

Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought

David Martinez

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009, 185 p. Paper, \$19.95.)

One of the most important yet misunderstood figures in American Indian history is Charles Alexander Eastman (1858–1939), a Dakota physician, writer, and activist who lived during some of his people's most challenging years. In his writing and public-speaking career of nearly two decades, he produced (sometimes in collaboration with his wife, Elaine Goodale) nine books including *Indian Boyhood* (1902), *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), and *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916). While Eastman's works covered a number of topics and addressed a wide range of audiences, in *Dakota Philosopher*, American Indian Studies professor David Martinez reads Eastman for the contributions he made—and continues to make—to Native philosophy.

Eastman was born near present-day Redwood Falls four years before the U.S.-Dakota War. When the fighting began, he was separated from his father (his mother was already dead) and taken by family members to Canada, where they lived as refugees while maintaining a traditional lifestyle. After reuniting in 1873 with his newly “civilized” father, Eastman embarked on a process of educational, professional, and political accomplishment that is nothing short of astounding when considered in its historical context. He became the first Native graduate of Dartmouth College, an institution founded expressly for educating Indians, and he was the first Indian doctor with a medical degree, graduating from Boston University in 1890. He started his practice at Pine Ridge Agency, where immediately upon his arrival the Wounded Knee Massacre occurred. Eastman then worked for various tribes, the Indian Service, Carlisle Indian School, and the YMCA.

Along with other notable Native intellectuals, such as Gertrude Bonnin and Arthur C. Parker, he cofounded the Society of American Indians, America's first pan-Indian organization and an important predecessor to the National Congress of American Indians and other advocacy groups. Eastman is remembered by scholars today as an advocate for Indian assimilation policy (boarding schools, allotment, citizenship), yet one who simultaneously offered scathing critiques of U.S. imperialism, capitalism, and racism. He is also sometimes read as a sellout.

It is that perception of Eastman as a collaborator with colonialism that Martinez challenges in five chapters, each focused on a different aspect of Eastman's thought. His life story is relayed in Chapter 1, which also situates his thought

in the context of American Indian intellectual history. Chapter 2 reads Eastman's writing in a rather different context—that of Dakota sacred history, oral tradition, and mythology—and is the most clearly “traditional” part of the book. Chapter 3 examines his evolving thought regarding Dakota-Ojibwe relations; this chapter, which effectively chronicles the transformation of old enemies into new allies, will interest students of both Minnesota history and the rise of pan-Indianism and intertribalism. Chapter 4 focuses on Eastman's work with the Society of American Indians during the Progressive Era, which for Natives was also the Assimilation Era. This essay interprets Eastman not as a collaborator so much as a “prophet.” Chapter 5 situates Eastman's work in what was perhaps his most personally difficult context—the 1862 war—and finds his work to be contemplative and critical. There are also a preface and epilogue, which I appreciated for Martinez's personal anecdotes and reflections on the importance of Eastman to Native and American intellectual history.

“Eastman continues to be taunted by latter-day critics for his assimilationist tendencies, as if he were the Dakota equivalent to Dinesh D'Souza,” Martinez complains at the outset of his book; instead, Eastman should be considered “a paragon of the American Indian intellectual.” As a Native professor of literature and American Indian studies myself, one who has encountered many of the same dismissive attitudes Martinez discusses, I could not agree more. In this age when national, racial, and cultural borders are strengthened not weakened, we could use a few more prophets and philosophers like Charles Alexander Eastman. Martinez's book provides some hope that when they emerge, they will be better understood than they have been so far.

Reviewed by Scott Richard Lyons, associate professor of English and director of Native American Studies, Syracuse University, and author of X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).



Great Lakes Indian Accommodation & Resistance during the Early Reservation Years

Edmund J. Danziger, Jr.

(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009, 322 p. Cloth, \$60.00.)

Professor Danziger tells an important story concerning a pivotal era for Great Lakes Indian peoples. Following the

path-breaking *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (1986) by Helen Hornbeck Tanner, et al., and Richard White's *The Middle Ground* (1991), this is the first study to explore loss of autonomy and confinement to reservations in this region. Telling this story is no small challenge, since it involves an area of 94,000 square miles and 81 reservation communities (56 in Ontario, 25 in the U.S., including both Algonquian and Iroquois cultures) and the policies of the colonizing governments of the U.S. and Canada.

An introduction points to the geographical and commercial connections of the region, offers a succinct description of Algonquian and Iroquois cultural characteristics, and describes the modernizing forces that propelled European immigrants and their governments over the region in overwhelming numbers. This sets up the book's dominant theme: "the historic struggle of the late 1800s between an expanding white frontier assisted by federal government employees, on the one hand, and far-flung aboriginal communities determined to preserve their autonomy and prosper . . . on the other." The core of the book consists of three parts: Making a Living; Battling for Mind and Soul; Who Shall Rule at Home? A conclusion summarizes the variety of ways in which Native peoples survived the aggressions of the two national governments and their citizens and prepared the groundwork for the Red Power movement that emerged in both countries in the last 50 years. Indeed, two themes run through the exploration of economic, cultural, and then political developments: a "bullying" approach by the two governments, in which altruistic rhetoric of emancipation and opportunity overlay dispossession and the undermining of individual as well as group independence; and a pattern of creative, dynamic, and varied Native strategies to maintain identity and some degree of autonomy.

In marked contrast to his 1978 study, *The Chippewa of Lake Superior*, Danziger listens to Native voices in this work. Certainly, the rich literature of community studies from the last 20 years both modeled and facilitated the exploration of Native agency as well as national policy. Danziger uses this scholarship well but also probes government archives for Indian testimony and applies a critical reading to the words and actions of federal officials and the non-Native actors involved.

The scope of the study and the breadth of scholarship offer important insights. In both nations, federal policy assumptions undermined the stated goal of fostering commercial agriculture in Native communities. Petty interfer-



ence and land policies that facilitated dispossession were common on both sides of the international border. The instability of farm prices further eroded the goal. To be sure, where climate and soil conditions were good, some Indian farmers succeeded despite the formidable odds. Especially in the northern parts of the region, however, Natives pursued more flexible adaptations. Seasonal wage labor and continued hunting, fishing, and gathering reflected effective survival tactics, not a refusal to adapt to changed circumstances.

A willingness to adapt and use both individual and collective strategies to manipulate government officials characterized Native responses to the educational and religious invasions that confronted them. While recognizing the divisions and disruptions that resulted, Danziger stresses resiliency. A similar theme emerges in reservation politics. Efforts to destroy patterns of Native governance disrupted indigenous leadership, but "local American and Canadian chiefs and councils exercised broad and important powers in conjunction with Washington and Ottawa."

Some concerns arise. While the thesis of common federal policies and citizen action is generally persuasive, at least two differences deserved more attention. Both nations sought to break up tribal holdings into individual allotments. But Canada's Indian Act of 1876 did not identify "surplus land," which was essential to the U.S. Dawes Act of 1887. What difference did this make in loss of land? In the area of sovereignty, Canadian law made no acknowledgment akin to the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court under John Marshall. While the Marshall legacy was weakened during the later nineteenth century, it continued to operate. Did this difference in jurisprudence have no consequences for Native self-governance? In addition, Danziger offers no rationale for the chronological boundaries of the study. Increasingly, scholars of U.S. Indian history see 1900 as a shift from assimilation to dispossession, but Danziger asserts a persistence of policy "well into the 1900s."

Richard White's *The Middle Ground* coined a phrase that transformed the historiography of Native peoples across the continent. Danziger's new book synthesizes the rich scholarship that followed in a manner that should inform scholars, laypeople, and political leaders. That is more than enough. The questions it raises are part of its strength.

Reviewed by Wilbert H. Ahern, Emeritus Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of history and American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota-Morris. His research and publications explore federal Indian policies and the strategies of American Indians for addressing their new circumstances from the 1880s through the 1920s.



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