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## Review of The Cheyenne Nation: A Social and Demographic History.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Cheyenne Nation: A Social and Demographic History.* By John H. Moore. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Figures, maps, photographs, tables, linguistic appendix, notes, bibliography, references, index. xxv + 390 pp. \$32.50.

"Like every nation in the world," John Moore argues in this exceptionally candid and respectful study, "the Cheyenne have cosmopolitan origins." Building on the Cheyenne case, Moore convincingly challenges the persistent characterization of tribal societies as static "crystals" shattered by their collision with European states.

Like nation-states, "tribal nations" may consist of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, experience internal social and economic struggles, and respond to changing external conditions by restructuring their institutions. Tribal nations have their own constitutional histories and sense of national purpose. Where they differ from nation-states, Moore contends, is in their lack of a coercive, centralized state apparatus.

*The Cheyenne Nation* demolishes the presumption—that is at the same time both romantic and racist—that "Indian" nations changed little until European invasion knocked them from their ancient, stable orbits. Tribal nation building preceded European encroachments on the continent, which introduced new constraints and opportunities. As Moore demonstrates, moreover, it has been the very diversity and conflict within tribal society that has made rapid adaptation and survival possible.

Moore's unconventional conclusions are the direct result of an unconventional methodology, which accepts conflicting reports from informants rather than attempting to sift from them a single "correct" view. This recognizes that a diversity of viewpoints should be natural among the members of any dynamic society and that a study of the differences is a powerful tool for identifying and understanding social conflict and change.

If Moore errs, it is in failing to accept the legitimacy of the new dialectic involving "traditional" Cheyenne, with whom his sympathies clearly lie, and the tribal council system organized under federal laws. However incompetent or unsavory the council party may be, it is nonetheless a Cheyenne phenomenon made up of persons who consider themselves Cheyenne. Like the emergence of the Dog Soldiers in the 1840s, which Moore traces so well, the rise of the council group since the 1930s has been a new division within the nation, and a new challenge to national unity, arising from different responses to new external forces.

There is one interesting difference, however. When the Dog Soldiers consolidated themselves as a revolutionary, alternative society, the Cheyenne briefly became *two* distinct nations. U.S. laws today legitimize, finance, and protect only one party or tendency in the "tribe" at a time. The option of fission does not exist. Hence modern-day tribal struggles are pressurized, and inescapable, to a far greater degree. Situations which would have given birth to new

tribal nations a century ago now usually result in internecine violence, as at Pine Ridge in 1973 or, more recently, at Red Lake.

Indeed, *The Cheyenne Nation* should be required reading for those federal bureaucrats who have been entrusted since 1978 with determining "who are Indian tribes."<sup>1</sup> In several of these recent cases, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has rejected groups for the same kind of history of social fission, exchange of families with neighboring tribes, and varying membership that Moore describes for the Cheyenne. What Moore reveals as the underlying dynamic of tribal society, the B.I.A. regards as inconsistent with being a "tribe." Its researchers are still "crystallographers," which might be amusing if it did not affect the legal status and future of a great many tribal nations.

#### NOTES

1. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 25 ("Indians"), Part 83; Russel L. Barsh, "Federal Acknowledgment of Indian Tribes—A Challenge for Anthropologists?" *Practicing Anthropology* (May 1988).

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