

First Nation Performance Rediscovery (1883-1995)

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The Long and Terrible Shadows by Thomas R. Berger (1991) and Jim Miller's Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens (1990) portray the historic reality of the conflict between North American indigenous peoples' rights and the whiteman's values. These two writers indicate clearly how the aboriginal position has often been lost through historical amnesia, church and political enmity and a myopic press that fuels the wilful ignorance of a linear citizenry. The historic amnesia and myopic media of the whiteman have been most effective in hiding indigenous heroes from their peoples. A glimmer of light is emerging in historical writing - witness the cited works of Berger and Miller - and in an improving aboriginal and non-aboriginal literature and press. Political, social, educational, and economic positions of indigenous peoples are reported and given credence. Aboriginal leaders emerge as substantive historic figures. Today's indigenous and non-indigenous peoples have an improved opportunity to know and make use of their own role models. An increased effort in this area may help to remove the humiliation that has blanketed the aboriginal peoples of the Canadian Plains and the Shield for the past one-hundred-and-twenty-five years. This paper presents the changing image of the aboriginal athlete during those years following Canadian Confederation to the present.

This research focuses upon four periods: runners; people of the horse; beyond the 'Blackhawks'; and rediscovery. This investigation begins with the performance of Little Plume in 1883 and continues beyond the performances of Angela Chalmers in 1995. The spirit of these performers reflect their traditional values since such acts to enable the people to design and redesign themselves both individually and collectively. It is through the "I of experiencing the body" that in sport, as in other performances, the process of valuing takes place - the process defined by inherent choice of what to retain, restore or reject.