

R. H. Barnes. *Two Crows Denies It: A History of Controversy in Omaha Sociology*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) xiii, 272 pp., \$24.95.

The subtitle of this book clearly reflects the scope of work Barnes sets out to accomplish. It also suggests that the study is aimed at a disciplinary readership consisting of anthropologists, sociologists, and some social historians more than an interdisciplinary audience reflected by the membership of the National Association for Ethnic Studies. Specialists in Plains anthropology and world-wide kinship studies will undoubtedly welcome this historical review of the Omaha tribal social system. Non-specialists can glean some insights as well.

The earliest analysis of the social organization of the Omaha tribe was published more than one hundred years ago by James Owen Dorsey (*Omaha Sociology*, 1884). That report of the Bureau of American Ethnology is now considered a "classic" as is the Bureau's 1911 publication of *The Omaha Tribe* by Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche. The latter ethnographic tome has assumed additional importance since La Flesche, son of Joseph La Flesche (an Omaha tribal chief), is considered to be the first professional American Indian anthropologist. Continuities and changes in Omaha social organization were studied for a short time in the early 1930s by Margaret Mead who was married at the time to Reo Fortune. Her short ethnographic trip to Nebraska, however, was more a function of the time allotted to Fortune's study of secret societies than a continuing or deep involvement with the Omaha *per se*.

For a number of reasons chronicled by Barnes, the Omaha tribe has assumed a rather dominant position in the study of kinship and social structure. Traditionally, the "Omaha type" of organization has been extended to other systems in which (1) descent is patrilineal, and (2) labeling of relatives is classificatory such that the same kinship term links persons of different generations. In the Omaha case, for example, one's father's sister is called "sister" and her son is called by the kin term meaning "sister's son"; at the same time one's mother's brother's son is referred to by a separate term which is the same as for one's "mother's brother." The specific kinship terms, incidentally, are different depending upon the gender of the person (ego) from whom the relationships are being reckoned. The implications of these linguistic categories are significant beyond the exotic and esoteric matters which intrigue anthropologists. They provide a blueprint for kinds of role behavior which are expected or prohibited between members of the social group. In that sense, within the context of the larger cultural system, they spell out one's rights, duties, and obligations to other members of the society.

Much of Barnes's discussion revolves around a description of the ten clans of the Omaha, the sub-clan groupings, and personal names

associated with these specific descent groups. The controversies, from which the book's title and subtitle are derived, arise from a base of conflicting information given by different informants utilized by the various ethnographers. Alternative perceptions of the social system were apparent to Dorsey as he obtained data from Joseph La Flesche and Two Crows (Lewis Morris) who doubted or denied certain information offered by other Omaha informants. Barnes uses this controversy to look at various theoretical models and to point out that the "Omaha type" may not be as accurately known as supposed. For readers of more general interest the important point here may be to underline the fact that no one individual is completely conversant with the total socio-cultural system of which he or she is a member. Thus perceptions of ethnicity or the boundaries of an ethnic group are subject to a good deal of variation depending upon the particular informants providing data; another series of factors, of course, involves the theoretical models or perspectives of the scholar who is recording or interpreting the data.

Barnes assumes that readers have a background in ethnography and kinship studies. Without that background readers may be confused by the use of the term "gens" as well as "clan" and the algebraic-like shorthand for indicating kinship statuses. For readers who are willing to dig into, or transcend, these sorts of technical matters there are valuable insights into the matter of ethnicity and the nature of ethnic groups. Boundary-maintaining mechanisms and relationships of kinship to other aspects of the cultural system are well exemplified in this book. Diametrically opposed mythological concepts, for example, are involved in the naming of the earth moiety and the sky moiety. These moieties and their component clans are reflected spatially in the organization of the camp circle. Personal names and hair styles traditionally announced one's clan or sub-clan. The use or avoidance of personal names as terms of address or references had specific cultural connotations in Omaha culture. For these reasons of propriety, Euro-Americans were considered impolite if not boorish in using personal names rather than appropriate kinship terms in certain social situations. These sorts of examples are useful in our attempt to understand the dimensions of ethnicity, differing social etiquettes, and contrasting world views. General readers interested in ethnicity will have to pull these matters out of the text on their own, however, since Barnes has written this book for a somewhat different purpose. That purpose is indeed justifiable though it may inhibit the use of the book by a wider audience concerned with some of the broader issues at hand.

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