

# Books

Scott London

1969

a review of

*Man's Rise to Civilization As Shown by the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State* by Peter Farb, E.P. Dutton, 332 pp. 1968, \$8.95.

*Man's Rise to Civilization As Shown by the Indians of North America from Primeval Times to the Coming of the Industrial State* is quite an eyefull title. Don't be fooled.

From the womb of the University that taught Farb the scientific method, characterized by the measured prose of *Man's Rise et cetera*, comes the knowledge that Farb has put together with his observations learned in the field that makes this book the best one of a general nature available today on the Americans (North American Indians).

When ivy walled stay-inside scholars are wrong in their theories as contradicted by first hand experience and observation, Farb says so.

Whether it is Marx and Engels misusing the second hand information of Louis Henry Morgan's League of the Ho-De-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois that happened to fit their economic theory or Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* claiming "Apollonian" noncompetitiveness for the Zuni culture, that has misled several generations of university students—myself included—Farb sets the record straight.

Farb touches briefly but adequately on the U.S. government's policy of genocide along the old frontier as well as the earlier occidental discovery and conquest of the Americas. Perhaps Columbus was the first "rioter" as he "discovered" the new world and "claimed" it on behalf of his sovereign. Hardly different from "discovering" a TV set in an abandoned store and "claiming" it on one's own behalf.

No doubt earlier Americans were as put out as United Statesians are today who feel cheated when their goods are "liberated." For ever since the occidental occupation of America, property rights have never been sacred, and people's property rights, especially when held in common, have been held as sacred as the hundreds of thousands of American lives that were smashed as casually as a throwaway coke bottle.

There may be a key here. Americans saw themselves as one with the land. To destroy it was to destroy self. United Statesians seem to hold life cheap, notice the U.S. fetish for body counts in Vietnam, and it would appear that the land is so valued, think of the U.S. officer who would "destroy a city to save it."

Farb also considers why whites Indianized (Americanized): "Indianization impressed Michel Guillaume Jeane de Crevecoeur, who wrote in 1782 in his *Letters from an American Farmer*: 'It cannot be, therefore, so bad as we generally conceive it to be; there must be in the Indians' social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to be boasted of among us; for thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those Aborigines having from choice become Europeans.'"

De Crevecoeur touches precisely the sore spot that so bewildered whites. Why did transculturalization seem to operate only in one direction? Whites who had lived for a time with Indians almost never wanted to leave.

But almost none of the 'civilized' Indians who had been given the opportunity to savor white society chose to become a part of it. And the white squaw men persisted in their determination, even though they were subject to legal penalties as well as to great contempt from other whites.

"There were special aspects of Indian society that made it possible for so many thousands of whites to be incorporated into it. One of the things that amazed the earliest explorers, almost without exception, was the hospitality with which the Indians received them. When the Indians later learned that whites posed a threat, their attitude changed, but the initial contacts were idyllic...Hospitality and sharing were characteristic of all Indian societies."

Farb tells his story of mankind in an ordered taxonomy of social organization. Don't be put off by this. His prose flows seemingly without effort so that his discussion of bands, tribes, chiefdoms and states is highly readable and remarkable free of trade terms.

The tale is well told by a wise man.

# fifth Estate

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Fifth Estate #84, July 24-August 6, 1969

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