

North South East West: American Indians and the Natural World

Marsha C. Bol

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Dr. Marsha Bol brings her extensive training and experience as an anthropologist in “Indian country” to this magnificently illustrated work on American Indian culture from pre-European contact to the 1990s. Her expertise was complimented by a talented group of native consultants and advisors in the production of this book. This rich combination, along with numerous historical and contemporary quotes, imbues this work with a strong authentic voice. The inclusion of more than 100 compelling portraits of individuals, past and present, and more than 200 stunning unpublished photos of Indian artifacts (taken from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History’s American Indian Collection) makes this book a powerful visual experience. Yet the reference value of this volume alone takes it beyond the genre of a “coffee-table book.”

In American Indians, the past is documented, not romanticized. This is most poignant in the discussions of the forced removal of children from many tribes to residential schools. The abundance of contemporary voices also keeps readers grounded in the very real world of “modern” Indians, serving to correct a common impression that Indian life exists only in the past; clearly, urban and reservation Indians are very much around. Bol’s section on urban Indians, who are often overlooked, is a refreshing surprise.

The book, oriented to the four directions, details four major tribal groups each representing a cardinal point of the compass. Though by necessity of format, the view may appear at first somewhat limited, inclusion of many other tribal cultures under subheadings such as “water containers” and “food preparations” gives the material a broad scope. American Indians is highly recommended for both natives and non-natives due to its intrinsic beauty, breadth of material and the respect shown the subject matter.

GABRIELLE SHAW (September / October 1998)

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