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Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women. By Carolyn Niethammer. New York: Collier Books (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.), 1977. 281 pp. pap. \$7.95.

From the first page, Carolyn Niethammer emphasizes the tremendous diversity of roles and practices among Native American women, a plentitude which quickly dispels any stereotype of "the Indian squaw." Many kinds of women were born on these soils, grew to puberty, married, reared children and maintained homes, and returned to Mother Earth. Niethammer paints a colorful panorama as she traces the cycle of their lives. Descriptive rather than analytical, the book constitutes an informative introduction to the subject of women's roles in Native American societies.

Beginning with birth practices, Niethammer examines a broad spectrum of tribal involvement, from comradely assistance from several people to complete isolation of the laboring mother. A Kwakiutl woman of British Columbia, for example, was assisted by a whole team of midwives. The Caddo woman (Mississippi-Arkansas border area), on the other hand, sought out a riverside site, built a small shelter, and had her baby by herself—then waded into the river, breaking the ice if necessary, to bathe herself and her infant.

Parents may wonder how babies were cared for in a society devoid of cotton cloth or paper products. Native women used Spanish moss (Natchez), pulverized buffalo chips and cattail down (Cree), or fine cedar bark (Hopi). Little bottoms were powdered with warmed ground buffalo chips (Mandan) or rubbed with bear grease (Natchez). The cradleboard kept little backs straight, allowed curious eyes to watch mother's activities without wrecking them, and provided warmth and security. Birth control was often necessary, especially in harsh environments like the bitterly cold subarctic or the sparsely vegetated Southwest. Special contraceptive medicines were prepared, ceremonies were held, and abortions and even infanticide were sometimes resorted to. Love for the child was paramount; numbers had to be tempered by practical considerations.

As their children grew, Native American mothers instinctively reared them according to surprisingly "modern" psychological principles. Children were encouraged with lavish praise rather than struck or badgered with strict admonitions, gently and constantly taught to win community approval by proper behavior. Failure to obey meant rejection and loneliness. Family gatherings often involved story-telling of tribal legends which stressed acceptable actions.

Feminists may feel enraged to learn about the taboos surrounding a girl's arrival at puberty, for most tribes insisted that the girl be isolated

because she was a malevolent influence on others, especially on men; whereas, for the young boy puberty opened onto new freedoms and strengths. Niethammer quickly summarizes a number of theories explaining the taboos (though she does not mention any scholars by name at this point) and notes a simple explanation: the four-day rest each month was welcome relief from a grueling workload.

Upon reaching puberty, the girl was ready for marriage. A young native woman often had her mate selected for her by parents, older brother, or male cousin. Since there was little place for a single woman in tribal society, there was little choice whether she would marry, nor perhaps when, nor even who (especially in strictly authoritarian societies). A woman might find herself one of several wives, especially if she had married a head-man who had to entertain many guests and maintain a stock of gifts. Often co-wives were sisters or near-relatives of the first wife to assure a more harmonious household. With regard to sexual patterns, native people enjoyed the kind of freedom from guilt and sin that American society yearned for in the 1960s. Sex was one of the functions in life, no more, no less. But there were taboos to prevent incest, often more elaborate than those in Judeo-Christian society, and punishments for adultery, ranging from mildly admonitory (Crow) to severely disfiguring (Mobile). The Native American woman shared similar discrimination with her white sister, for it was usually the female adulterer who suffered the physical mutilation.

Niethammer's chapter on "Religion and Spirituality," though tantalizingly brief, emphasizes the pervasiveness of Native American religion in every activity of life. In certain ceremonies, those seeking to assure fertility in the plant and animal worlds, for example, women played important roles.

From birth to death, Native American women had a secure if somewhat monotonous existence and suffered no identity crises. In most tribes they were accorded dignity. And in modern times, when the reservation system disrupted men's roles and forced some into idleness, despair, and alcoholism, the women have held the families together, have maintained their craft skills, and have taken seats in tribal councils.

Niethammer's book follows the pattern of several earlier books in discussing the various roles of native women and scanning the continent's tribes for examples and practices—an approach which, if cursory, permits the reader to make comparisons among tribes. One might wish for greater depth, but Niethammer does provide an excellent bibliography to aid in further investigation. The text is punctuated with tribal stories and legends pertinent to the topic at hand to convey a sense of the tribe's life-view.

In contrast to Walter O'Meara's *Daughters of the Country: The Women of the Fur Traders and Mountain Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), Niethammer's book presents a more balanced assessment of women's roles, for O'Meara concentrates on sexual roles of women associated with the fur traders from early native-white contacts. Hence his is a story of exploitation, humiliation, enslavement, marriage, and frequent abandonment. These elements did exist, but they are not the whole picture. Niethammer's book reveals the full range of human relations between native men and women—some of the worse and most brutal, many of the most affectionate and loyal. The book offers a good starting point for the study of women's roles, for one may then select a tribe, a group of tribes, or a role for further investigation. To aid in the evaluation of her material "in terms of theories of women's status and role," Niethammer lists 10 sources in a brief annotated bibliography.

In comparison with *Indian Women of the Western Morning: Their Life in America* by John Upton Terrell and Donna M. Terrell (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1976), Niethammer's style is less strained in presenting the female point of view. In the Terrells' book, one is aware that "woman" was simply substituted for "person" in numerous discussions of general behavior patterns. The Terrells, however, offer more historical background and development than does Niethammer.

I Am the Fire of Time: The Voices of Native American Women, edited by Jane B. Katz (New York: Dutton, 1977), complements Niethammer's book by covering many of the same topics but using the songs, autobiographical or biographical accounts, poetry, and other first-hand recordings of Native American women. Niethammer's book is more coherent, organizationally and stylistically, because of its single voice. There is some overlap among all these books but not so much as to eliminate any from a reading list assembled to increase appreciation for the significant contributions made by our nation's *first ladies*.

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Ceremony. By Leslie Silko. New York: Viking Press, 1977. 262 p. \$10.00.

Leslie Silko's novel, *Ceremony*, tells the story of a young halfbreed Laguna man, Tayo, who has just come back from fighting in World War II. He is trying to readjust to life on the Laguna Reservation, in addition to dealing with all the suffering and nightmarish impressions he has just seen in the war, and also dealing with himself as a halfbreed individual in a tribe where mixed blood is frowned upon.