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Spring 2007

Review of *Native Americans in the School System: Family, Community, and Academic Achievement* by Carol J. Ward

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Reyhner, Jon, "Review of *Native Americans in the School System: Family, Community, and Academic Achievement* by Carol J. Ward" (2007). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 871.

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'Pictures Bring Us Messages' / Sinaakssiiksi aohtsi-maahpihkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation. By Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers with members of the Kainai Nation. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. xvii + 280 pp. Map, plates, figures, table, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

In August 1925, University of Oxford anthropologist Beatrice Blackwood spent two days on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta, home to the Kainai Nation. Assisted by the Indian Agent, she toured the reserve and took 33 photographs. Blackwood was investigating potential links among "race," culture, and environment, and some of her photographs were anthropometric in nature. Others, showing men working in fields or girls at residential school, portrayed a culture in transition. Upon her return to Britain, Blackwood deposited the Kainai photographs with Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum.

In 2001 Alison Brown, research fellow at the University of Aberdeen, Laura Peers, curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum, and the Kainai Nation initiated a collaborative project to reincorporate Blackwood's photographs into Kainai community life. *'Pictures Bring Us Messages' / Sinaakssiiksi aohtsi-maahpihkookiyaawa* is an account of that visual repatriation effort. Using the technique of photo elicitation, Brown, the project's principal field researcher, and 27 elders engaged in open-ended conversations about the photographs. Here, the meanings the photographs had for the elders came to the fore.

The opening chapters provide a useful framework for understanding the social and academic circumstances in which the photographs were created. Chapter 4, "Reading the Photos," offers historical insights shared by the elders. These are glimpses, however, not "entire bodies of knowledge and narratives of history" of the sort that Brown and Peers tell us the photographs have the power to elicit. This may be due in part to the project participants' agreement that personal stories were for community use only. Since "biographical information offered about the people in the photographs pertained specifically to those individuals and also to the values, traditions, beliefs, knowledge, and relationships which are at the heart of Kainai culture," the absence of such material creates a real void.

The book's focus, in any event, is on the collaborative process itself. Brown and Peers intend *'Pictures Bring Us Messages'* "as a guide for other researchers contemplating similar projects" and therefore describe in detail how the research partnership developed. They explain how Kainai representatives helped shape research questions, advised

on cultural matters, and reviewed research findings "at every step of the way." At the project's end, Brown and Peers presented the Kainai Nation with copies of Blackwood's photos as well as a set of interview tapes and transcripts. They also produced CD-ROMs with images of the photos and associated materials for use in Kainai schools. These measures helped ensure that the project served community as well as scholarly purposes.

Clearly, the Kainai-Oxford Photographic Histories Project is a laudable undertaking. The book's utility for a broader audience, however, is less obvious. The project's steep cost—it was funded by a £78,000 grant—means that most institutions will have to explore less expensive ways of working with communities. Then, too, many of the practices that Brown and Peers tout as "the essence of postcolonial, up-to-the-minute museum strategies" will already be familiar to North American museum and archives professionals. It is established practice for North American museums to work closely with First Nations on projects with First Nations content, and Brown and Peers's assertion that "most" museums and archives "have never tried" to find community contacts is badly off the mark.

Perhaps *'Pictures Bring Us Messages'* will be most helpful to heritage professionals in Britain and Europe looking to build collaborative relationships with overseas source communities. Given that many important First Nations heritage materials are housed in European collections, the establishment of such partnerships would be most welcome. **Susan Berry**, *Ethnology Program, Royal Alberta Museum*.

Native Americans in the School System: Family, Community, and Academic Achievement. By Carol J. Ward. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005. xiii + 267 pp. Figures, tables, notes, references, index. \$34.95 paper.

The title of this volume promises more than the content delivers. The heart of the book is information from Ward's 1992 University of Chicago doctoral dissertation, which focused on the social and cultural reasons leading to students dropping out of school. Her first two chapters provide a good review of research on dropouts and Indian education; the following six focus on the results of her 1987-1989 study of 698 Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and white high school students attending the Colstrip Public, St. Labre Catholic, and Busby Tribal Schools in Montana. Fifty-two percent of the students in this study were Indian, with a dropout rate of 45%.

Ward found that after years of decreasing, dropout rates were beginning to rise again. Using an ecological holistic research approach with qualitative and quantitative methods, she examined school, community, and family influences that led to students staying in or dropping out of school. Poverty, discrimination, and permissive/noninterference child-rearing practices interacted with other factors such as Native culture capital in determining who dropped out and who did not.

As late as 1987, stores in a nearby “white” town posted “No Indians” signs in their windows, and Ward quotes Richard Littlebear, president of Chief Dull Knife College, about the “historical hurt” from social bias and racism that continues to affect American Indian adults and children. Extracurricular activities, especially sports, could have negative effects on students’ academic expectations as well as the lack of jobs available to high school graduates. Many young women saw “being a mother was the only adult role they felt they could assume successfully.”

Peer pressure was also a factor and “even ‘good’ students felt compelled to meet the expectations of Indian friends to drink and ‘party’ on the reservation, where such activities were common.”

Citing a Bureau of Land Management study, Ward writes about the Northern Cheyenne that “there is no other reservation where the tribal members constitute a majority of the population,” which is patently false for both Montana and the United States.

Ward concludes “that Indian students cannot escape some form of negative social bias or racism within the school context, whether it takes the form of paternalism by school personnel or prejudice from other students,” and she found that a strong sense of tribal identity, including tribal language fluency, or “cultural capital,” provides an antidote for students to that social bias and racism, reducing their chances for dropping out of school. **Jon Reyhner**, *Department of Educational Specialties, Northern Arizona University*.