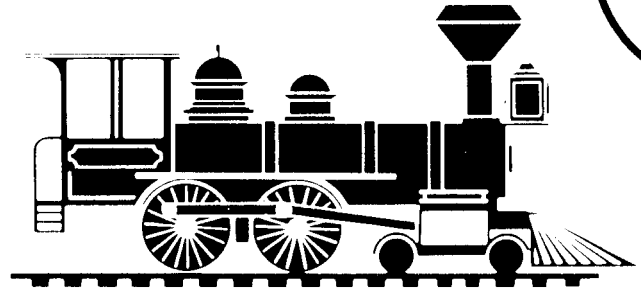


Northern Plains Reviews



Gary Clayton Anderson. *Little Crow: Spokesman for the Sioux*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1986. (x) + 260 pp., including contents, list of illus. and maps, acknowledgements, introduction, preface, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Illustrated. \$19.95 (cloth); \$10.95 (paper). Available from the publisher at Order Dept. 720, 1500 Mississippi St., St. Paul, MN 55101 (add \$1.50 for postage and handling; MN residents add 6% sales tax).

Anderson tells the reader in his introduction that his intent is to present an example of an "ethno-biography," which, he explains, consists of the "writing of biography from the perspective of a minority culture" (p. 3). The subject of his exercise is the tragic Little Crow, whom Anderson effectively portrays as much as a symbol as an actual leader of the Dakota Sioux during the conflict of 1862. Consequently, it is his ability to reconstruct the ideologies and perspectives of participants in this culminating encounter upon which Anderson chooses to be evaluated.

At the beginning of the 18th Century non-Indians — traders, missionaries, travelers, and the military — made their entrance upon the upper Mississippi River. The first families of non-Indian Minnesotans, some few with empathy for the plight of the eastern Dakotas, did not understand fully the extenuating historical circumstances that preceded the confrontation. Instead, they created myths about Little Crow as leader of the perpetrators of the violence. Anderson shows how violent the decades of interaction before the conflict of 1862 were in the lives of the Dakotas.

While Anderson marshals the available evidence to shape a comprehension of the dwindling options accessible to the particular bands of eastern Dakotas, his technique as a biographer is more obscure. Propelled by an explicit positivist bent, Anderson culls the 19th Century primary sources, some never before utilized, to reconstruct a single reality, rather than a series of realities, within which he thinks Little Crow, the eastern Sioux, and Minnesotans actually intersected, with the inevitable conflict resulting. Unfortunately, the sources are incomplete, which leads Anderson to conjecture, and at times he borders upon psychological observations without supporting documentation.

Anderson attributes Little Crow's rise to influence as necessarily tied to strategic alliances and kinship networks emanating not only from the particulars of socio-cultural circumstances, but also from careful constructions by Little Crow. Anderson provides in an appendix a full reconstruction of Little Crow's genealogy, based on available information. By showing the extent of intermarriage between relatives of Little Crow and members of the soldier societies with traders, he suggests the extent to which Little Crow must have utilized his kinship relations as a basis for alliance.

While kinship obligations in Dakota society carry important moral valences, the situational dynamics often reflect the very specific interactions of individuals. Kinship is a meaningful subsystem of

symbols and meanings informing behavior in a society, but the individual motivation of any self emerges and is articulated based on socialization and overall degrees of an individual's participation. Trade alliances based on "marriages of the country" did not necessarily respond to the moral obligations expected of an individual in the role of relative in eastern Dakota society.

Anderson attempts to explain these kinship systems. He does not understand kinship theory, however, nor how adequately to fit his data within the framework of Dakota kinship. For example, his discussion of Dakota kinship is marred by his incorrect use of the term "affine" (p. 24) and his inability to realize that in Dakota society being a relative precludes the anthropological misnomer of fictive kinship. He mischaracterizes these relatives as "those coming purely from ceremonial adoption and gift giving" (p. 24).

Anderson allows a glimpse of intratribal competition for authority and status and demonstrates how traders engaged in activities to influence various headmen. He concedes that Little Crow was neither very representative of nor extremely marginal to his culture. Frequently, Anderson relies upon hypothetical psychohistorical suppositions as to the nature of Little Crow's thoughts and those of his supporters.

This study does synthesize much of the information available in written sources about the conflict, but disappoints in that so few new insights emerge. Anderson encounters the same problems in his approach to biography that any biographer encounters when the data assembled includes no written records created by the person who is the subject. Thoughts are attributed by Anderson to the subject too simplistically, based merely on the observations or interpretation of others. One set of myths is thus exchanged for a revised set. This work should be more accurately considered an interpretation of polity in eastern Dakota society in the mid 19th Century, rather than an ethnohistory.

Poplar, Montana

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Erwin N. Thompson. *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri*. Medora, ND: Theodore Roosevelt Nature & History Association, 1986. iv + 111 pp., including contents, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. Illustrated. \$5.95 (paper). Available from the Fort Union Trading Post NHS, Buford Rt., Williston, ND 58801 (add \$1.00 for postage and handling).

Erwin N. Thompson, a retired National Park Service employee, has written a narrative history of Fort Union Trading Post. In this new edition based on a study of Fort Union Trading Post done by the