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BOOK REVIEW

Indian Oratory: Famous Speeches by Noted Indian Chieftains. W. C. Vanderwerth, Editor. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971. Pp. xviii, 292. \$8.95

Although books and articles dealing with Native Americans continue to proliferate, a significant void remains in the area of documented Native American oratory or public address. W. C. Vanderwerth's book, *Indian Oratory*, was a valid attempt to fill a portion of that void, notwithstanding some serious problems. Many volumes dealing with "American Public Address" line the shelves of bookstores and libraries, but few of the sources include recorded speeches, and their analyses, of outstanding Native American speakers. These speeches are available, yet few individuals have joined Vanderwerth in locating, analyzing, and publishing these important messages in North American history.

The most recent speech included in the work was delivered by Quanah Parker (Comanche) in 1910. Vanderwerth, or some other researcher, should be encouraged to edit a second, and perhaps third, volume to preserve many more recent speeches of importance. The volume includes 49 addresses from 36 Indian speakers representing 22 tribes. With one exception, the speeches are arranged chronologically, beginning with the March 15, 1758, address by Teedyuscung, and concluding with the speech from Quanah Parker.

The issues to which these Indian spokesmen addressed themselves were obviously of major importance, or as Carmack pointed out in the foreword, "They were of threatening and urgent concern. . . ." Many of the issues are still relevant to Indian life today, and therein may lie the real value of the book. The closing paragraphs of an 1879 speech by Chief Joseph, for example, have been echoed many times in recent years by other noted Indian speakers.

One major flaw in this work is the inadequate consideration given the problem of authenticity of speech texts. Serious and legitimate doubts about the accuracy and reliability of the translations and sources of the manuscripts prevail. This problem was alluded to by the author himself when he said, "However, some of the Indians complained that the interpreters did not give . . . the meaning which the Indians intended to convey when they were addressing the whites." Vanderwerth wrote in the preface, ". . . it is difficult to record just where the information was retrieved. . . ." And later, he added, "Every effort was made to trace the speeches as far back as possible, so that *little* would be added or subtracted. . . ." The effort

is a commendable one, but the problem remains that many early reporters of speeches were not well trained and they frequently gave only the gist or main thrust of the address. Material that was considered dull or unimportant was omitted in many cases, and sometimes reporters admitted having been so caught up by certain speakers that they forgot to print all that was said. One research specialist, Ernest G. Bormann, stated, "We are usually skeptical of the authenticity of speech texts from the colonial period in America. . . ."¹

Almost all of Vanderwerth's sources are secondary, at best. Readers should be fully aware that most of these speeches were delivered in Indian languages, all unique, and this was an almost insurmountable problem for reporters and translators. Vanderwerth provided little corroborating evidence that the orations in his book are, to be sure, the actual words or meanings intended by Red Jacket, Tecumseh, Sequoyah, Seattle, and others. Frequently listed as sources in the bibliography, for example, were reports from the "Commissioner of Indian Affairs," who was rarely a friend of Native Americans, or even a good listener.

Further evidence of the problem mentioned above can be found in the selected 1811 speech by Pushmataha (Choctaw). In the source used by Vanderwerth for this address, the *Congressional Record*, Monday, June 13, 1921, p. 8279, the paragraph immediately preceding Pushmataha's supposed speech in reply to Tecumseh says:

What a pity that *no accurate account* of this wonderful debate between these two giant primitive orators *was* at that time preserved. . . . I will undertake to give it to you *in part as nearly as I remember hearing it told by some of the old Indians many years ago*.

With this kind of evidence available, Vanderwerth should have investigated further and informed his readers of the questionable status of several speeches in the book. Indian people and others in the United States would, no doubt, be appreciative of such qualification. Instead, Vanderwerth chose to say, "It is quite likely that the translations were very much as the speakers gave them. . . ." There may be much value in publishing accounts, excerpts, recollections, etc., of important historical speeches, but they should be labeled and presented as such.

Does the book accomplish the editor's goal? It probably does, since Vanderwerth is a historian and not a rhetorician. He edited these selections ". . . to give some idea of the problems faced by Indians in meeting the ever-increasing infringement on their territories by

the whites." *Indian Oratory* furnishes some significant historical issues and perhaps some of the words used to cope with those issues, but the book is not a true account of Native American public address. The authentic record, an oral one, has probably been lost forever.

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NOTE

1. E. BORMANN, *THEORY AND RESEARCH IN THE COMMUNICATIVE ARTS*, 177 (1966).