

**Iroquois Women: An Anthology.** Edited by W. G. Spittal. Ohsweken, Ontario: Irocrafts, 1990. 233 pages. \$31.95 cloth. \$15.95 paper.

*Iroquois Women* is a valuable collection of papers dealing with the position of women in Iroquois culture. It includes classic works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as modern analyses. Among the former are Lucien Carr's "On the Social and Political Position of Women among the Huron-Iroquois" (1884), A. Goldenweiser's "Functions of Women in Iroquois Society" (1914), and J. N. B. Hewitt's "Status of Women in Iroquois Polity before 1784" (1933). These papers were instrumental in bringing attention to the issue of women's roles among the Iroquois. They were based primarily on examinations of documents written by Jesuit missionaries and other European observers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and therefore focused on presumably traditional Iroquois practices and beliefs.

On the whole, these papers supported the notion of an Iroquois matriarchy, a notion that was popular at the time they were written. Earlier European and American scholars such as Lewis Henry Morgan (*League of the Hodenosaunee or Iroquois*, 1851) and Frederick Engels (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884) had explicitly described Iroquois political and social life in these terms. Although it is certainly understandable, given the marked subordination of women in nineteenth-century European and American society, that writers of the period should be struck by the contrast presented by Iroquois women, it is also true that they somewhat exaggerated the power of women. The term *matriarchy* implies women's exclusive dominance, as a reverse of the relations under *patriarchy*, a pattern that the writers took for granted and which therefore needed no explanation. Perhaps the problem that Euro-American researchers had in analyzing Iroquois culture derived from their unthinking acceptance of the principle that some group in a society has the right to dominate others. They assumed that, since men clearly did not dominate women in traditional Iroquois culture, women must have dominated men. This was an unfortunate distortion, because it perpetuated a false presumption that all societies share the belief that some people have the right to control the actions of others.

Despite this drawback, research about the Iroquois correctly pointed to women's important contributions to political decision-making. Iroquois women had rights to discuss local, national, and international issues. Their opinions were voiced and listened to in

community discussions. And they played crucial roles in naming and deposing confederacy chiefs. The articles also discuss women's social, economic, and religious activities.

The earlier popular notion of the existence of an Iroquois matriarchy has been deflated, beginning with Cara Richards's paper, "Matriarchy or Mistake: The Role of Iroquois Women through Time" (1957). Unfortunately, though, many current writers seem content to simply refute the idea that women dominated Iroquois polity. In doing so, they neglect to delve deeper into Iroquois society, where they might have found evidence of true gender equality.

Judith Brown's paper in *Iroquois Women*, "Economic Organization and the Position of Women among the Iroquois" (1970), presents a balanced view of Iroquois culture and has become a modern classic. The significance of Brown's contribution is two-fold. First, she neither exaggerates nor underestimates women's importance in Iroquois society. Second, she looks for the origins of women's status, rather than simply describing the results. Brown's thesis, which is widely accepted, is that Iroquois women's social and political autonomy stemmed from their control over resources. Not only were they the producers of primary subsistence as farmers, but, of equal if not greater importance, they controlled the distribution and use of both the land itself and the products of land and labor. Brown's insight about Iroquois economies, i.e., the relationship between gender roles in economic organization and in sociopolitical life, has been widely applied by researchers interested in gender relations in other areas of the world as well.

A number of papers in the anthology are concerned with the lives of modern Iroquois women. Martha Randle's "Iroquois Women: Then and Now" (1951) was the first published work of this kind. The collection also includes a previously unpublished article, Ann Shafer's master's thesis entitled "The Status of Iroquois Women" (1941). Both of these works discuss the roles and status of contemporary women in light of historical material. Both also focus on Iroquois communities at the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Canada, although Shafer's thesis provides some data concerning people in New York. Although the specific activities that women are engaged in now obviously differ from those of the past, Randle and Shafer demonstrate that continuities with the past remain strong. Within the context of the Iroquois Confederacy, clan mothers still have important decision-making and symbolic roles. And despite the shift from matrilineal extended

family residences to nuclear households, women continue to be focal members of families and to function autonomously in their communities.

Shafer's paper is accompanied by extensive commentary and notes by the anthology's editor, W. G. Spittal. These notes provide valuable information gleaned from historical sources and from comments of contemporary Iroquois people, which amplify and explain Shafer's data. In fact, similar treatment of the other papers in the anthology would have been most welcome.

*Iroquois Women* also contains Sally Wagner's previously unpublished article, "The Root of Oppression Is the Loss of Memory: The Iroquois and the Earliest Feminist Vision" (1989), which details the influence of Iroquois society on the development of nineteenth-century feminist movements in the United States. Wagner's work presents the words of feminist activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Gage, and Alice Fletcher, in which they explicitly credited Iroquois women and Iroquois culture as models of the kind of society they hoped to establish.

The anthology has reprinted three Canadian newspaper articles concerning Kahn-Tineta Horn, a native rights activist from the Mohawk Reserve at Kahnawake. Two of the articles date from the 1960s, when Horn first became popularly known; the third, written in 1989, is an account of her current interests. The first articles, written by Peter Gzowski, are quite startling to read nearly thirty years later. In what was meant as a sympathetic treatment, Gzowski sensationalizes Horn's activities in a way that comes across as condescending and sexist. Still, the articles do provide some sketchy history of Kahnawake and raise the issue of anti-Indian racism in Canada. The more recent article, printed without an author's credit, ends with an unintended ironic comment on the earlier stories, noting that Horn currently is working on a master's thesis at Carleton University in Ottawa which will "illustrate the need for Indians to gain control of how the media portrays [sic] them" (p. 232).

Several additional papers are reprinted in the anthology but have not been specifically discussed in this review. For further reading on the subject, I would recommend an article by Diane Rothenberg, "The Mothers of the Nation: Seneca Resistance to Quaker Intervention" (in *Women and Colonization*, ed. M. Etienne and E. Leacock; Praeger, 1980). This paper adds a dimension not covered by those in *Iroquois Women*, because it deals with the impact of European colonization in transforming Iroquois society

and undermining the traditional roles of women. In addition, it shows the strength of women's resistance to their changing world.

*Iroquois Women* is richly illustrated with photographs—spanning the years from the late nineteenth century through contemporary times—of Iroquois women and their families. Spittal provides instructive comments, which give historical and biographical information about the photographs.

In sum, this is a most welcome anthology, bringing together as it does the well-known works dealing with women in Iroquois society, as well as a number of enlightening additions. Readers interested in Iroquois culture or in gender relations now no longer have to search through numerous sources but can conveniently find the central papers in one volume.

*Nancy Bonvillain*

New School for Social Research

**The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England 1675-1678.** By Russell Bourne. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. 288 pages. \$22.95 cloth. \$9.95 paper.

King Philip's War was a disaster for the inhabitants of New England, whether Indian or white. Proportionately, the war cost more American lives than any other in 350 years of colonial and national history. Of New England's ninety towns, fifty were attacked or burned; the region's economy was ruined, and it took New England a century to achieve prewar levels of prosperity. For the Indians, according to Francis Jennings, the war represented the Second Puritan Conquest (the first being the Pequot War of 1636-37). The power of the Wampanoag, the Narragansett, and their allies in southern and central New England was shattered forever. Puritan assaults on the Narragansett fortress in December 1675 and on the Indian fishing village at Peskeompskut (renamed Turner's Falls) in May 1676 slaughtered men, women, and children, while the increasingly effective tactics developed by Benjamin Church, using Indian auxiliaries, caused steady attrition of native numbers. Famine and disease took an additional toll. Indian leaders were hunted down and killed or executed. Captured women and children were sold into slavery. Remnants of once powerful tribes fled from the havoc. Some dispersed to join more distant communities; others migrated north to French mission villages in Quebec. New