

**Invisible Reality: Storytellers, Storytakers, and the Supernatural World of the Blackfeet.** By Rosalyn R. LaPier. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. 246 pages. \$50.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper, \$50.00 electronic.

Rosalyn LaPier's *Invisible Reality* is a gem, a masterwork on the spiritual beliefs and religious practices of the Piegan Blackfeet of northern Montana. An associate professor in the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana, LaPier (Blackfeet/Red River Métis) was raised by Blackfeet elders who taught her about life based on their experiences, ancestral recollections, and stories stretching back to the buffalo days before 1880, told with great fidelity to the truth. She learned about gods and spirits and Blackfeet men and women who were in constant contact with an invisible reality and who applied great spiritual powers for the well-being of the Blackfeet people. She also discovered that Blackfeet stories in books lacked the mystery and enchantment of the stories her people told. Eventually she grasped the meaning of Blackfeet religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Historian William Farr's elegant expression of this knowledge identifies the central point of *Invisible Reality*: "the Blackfeet world possessed an extra dimension, for amid the visible world, was an invisible one, another magnitude, a spiritual one that is more powerful, more meaningful, more lasting, it was a universe alive" (xxxiv).

The Blackfeet believed the universe is made of three realms, the Above world, the Water world, and the Below world. The three worlds are parallel realms, existing separate from one another but also permeable and connected. The Above world is the home of the deities, the Sun, his wife the Moon, and their son the Morning Star. The ultimate source of power is the sun (Na-to-ye) which means "of the sun," a term typically translated as "spiritual medicine." There were gods and other spirit beings in the Above and Water worlds. The Below world where human life is, has none of these. The Blackfeet were powerless. They depended entirely on the supernatural for power. There were many spirit beings. They communicated with women and men in several ways and often manifested themselves to a person or an object through speech, making a pact between the supernatural being and the recipient. This imposed obligations on the recipient such as prayers, memorizing songs, dance movements, and the making of offerings.

The spirit being was an ally. Scholars who studied the Blackfeet from the 1880s to the 1910s noted that all Blackfeet had access to some power from a personal ally. Life was futile without it. Spiritual beliefs gave stability to life in good and bad times. Some people had many allies in objects such as tipis, medicine pipes, or medicine bundles. Possession of these sacred objects and the power they bestowed gave one prestige and wealth. A recipient could sell the right to the power to some one else for horses or other possessions, without losing their access to the power. Some remarkable people had great power. Some of them were known to control weather, the most important use of power in the Blackfeet world. The weather was not part of the natural environment. It was made up of supernatural entities that often challenged the Blackfeet and that the Blackfeet attempted to control. There were other uses of allies, such as healing, luck in hunting and in going to war. The Blackfeet were more interested in

having the forces of nature bend to their desires than in living in harmony with it, a point LaPier makes emphatically

People from the four confederated tribes of the Blood gathered at the O'Kan (Sun Dance) in late summer for about one month before buffalo hunting. People gave offerings to the sun priests who made appeals to the sun for the well-being of the community. The people also constructed the sacred Medicine Lodge under the direction of a sacred woman. Blackfeet conducted many rituals for the allies in the Medicine Lodge, which included opening the Beaver Bundle and its myriad of sacred objects. It included the famous O'Kan, the self-torture of young warriors who sought a vision during a four-day ordeal of food and water deprivation and the pain of hanging from a central pole on leather lines with hooks stuck into the breasts of the participants. The Sun Dance was a reenactment of a series of stories of the allies. The stories described the relationship between the Blackfeet and the supernatural deities.

Opening my eyes to many Blackfeet beliefs, *Invisible Reality* recalls two other Native-authored books conducting research on their own people. One is a masterpiece by the late Alfonso Ortiz that is invaluable to anthropological literature, *The Tewa World: Space, Time, Being, and Becoming in a Pueblo Society* (1969). Beverly Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (1980) collects traditional stories and accounts of some of the lives and rituals practices of her elder female kin and a friend and complements *Invisible Reality* in many details. The stories and anecdotes reach back to the 1880s, as did LaPier's informants' information.

LaPier also includes a brief but very important summary of the history of the Blackfeet economy from the buffalo days to the present. In the 1960s I researched the economy of Blackfeet households and families using public records from the 1920s as well as conducting house-to-house surveys. I was treated with more politeness than I deserved and I was given a banquet of gentle subtle humor very similar to the manner of LaPier's writing and storytelling. LaPier used many sources I had located. A dedicated scholar, she reported the information contained in them with admirable precision. She conducted research in eleven Blackfeet archives and consulted every other source she could find. In addition, her meticulous use of the observations of the major works on the Blackfeet such as McClintock, Grinnell, Wissler and John Ewers give one great confidence in the validity of her research and findings. I urge everyone interested in the Native Americans of the Great Plains to read this book.

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**Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities.** By Mariana Mora. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 288 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$27.95 paper; \$15.85 electronic.

Mariana Mora's recognition of her positionality within Zapatista communities as a *kaxlane*, an outsider, and the effects this may have had on her point of view in