

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Stands in Timber, Margot Liberty. *Cheyenne Memories*. Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 1998. xxix + 330 pp. \$16.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-300-07300-3.

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## *Cheyenne Memories: An Oral History*

I was very pleased to learn that Yale University Press had seen fit to reprint *Cheyenne Memories* with a new Preface by Margot Liberty.

This particular piece of oral history remains a classic for those of us interested in the impact on the Native American by the incursion of the Anglo-American and Hispanic-American into the western frontier. John Stands in Timber's memories of beginnings of his tribe are the stories that set the Cheyenne apart from other tribes of the region. His recollections of the tribe's rituals, the tribe's political organization, and the tribe's particular view of history makes this slender volume a niche component of the western historians' libraries.

Military historians ought to also have an interest in these oral traditions. John Stands in Timber's grandfather died at the Battle of the Little Big Horn along with Custer. His words reveal oral traditions covering the war years with the Crow and the Assiniboins, meeting the Sioux, and fighting the Shoshonis. All of these are recounted almost as if the story teller were there in person. The oral historian can picture the old man speaking before a camp fire telling the young warriors the history of their tribe.

Perhaps the best parts of the oral tradition are those that speak to the ancient myths of the Cheyenne beginnings, their myths of creation. The tales of Sweet Medicine followed by the First Miracle truly set the stage for a set of tribal memories recounted by an intelligent and intense interpreter of his people. The audio tapes made by Margot Liberty must remain among the best of their genre.

John Stands in Timber's clear understanding of the Cheyenne tribal organization is a worthwhile treatise on Native American Political Science.

But the "Teller" is truly in his element when discussing and recounting the stories of the Soldiers. He tells of the several military societies that made up the Cheyenne "army." His tales of the Dog Soldiers are particularly interesting. Their strategies and tactics are delineated in great detail. Since my own particular interest in Frontier History extends into the Cheyenne story, I was struck by his clearness of thinking and insightful comments about the Soldier Societies, some of which enter into my own research.

I was also quite taken with the chapter on the Ghost Dance Years, 1890-1900. The search for an Indian Messiah was of particular interest.

The final paragraph really sums up the entire oral history of the Cheyenne, as seen by John Stands in Timber. That paragraph says, in part, that he hopes that the Cheyenne will never forget their heritage, never forget whom they are from and from where they come. He ends by stating, "They [the old Cheyenne] are gone now and much of what they knew has been lost. But I am glad I have saved a part of it for those who will come after us. It is important for them to remember some of the things that made the Cheyennes a great and strong people."

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