

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Living through the Generations: Continuity and Change in Navajo Women's Lives. By Joanne McCloskey.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1pf0t3n0>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 32(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Joe, Jennie R.

Publication Date

2008-03-01

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/>

says that within the Americas, “no tribal group is known to have had a written language or methods for the mass dissemination of written literature during aboriginal times,” thus ignoring the Mayan temples, monuments, and codices, and other indigenous groups’ uses of writing (3).

Unfortunately, it is not clear who French perceives to be his audience. The analysis is too simplistic for graduate students or scholars, and the lengthy use of direct text from documents in place of narrative description or analysis makes the work too confusing for undergraduates. Although French is clearly sympathetic to American Indians, his work is too problematic to be useful in the classroom. The back cover of this book states that “Dr. French . . . has worked in Indian country for over thirty years as faculty advisor to the Indian Student Organizations at Western Carolina University and Western New Mexico University.” His understanding of Indian history and law seems at times to be as superficial as this grounding in Indian country.

David R. M. Beck

University of Montana

Living through the Generations: Continuity and Change in Navajo Women’s Lives. By Joanne McCloskey. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007. 240 pages. \$24.95 paper.

McCloskey’s book is about three generations of Navajo women who live in or near communities located in New Mexico within the region of the Navajo Reservation known as the Eastern Navajo Agency. The governmental site for the Eastern Navajo Agency is in Crownpoint, New Mexico. Crownpoint was established in 1910 by a non-Indian, superintendent Samuel F. Stacher, who selected the site for a boarding school and for the administrative offices of the Eastern Navajo Agency. McCloskey tells us that the growth of Crownpoint helped transform the lives of the three generations of Navajo women in her study. In this respect, the reader learns a little about the history of Crownpoint because it serves as a backdrop for the discussion of how community development economically impacted the lives of these women.

In recruiting potential study participants, McCloskey explained to the women that she wanted to ask them about motherhood, family, and child-bearing patterns. The rationale for studying Navajo women was the centrality of motherhood in Navajo culture and how this centrality is exemplified through the tribe’s traditional matrilineal social organization. The author also adds that Navajo gender ideology was another factor because of the central place that Changing Woman has in the culture. For the Navajos, Changing Woman symbolizes fertility and regeneration of all life.

The women recruited to participate in this study represent three different motherhood typologies: (1) grandmothers, (2) midlife mothers, and (3) young mothers. More specifically, these women included (1) grandmothers who are past childbearing age and grew up in the 1920s and 1930s; (2) midlife mothers who grew up during the 1940s and 1950s and were employed; (3)

midlife mothers who were not employed but were engaged in various forms of informal economy; and (4) young mothers who grew up during the 1970s and 1980s and were in their teens and early twenties. The author, however, does not specify if any of the generation comparisons involved women from the same family. She did note that the sample included two extended families, but data from this group were not presented or analyzed separately.

In her findings, McCloskey reports that the generation of grandmothers was least impacted by the community's growth and development. Most of the grandmothers had no formal schooling, and their life histories were marked by living a traditional Navajo lifestyle that included carrying on traditional Navajo spiritual practices, having had arranged marriages, being occupied with raising children, and having cared for livestock. They were never actively engaged in wage labor except when some, as young women, worked periodically as temporary farm laborers. Compared to the other two generations of women, most of the grandmothers were more likely to have had stable marriages and lived most of their lives on the reservation, maintaining the family home on ancestral land. Most of the grandmothers not only defined motherhood as a sacred trust and responsibility but also believed in nurturing and maintaining kinship ties, an important support system that helped them survive various hardships.

Grandmothers had limited personal contact with the outside world but learned to adjust to a number of changes, including the infamous livestock reduction of the 1930s that drove Navajo families across the reservation into unending poverty. Because of the economic hardships that followed the livestock reduction, increasing numbers of the grandmothers' spouses and adult children left the reservation in search of wage labor, including work on the railroad. Livestock reduction also impacted the economic resources of the grandmothers, some of whom no longer had enough wool to weave rugs or enough lambs to sell to the local trader in the spring in order to clear credit for food bought during the winter months.

According to McCloskey, the midlife mothers were most impacted by development and change on the reservation. Mandatory and increased acceptance of schooling placed most of the midlife mothers in the local boarding school in Crownpoint or elsewhere. Vocational training was heavily emphasized by the government. Many of the midlife mothers therefore sought further education to learn certain job skills (for example, typing or working in hospitals). On completion of this training, most of these women found employment in Crownpoint's schools or government offices. As more programs and projects were established in Crownpoint, the job-skills requirements increased. Some jobs were phased out, leading to increased unemployment. In response, some of the midlife mothers enrolled in college classes while others left employment. Those who were unemployed sometimes turned to informal economy (for example, selling food or making and selling crafts) to supplement their family income.

Unlike the generation of grandmothers, the midlife mothers did not have arranged marriages and were more likely to have a history of troubled marriages or divorces. Those without partners became single heads

of household and maintained nuclear households, often remaining in Crownpoint in order to be near their place of work or to have access to classes offered at the local college. Unlike the grandmothers, the midlife mothers tended to be bicultural as well as bilingual and claimed membership in one of the local Christian churches. Midlife mothers also reported that most of their children did not speak Navajo, although they acknowledged their tribal membership.

At least economically, the most disenfranchised generation in this study was the young mothers. Without jobs or homes of their own, most were dependent on their families. They lived with their parents or their boyfriends' parents. Understandably, teen pregnancy also cut short their education; some attended the local branch of the tribal community college to obtain their GED and/or took courses at the local Diné College. Because most available jobs require college preparation and most semiskilled jobs are taken, there is virtually no employment for these young mothers. Perhaps because their personal economic circumstances were weak and unpredictable, most of these young mothers said they did not want to get married but were willing to maintain a relationship with the father of their children.

Many of the young mothers and their children do not speak Navajo, have had little or no exposure to rural living, and have not tended livestock. They are also less likely to be involved in other traditional activities, although some may utilize some of these resources on the advice of parents or grandparents. The Indian world these young mothers describe is also more pan-Indian. Unlike the midlife mothers, these young mothers also grew up when there were choices of schooling. The community not only had a public high school but also had two other local resources: the tribal community college branch and a technology institute. They did not have to attend government boarding schools that would have required them to be separated from their families.

Historical contextualization is important to understanding the impact of change on the lives of those being studied. In this regard, McCloskey posits that the modernization that occurred in Crownpoint did help change the lifestyle of these Navajo women but not necessarily their cultural values and identity. Although her examples of community development and its impact on the lives of these different generations of women are easily understood—that is, changes that came with programs and agencies such as a new hospital, public schools that replaced federal boarding schools, and the growth in diversity that came with various religious denominations—McCloskey is more vague about the continuity of cultural values and identity. Her criteria seemed limited to noting whether the language is maintained or whether the women utilized traditional Navajo healing resources. Outside of this, it is not clear what values are being measured or analyzed, and this data is especially weak for young mothers. For example, nothing is said about how tribal identity influences these young mothers' forms of parenting or aspirations for their own children or their children's future. What aspects of the Navajo identity and cultural values do young mothers encourage their children to learn when they are redefining the cultural values and tribal identities of their mothers and grandmothers?

The other shortcoming in this study is the lack of information about the men, which should be critical to any discussion of family and motherhood. Without information about the men in the lives of these women, it is hard to determine if these men view themselves as nonessential, which seems to be indicated here. Also, the reader would find it helpful to know how the economic impact on the men affected the women directly. Future studies might well heed Professor Lamphere's suggestion to focus on community studies that are more inclusive and therefore generate more data to help increase our understanding of the variability and differing strategies utilized by men and women in dealing with change or even economic constraints (L. Lamphere, "Historical and Regional Variability in Navajo Women's Roles," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1989).

Jennie R. Joe
University of Arizona

Massacre at Camp Grant: Forgetting and Remembering Apache History. By Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007. 159 pages. \$17.95 paper.

In the early morning of 30 April 1871, a group of Anglo, Mexican, and Tohono O'odham men traveled from Tucson to Camp Grant on the San Pedro River Valley near the San Carlos Apache Reservation to slaughter upward of 150 Apache men, women, and children. At the time of the event, President Grant characterized it as "purely murder." Lieutenant Whitman, commander at Camp Grant, called the massacre a "vile transaction." Frank Lockwood, in his classic history *The Apache Indians* (1938) referred to the Camp Grant Massacre as "the blackest page in the Anglo-Saxon records of Arizona." The place of that incident in the way Arizona history is socially represented, and the various narratives surrounding it, is the central theme of Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh's *Massacre at Camp Grant: Forgetting and Remembering Apache History*.

Colwell-Chanthaphonh's primary goal for this work is to tell the story of the Camp Grant Massacre from the multiple perspectives of its instigators and the victims of its violence. The success with which readers come away feeling he has accomplished this goal likely will depend on the disciplinary and ideological perspectives they bring to the book. For this reader, the book's most successful aspect lay in its detailed analysis of the competing Anglo representations of the event through the years. Through something akin to critical discourse analysis, Colwell-Chanthaphonh approaches the varying accounts of the killing to drive a wedge between the "truth" and "representation" of the events of that day. Colwell-Chanthaphonh offers a careful rendering of sixty-five texts published between 1871 and 2003 to demonstrate how "the author's choice of tone, genre, events, characters, dates, and numbers" are all variable and in the service of social, political, and historical objectives. These variations extend to estimates of the dead that range from 30 to 195, estimates of the child captives that range between 11 and 35, and competing claims