

# UCLA

## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

The Ethnic American Woman: Problems, Protests, Lifestyle. By Edith Blicksilver.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6nf811s2>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 5(2)

### ISSN

0161-6463

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### Publication Date

1981-03-01

### DOI

10.17953

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Given the above cited problems, it is difficult at best to get excited about *The Urban American Indian*. This effort proves to be terribly pedestrian, tends to overemphasize obvious points, is strongly value orientated and leans toward conjecture, is often naive in its concerns, and is, for the most part, laborious to read. I suspect the book was meant to serve as a cook book overview, but the end-product may be too superficial and shallow. Few concerns are developed to the point of providing any meaningful impact for the reader. If a tool for sensitizing the lay reader to the difficult urban path traveled by some Indians encumbered with poverty, high fertility, extensive unemployment, underemployment, family disorganization, alcoholism, stress and emotional problems in the process toward urbanization is important, then Sorkin's book may be of some use. Like all minority groups of the past and present, the urban Indian is experiencing an uncomfortable period. Unlike many past minority groups, the American Indian can readily return to the primary group setting, but still receive the short end of the stick. Beyond this purpose, *The Urban American Indian* is not a provocative encounter and would probably hold little utility for a serious reader or researcher interested in the subject.

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**The Ethnic American Woman: Problems, Protests, Lifestyle.** By Edith Blicksilver. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1978. 381 pp. \$12.95.

It is the nature of anthologies to be uneven, and *The Ethnic American Woman* is no exception. Blicksilver has collected into one volume the fiction, essays, letters, and memoirs of ethnic women in America. Despite the diversity of the contents, certain strains echo through the collection. The often unarticulated pressure to acculturate, to become "American," appears over and over. Yet always there is a grasping to retain ethnicity. Although acculturation for many meant a rejection of their heritage, family and neighborhood continued to remind them of the past, of relatives, or of "old country" ways. The need to write about that heritage sometimes so tenuously maintained attests to the links which, once forged, are difficult to break.

charged, impose a devastating effect upon the urban Indian and hold disastrous results for all Americans.

The mass of material collected in this volume can be overwhelming at first glance. The table of contents reveals the inclusion of material from known writers—Grace Paley, Nikki Giovanni, Margaret Walker, Muriel Rukeyser, and others—and new contributors. The entries trace women's lives through childhood, family experiences, school, work, and religion, and the experiences are chronicled in a variety of genres. By starting at the beginning and reading straight through, one becomes aware of the shared experiences of ethnic women, of American women, of all women. It is similarities rather than differences which glare out at the reader. There is an intriguing sense of recognition by the writers themselves of their shared experiences with other women, particularly other ethnic women. Virginia Sneve had as a teacher Miss Suzuki, a woman who had been in an internment camp during World War II, and several of the writers recognize in those around them their own feelings of alienation, of the need to conform, or of their "separateness."

In a collection which attempts to do so much, it is to be expected that no particular ethnic group will be adequately represented. Of the 95 entries, 32 represent Jewish or black experiences. The rest are divided among 23 other groups. Of particular interest to readers of this journal are the entries by Native American women. There are eight in this group: Rose Mary Barstow, Joy Harjo, Nila Northsun, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Leslie Silko, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Liz Sohappay, and Anne Webster.

The writings by Native American women in the collection share some characteristics with the expressions of Euro-American women—feelings of alienation, loss of tradition, prejudice. However, there is, as there most always is with Native American experience, a major difference in tone and response to oppression. As a child Rose Mary Barstow denied her Indianness, refusing to be identified with "the savages," but as an adult she relearned the Ojibwe language and became again a part of her people. Despite a bitter diatribe against American greed, Buffy Sainte-Marie can still "rejoice in our survival and our ways." She identifies the evil and by virtue of naming it assumes a kind of power over it and then can deal with America in her own way. In poetry Nila Northsun speaks of the old ways disappearing in the city where there are no rabbits to skin and there is no grandma to tell the stories, and Liz Sohappay and Joy Harjo write of the past, of the songs and stories that con-

tinue into the present. Leslie Silko's story "Lullaby" poignantly evokes the pain of superimposed white values on Native American culture and her story ends with the only adequate response remaining: the songs of the oral tradition. Many of these entries will be familiar to those who have read a great deal of the literature, and those readers may be disappointed that Blicksilver did not include more of the Native American experience. By including poetry, essays, and a short story, however, Blicksilver demonstrated the range of expression by contemporary Indian women.

Blicksilver's book was published in 1978 and represents one of the first attempts to collect materials from so many ethnic women. She is to be commended for recognizing the diversity and range of women to include as "ethnic," for so often the term is used to refer only to persons of color, with so many "whites" assuming they are not "ethnic." The recognition that all of us are indeed ethnic is important, for to repudiate that is to deny our personal and family histories. The weakness, of course, is that to do what Blicksilver set out to do is to write a history of women in America. It cannot be done in one anthology. Particularly, Unit 12 (Literary Criticism) is broad enough to require an additional volume itself.

Since the publication of Blicksilver's book, there have been other collections with various formats. Jane Katz collected the voices of Native American women in *I Am The Fire of Time* and Dexter Fisher brought together the writings of Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Asian-American women in *The Third Woman*. Because of their narrower focus, these books are probably more useful to the specialist. For an introductory course in women's studies or for a study of the immigrant experience, however, Blicksilver's book is useful and varied.

In her essay Maria B. Frangis, a Greek-American woman, sums up what Blicksilver portrays throughout the collection: "America no longer wants to be a melting pot but rather a mosaic, where all the individual pieces help to make up the whole. To be ethnic is to be all right" (p. 46). Indeed Blicksilver's collection records the voices of women who generally feel "all right" about who they are and who their ancestors were. They are women who have recorded the pains of their ancestors, who have suffered themselves, and who can articulate their pain and define themselves anew within the context of their heritage.

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