Book Review

Stephen Kent Amerman. *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools, 1940–2000.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 280 pp. Hardcover $40.00.

Works on American Indians in urban areas remain few. Considering that American Indians began relocating from reservations to cities in large numbers after World War II and approximately half of the American Indian population lived in cities by 1970, the lack of historical discourse on how American Indians responded to urbanization is baffling, especially when compared to the breadth and depth of work dedicated to how American Indians responded to changing conditions on reservations throughout the twentieth century. That Stephen Amerman's *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools, 1940–2000* represents the first book to examine the history of American Indian educational experiences in the urban sphere further attests to the limited confines in which scholars have positioned America's native peoples. Amerman's work, therefore, begins to broaden the framework of understanding American Indian history and—more important to historians of education—reveals some of the obstacles faced, strategies pursued, and accomplishments achieved by American Indians as they engaged with a city school system. *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools* directs much-needed attention to an ignored but important aspect of America's educational history in the twentieth century and, in doing so, affirms the need for additional works that examine American Indian urban experiences as they relate to education.

The first three chapters of Amerman's study contextualize American Indian education in Phoenix through a focus on the dynamics of the city, the schools, and student population. Throughout these chapters, the author integrates standard sources of historical research with oral history interviews. In doing this, he conveys both the facts and feelings of urbanization and schooling for American Indians in Phoenix. A greater emphasis, however, is placed on feeling. Amerman admits that locating documentary sources on the history of American Indian urban education is challenging, and—perhaps as a consequence—he relies heavily on oral accounts. Integrating American Indian voices is essential in writing a balanced and more thorough history, but these chapters, along with the last two, depend too greatly on people's memories and relate to topics that too frequently are not relevant to the historical focus of the work. Furthermore, the author's excessive use of quotations from his oral history interviews becomes

burdensome to read as many—such as an almost page-long description of one former student's musical interests (p. 84) and the same quotation used three times (p. 90, 102, 180)—do not advance the study.

Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, focus on how key members of the American Indian community advocated for changes within the Phoenix Union High School System in 1973 and the resultant developments that came afterward. These are the two strongest chapters of *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools* in terms of substance. Amerman shows that American Indian activism came in many forms. Just as it came in the form of direct conflict, it also came in the form of participating in school board meetings, forming coalitions, and working within existent bureaucratic structures. The appointment of a Director of American Indian Education, the acquisition of funding from Title IV (Indian Education Act of 1972) and the U.S. Department of Education, and the creation of new educational programs specifically designed for American Indian students exemplify some of the achievements that came from community organizing and activism. While Amerman highlights the advances made from increased community involvement and the determination of central figures, he spans several decades at a rapid pace in Chapter 5. Further details, for instance, of the work of the Title IV Parental Advisory Committee, the Learning Circle program for elementary and middle school students, and the Hoop of Learning Program for high school students would begin to give readers a more complete grasp of the ways in which American Indians directed the course of education to fit their children's and community's needs.

Amerman makes a contribution to the understudied history of American Indian education in urban areas. Nevertheless, *Urban Indians in Phoenix Schools* does not provide an in-depth examination. Additional research and analysis is warranted, for the book by no means offers an extensive history on the subject. Moreover, Amerman contends, "... [I]t seems reasonably safe to present Phoenix's Native community as fairly typical. The experiences that American Indians had in Phoenix's public school system were likely quite similar to those of Indians in the classrooms of Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Seattle, Denver, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, and other cities with large Native populations" (p. 4). This assumption ignores the distinctiveness of American Indian communities in urban contexts. As various intertribal American Indian communities responded to particular settings and directed education to meet their local circumstances, it seems unreasonable that any typical experience indeed exists.

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