whites came” (p. 91). Both involve superimposing contemporary understandings onto the past. Questions which presume that modern Indians share the same views as their ancestors, or that certain essential characteristics define “traditional” Indians, or that “nature” is a universal concept, all represent similar strains of ahistorical thinking.

When it comes to answering historical questions, or interpreting one’s evidence, White councils against related ahistorical pitfalls, such as the ethno-historical method of “upstreaming,” which assumes, in his view, that “the meaning and significance” of Indian ritual “exists relatively unchanged across time” (p. 92). How do historians reconstruct Indian worlds using documents that so often mute the Indian voice? According to White, scholars can never reconstruct “a purely Indian view of the natural world as it existed before whites” (p. 93). Historical sources are always muddy and impure, and to think that they can afford an unclouded view of the past is arrogant—in White’s words, “to seek purity is to create falsity” (p. 94). Since historical documents are essentially conundrums of mixed meanings created by two cultures who poorly understood each other—rather than clear windows through which to view the past—White urges historians to see in them a struggle for common meanings (White’s “middle-ground”). To reconstruct those meanings, environmental historians should look towards the linguistic and “spatial” history of Native Americans: their “movements, boundaries, and names upon the land,” which, he argues, can be carefully derived from Euro-American sources.

It is precisely the question of sources that animates Angela Cavender Wilson’s provocative essay on oral history and scholarly accountability, “Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History.” Wilson asks why historians have never bothered to learn Indian languages or ask contemporary Native Americans about their own history, even though it has often been passed down through oral tradition. Would scholars of Germany or China, she asks, attempt to write the histories of those countries without learning those languages or consulting Native sources? “Is it simply because most of our sources are oral rather than written, because we put our faith in our elders rather than on paper, that this double standard is tolerated?” (pp. 101–102).

Wilson believes that oral history is “the greatest resource upon which the discipline of American Indian history will proceed,” but she also realizes that attention to oral sources raises special methodological and ethical problems (p. 102). She spends most of her essay addressing these problems and prescribing how scholars should use oral history. For one, they should proceed with humility, becoming students rather than experts of Native American languages and cultures. They should abide by Native protocol and ritual when obtaining information, respecting traditions that often demand reciprocity and generosity. Scholars should also allow Native communities to determine “whether they have information relevant to a scholar’s study,” who “is authorized and informed enough to share information,” and “what information is appropriate to share” (p. 106). Finally, historians should evaluate Native oral histories on their own terms—academics are not the arbiters of truth or believability and should not attempt to make Native oral tradition “conform to Western notions of respectability, truth, narrative format, categories, significance, terminology, sensibility, and so forth” (p. 110).

Her suggestions push us towards a more sensitive and encompassing scholarship, but they also raise a number of questions and contradictions concerning historical methodology. Given that non-Indians have historically appropriated not only Indian land and resources, but also the Indian past, for their own purposes, Wilson’s insistence that Native Americans should tightly control the dissemination of tribal history seems altogether reasonable. On the other hand, why should historians privilege the version of history endorsed by tribal governments? History is not only contested between whites and Indians, but *within* Native communities as well. If one is to carry forth Wilson’s analogy that studying Native American societies is akin to studying foreign societies, how many historians would uncritically allow the ruling government of the country they study to dictate the terms of their investigation? Certainly foreign scholars of Turkey, if they are interested in the Armenian question, would not abide solely by that government’s version of history. Perhaps my own analogy here is somewhat overdrawn because American Indians in this country have been the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of genocide. But does that mean that we should suspend our critical approach and accept only tribally sanctioned versions of events? Can the “ownership” of history be taken too far? Wilson notes that the Winnebago nation of Wisconsin has recently limited the study of the Winnebago language to Winnebago people. By Wilson’s own criteria for writing responsible Indian history, a non-Winnebago person could not now produce a sensitive and informed history of those people. Is this putting history back into its proper place or making it into exclusive property?

Some scholars might also question Wilson’s admonition to let Native oral traditions “stand on their own,” rather than subjecting them to Western forms of interpretation, classification, or contextualization. Isn’t this what historians and other academics have been trained to do? Don’t they contextualize data, sometimes reducing entire religious movements, for instance, to their social or economic or demographic origins (as Native anthropologist Russel Thornton does with the Ghost Dances of the 1870s and 1890s in his demo-

graphic history of Native America)? Moreover, aren't scholars already imposing Western structures of form and interpretation on Native oral traditions simply by translating them into English and incorporating them into traditional historical narratives to be consumed by an academic readership? How do we reconcile this most basic contradiction, between honoring the sacred nature of oral tradition and rendering it in a Western format? However we resolve this problem, Wilson wisely advises scholars to recognize that Native stories are alive. They have a "power" and a "spirit" of their own and must be treated with respect. As one "informant," Mabel McKay, expressed it: "Our stories, like our lives, are living. Might as well give white man your leg or arm. No matter what he gets, he just does with it how he likes. Like our land" (p. 111).

Wilson's piece is vital and thought-provoking. She asks us to admit our biases, to reexamine our methodologies, and to acknowledge our responsibilities to the communities we study. The same topic has been at the forefront of recent discussions on Native American scholarship, explored in the winter 1996 issue of the *American Indian Quarterly* (where Wilson published a shorter version of this piece), a recent H-Amindian string on "scholarly accountability" (catalogued on the Internet at <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~amind/>), and at the first annual Native American Studies conference in Boise (February 1998). These discussions have forced non-Indian scholars such as myself to reconsider the ways in which we carry out our scholarship with regard to living Native communities, a topic that is all too easily passed over in graduate classrooms filled predominantly with non-Indian scholars. Based on this standard, Wilson's article lives up to this book's desire to "rethink" American Indian history where the others do not. By engaging in such a dialogue, perhaps we can realize Wilson's hope of a new history forged by historians and Native Americans working together with "mutual respect for the authority and skills that each brings to the understanding of American Indian history" (p. 115).

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Theodore Roosevelt and Six Friends of the Indian. By William T. Hagan. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. 274 pages. \$25.95 cloth.

This book is a very careful, detailed, and fully documented account of the efforts of each of the "six friends" referred to in the volume's title to influence Theodore Roosevelt regarding aspects of Indian policy with which they were concerned as well as with regard to the tribe or tribes in which they, for various reasons, took a direct interest. Who were these "six friends" who collectively put at Roosevelt's disposal a broader range of experience and expert information in Indian affairs than had been available to any previous president?

George Bird Grinnell, a Yale graduate who held a Ph.D. in paleontology from the same institution, not only had actually experienced an attack by