

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Stories of Traditional Navajo Life and Culture. By Twenty-two Navajo Men and Women. Edited by Broderick Johnson.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/47p5r21v>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 9(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Ruppert, James

Publication Date

1985-03-01

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/>

Reviews

Stories of Traditional Navajo Life and Culture. By Twenty-two Navajo Men and Women. Edited by Broderick Johnson. Tsaille, Arizona: Navajo Community College Press, 1977. 335 pp.

Although it is a bit unusual to review a book this long after publication, I think there are a few good reasons to do so. First of all, after a publishing absence of about five years, Navajo Community College has begun to redistribute its older products and publish new ones. In fact, they are busier than ever. Under the capable hands of writer Anna Walters, the Press is poised to move forward again with an eye on distribution as well as quality. While NCC continues to suffer from financial problems, it appears that the administration is ready to support a small investment that will need to pay its own way. Recently the Press published some poetry and an excellent anthology of short fiction by American Indian writers edited by Simon Ortiz entitled *Earth Power Coming*, which is about to be reprinted since it sold out. Forthcoming is Dave Brugge's *Navajos and the Catholic Church*. Many of the older volumes from NCC Press are once again accessible. Mail order directly to the Press is still the surest way to find their titles.

Another reason why this volume is still significant is that with the strong recent interest in American Indian autobiography and the excellent critical contributions by Sands, Brumble and Krupat, this volume does represent a genuine attempt to present autobiography as directly from the Navajo viewpoint as possible. The life stories are collected from elderly Navajos by younger Navajos and translated by other Navajos. The editor concludes that "the true Navajo thinking and 'flavor' were preserved and the Navajo viewpoint was retained." I think he is right. The obvious attempt here is to present autobiography which, while being true to the individual's experience, reveals the larger outlines of cultural change and group identity. By involving so many Navajo individuals in the process, the aim is to achieve both personal and tribal autobiography. In many ways, the volume succeeds admirably in presenting information about traditional life styles, education and culture. The composite picture of the twenty-two

autobiographers presents a powerful impression of the tensions of tradition and change in individual lives. Still one cannot help but wonder how much its clearly educational and sociological (not to mention tribally political) expected uses help structure the accounts.

With so many intermediaries, it would be difficult to analyze the personal and social aims that might have intervened. The volume has no information about what kind of questions were asked or even if the individuals were questioned. No one set of criteria is presented for translation from Navajo to English (a truly monumental task for anyone who has tried it). We do not know if the strong chronological lines in the autobiographies were coaxed out or appeared naturally, or whether everyone was encouraged to make comments about their interaction with white education in order to create some consensus of opinion.

I realize that I may be unfair to the volume in some way here. I may be asking it to be something it is not. It does not intend to be a scholarly text on Navajo autobiography. And though we could wish for more information on the mode of production of the text, the social and cultural tension in the discourse, and opposing ideas of the author function in these texts, its goal is to collect the thinking of the older generation of Navajos who may be concerned that some of the traditional cultural lifestyles may be lost. I think that it does this task exceedingly well. It presents an entertaining, well-rounded, significant statement of cultural attitudes and cultural change. I would like to see someone do a serious discourse analysis on it, but as a cultural statement, the book remains an important publication, one we should not pass by or under appreciate. It is now ripe for rediscovery.

James Ruppert

University of New Mexico-Valencia
Campus

The Iroquois and the New Deal. By Laurence M. Hauptman. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981. 256 pp. \$20.00 Cloth.

In Hauptman's view, the Iroquois New Deal was an effort in community building that succeeded more than it failed. Through the use of strong documentation and oral history, Hauptman reveals that the New Deal programs among the Iroquois in New