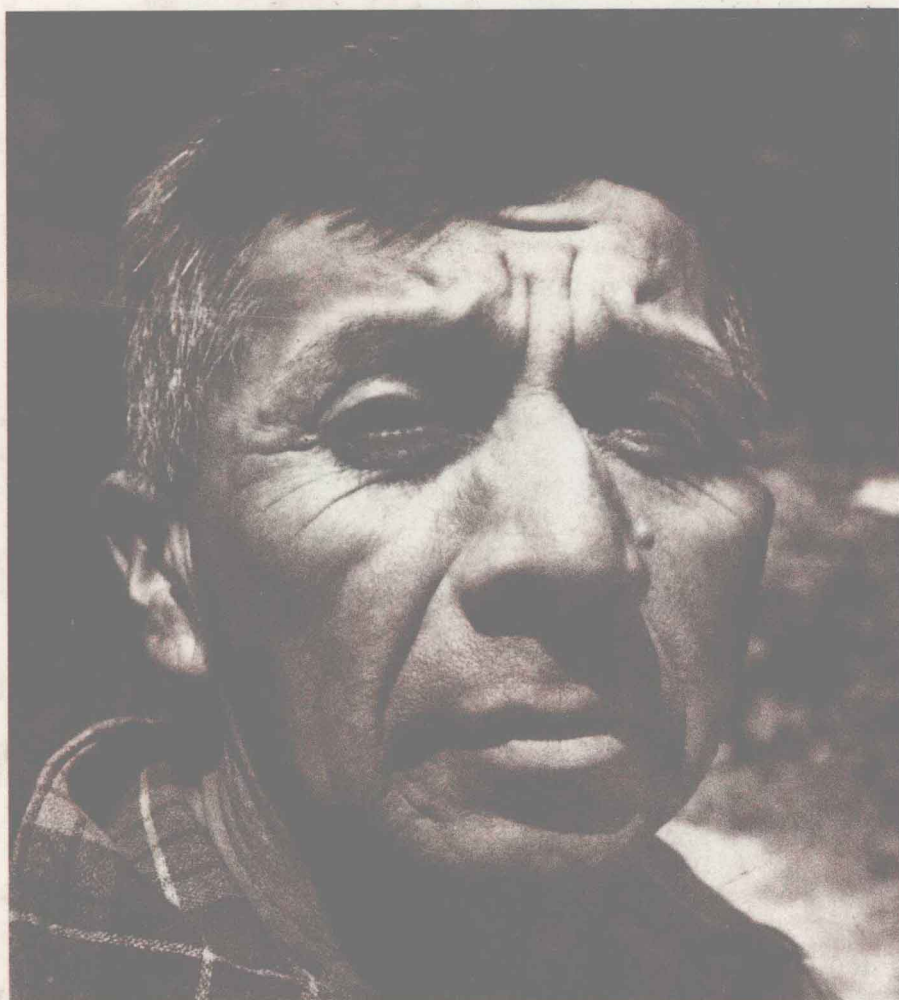


William Hodge

THE FIRST AMERICANS

THEN AND NOW



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WILLIAM H. HODGE

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THE FIRST AMERICANS

THEN AND NOW

For Susan, Matthew, and Peter

PREFACE

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

This book describes the nature of 13 native American groups as they were prior to White domination and as they have become in the last half of the twentieth century. Particular groups were selected because information concerning them was sufficient for the "then-and-now" time perspective of this book. Initially, an essential question is posed: What are these people like? The answer consists of a discussion about who, where, and when are Indians. The meaning of urban residence and the nature of Indian ethnicity are then considered. Following this, New World prehistory is briefly examined to demonstrate that the essential outlines of native American existence developed largely within the confines of the Western Hemisphere. The roots of the native American present most certainly lie buried deep within an American past. This development of modern aboriginal life is briefly outlined, and the possibility of transoceanic contacts influencing that development is discussed. A brief comment is made on native languages, and finally the nature and implications of one central, theoretical concept, the culture area, are presented.

With this general answer as a backdrop, the nature of native American life is considered in a specific sense by describing, within the then-and-now format, the dimensions of existence of 13 individual groups of people, ranging from the Eskimo of the Arctic to the Papago and Eastern Cherokee peoples in the south. Finally, both the general and the specific are pulled together within a contemporary framework, and the first Americans are presented as people who are an integral part of modern American life. Indians are both in and of our times and must be understood as such.

WHY STUDY AMERICAN INDIANS?

The distinguished anthropologist Carleton S. Coon* speaks of "a haunting fear of the imminent end of the world" that now prevades our daily

*Coon, Carleton S. Overview. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 6. Palo Alto, California: Annual Reviews, 1977, p. 1.

lives and is shared by the majority of the human residents of this planet. John R. Platt*, considering such a fear, has said:

We have . . . reached a kind of plateau in the area of "over-kill," since both the Russians and the Americans now have enough megatons of nuclear weapons in their arsenals to destroy not only themselves but all life on the planet several times over—with the equivalent of more than 10 tons of explosive for every man, woman, and child alive today, as John F. Kennedy once put it. How can we worry more? The worst is already here.

However, Platt also comments that:

. . . the present generation is the hinge of history. We see that if we can survive for the next twenty or thirty years, we can move into a high-technology world society reaching across the solar system, with new levels of well-being and hope and fulfillment—a society that might find out how to keep itself alive and evolving for thousands or millions or billions of years. This "step to Man" will be a transition to a new stage in biological and social and intellectual evolution. *But the time for the decision is now.* [Emphasis mine]

The first Americans also had "a haunting fear of the imminent end of the world." All too often their fears were realized. But many American Indian peoples, including the 13 groups presented in this text, did survive. In doing so, they learned many difficult and valuable lessons and techniques with respect to coexisting with forces and peoples much stronger than themselves and over whom they had no control or for whom, at times, they did not have much understanding. If we are willing to benefit from their experience, we can take a significant step now in this time of decision when we, our native American brothers and sisters, and others are "the hinge of history." If we ignore what they have learned at such great cost, we imperil or perhaps are in danger of obviating what could be our own bright future. Hence the following pages are something more than an illustration of what may seem to some of us as a preoccupation with the quaint and curious from-womb-to-tomb account of peoples throughout native North America. The contents of this book must be viewed as a report of several vital and successful experiments in the art of survival under extreme and difficult conditions.

On a less dramatic note, there are other reasons to study the native American experience. For the first three decades of this century, American anthropology was largely the study of American Indians. The ethnography and ethnology of native North American life are still of great

*Platt, John R. Shaping the Evolutionary Future. In H. V. Kraemer, ed., *Youth and Culture: A Human-Development Approach*. Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole, 1974, pp. 10–46; quotations on pp. 18, 19.

consequence for the discipline. Accordingly, to understand anthropology is to know something about our native peoples. On a more general note, New World native peoples form a vital part of the human spectrum and have done so both in the past and now. An understanding of such individuals is a prerequisite to the valid perception of the nature of humanity.

Oshkosh, Wisconsin

W. H. H.

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Oshkosh, Wisconsin

W. H. H.

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