

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Women of the Apache Nation: Voices of Truth. By H. Henrietta Stockel.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/16s2h884>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 18(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Greenfeld, Phillip J.

Publication Date

1994

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

ship might overlook. Farella is without peer among non-Navajo people in his knowledge of that material; an occasional footnote and a complete bibliography might strengthen his case for paying attention to unclassifiable incidents in everyday Navajo life. At the very least, he might have cited his earlier book *The Main Stalk* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984). There, in a more conventional way, he introduces material crucial to his argument here. I can find other small points of disagreement with *The Wind in a Jar*, and I certainly do not recommend it to the exclusion of standard investigations of Navajo culture. But it is an important book that offers a valuable supplement to today's usual academic fare, pointing to a newer way of understanding America's other cultures—especially the indigenous ones.

Paul G. Zolbrod
Allegheny College

Women of the Apache Nation: Voices of Truth. By H. Henrietta Stockel. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993. 224 pages. \$12.95 paper.

Apache Indians are "hot" right now. Two movies, one for television and one for the theaters, have brought them back into the national consciousness. Not since television's "Broken Arrow" has so much national attention been focused on these southwestern Athapaskans. This concern with the Apache in the visual media has been matched by a variety of histories, ethnographies, and historical reconstructions in the print media, including but not limited to Farrer's *Living Life's Circle*, 1991; Perry's *Apache Reservation*, 1993, and *People of the Mountain Corridor*, 1991; and the paperback edition of Faulk's *The Geronimo Campaign*, 1993.

With the rise of women's studies programs, a second contemporary national focus is on women. These two current interests, Apaches people and women, seem to have coalesced to produce a spate of books on Apache women. Stockel's finds company with Kimberly Moore Buchanan's *Apache Women Warriors*, 1986, and the even more current Ruth McDonald Boyer's and Narcissus Duffy Gayton's *Apache Mothers and Daughters*, 1992. Of these three, I must say I am least impressed by Stockel. The main thrust of *Women of the Apache Nation* is contained in four chapters. Chapter 1 is a review of the importance of women in Apache

society, with special emphasis on the puberty ritual. The second chapter is a review of Apache women as warriors, the topic treated independently in Buchanan's work. The third chapter consists of interviews with two contemporary Chiricahua women from Mescalero, New Mexico—Elbys Naiche Hugar and Kathleen Smith Kenseah; the fourth centers around interviews with two Chiricahua women from Oklahoma—Mildred Imach Cleghorn and Ruey Haozous Darrow. The book is thus about Chiricahua Apache women, although the title implies a more general treatment. However, *Women of the Apache Nation* carries a more romantic connotation; if there is one thing this book is not short on, it is romanticization.

Starting with the title, the author idealizes her subject matter and does not seem overly concerned that, where she runs out of information on the Chiricahua, she blithely substitutes ethnographic materials from Mescalero or Western Apache and thus conflates into a single society and culture what were and are, in fact, separate and fairly different Indian societies. This is especially true in chapter 1, where Stockel tries to give an overview of women's roles and importance in the society. She discusses puberty observances (p. 6) using Thomas Mails' outline from *A People Called Apache*, 1974, which is itself based on Keith Basso's Cibecue Apache descriptions in *The Gift of Changing Woman*, 1966, and *The Cibecue Apache*, 1970.

Stockel vacillates between emphasizing the "matriarchal" (which she is really confusing with matrilineal) nature of Apache society (pp. 12, 17) and the complementary and in some areas asymmetric nature of men's roles which defined them as the primary leaders and spokespersons, allowed them to have more than one wife, and apparently gave them the right to punish wives for adultery by mutilating their faces. In her zeal to emphasize the importance of women she also fails to mention that women could neither participate in nor view games like hoop and pole and that various parts of religious practice (singing the puberty ceremony, for example) were forbidden to women. Claire Farrer's (*Living Life's Circle*, 1991) recent discussion of these issues emphasizes women's importance in decision making, descent, and camp composition and their freedom to choose in war and hunting, but also highlights the independent sphere of men more realistically, at least for the Mescalero. One of the insightful quotes from Farrer is Bernard Second's (her medicine man/mentor) statement that "men invented religion and kept it to themselves; for, if women had that, too, they would be in total control."

Stockel, in line with her attempt to define Chiricahua Apache society as matriarchal, seems to accept a view (p. 19) that Apache polygamy was a relatively recent innovation, the result of a demographic imbalance caused by war. One need only look at the comparative data for other societies throughout North America (including other Athapaskan societies such as the Navajo) to realize that polygamy was generally practiced where resources and conditions would allow and was a male prerogative or perhaps even a mandate, if the man was skilled, prestigious, and socially prominent.

Throughout chapters 1 and 2, a variety of minor ethnographic inconsistencies or inaccuracies seem to reflect a rather unsophisticated control of the ethnographic literature. For example, after having described in great detail in chapter 1 the importance and form of girls' puberty ceremonies for Apaches, she claims that Lozen, Victorio's warrior sister, had a puberty ceremony much like a Plains vision quest (p. 48), in which she retreated into the mountains for four days to seek her power. Stockel apparently is confusing Apache beliefs about contacting power with Apache practices relating to puberty rituals. It is generally the Apache belief that power offers itself to people while they are alone, out in the woods, or through a dream. The chosen one then has the opportunity to become a medicine person; if she accepts, the power will sometimes take her out into the mountains to teach the proper ceremony and songs (Morris Opler, *Apache Odyssey*, 1969). I know of no ethnographic account indicating that puberty ceremonies for females were anything but group affairs, different from and independent of quests for supernatural power or offerings of supernatural power. The one thing they might have in common is that the girl, while she portrays Changing Woman in the ceremony, has Changing Woman's supernatural power. They were not and are not solitary power quests, but rather public recognition and confirmation of adult status.

The interviews in chapters 3 and 4 seem to reflect a journalistic approach, revealed in the introduction to the book (p. xviii), where Stockel admits that the first Apache woman she called for an interview responded with, "Why would I want to talk to you about anything?" As with the rest of the text, the interviews are romanticized. We learn (pp. 105, 115) that Apache women know "in their bones" and "instinctively" about dancing and cooking corn in the ashes. Another inane statement relates to a discussion

with Mildred Cleghorn about a young Apache man who is attending Dartmouth University [sic] (pp. 139–40). The man had written Mildred about his Apache background, and Mildred was very impressed with him. Stockel comments, “It is doubtful that the young man Mrs. Cleghorn holds in high esteem will ever be able to know or participate in certain activities that were once commonplace within the Apache culture, such as tanning a hide.” I personally doubt that he has missed much of a mystic experience in not doing this (not that Apache men tanned hides on a regular basis, anyway). We then find out a few lines later that Mildred Cleghorn has only tanned one buckskin in her life herself, and that was her “first and last.”

The interviews are really the most important part of the book, because they inform us about the current lives and backgrounds of four prominent Chiricahua women. In this sense, they are similar to interviews one reads in news magazines: informative but not overly thorough or deep. These women’s relationships to each other and to well-known Apaches of the past are described in various somewhat confusing prose statements. Genealogical diagrams would have helped make these relationships much clearer. Little is made of the current nature of women’s roles in contemporary Apache culture except by implication: We learn that several of these women hold important political positions.

The fifth and concluding chapter focuses on Stockel’s personal experience in visiting the Mescalero Reservation. She participates in a dance (p. 179) with the mountain spirits, the *gâhé*, and experiences a sense of connection which, like much of the rest of the book, is highly romanticized. She says, “I felt part of the ancient, sacred ceremony.” In his foreword, Dan Thrapp, a prominent historian of the Apache, further idealizes her participation into “Finally she *was* Apache” (p. xv).

This book’s subject matter overlaps significantly with Boyer and Gayton’s *Apache Mothers and Daughters* mentioned earlier in this review. Since there is so much overlap, it is only logical that they be compared. Although lacking in some areas (I have some problems with how Apache words are transcribed and translated), Boyer’s and Gayton’s book is thorough, insightful—an in-depth study. Boyer’s association with the Chiricahua of the Mescalero Reservation goes back more than two decades, and she has worked closely with one of her subjects to produce what is in fact a joint effort. It is well illustrated with family portraits and excellent genealogical charts, contains much new material from

various ethnographers' unpublished field notes, and reports extensive oral family history covering more than a hundred years. Particularly important is a body of material describing the introduction and ritual of the Silas John, Holy Ground Movement from Whiteriver on the White Mountain Apache Reservation to the Mescalero Reservation and the Chiricahua Apaches living there. It is a far superior work, and I recommend it highly. Unfortunately, I cannot do the same for *Women of the Apache Nation*. I find it too romanticized and shallow in its treatment of the subject matter.

Philip J. Greenfeld
San Diego State University

Women of the Native Struggle: Portraits and Testimony of Native American Women. Edited and with photos by Ronnie Farley. New York: Orion Books, 1993. 158 pages. \$25.00 cloth; \$22.00 paper.

Women of the Native Struggle is essentially a contemplative and moving photographic essay compiled by New York photographer/artist Ronnie Farley, who was commissioned in 1988 by an alternative educational organization in New York to travel the land and record the lives of contemporary Native American women. Following a brief introduction and preface, the book consists almost entirely of photographs and quotations—portraits and testimony—of Indian women of all ages, occupations, and tribal affiliations. It is divided thematically into sections pertaining to children and family, traditions, the earth, relations with non-Indians, and so forth. All individuals are identified by name and tribe, and often geographical location and date as well, giving them a solid identity in this very real world.

Farley's dignified black-and-white photography of native women and their societies adorns each page. Interestingly, each picture sits on the page within a border previously drawn in felt-tip marker, giving the reader/viewer the intimate impression of leafing through someone's carefully compiled scrapbook. These are not the staged, predictable photographs of shawl-clad Indian women with baskets and cradle boards. The photographs are not tinted in sepia tone for that "timeless quality" often sought by those who would persist in depicting Native American life as a long-extinct phenomenon existing only in some bygone era. Farley