



Paige Raibmon. *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. xv + 307 pp. \$84.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8223-3535-1.



Reviewed by Susan Neylan

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I will admit that I have been very much looking forward to this book. Familiar with Paige Raibmon's dissertation upon which this, her first book is drawn, and knowing her research from numerous conference presentations, I was not to be disappointed. Her book revolves around the idea of "authenticity" as it applies to late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Northwest Coast Aboriginal cultures in Canada and the United States. Raibmon does not conceptualize the term "authentic" as the measure of the real or genuine historical experience of Native peoples. Rather, she examines how notions of authenticity were historically bounded, based in colonialism, and both the discourse and category of analysis by which Aboriginal people came to be measured. "Authenticity was a structure of power that enabled even as it constrained, their interaction with the colonial world" (p. 11).

Through three case studies, Raibmon gives her readers examples of how Native and non-Native alike used ideas about what it meant to be an "authentic Indian," ideas that were usually defined within the framework of unattainable bina-

ry opposites (especially prominent were civilized/uncivilized, modern/traditional, capitalist/subsistent, and White/Indian). To be an "authentic Indian" meant adhering to static images of primitiveness, innocence, and disappearance before the face of the modern, capitalist society of the White newcomers. Another way authenticity was defined was by putting on display examples of so-called civilized Indians, whether through government-sponsored exhibits highlighting the achievements of model residential school students, or by Alaskan missionaries' attempts to cash in on the tourist traffic through tours of its Christian Tlingit cottages. Here authenticity was defined in opposition to apparent colonial successes; tourists were urged to see both sides--the vanishing "authentic Indian" past and the vanishing "Indian" in the present through assimilation.

First Nations challenged this typology in creative ways to resist colonial impositions or utilized the assumptions about authenticity for their own benefit, for example, as paid cultural performers or as the manufacturers of tourist souvenirs. And yet, "Aboriginal attempts to fashion

lives that defied dichotomies--lives that were simultaneously 'Aboriginal' and 'modern'--were rarely easy and often painful" (p. 200). Herein lies what Raibmon terms the double-edged nature of the idea of authenticity. Despite the remarkable Aboriginal agency in the face of static visions, the process was anything but benign, something of she reminds her readers by using the controversy over contemporary Makah whale hunting in western Washington to illustrate the persistence of the contradictory and ahistorical discourse that demands that Native people adhere to White notions of "Indianness" in order to be "authentic."

Theoretically informed, *Authentic Indians* is arranged around three highly readable and fascinating episodes taken from Northwest Coast history. Raibmon selected her three case examples for their illustration of how questions of authenticity spurred Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal encounters around performance, work, tourism, and legal identity. Interestingly enough, the first of these did not take place on the Northwest Coast at all. Raibmon reads the meanings of Kwawaka'wakw participation at the 1893 World Fair in Chicago, demonstrating how traditional cultural expressions, modern wage labor, and political protest intermingled in their public performances at the fair purported to be "authentic" living exhibits. The commodification of cultural practice through dancing at the fair did not necessarily negate Kwawaka'wakw authority in the traditional context. Potlatches were given back home in British Columbia using the money received as wages, and the choice of what could be performed, even in the secular context of a tourist spectacle, was predicated on who had the hereditary rights and prerogatives to particular dances.

The second case study, and my personal favorite for what it reveals about a rather understudied area of Aboriginal working-class history, centers on the use of Aboriginal labor in the U.S. Pacific Northwest's hop industry. In the hop fields, Natives from up and down the coast as far north

as Alaska were migrant wage laborers in a capitalist economy, objects of ethnographic study by anthropologists, and picturesque spectacles captured by the "Kodak-fiend's" camera. However, Raibmon reveals that Aboriginal agendas coexisted with these outsiders' categories and allowed Native needs to be served: "Families on the move wove political and cultural imperatives into their travel itineraries" and migration itself to work in agricultural venues outside home territories, were "one way to evade colonial interference"(p. 103). Moreover, these came to transcend the colonial boundaries themselves, as hop field gatherings became "places where new forms of pan-Aboriginal identity--political, cultural, and religious--evolved" (p. 200).

The final episode from the Northwest Coast Raibmon explores is a court case brought forth by a Tlingit man, Rudolph Walton, to try to get his two mixed-descent stepchildren admitted to the white public school in Sitka, Alaska. This 1906 legal battle, which ultimately failed for Walton and his family, was as much a trial of how the non-Aboriginal culture defined "civilization," as it was an example of the limiting and exclusionary nature of "authenticity" when applied to "real" Aboriginal people. Alaska in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the rise of a burgeoning tourist industry that served to essentialize all Aboriginal inhabitants into two opposing categories: uncivilized "authentic Indians" and "civilized," Christian ones; the lived Aboriginal experience, Raibmon persuasively argues, was never that neatly divided.

There is no mistaking this as the work of anyone else but a historian. Raibmon's attention to the larger historical context and developing nineteenth-century Indian policy, not to mention the detailed explorations of her three case studies, betray her mastery of the topic and of the range of source material she has culled together from disparate sources. She makes no claims about the uniqueness of the Northwest Coast experience

with authenticity, but instead sees her choice of geographic and temporal focus, illustrative of trends influencing the colonial imagination on Native peoples elsewhere. "It was at this historical moment, as political and economic conditions seemed to ensure the disappearance of Aboriginal people and culture, that non-Aboriginal fascination with romantic images of vanishing Indians flourished" (p. 123). History, she convincingly explains, is central to the very construction and maintenance of Aboriginal authenticity, whereby "Indians" were categorized as being "of the past"--"by this definition, all things authentic were (and are) constantly receding into the past" (p. 202). One of the strengths of the book is Raibmon's tendency not to isolate the historical processes she sees at work in the three historical vignettes. The episodes are compared and highlighted for some of their similarities, and the past is linked to the present, giving full credence to the cultural and historical continuum that had informed Native lives long before Euro-American/Canadian newcomers arrived on their shores.

In her search to find the meaning of this discourse of authenticity for Aboriginal individuals, she draws upon some interesting Native textual sources. She consults a journal kept by a British Columbia Native who worked in the hop fields for a number of years, and investigates Tlingit Rudolph Walton's diary that recorded much more than simply his own perspective on the trial for education rights that he brought before the Alaskan courts. Raibmon also searched out non-textual sources to enhance her interpretation. Looking into the photographic record of the Chicago Fair, for instance, she shows the reader how the dichotomies of traditional/modern or authentic/inauthentic were blurred together, and offers the example of how on one occasion, the photographs of dancers themselves became "property" distributed at a potlatch. Indeed, this work is richly illustrated, with nearly forty maps, figures, and photographs placed throughout the book where they are referred to directly in the text, in-

stead of being lumped together in the center of the book, which, although ultimately a decision taken by the press itself, is a format highly complementary to Raibmon's analysis.

Other scholars have broached several of the topics Raibmon's book engages--studies of colonial images of indigenous peoples in North America, the rise of tourism and the Aboriginal curio-collection phenomenon, examinations of the impact of Christian missions on Northwest Coast peoples, and discussions of Indian policy in the U.S. and Canadian contexts.[1] However, no one has ever before analyzed them so effectively in a single work and considered how these elements interacted with one another. *Authentic Indians* is a thought-provoking, original study well deserving attention from readers interested in understanding how colonialism served to shape images of Native peoples (many of which remain with us today) and the responses Northwest Coast peoples created to reject, ignore, or appropriate these depictions.

Note

[1]. Regarding the study of colonial images of indigenous peoples in North America, see Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992); Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001). For literature on the rise of tourism and the Aboriginal curio-collection phenomenon, see Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, eds., *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001); Ruth Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, eds., *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and*

Post Colonial Worlds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). On the impact of Christian missions on Northwest Coast peoples, see Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992); C. L. Higham, *Noble, Wretched, and Redeemable: Protestant Missions to the Indians of Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press and Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000); Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). On Indian policy in the U.S. and Canadian contexts, see James A. Clifton, ed., *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990); Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2002).

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