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Peer reviewed

Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country. By JENNIFER S. H. BROWN. (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980. xxiii + 255 pp. \$24)

Jennifer Brown, an anthropologist, brings her considerable analytical abilities and her innovative interdisciplinary approach to the study of the fur trade

in *Strangers in Blood*, a revision of her dissertation. She has given us a preview of the book in earlier articles that have contributed significantly to that growing field of scholarship, which views the fur trade as an institutional mechanism for creating a distinct "socio-cultural complex," to use John Foster's term. *Strangers in Blood* is a landmark publication, for it is the first book-length work in a specialization which the author has helped define.

Beginning her study in 1670, but concentrating on the period from 1780 to 1870 for which there are better records, Brown focuses on the "interracial encounters" between company men and native women and the problems faced by the fur trade participants and their progeny. She employs a "macrobiographical method" to trace the structure of the social life of the "temporally and/or socially distinct groups" over time (p. xx).

In the first four chapters, Brown delineates the contrasting social features of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest companies which, she argues, formed distinct "social worlds" because of different organizational structures, cultural backgrounds of their personnel, and patterns of interaction with Indians. Brown challenges the commonly held belief that the Northwesters had better relations with the Indians. Although the Northwesters were more flexible, intimate, and informal in their dealings with the natives, these characteristics, she says, led them into relationships with native women of the "casual-exploitative type." The Hudson's Bay officers were more formal and reserved with the Indians, but also more just; their alliances with native women, strengthened by patronage bonds with high-ranking fathers-in-law, exhibited greater permanence and signs of mutual loyalty and affection than did the Northwesters' relationships before 1821 (p. 131).

Drawing upon and confirming the findings of Sylvia Van Kirk, Brown sees the year 1821, the date of the two companies' merger, as a watershed, for it "removed the main structural basis of [the two companies'] social separation and distinctiveness" (p. 111). Thereafter, the traders shared a "unified concern" for the challenges to their way of life posed by settlers, missionaries, and Governor George Simpson. Yet Brown's evidence suggests that 1821 brought readjustment not "revolution" (her word); mixed-blood women of rank, for example, maintained their social standing and potential for assimilation into the 1830s.

Despite some shortcomings in organization (chapter seven which deals with parents and children before 1821 should have appeared earlier), the book makes a significant contribution to our understanding not only of the fur trade but also to anthropology and Indian-white relations. In addition, its many provocative arguments and observations chart the path for future research and render the book worthy of an especially careful reading.

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