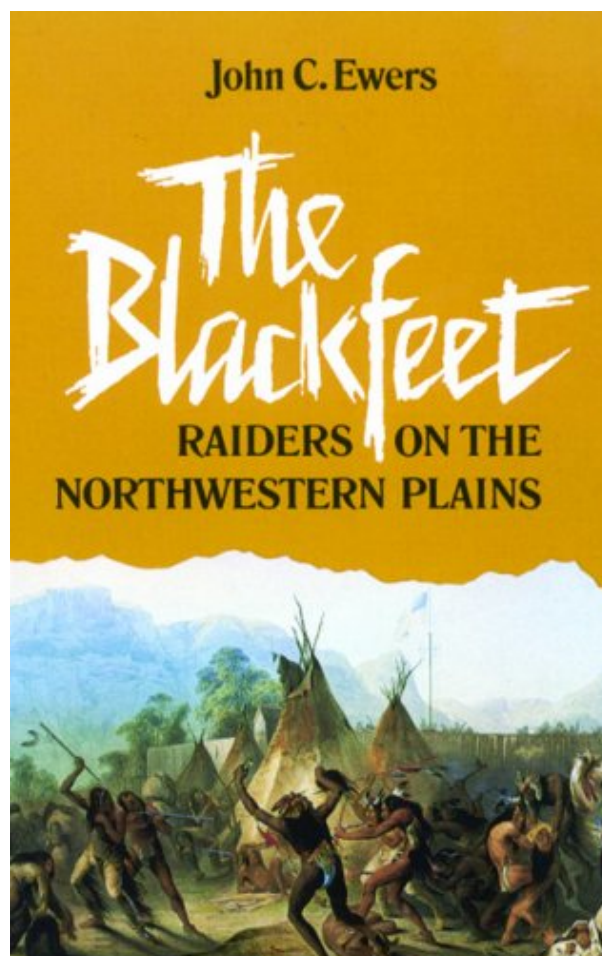


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About the Author

John C. Ewers (1909–1997), was the first curator of the Museum of the Plains Indian on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Later he served as Director of what is now Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History and was Ethnologist Emeritus with the Smithsonian. His many publications include *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* and *Plains Indian History and Culture: Essays on Continuity and Change*.

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The Blackfeet were the strongest military power on the northwestern plains in the historic buffalo days. For half a century up to 1805, they were almost constantly at war with the Shoshonis and came very close to exterminating that tribe. They aggressively asserted themselves against the Flatheads and the Kutenais, shoving them westward across the Rockies. They got on fairly well with English and Canadian traders during the heyday of the fur trade on the Saskatchewan River, but on the upper Missouri they took an early dislike to Americans, whom they called "Big Knives." American fur traders, such as Manuel Lisa, Pierre Menard, and Andrew Henry, were literally chased out of Montana by the Blackfeet.

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thoroughly documented research

By jannert

This book is a researcher's dream, and a pleasure to read. First published in 1958, this volume traces the history of the Blackfeet from pre-horse days through to the 1950's. The author displays a thorough understanding of his subject, and extensively annotates his work, paying meticulous attention to dates, places and names. John C Ewers was the first curator of the Museum of the Plains Indian near Browning, Montana, and many of the items in the museum collection were given to him at the time by elder members of the tribe at the time. He used primary sources for much of his information for this book, and corroborated details with these tribal elders as much as possible. This is a well-written, respectful history of the Blackfeet nation, and ought to remain in print for decades to come. Potential buyers should scan the Table of Contents page for an overview of subjects covered.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

A good, reasonably thorough, traditional ethnography

By Arthur Digbee

This is a good, old-style ethnography of the Blackfoot. It provides a reasonably thorough account of material culture. It's weaker on traditional human culture, especially religious beliefs, but it does a decent job on the outward manifestations of interior beliefs.

As you would expect from this kind of ethnography, the book is descriptive, not explanatory. With very few exceptions, it also fails to make any comparisons with other cultures, and any comparisons concern only the tribe's near neighbors such as the Crow or Flatheads.

Because he did his work in the 1940s and 1950s, Ewers' respondents include elderly members of the tribe who recall customs of their pre-reservation youth. Along with the accounts of white explorers and traders, these provide Ewers' main sources for the history of the Blackfoot.

The parts that stick with me the most are the participants' views of horse raiding expeditions, and the views of "medicine" rituals and objects. Both of these are easily distorted by outsiders, and Ewers seems to get them right.

It's interesting to see the tension in this older ethnographic perspective. He's sympathetic to the tribe, he recognizes the inhumanity inflicted on them, and yet he also praises "good" Indian agents who try to help the Blackfoot learn to farm and ranch. He even has some good things to say about Indian boarding schools!

Simplifying a bit, Ewers tends to see the political and economic injustices inflicted on the Blackfoot but he cannot see the cultural injustices. The tension is evident even in the title, which refers to the "Blackfeet," even though he notes in the text that this plural is not used in the Blackfoot language and many Blackfoot insist on the singular usage that I have used in this review. Some are even offended by the term. It's not clear that Ewers would understand why this matters.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Best Book on The Blackfeet History I have ever...

By Jake Burdeaux

This is probably the most authentic account of the Blackfeet I have ever come across. It has the "Civilization of the American Indian Series" endorsement, which I trust as being the seal of authenticity when it comes to Native American Histories.

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