

MAILS, THOMAS E. DOG SOLDIERS, BEAR MEN AND BUFFALO WOMEN: A Study of the Societies and Cults of the Plains Indians. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973, 384 pages, \$20.00.

Reviewed by Alvin Magid

One can only marvel at a work such as this: nearly 400 oversize pages which include more than 150 illustrations by the author--in pen-and-ink, charcoal, and bold color--of Plains Indian physiognomy, regalia, and ceremony. The accompanying text highlights secular and ritual aspects of those Indians' associational life organized around an array of warrior societies, civil societies, and cult groups--both male and female. Various dance rituals are examined in Dog Soldiers, Bear Men and Buffalo Women, including the Hot Dance of the Arikara (p. 149), the Hidatsa (p. 170), and the Crow (p. 300); the Bear Song Dance and the Sacred Pipe Dance of the Crow (p. 300); and the Horse Dance performed by the Assiniboine (pp. 343-344). A labor of love indeed by Thomas E. Mails, a Lutheran minister who has managed to evoke much of that life in great literary and artistic detail.

The scope of Mail's enterprise is matched only by the price set upon it: \$20. Ugh! A likely success nevertheless in an age which seems finally to have discovered, and even been touched by, aboriginal Americana. The study merits a wide readership.

Dog Soldiers, Bear Men and Buffalo Women concentrates on associational life in the century after 1750--when a kind of apogee was achieved in Plains Indian religion, government, and social organization generally and when, coincidentally, all of this was being increasingly threatened in the contact with an expansionist European-descended civilization. Mails' discussion of these and kindred matters draws heavily from the earlier ethnographic work of such luminaries as Robert Lowie, James Mooney, Edward Curtis, and George Dorsey, among others.

Regrettably, except for briefly outlining the legendary origin of warrior societies, civil societies, and cult groups among various plains nations, Mails makes no effort to deal specifically with the evolutionary history of those associations either before or after the period 1750-1850. Thus, we learn that the warrior societies often served in that period as a constabulary, their police activities constituting an important social control mechanism in domestic affairs and in contact with other peoples--Indian and white. But it is not

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altogether clear why the social control function should not have been as vital in associational life before and perhaps even after that climactic era. Here and elsewhere in the volume, the author's restricted time frame has sometimes caused him to render as still-life what was in fact a dynamic, evolving social process.

One is struck by yet another aspect of Mail's treatment of the constabulary role in associational life on the plains. Stressing the warrior societies' legitimate police activities, the author seems oblivious of their possible anti-social behavior and of the effects such behavior may have had on political life and social cohesion generally. Some cops are robbers in many communities, and in some communities many cops are wont to transgress the law. Chicago and New York are hardly exceptional here. Nor are Western or modern societies.

My own research among an African people, the Idoma ("Political Traditionalism in Nigeria: A Case-Study of Secret Societies and Dance Groups in Local Government," *Africa*, XLII, 4, October 1972, 289-304), revealed that even as they were being called upon to perform legitimate constabulary functions, secret societies and dance groups were behaving anti-socially themselves. Praedial larceny, crop destruction, wife-chasing and seduction, and harassment of unpopular non-members were often being pursued by the associations as recreation. Whenever they acted *ultra vires*, the secret societies and dance groups provoked inter-generational discord and intensified strains in political life. The associations' ambivalent role in Idoma could be traced through the precolonial, colonial, and independence eras--a pattern which has been found to recur in many non-Western societies. Unfortunately, Mails does not clarify the Plains Indians' conformity to or divergence from that pattern of behavior.

Notwithstanding these few criticisms, artistically and scholastically Dog Soldiers, Bear Men and Buffalo Women is a study well worth consulting.