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Review of *The Plains Indians* By Paul H. Carlson

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The Plains Indians. By Paul H. Carlson. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1998. Photographs, illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 254 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

The enormous increase in ethnohistorical studies over the past generation or two has made room for a new overview of Plains Indian history. Paul Carlson's *The Plains Indians* provides an overview but falls short of filling the niche.

The book is dated in some of its approaches, stereotypical in some of its descriptions, and uneven in its incorporation of recent literature. Its title should include dates since the book concentrates on the period 1750-1890. Chapter one, "The People and the Plains," locates the various tribes in their nineteenth-century positions, and chapter two, "First Arrivals," surveys ancient America via the standard stepping stones—Bering Straits, Anasazi, Clovis, Mississippian culture. But there is little time depth to pre-contact Plains history or attention to Plains Indians' accounts of their origins. A brief epilogue discusses the twentieth century.

Most of the book comprises general descriptions of Plains Indian life in the horse and buffalo days, illustrated by examples from particular tribes, and with reminders that Plains Indians differed from each other within a broader context of shared cultures. Plains Indian people are described in one-dimensional terms and past tenses. Blackfeet men were relatively "free and easy, concerned with the material pleasures of life," compared with "far more austere and serious Cheyenne men." A Plains Indian male "usually became a joyous warrior in battle," a devoted parent, and a reliable hunter. "Proud, mystical, and spontaneous, the Plains Indians were tall people (Comanches and Tonkawas excepted)"; Lakotas had "long faces and prominent noses"; Pawnees had "heavy, massive faces"; different tribes had differently shaped heads. Southern Arapahos were "friendly people of an easy

temperament." In places, the book reads like something from another era.

The author, a professor of history at Texas Tech University, cites plenty of dissertations from Texas Tech but few from anywhere else; he incorporates much ethnohistory, but omits, for example, recent works on Cheyenne history by John Moore and Elliott West. Reading exactly the same lengthy footnote twice (pp. 11-12) is rather annoying.

The book improves in chapters eight, nine, and ten, which provide clear and concise accounts of shifting patterns of trade and diplomacy, the contest for the Plains, and the reservation era, with broad explanations appropriately laced with good examples. But for an overview of Plains Indian culture, general readers still may do better to go back to Robert Lowie's *Indians of the Plains* (1954) and other standard works.

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