

BOOK REVIEWS

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Prairie Forge: The Extraordinary Story of the Nebraska Scrap Metal Drive of World War II

James J. Kimble. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 236pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Paper, \$19.95.

While drives to collect metal, rubber, paper, fats, and oil formed enduring memories for World War II-era Americans, the necessity and start of the scrap metal drive—the “father” of all scrap drives—has remained poorly understood until now. James J. Kimble corrects the longstanding misconception that scrap metal drives were, at best, a rather benign measure to provide patriotic Americans a sense of participation in the war effort. While some interpret the scrap drives as simply wartime “recycling,” they were, in truth, critical to the war economy.

In layman’s terms Kimble fluidly and energetically describes how scrap metal’s importance for peacetime steel production was magnified in wartime. Steel can be manufactured without scrap metal but at the cost of consuming far more raw materials. Further, scrap metal shortages threatened to increase significantly the time needed to produce steel in the quantities war industries required, and time is always in short supply during war. American steel mills desperately needed scrap metal, especially in 1942–1943.

Kimble deftly relates how Henry Doorly, publisher of the *Omaha World-Herald*, the most influential newspaper in Nebraska, crafted the nation’s first coherent scrap drive. The author’s extensive research in local, county, regional, and national sources gives

readers a fascinating insider’s point of view on how Doorly conceived, organized, and championed the scrap drive. Juxtaposed against the federal government’s previous, rather ineffective scrap aluminum drive, Kimble examines the psychology Doorly employed to rally Nebraskans to collect scrap metal at an extraordinarily high rate. Doorly’s initial high-spirited county-versus-county competition (effective in a state obsessed with football) unexpectedly morphed into a statewide “we-are-in-it-together” camaraderie. Nebraska’s scrap metal collection program substantially exceeded all expectations. With the federal government’s enthusiastic support, Doorly and his employees distributed the fairly comprehensive “Nebraska Plan” to newspaper editors around the country, who then exhorted local citizens to collect an overwhelming amount of scrap metal to sustain the national steel industry through 1943. The Nebraska Plan became a blueprint for other states to follow.

A few additions would have made Kimble’s already solid work even better. A map of Nebraska counties would be a helpful supplement to Kimble’s figures for county population and quantity of scrap metal collected. Clarification regarding the number of judges in Nebraska’s scrap metal drive would also be welcome, as would be a complete list of their names. A state-by-state comparison of scrap metal collected per capita in 1942 would be most interesting, as well. Finally, the bibliography needs a listing of all relevant *World-Herald* articles and, perhaps, annotations for the most significant resources.

Kimble’s well-crafted narrative capably

examines this often poorly understood moment of American history. Scholars, students, or enthusiasts of World War II or American history must read this book to be minimally conversant on scrap metal collection. *Prairie Forge* will inspire other writers to explore similar topics.

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The National Council on Indian Opportunity: Quiet Champion of Self-Determination

Thomas A. Britten. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014. 352pp. Illus. Tables. Figs. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$45.00.

In 1966, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey raised the question of how Indian people could “become part of the total spectrum of American political, social, and economic life” while making their own choices whether “to be or not to be an Indian” (p. 3). The National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO), established by executive order of President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968, sought to remove barriers between government and indigenous people that prevented them from making their own choices, envisioning their future, and being able to act as their own advocates. Thomas A. Britten’s work informs the reader about this little-noted and often misunderstood organization that sought, despite compromising flaws, to address the critical issue of American Indian self-determination.

Britten takes issue with Sar Levitan and Barbara Hetrick’s 1971 assertion that “a careful investigator would be hard put to find any actual achievements of the council” (p. 261). Instead, Britten states that the NCIO, one of the last expressions of Johnson’s Great Society, sought to help Indians better utilize new government programs while coordinating federal agencies’ efforts to improve the delivery of services. Britten states that the NCIO was the first government organization

to involve American Indians in the decision-making process as makers of strategy, not merely as objects of policy.

As Britten relates, the NCIO’s biggest problem was the custom for any organization overseen by Congress to take credit for its actions, thus proving its worth to legislators. However, as a council of federal agency heads and Indian representatives chaired by the vice president, the NCIO was an intermediary organization that had to work in concert with other entities to achieve results. Thus, it was afforded little chance to claim credit for its accomplishments. For example, getting officials from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Indian Health Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs together to smooth over their differences and improve the quality of housing on reservations was a great achievement, but which entity should get the credit? If the NCIO took too much credit for the accomplishments it helped foster, it risked hampering other agencies’ efforts to justify their existence and their use of taxpayer dollars to Congress. This situation would have made it difficult in the future for the NCIO to get agencies to respond to the council’s requests for their cooperation. Thus, the NCIO had to walk a fine line between alienating other agencies and becoming known as a “do-nothing” waste of time and taxpayer money. Ultimately, the “do-nothing” onus was hung on the council, costing it its future.

Britten does a fine job of placing the subject within the context of the times. As a late addition to the Great Society, the NCIO faced both a backlash from critics of the Johnson administration’s programs, who resisted further expansion, and a government that was overextended domestically and abroad. Britten also notes the growing rivalries between reservation and urban Indians and the problems the council faced in leadership and funding.

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Life among the Indians: First Fieldwork among the Sioux and Omahas

Alice C. Fletcher. Edited by Joanna C. Scherer and Raymond J. DeMallie. Foreword by Francis La Flesche. Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. 432pp. Illus. Figs. Maps. Apps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$65.00.

The 1887 manuscript "Life among the Indians" is an autobiographical account of Alice Cunningham Fletcher's experiences as an "outside observer" (p. 74) among the Sioux Indians of Dakota Territory and the Omaha Indians of Nebraska from 1881 to 1882. An anthropologist and reform activist, Fletcher (1838–1923) devoted her life to understanding the diversity and sophistication of indigenous cultures in the United States. Anthropologists Joanne C. Scherer (Smithsonian Institution) and Raymond J. DeMallie (Indiana University) unearthed Fletcher's manuscript from the Smithsonian's National Anthropological Archives and worked for several years to transcribe and publish her work. The editors' detailed introduction enables readers to understand how Fletcher's early life, education, career in anthropology, and years of involvement in political reform impacted her work with indigenous tribes.

Fletcher's goal for her 1887 work was to show the "common humanity" between American Indians and white Americans "as a way of countering prejudice" (p. 3). As Scherer and DeMallie eloquently explain, Fletcher initially planned to observe only selected aspects of Indian women's lives, but she learned much about native communities beyond the scope of gender dynamics. Fletcher studied intimate details of child-rearing, dancing, religion, work, kinship, hunting, diplomacy, marriage patterns, and sacred world views of the Sioux and Omaha. Moreover, she emphasized the resiliency of native people. Even in the midst of massive transformations and after years of failed federal policies, these communities employed creative modes of survival.

Fletcher was sympathetic and tolerant of native people, but like many of her contemporaries, she largely approved the ideology of assimilation. She appreciated indigenous cultures yet believed that native communities needed to make "progress." Herein lay the dilemma for anthropologists who worked with American Indian nations at the time—how could one hope to preserve cultures while simultaneously supporting programs that sought to eradicate them? Fletcher undoubtedly struggled with these notions, especially when she confronted the atrocities that land allotment created within native communities. Such failed policies prompted her to expose the "corruption and inequities of the reservation system" in her manuscript (p. 54). She also included detailed observations of the negative stereotypes and abusive treatment heaped upon native people by white federal agents, traders, and landowners.

Scherer and DeMallie ably contextualize Fletcher's fieldwork, which has been a contentious point for scholars and the modern Sioux and Omaha nations. Some writers portray Fletcher as an "arrogant meddler" (p. 69), and her role in removing the Omahas' Sacred Pole to be stored at Harvard University's Peabody Museum remains a prickly subject. The editors take appropriate steps to dissect Fletcher's disputed reputation, however, arguing that her writings—especially *Life among the Indians*—reveal a more intricate story. This volume will certainly add to the lively scholarly debate while making Alice Fletcher's life story and worldview all the more captivating.

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