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Review: The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism

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The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism. By Keith Thor Carlson. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010. xix + 375 pp. \$32.95 paper)

Cultural continuity and identity among Native peoples across the seeming divides of conquest, disease, and colonialism are significant issues for Native peoples and scholars of Native peoples. They are especially visible in Canada in ongoing lands claim cases, and in the United States in cases involving tribal recognition and claims to human remains under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). But the force of these questions is not restricted to legal issues; they go to the very heart of what it is to be a Native person (or not a Native person, as we read news accounts of California tribes dropping members from tribal rolls). Keith Thor Carlson addresses them in the case of the Stó:lō people of the Lower Fraser River in British Columbia. The Stó:lō are Halq'emeylem-speaking Coast Salish, the word Stó:lō meaning “river people.”

The Stó:lō and their country have been the focus of a remarkable bloom in archaeological, anthropological, and ethnohistorical

scholarship over the past couple of decades, including Carlson's own seminal *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, published in 2001 by Douglas & McIntyre and the Stó:lō Historical Trust. The book at hand, a revision of Carlson's 2003 doctoral dissertation, is a significant contribution both to that literature and to the scholarship of continuity and identity among Native peoples. Carlson draws heavily on the Native scholarship in oral traditions. Consequently, the book has a strong Coast Salish perspective. Carlson investigates identity, as well as social group continuity and formation in time and space; space is as important to his account as time. This is a strength of the book and very unusual for either a historian or a cultural anthropologist. As an archaeologist, I think historians have a hard time with space, and cultural anthropologists have a hard time with time. For the Stó:lō, time and space (including both place and the links among places) frame identity. Thus the book is also a contribution to a growing literature on the cultural significance and power of place in identity formation and continuity (e.g., Thomas F. Thornton's *Being and Place Among the Tlingit*, 2007).

The book is divided into five sections and chapters. The first section frames the book and, as Carlson's title has it, the power of place (the profound importance of place to identity) and the problem of time (the passage of time forces renegotiation and change among competing collective identities, none of which, in Carlson's view, is more or less traditional). The second section lays the material and spiritual groundwork for understanding what follows. At one point (p. 64), Carlson asks the reader to: "Imagine Stó:lō historical understanding as a single play unfolding simultaneously on two separate stages separated by a passageway. On the first stage occurs the drama of the familiar physical world. On the second are depicted the actions of the *xá:xa* (sacred or taboo) realm of the spirit world." Essentially these two chapters present the plays on each stage.

Section three is titled "Movements and Identities across Space and Time." The first chapter in the section (chapter 4) is concerned with showing how precolonial Stó:lō identities were constructed out of the shifts and movements of individuals and groups caused by a variety of catastrophes as related in oral traditions (of course, at the time Stó:lō itself, as an identity, did not exist). Thus, the catastrophes, shifts, and changes of the colonial and post-colonial worlds are themselves continuities with the past. Also, he argues that the traditional histories prepared people for catastrophes to come; they were a normal part of the world.

The section's second chapter provides five detailed case studies based on oral traditions of post-contact movements and mass migrations by five groups who eventually formed part of the larger Stō:lō entity. This chapter is, to me, the most interesting because it describes situations of flux and change markedly different from the frozen "ethnographic present" described in many Northwest Coast ethnographies.

Sections four and five treat the still unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable) dialectic between the local and regional scale of identity and action. Section four deals with the development of the Native reserve system in British Columbia. Unlike reservations in the United States, to which people were usually moved, in Canada, reserves were generally established where people lived. However, the reserves were both too small to be economically viable, and people were legally nailed in place; one's legal identity as Native was tied to a specific reserve (not any reserve). This was a result of both evolving colonial policy and Native politics. Section five presents the antithesis, the formation of a regional Stō:lō identity. The dynamics producing this included the participation by Native peoples in provincial celebrations of the birthday of Queen Victoria over a period of twelve years as well as Native responses to the lynching of a young Stō:lō man by vigilantes from the United States. The final section brings the analysis into the early twentieth century where it ends.

The Power of Place, the Problem of Time is engagingly written; the analyses are keen; the ethnography and ethnohistory top notch. Showing how Stō:lō identity flows along dimensions of time and space and is structured by their intersections is a significant contribution.

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