

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working Class Culture

Thomas W. Dunk

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995. xii + 191 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Don Bennett
University College, Dublin

This useful short volume successfully describes working-class culture in a "place of long, empty distances, of big machinery, large trucks, rail cars, and lake ships" (p. 75). Its substantive chapters portray life in Thunder Bay. This description comprises the most valuable half of the book.

Theory, not ethnography, is, however, the author's goal. Dunk has strained to create a theoretical work. It is good theoretical work, as far as it goes. A broad Marxist critique of capitalist social formations constitutes the motif. This macrosociological outline is competent and well referenced. Toward his conclusion, the author works systematically to prove that the working class *is* ideologically duped by the cultural superstructure that so efficiently surrounds capital. "Subordinate classes," as Dunk's final paragraph puts the point, "are trapped in a veritable hall of mirrors" (p. 160). Theoreticians will find this a beginning, rather than an end to the analysis of working-class culture. Theoretical contribution in this area requires explaining how, conceptually, the hall of mirrors works. Dunk contributes only a little to this task.

Most readers will find interesting the author's description of the preoccupations of his beer-drinking, gender-dominant Ontarians. The depiction of the North American working-class condemnation of education and of thoughtful thinking makes up a compelling section, especially if compared to European working-class cultures. What working-class North Americans reject, at a conscious level, about the intelligentsia is its lack of intelligence. One who thinks in any way that can be defined as complex "is . . . emotionally weak and not able to face reality, lacking in intelligence" (p. 135). European working classes are very different. Dunk has captured this North American dimension very well.

The book portrays an extraordinary degree of male dominance. Female lives are subordinated to male enjoyment. This is the most striking aspect of the book. Its author would doubtlessly agree, however, that it is the least well-researched one. Negative White working-class attitudes toward the Ojibwa, who live adjacent to Thunder Bay, are also described in an interesting chapter.

Fraternal social solidarity distinguishes Ontarian working-class culture in this presentation. Working-class men consciously pursue friendship values, in Dunk's view, in order to assert their rejection of middle-class ideals of individual achievement. A local softball team is used to illustrate and exemplify this, as well as other themes covered in the book. Alongside the consciously fraternal, there necessarily lies the cultural unconscious. Everyone is assumed, for example, to have contributed his share to the team's beer fund; it cannot occur, culturally, to anyone to doubt anyone else's input.

This study might have been extended to some consideration of wider community life; we are told nothing about whether or not these men exhibit any communal social-

ity or solidarity beyond their leisure and work circles. This would seem to be the next research step.

Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies

Katherine Pettipas

Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1994. xiv + 304 pp. \$39.95 (cloth)

Reviewer: Cath Oberholtzer
Trent University

As the powerful Thunder Beings roared and rent the sky, *kisikaw-awasis*, “Flash-in-the-Sky Boy,” was born. The year was 1816 and this newborn infant (later renamed Piapot) grew to be a strong political and spiritual leader for his peoples in their resistance to governmental and missionary forces designed to quell Native spirituality on the Canadian Prairies.

This dramatic opening immediately draws the reader into the Native viewpoint, not only aligning our sympathies with the Native voice of tribal history, but also opening windows onto the social and spiritual setting of individual groups, and into the environmental setting of the prairies in the early nineteenth century. By examining the experiences of the Plains Cree from the 1870s to 1951, Pettipas exposes the persistence of religious practices despite missionary pressures to change, and the enactment of judiciary laws forbidding them. As Pettipas so poignantly declares, “It is time the story was told” (p. 16).

In relating the story, Pettipas gives life and meaning to what at times might otherwise be very dry reading. Using clear and precise language, she has incorporated a large corpus of archival documents into succinct statements. By deftly establishing the embedding and subsuming of Native religious expression within a form acceptable to Canadian administrators, both government policies and missionary endeavours are given a context, a context which in this case explains Euro-Canadian concerns and viewpoints vis-à-vis the Native situation at each stage.

Each chapter moves chronologically from the initial efforts of the Canadian government to sever the ties that bound every Native to each other, to the ultimate reversal when the notion, “severing the ties that bind,” refers to the Native efforts to cut loose from the White suppression of Native spirituality, and to restore, through spiritual teachings and ceremonies, the traditional ideological bonds (p. 231).

During the period of colonial expansion from 1870 to the turn of the century, the Natives, viewed as impediments to progress, became dependent victims of the *Canadian Indian Act of 1876*. In their haste to transform “Indians” into “Canadians” through this hegemonic device, administrators were endowed with inordinate amounts of authority and power. Foremost was the repression of Native religious practices, for it was perceived—most astutely—by non-Natives that these practices were fundamental to Cree identity and critical for maintaining “the ties that bind.”

As the push for settlement intensified, the two cultures clashed; Cree independence changed to wardship under the control of the federal government. Religious repression, particularly in the regulation of Sun Dances and Giveaways, and laws preventing movement between reserves incited the Natives into non-violent forms of resistance.