

ment. (In fairness, I should note that the Gerlachs describe an interesting mechanism fostering equality, namely, the presence of contradictory rules, such as the opposition between matri- and patrilineality introduced by Islamicization.)

Except for papers by Greenwood and Mars, the articles in this volume could use further analysis and elaboration. Given this, and some inconsistencies in the reference sections, one wonders about the editorial services provided by Avebury Press. The typeface is not pleasant to read; neither are its printing standards impressive. At U.S. \$44.95, this short book is grossly overpriced. Nonetheless, it did help me to think about equality in a more systematic fashion, and other readers may benefit similarly.

### **An Error in Judgement: The Politics of Medical Care in an Indian/White Community**

Dara Culhane Speck

Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987. 281 pp. \$12.95 (paper)

*Reviewer:* Alexander M. Ervin

University of Saskatchewan

Personally, I would rate this book as the most significant publication in Canadian applied anthropology of the decade. It is all the more remarkable because it was not written by a senior academic but rather was originally formulated as a undergraduate thesis at Simon Fraser University. Although Speck is a novice academic (she is currently a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia), she does not come to this research inexperienced. She draws upon her years as a political activator and community developer at Alert Bay on Cormorant Island, British Columbia, a mixed community consisting of non-Natives and Kwakwaka'wakw Indians. She had married into the Native community and had served in various roles for the band council. She played a central advocacy role in the dispute that she describes.

The book centres on the tragically unnecessary death of a young Indian girl due to appendicitis. It is a passionate ethnography (a term used originally by the late Jules Henry) which vividly shows the effects of this death on the child's extended family and the community as a whole. That many Indian children die tragically does not lessen the pain of any particular instance for Native people. In this case the death was due to the negligence of an alcoholic doctor. As proven by a subsequent enquiry, two later deaths were also directly related to his negligence. But more than this, Speck shows that these incidents are not isolated but rather represent the sub-standard health care that Native people in Canada receive, a situation related to their colonized status.

Speck does not explicitly indicate her theoretical perspective; a political-economic one seems implicit and she handles it very well. In fact, one of the book's strengths is that it contains a well thought out anthropological perspective for social criticism without burdening the reader with the standard "genueflections" to literature reviews, conceptual operationalizations, and other overly academic "baggage." To do so would have taken away from the chronicle of the tragedy of Renée Smith's death and the portrayal of the injustices imposed by colonialism upon the Native people of Alert Bay. The types of data and literature used and the implicit theoretical

perspectives are still sound from my academic perspective. Her endnotes and bibliographies support that observation. Data consists of first-hand observations, descriptions of episodes, transcriptions from the several enquiries into the incident, newspaper reports and editorials, data from the ethnographic and historical literature, and other types of evidence such as epidemiological statistics.

In addition to demonstrating her excellent narrative skills, the author brilliantly encapsulates the essence of complex institutional systems. Examples of such writing include her summary of some of the complexities of traditional medicine (pp. 69-70) and the consequences of colonialist attitudes among professional health workers (pp. 99-100). She has the ability to summarize neatly significant far-reaching truths. For example, in reference to Renée Smith's older female relatives, she states that, "The Dick girls form part of that brigade of women who keep the Native community going" (p. 23). Those familiar with Native Studies know the powerful truth of that statement. The book offers many small lessons and insights, while maintaining the principal theme that Canadian Native people have suffered from a complex colonizing history, which has resulted in persistent yet subtle repressive attitudes about them among the majority of Canadians. These realities continue to result in substandard services to Native people in spite of the emergence of a potentially countervailing "racial liberalism."

I do not have any significant criticisms of this book. Some could argue that Speck should have provided direct recommendations for the improvement of health-care delivery. She may have avoided this in deference to Native leaders, who are charged with that task. As she points out, even the transfer of authority to Native people can have great risks, if it is piecemeal and is not well thought out. Others might suggest that the issues raised in the book should have been more directly analyzed in the context of the comparative literature on health and health-care delivery to Fourth-World peoples. Such a treatment might have been counterproductive, imposing a "stuffy" and involuted academic tone to a powerful piece of passionate but sound advocacy. My only serious suggestion involves the book's length. Two hundred and eighty-one pages is not overly long for an academic book. It may be too long to maintain the attention of policy-makers, politicians, and physicians treating Natives, groups that she presumably wants to influence. Given her superb writing ability, she surely could have produced a shorter version with similar impact.

The book has many potential contexts and uses. Students at all levels of anthropology, sociology, native studies, medicine and nursing, and the general public could benefit from it. Let us hope that some policy makers are reading it too! Finally, we so-called "established" and "professional" social scientists have much to learn from the book, especially in terms of effective communication and passionate commitment.