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Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984. By William S. Simmons.

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### Author

Parks, Douglas R.

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stimulating mix of poets, fiction writers, and non-fiction prose writers (I assume). Well-known writers such as Kenny, Peter Blue Cloud, and Roberta Hill Whiteman have contributed, as well as other writers whose work has been reaching a wider audience in the last few years: Rokwaho, Karoniaktatie, Gail Tremblay, Beth Brant, and Salli Benedict. The volume has a truly multi-generational feel about it. It merges work by people who have been active in Iroquois life for many years with writers publishing for the first time.

The basic premise of the anthology ties in with some questions with which I've been wrestling. Geary Hobson's article in a recent issue of *the Wicazo Sa Review* 5:1 (Spring 1989) argues convincingly that not enough respect and understanding are employed in the academic attempt to subsume Native American Literature into American Literature. His point is that literature from members of a tribal group can be understood only in the context of that nation. This anthology seems to be based on that position. It would appear that everything from the selection of the contributors to the selection of the material rests on some unspoken assumptions, assumptions that are vital to improving our understanding of Native American Literature and especially Iroquois writing. I think that the lack of an introduction which addresses this issue is a flaw in the book. Certainly it could be said that the reader can draw his own conclusions as to what constitutes contemporary Iroquois writing, but here is a chance for the real experts to encourage some insight into Iroquois thought, experience, and literature.

What is the vision of the editors? What common threads connect Iroquois writing with, say, Navajo writing, or what differs? What are the special, unique strengths of contemporary Iroquois writing? How important is it that we see the work here as Iroquois, Native American, or Modern American? There are so many questions in my mind. It just seems that the striking work in the book deserves the sturdy frame of a good introduction.

*James Ruppert*  
University of Alaska, Fairbanks

**Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620–1984.** By William S. Simmons. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986. 331 pages. \$35.00 Cloth. \$15.95 Paper.

Although decimated by disease and overrun by the force of European settlement, the Indian tribes of Southern New England—the Massachusett, Wampanoag, Mashpee, Gay Head, Narragansett and Mohegan—have persisted in the area of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut for three centuries, and many of their descendants maintain Indian identities to the present day. In this volume William Simmons gathers together folklore from each of these groups that dates from earliest European contact and continues to the present. This discrete and manageable body of material is analyzed to identify the symbols expressing Indian identity over time. In the author's words, the "overall aim is to represent the symbolism, worldview, we might say spirit, of the New England tribes in the context of their material and historic existence" (page vii).

The author's method is to assemble as full a corpus as possible of folkloric material from these tribes. He has searched exhaustively both the published and unpublished literature, and has supplemented it with interviews between 1981 and 1984 with various contemporary New England Indians. The end result is an impressive compilation of some 240 texts, beginning with Indian traditions recorded by the Puritans and continuing through time with the writings of Indian people themselves, as well as those of anthropologists such as Frank Speck. An index of these texts according to folklore motifs is presented at the back of the book.

As Simmons notes, this material is distinctive, representing "one of the oldest continually recorded bodies of Indian folklore known in North America"; moreover, this book is doubtlessly "the longest term historical study of oral narratives" in the literature (page 8). However, this material consists largely of fragments, most recorded by whites only in outline form, and often reworked in the process. By and large, their written versions give synopses of plots and folklore motifs, providing little more than fleeting glimpses of Indian cultures and the context of folklore in daily life. More insightful are those writings by people of New England Indian ancestry, notably Gladys Tantaquidgeon, an elderly Mohegan, who, inspired by Speck, collected New England Indian folklore during the 1920s and 1930s.

The study begins with a summary of the history of the southern New England tribes and traces them through time from first European contact to their modern descendants. It forms a helpful backdrop to the comparative presentation that follows based on material from each of these groups. To provide an appropriate

ethnographic context for the analysis of folklore, Simmons next turns to a synthesis of the worldview of the southern New England Indians during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Drawing his data from the admittedly biased writings of the Puritans, the author reconstructs an ethnohistorical account of New England Indian culture, carefully evaluating each of his sources. He relies on anthropological insights from the comparative study of North American Indian culture to reconstruct the parameters of an Indian cultural universe only vaguely understood by European observers. The dominant themes in his discussion are religious: the pantheon, shamanism, and a variety of rituals.

Following this introductory material is the heart of the book, a sequence of chapters that presents the corpus of folklore texts organized thematically under such headings as First Europeans, Christianity, Shamans and Witches, Giants, and Little People. (A small number of texts that do not fit neatly into any of these types are given in an appendix.) Each chapter is arranged chronologically, thereby illustrating the historical development of the theme from the seventeenth century to the present. For example, the chapter on the first Europeans begins with a 1634 account of the encounter: "They took the first ship they saw for a walking island, the mast to be a tree, the sail white clouds, and the discharging of ordnance for lightning and thunder" (page 66), approaching it fearfully after the ship had fired its salute. By the 1920s, in contrast, much of the mystery of the first encounter had been lost, and tales were told of the prophecy of an elderly chief who, on his deathbed, predicted the coming of the white people and warned against giving them land (page 72).

The book concludes with a chapter that summarizes the surviving elements of aboriginal tradition, arguing that those symbols that persist through time spring from the deepest Indian identity and are nurtured in the context of social cohesiveness, where those people of Indian descent maintained distinct boundaries to separate themselves from the larger white society. At Gay Head, on a remote peninsula of Martha's Vineyard, the descendants of the Wampanoag today represent the strongest survival of Indian tradition, which the author correlates directly with their social isolation and internal cohesion. Other communities, less socially bounded, have preserved fewer survivals. For all the group, however, Simmons notes that the closer to the present

one approaches, the more Indian folklore becomes like that of the larger society. This he attributes not to random borrowing, but to specific turning points in the history of New England Indian society, including the wars with the English during the seventeenth century (resulting in loss of confidence in traditional beliefs), acceptance of Christianity (representing the displacement of traditional religion), and such political events as allotment of land to individuals (resulting in detribalization), and the Indian Reorganization Act (leading to a resurgence of Indian identity). Whatever its context, Simmons argues that New England Indian folklore "is the major vehicle for expressing and perpetuating a persistent Indian identity" (page 267). It provides a key for understanding their history and represents the primary survival of "an Indian spirit" (page 270).

This book is a model of careful scholarship, demonstrating the potential value of the ethnohistorical study of folklore, an approach that has not been explored by students of American Indian oral traditions. Like many studies of contemporary American Indian ethnicity, for the explanation of continuity Simmons has drawn on Edward Spicer's concept of "persistent identity systems," but he has done so creatively, rather than mechanically, and in the symbolic context of folklore has offered valuable new insights. This is a volume whose methodology deserves emulation.

*Douglas R. Parks*  
Indiana University

**Native Writings in Massachusetts.** By Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1988. 791 pages, 2 vols. \$60.00 Cloth.

Ives Goddard and Kathleen J. Bragdon have made a significant contribution by publishing this book. It includes all extant manuscript writings in the Massachusetts language by native speakers, gathered through an extensive search of the nation's major repositories, including the Clements Library and the Huntington Library. Most of the materials, however, came from County of Dukes, Registry of Deeds; Massachusetts State Archives; Massachusetts Historical Society; Office of the Town Clerk, Natick,