

Reviews

Rosalyn R. LaPier and David R. M. Beck, *City Indian: Native American Activism in Chicago, 1893-1934*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. xxvii, 268pp. ISBN 978-0-8032-4839-7.

“This all made for a messy, complicated road to the future” (p.167), write the authors of this admirably clear and important study. Rosalyn R. LaPier is assistant professor in the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana, and David R. M. Beck is professor of Native American Studies at the same institution. Noting a lack of scholarly attention to urban Indians during the so-called Progressive Era, the writers focus on of the period from the famous 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago until the enactment of less assimilationist Federal policies in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. They dramatically show how Native Americans struggled to adapt to urban life then, while both retaining something of their tribal heritages and controlling how white America defined Indians. They argue that the experiences of Indians from the Chicago area, and of those who moved there, were both unique, and in ways representative of broader Indian experiences in the United States then. While focusing mostly on self-designated Indian leaders in the city, the authors do not ignore the difficulties and achievements of ordinary people of the tribes.

LaPier and Beck organize their book logically. After a long preface, Chapter 1 examines the history of the many Indian peoples of the region, how white settlement utterly changed their lives – and how Chicago, and white Americans generally, benefitted from the conquest of Indian lands and resources. Chapter 2 focuses on the famous Columbian Exposition, its celebration of supposed American growth and progress, and how it both welcomed and exploited Indians. Ironies abounded: to honor their heritages, Indians often acted out of what they considered traditional roles. Yet, of course, this also perpetuated stereotypes of “savages,” admirable

in their way, but incapable of progress. *Balancing* such losses and possible gains – this is a major theme of a sophisticated book. Chapter 3 continues the theme, examining the work of famous “Indian professionals” such as Carlos Montezuma, MD., and other less famous doctors, businessmen and women, entertainers, and scholars. Many attempted to exert leadership not just of their own tribal peoples, but of all Chicago Indians and of those throughout the country, and worked with or against white supporters or opponents....oh it does get messy! Such leaders were often highly educated even by contemporary white standards, having come through the famous/infamous Indian boarding school system. Some also helped poorer Indian peoples struggling to secure a foothold in the fast-expanding city.

Chapter 4 presents the encampments (Indian gatherings), and “typically Indian” entertainments; it features celebrated Indian athletes; and highlights again the balance trap. Indeed, most of the excellent illustrations throughout the book depict supposedly typical Indian men and women in feathers and buckskins. Chapter 5 focuses on a major but short-lived organizational development, one involving both Indians and white sympathizers: the Indian fellowship League, soon to be controlled by non-Indians. Chapter 6 focuses on other organizations, including those formed by Indian and white women. For example, in 1930 Tsianina Blackstone (Cherokee-Creek) and Anna Fitzgerald (Chippewa) helped found the First Daughters of America, a club to both counter negative portrayals of Indians “by wild west shows, the state, or motion picture” (p. 107), and to preserve important Indian cultural expressions. Indeed, Chicago witnessed an important increase in so-called *pan-Indian* awareness and activism. Chapter 7 deals with the immensely complex, evolving issues relating to race and Indians, and the especially divisive issue of “mixed-race” Indians – especially those of African-American and Indian ancestry.

Chapter 8 on “Self-Determination” is, essentially, a conclusion, a clear and thoughtful summary of the major themes developed in the book. “There was often a fine line,” write the authors in almost ironic understatement, “between gaining the type of attention that would help modernize American views of Indians and the kind that would perpetuate old myths” (p. 159).

As must be now be apparent, this is an enlightening study, that critically but fairly examines the achievements and failings of Indian and white peoples. And one with a message not just for historians, anthropologists, students, and others interested in ethnic relationships, along with the history of a major city. But also for writers: clear, strong prose can powerfully

convey the most complicated, changing, frustrating of human social, racial, and legal relationships. Based on an impressive range of archival, newspaper, and other primary sources (over 30 pages of endnotes), it convincingly shows both the unique and, to an extent, representative nature of the Chicago Indian experiences. It emphasizes just how divided Indian peoples themselves could be on major issues. And it demonstrates – a major thrust of recent Indian Studies research - how adaptive Native Americans strove to exploit often paternalistic white programs designed for their supposed improvement. There are almost thirty pages of detailed appendices: on Indian population in Chicago, 1830-2010; and census information on Indian population in the city in 1920, and in 1930.

Although I have no major criticisms, a few issues deserved further examination (especially as the book, at 18 pages of preface/acknowledgements, and 173 pages of actual text, is not over-long). While the focus on Chicago is clearly valid, the writers might have placed it more effectively within a broader contemporaneous American context. Also, while they suggest the exemplary nature of the 1893-1934 Chicago experience, they could have speculated more on actual ways these events influenced Indian-white encounters in the later twentieth century and beyond. The First World War surely deserves more attention, especially in relation to Indian participation in the armed forces of the United States, and in the so-called modern world. To claim that the Federal Government, reformers, and academics “continued to view and treat American Indians as inferior” (p.58), surely simplifies far more complex and evolving racial/cultural/political/legal attitudes?

Finally, a minor point. Who was it said that “Heaven hath no joy like an academic cited”? ‘Tis true! But: in their bibliography the writers get my middle initial wrong. It is not “J”.

Michael C. Coleman

University of Jyväskylä

Aaron J. Palmer, *Rule of Law: Elite Political Authority and the Coming of the Revolution in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1763–1776*. Brill Academic Publishers. 318 pp. ISBN 9004272348.

In *Rule of Law*, Aaron J. Palmer pledges to go beyond accounts of other historians in explicating the plight of the South Carolina elite to wield and maintain its political power during the 14-years period from 1763 to 1776.