

Book Reviews

WARRIORS OF THE COLORADO: THE YUMANS OF THE QUECHAN NATION AND THEIR NEIGHBORS. By Jack D. Forbes. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965. 378 pp. \$5.95.) Reviewed by Homer Aschmann.

It is indeed unfortunate for a reviewer to feel constrained to discuss a book in essentially negative terms when the author has gone to a great deal of effort and examined and cited a great number of documentary sources that have never before been used in reference to the history of the Yuman Indians. There is rich ore here, but it has been, almost perversely, mixed back into the tailings. After making such a sweeping condemnation the reviewer would seem obligated to back up his criticism with specifics, and I find that the ones I have are largely petty. But there are so many that they cause me to lose confidence in the interpretations of the substantial new documentary evidence that Forbes has introduced.

Warriors of the Colorado is an effort to present a history of the Quechan or Yuma Indian tribe from its origin in the misty past to its reduction to full dependency on the U.S. Government in the 1850's. The intent is to present the history from the Indians' viewpoint, a desire that is difficult to satisfy since almost all the documentary materials with which Forbes is comfortable come from non-Indian observers. In the absolute sense three sorts of information are available to the ethnohistorian: the ethnographic, the geographic, and the documentary. Forbes' effort is open to evaluation in each of the areas.

In the ethnographic realm the reader is immediately struck by his choice of Indian-sounding names by which to identify tribes. He uses Ootam to refer, indiscriminately, to both Papagos and Pimas, even to the Lower Pimas who had essentially no relation to events on the Lower Colorado. The use of Kamia to apply to all the Diegueños is a perfect mirror image of Gifford's identification of the Kamia as a few bands of desert and riverine Eastern Diegueños. (See E. W. Gifford, "The Kamia of Imperial Valley," Bureau of American Ethnology, *Bulletin* 97 [1931].) No justification is given for these and other neologistic usages in place of well established tribal names. The use of Indian looking words, taken largely from C. Daryll Forde, "Ethnography of the Yuma Indians," *University of California Publications in Ethnology*, 28 (1931), without citation and without any indication of how they might be pronounced, to refer to elements in the social structure or material culture of the Quechans, is just pretentiousness, though, properly, they are defined in a glossary.

More critical difficulty arises in dealing with the precontact history of the Yuman linguistic family and the region of the Lower Colorado River. Archeological, linguistic, and legendary evidence is cited extensively. It is all presented, just like a pack rat's nest; no coherent story emerges; sound interpretations are criticized and aberrant ones presented without comment. Perhaps the hardest part to swallow is that tribal origin legends are treated in the same way as archeological or linguistic evidence, that is as though they recorded historical events. Origin legends, as diffusible culture elements, can be used in historical reconstruction by a skilled interpreter.

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Treating them as historical fact has been recognized as bad historiography since the time of Vico and the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Another difficulty arises from treating relations between Indian groups throughout the Southwest as though they were alliances and conflicts between nineteenth century European powers. They weren't. While the Quechans, Mohaves, and some groups to the east were legitimate tribes capable of waging organized warfare or making peace, at least for a short period of time, the Indians to the west had only a *rancheria* or band organization. A band might defend itself, but certainly could not wage war. The Quechan League involving the Quechans (Yumas), Mohaves, Kamias (Forbes means Diegueños), Yavapais, Chemehuevi Paiutes and several group of Papagos, allied against a similarly widespread Gila Pima-Maricopa League is a figment of Forbes' imagination.

Conversely very little attention is given to the diversities of material culture and economy that characterize the numerous Indian groups of the Southwest, though in this area the ethnographic information is quite firm, and the differences in economy and way of life can afford an important explanatory continuity to the differential experiences of the several tribes in their contacts with peoples of European origin.

Although the extraordinary geography of the Colorado River Delta and its margins has always had a pervasive influence on all events in the Indian and subsequent histories of the region, the situation is not described clearly, nor is it understood. For example, Forbes speaks of the "mouth of the Laguna Macuata." The Laguna Macuata is a desert sink, its bottom below sea level. The southern end where water sometimes spills from the Colorado Delta into the sink is hardly its mouth. The only reasonably large scale map offered is abridged from Godfrey Sykes, *The Colorado Delta* (Washington, D.C., 1937) without citation and shows the intricate and perfectly transient network of distributaries on the delta that were present in the 1930's as the result of the flood of 1905-6 and subsequent efforts at flood control. Whatever the position of the distributaries may have been a century or two earlier it is unlikely to have been the same. With continuing alluviation there are no landmarks on the delta, and when Forbes positively locates eighteenth century villages far out on the open delta, I have no confidence that he appreciates the limitations of his evidence. Similarly, he identifies villages as belonging to different tribes when the tribal name recorded in a document is a unique variant. In some cases he may be right.

It is unfortunate that the evidence has been used so uncritically because Forbes has utilized many previously unexploited reports of visits to the delta and Lower Colorado, especially in the period from 1782 to 1845. The intricate interrelations among the several tribes in the area, and the expulsion of some and their emigration to distant locations during the 300 year period when there was European contact but not domination, has been studied thoughtfully by Leslie Spier in his *Yuman Tribes of the Gila River* (Chicago, 1933) as a topic of great theoretical as well as intrinsic historic interest. Forbes has relevant new evidence that could be used both more cautiously and more purposefully.

Warriors of the Colorado attempts to be a narrative history of an Indian tribe and the neighboring groups that interacted with it. Wherever possible the personalities involved are brought into the foreground, even when the

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evidence is terribly thin. We are told a tremendous amount about the motivations of Salvador Palma and Captain Pablo in their relations with Spanish missionaries and soldiers. Forbes wants to be sympathetic to the Indian viewpoint and these and other Quechans are presented as rational and humane individuals. But what can he know of their individual motivations? They left no diaries, and those who described them came from an alien culture as well as having had their own axes to grind in their reports. At the level at which we have any possibility of knowing them, the personalities of these long-dead Indians are uninteresting. The rewarding area of study is to learn how this society and culture reacted to a particular and knowable set of vicissitudes of history. Such understanding both contributes to and derives from a knowledge of the dynamic mechanisms within that culture and society. Forbes' judgments as to the effects on the development of the Spanish Empire and its inability to establish control over the strategic Yuma Crossing because of Indian resistance and independence seem both sound and plausible. His conclusions as to how the Indian cultures were modified by contacts with their neighbors and would-be conquerors are distinctly unsatisfying.

Both because of its intrinsic interest and because of the financial stimulus of the Indian Claims Cases, there has been a tremendous upsurge in interest in the Ethnohistory of the United States. Relations among Indian groups and between Indians and Europeans are involved. Anthropologists and historians have contributed, and certainly will contribute more, to a rapidly growing literature of which the book under consideration here is a part. In order that Ethnohistory not degenerate into idle antiquarianism it seems pertinent that some recognition be given to what its sources will and will not permit it to do. One goal that cannot be achieved, except under the rarest of circumstances or in explicitly fictional accounts such as Mc-Nichols' brilliant *Crazy Weather*, is the biographical narrative that focuses on the personal motivations of the Indian actors. Exceptions might be made where an Indian could be interviewed at length or if his own statements were preserved *in extenso*. Secondly, the more abundant reports of non-Indians about Indian activities are more than usually suspect. The best reporters stated just what they saw, and Indian society afforded the non-member no overview of its consensus. If there are many independent reports they are almost always contradictory in detail; almost all reporters have an ulterior motive, be it missionary and humanitarian or commercial and exploitative; almost never did a reporter understand the value system of the society he was describing. It is the peripheral descriptive comments that are most likely to be valid.

On these grounds a focus on economics and material culture is likely to be the most efficient way to get at other aspects of the culture as recorded in the documents. In this area individual observers deal with objective fact and can be checked against one another. Finally, the Indian culture must be presented as a coherent whole; in terms of what we have in the way of ethnologic theory, disfunctional or incompatible elements should be accepted only if the evidence as to their presence is overwhelming. Such a standard affords a check on the validity of aberrant documentary reports. It is not enough to believe, as Forbes evidently does, that Indians are men such as himself who will react as does he to comparable stimuli. In the

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ultimate sense they probably are, but the very mark of their Indianness is that the stimuli are perceived through a distinctive cultural screen, the appreciation of which will involve long study and subtle appreciation.

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THE MOUNTAIN MEN AND THE FUR TRADE OF THE FAR WEST. Edited by LeRoy R. Hafen. (Glendale, Calif.: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1965. 397 pp. \$14.50.) Reviewed by Clark C. Spence.

This is the first of "six or more volumes" of "carefully prepared biographies of some four hundred Mountain Men" to be written by over fifty scholars under the supervisory editorship of LeRoy R. Hafen. Without taking up the question (surely a debatable one) of whether the world is yet ready for so detailed a treatment of the Mountain Men, one must admit that the undertaking is ambitious, to say the least.

This first volume of the series is divided into two parts. Nearly half of it is devoted to a lengthy introduction on the fur trade by the supervising editor; the remainder consists of twenty biographical sketches of men connected with the trade. Hafen's introduction, which at the outset seemed to promise much, is flatly disappointing. Though based on a wide array of materials, it is largely factual, uninspiring, and singularly devoid of incisive new insights.

As might be expected, the biographical sketches vary in length, "depending on the importance of the subject and the available source materials," and cover not only the subject's role in the fur trade, but also the remainder of his life span. All are by experts; all are scholarly and in the main objective, although a touch of romanticism creeps into the portrait of Joe Meek (by Harvey E. Tobie) and of George Nidever (by Margaret E. Beckman and William H. Ellison).

Some of those whose biographies appear here are mere footnotes to history and will undoubtedly remain as such. Only eight of the twenty are mentioned in the index of Chittenden and four in Phillips; none appear in the *National Cyclopaedia of Biography*, only four in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. Herein lies the real value of Hafen's multi-volume set: it makes little-known, hard-to-find life histories readily available to the researcher, both amateur and professional.

But sometimes, despite diligent efforts by the author, sources are too meager to permit an adequate treatment of the subject. It is a pity, for example, that Ray Mattison's excellent sketch of Alexander Culbertson, an important figure in the Upper Missouri Outfit, is so brief (a mere three pages). One hardly envies the task of Wilbur Jacobs, who drew the name of a much less significant person, Henry Chatillon, whose chief claim to fame was that he guided Francis Parkman in 1846 (and Sir St. George Gore a few years later); or John Sunder, who in two pages deals—and deals well—with Pinckney W. Sublette, killed by the Blackfeet after a career of only a few months in the fur country.

On the other hand, some of the biographies run as long as twenty pages. Most, like Sunder's fine piece on Solomon P. Sublette, are fully documented;