



Northern Passage: Ethnography and Apprenticeship among the Subarctic Dene

Robert Jarvenpa

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What is it like living among and learning about the cultural realities of other people for the first time? Northern Passage uses the motif of apprenticeship to reveal the humbling, childlike quest of the novice ethnographer, on the one hand, and the trials of an active participant learning the intricacies of bush life and livelihood from subarctic Indian hunting partners and teachers, on the other hand. In the process, Jarvenpa's reflexive narrative presents a compelling vision of northern Dene or Athapaskan society. The Han people of the Yukon Territory and eastern Alaska and the Chipewyan of northern Saskatchewan emerge as vividly drawn actors in a cultural landscape distinctly influenced by gold miners, fur traders, missionaries, conservation officers, and other post-colonial agents. This candid but sensitive treatment deals with issues such as trapping economies, knowledge of the environment, dreaming and hunting power, permission and informed consent, language learning, accusations of spying, alcohol use, economic development, partnerships, note-taking, and the pros and cons of active participation. Jarvenpa's early field experiences unfold as a primer on false leads, setbacks and revealing discoveries building to a suspenseful aftershock.

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