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Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words. Edited and translated by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart.

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ceremonial organization and have valuable methodological implications for the study of other communities.

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**Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words.** Edited and translated by Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Fifth House Publishers, 1992. 408 pages. \$24.95 paper.

One persistent stereotype of Native North Americans is that a people with a distinct culture ceased to exist in the nineteenth century. What is thought to remain of indigenous people is a group of dark-haired, dark-skinned, lazy alcoholics who live off government subsidies for the poor. Contrary to popular belief, at the time of initial contact with non-Indians, Native North Americans possessed an elaborate system by which they achieved social, political, and religious integration. This system was relational in nature, rather than based on individualism. Tribalism was the means by which each member of society was given a particular role or function to perform. Creation stories (the peoples' history) helped to establish relationships and set the morality of the tribe.

Unlike the Europeans' reliance on the written word, creation stories were passed from generation to generation by oral tradition. This was problematic for the Europeans, because they embraced a "linear sequential view" of history which was based on truth. Efforts were aimed at validating theory, with an emphasis on facts. Facts were derived through a scientific epistemology. Because knowledge derived through oral tradition was connected to religion and considered by the Europeans to be a non-scientific epistemology, it was not considered to be fact but fiction. Even the creation story of Europeans was considered to be fact, based on eyewitness testimony and recorded through the written word. Considered inferior, traditional Indian culture had to be eradicated in terms of religion, language, leadership, and overall social structure by U.S. governmental policies and replaced by the superior European culture. The American public was very much in support of this assimilationist approach to dealing with the "Indian problem." Further, assimilation was considered to be

inevitable, leaving no possibility for Native North Americans to retain their own viable culture. The process being complete, Native North Americans who remain are thought to be lazy alcoholics who have failed to take advantage of the vast opportunities made available in a new and better American society.

*Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words* challenges this conception of native peoples. H.C. Wolfart points out that most Canadians have read about natives during the time of the buffalo hunt and intertribal warfare—that is, the days of cowboys and Indians—before the process of assimilation was complete. The stories in this book capture the missing time period in the minds of Americans, depicting the Cree Nation as a people struggling with the pressures resulting from assimilation, modernization, and industrialization. These are a people who both retained tribal tradition and incorporated new ways; a people who do not exist according to twentieth-century stereotypes. The first section of the book focuses on life in the bush and on the northern prairie of Canada. This section focuses on reservation life, including the influence of the fur trade. The second and third sections reflect the influences of a settled existence where agriculture was prominent. The volume portrays the complexity of Indian life and the multiple factors that influence what an Indian (Cree) is today and why a simple depiction is difficult, indeed impossible.

This volume includes the accounts of seven Cree grandmothers recorded between 1988 and 1990. Brief biographies are presented for each storyteller and an explanation of their relationship to Freda Ahenakew. The original Cree texts, spoken in each storyteller's mother tongue, are presented in both roman and syllabic orthography and translated into English in order to reach a wider audience. The various language versions also make *Our Grandmothers' Lives* a good text for teaching the Cree language. The editors distinguish between the particulars of various dialects (Woods Cree and Plains Cree) and discuss the context within which stories are told. For example, the introduction to the texts points out the significance of a hunter's first moose and the traditions surrounding this significant event, and the ambiguous position of owls in Cree thought. A positive aspect is that the stories, instead of being presented in a framework of nonnative scholars, are unrehearsed; the editors have gone to great lengths to keep the text free from the conventions of outside reviewers. Errors, hesitations, and breaks are left unchanged. The editors did

not rewrite or rework the text to be intended "for some particular audience or some further purpose" (p. 17).

In addition to challenging stereotypes, Ahenakew's and Wolfart's book accomplishes its intended goal of portraying the life experiences of Cree grandmothers through first-person accounts. The stories translate a rich oral tradition into written form. This is a crucial and difficult task, because of the increased reliance on the written word for gaining knowledge and the necessity of preserving culture for future generations that have a decreasing interest in the old ways. With the ill effects of assimilation becoming apparent today, more and more Native North Americans are turning to the old ways for guidance and understanding. Much has been lost, and efforts aimed at preserving what is left will make wisdom available when it otherwise would be lost.

"Encounters with Bears" by Janet Feitz does an excellent job of communicating the resistance of indigenous people to waste. Feitz chose to leave her trapline rather than to kill the annoying bear and waste meat. Glecia Bear's discussion of the use of deer bone for sewing needles and knives, and loin-sinew for thread demonstrates that more than the meat of a moose can be utilized. The contradiction between tradition and progress is also apparent. Running through the text is a theme of reminiscence about a time when food was clean and abundant, and old-age pension checks, the prevalence of illness, and alcoholism were nonexistent. Minnie Fraser tells the story of a young boy killing his first moose and finding himself uncomfortable at being confronted with the old tradition of sharing the meat. Cree religion is portrayed as having incorporated Catholicism to such an extent that Glecia Bear contrasts Catholicism with the whites' religion. The sexual division of labor and learning by watching also run throughout the text.

The intention of *Our Grandmothers' Lives* can be contrasted with *Black Elk Speaks* (1961) by John G. Neihardt and *Lame Deer Seeker of Vision* (1972) by John (Fire) Lame Deer. *Black Elk Speaks* gives an account of the life and vision of a holy man of the Oglala Sioux. Black Elk chose to reveal or teach the spiritual vision of his youth so it would not perish; he trusted Neihardt to be the instrument of preservation. Neihardt was looking for something beyond information about the messianic period of history and had his own agenda. So, in editing the transcripts of Black Elk's story, Neihardt provided his own rendition of Black Elk's vision—that is, his own literary interpretation.

*Lame Deer Seeker of Vision* by John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes tells the story of Lame Deer and his search for a place in the white world, as well as his later years as a holy man of the Lakota Sioux. Erdoes, unlike Niehardt, tried to be as true as possible to Lame Deer's account. However, it is still an interpretation, although not as much license was taken as in the account by Niehardt. Neither account possesses the honesty of the unhampered manuscript that *Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words* provides.

Another aspect of Indian life is portrayed in *Our Grandmothers' Lives* as well. This is the gender perspective. Both Niehardt's and Erdoes's books come from a male perspective and focus on the spiritual, while Ahenakew's book comes from the female perspective and is rich in tales of the temporal world. Overall, much is to be gained by reading *Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words*. These stories focus on the practical, the spiritual; on memories, as well as on prophecies. Humor, an important aspect of storytelling, is also evident. This is a wonderful book, a welcome addition to the literature on Native North Americans.

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**The Political Economy of North American Indians.** Edited by John H. Moore. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. 320 pages. \$32.95 cloth.

As a neoclassical economist, I anxiously awaited the review copy of *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, naïvely expecting an anthology applying modern tools of economics and political science. Reading John Moore's preface, however, I thought it strange that a volume on political economy would have its roots in correspondence between Moore and Valery Tishkov, a Soviet ethnologist. Then my naïveté quickly disappeared: The political economy in this volume is Marxist. If you thought Marxist ideology disappeared with the demise (Moore calls it a "restructuring") of the Soviet Union, rest assured that it is alive and well. *Bourgeois, proletariat, precapitalist exploitation*, and other Marxist rhetoric permeate Moore's introduction and some of the other papers. As a neoclassical political economist, I was sure I would be disappointed in the volume.