

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Native Heritage: Personal Accounts by American Indians, 1790 to the Present. Edited by Arlene Hirschfelder.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7nj0c7d1>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 21(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Donaldson, Laura E.

Publication Date

1997-03-01

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/>

bilities latent in an Indian Jesus. This book offers much. Above all it celebrates the potential universality of Christianity and the tenacious vitality of human religious vision.

Henry Warner Bowden
Rutgers University

Native Heritage: Personal Accounts by American Indians, 1790 to the Present. Edited by Arlene Hirschfelder. New York: Macmillan USA, 1995. 298 pages. \$15.00 paper.

The past decade has witnessed a dramatic upsurge of publishing by and about American Indians. If all these texts were condensed into a time capsule and then discovered by future potential readers, they might think that the predominant mode of writing and thinking about Indians was focused upon personal accounts: on growing up Native American or being a Native-American man, woman, writer, activist, elder, mixed-blood, survivor. While we certainly need accurate life-stories of what it means to be Indian in contemporary (as well as historical) America, this publishing interest in the personal—or what some have called “autoethnography”—also reiterates the pernicious idea of American Indians as Native informants whose lives function as “raw data” to be used and taken up by more theoretical scholars in a number of different ways.

I open with these somewhat pessimistic musings because they framed my initial response to the volume under review: “Oh no,” I thought, “not another collection of autobiography.” To my surprise, however, this 1995 anthology parts company with many of its counterparts because its focus is upon what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn describes as “who the Indian thinks he/she is in tribal America” (“American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,” *American Indian Quarterly*, 1996: 66). That is, the title is somewhat misleading since *Native Heritage* does indeed contain personal accounts, but each selection briefly illuminates both the meaning and diversity of the core values and social structures of indigenous societies. As Hirschfelder states in her editor’s introduction, “this anthology was created for one purpose: to share a small fraction of the rich and unique heritage of native peoples from many different regions of the United States and Canada. Herein readers are offered personal accounts of the inner mechanisms of native societies whose life-

ways have worked for millennia" [p. xix].

For example, the anthology opens with a section on "Family," which includes excerpts from Ella Deloria on why kinship was so important to the Dakotah, Maxidiwiac on Hidatsa kinship systems, Tom Johnson (Pomo) on why "without the family, we are nothing," Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) on clan membership, and Arthur McDonald (Lakota) on traditional Indian family values. I profitably used *Native Heritage* in my Introduction to American Indian/Native Studies course, and this last selection in particular sparked an extremely lively discussion about the current political and cultural debates on "family values." The largely non-Native undergraduate students in the class were taken aback by McDonald's example of Indian students who, if they receive a phone call telling them they are needed, will suddenly leave an academic environment and return home. Like the administrative officials McDonald criticizes, these students had a difficult time understanding "what is real and true to the Indian community"—in this case, the importance of the family and the obligations that members of the *tiyospaye* possess. After reading *Native Heritage*, however, this task became a little easier.

Other sections of the book are organized around such topics as "land and its resources," "language," "Native education," "traditional storytelling," "traditions," "worship," and "discrimination." Each possesses a composition similar to the "family" section: short anecdotes or analyses, most of which have appeared in previously published works. Hirschfelder also constructively balances descriptive and analytical narratives. In the segment on "traditional storytelling," for example, she juxtaposes Luci Tapahonso's more general presentation on retelling Navajo stories to Janet Campbell Hale's (Coeur d'Alene) personal reminiscence of her father's and uncle's Coyote stories. This integration of the expository with the autobiographical is a very effective means of educating the presumed general (and, I believe, non-Native) reader of *Native Heritage*.

Although I liked the anthology and have actually used it in my own classes, I do have some concerns, some of which are unique to this collection and some of which are endemic to the genre of autobiographical anthologies using narratives by American Indians. In terms of the more local issues, I felt that the individual sections needed more extensive and critical contextualizations. Hirschfelder does provide a short introduction for each topic, but they are very short and function mainly as

ways have worked for millennia" [p. xix].

For example, the anthology opens with a section on "Family," which includes excerpts from Ella Deloria on why kinship was so important to the Dakotah, Maxidiwiac on Hidatsa kinship systems, Tom Johnson (Pomo) on why "without the family, we are nothing," Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) on clan membership, and Arthur McDonald (Lakota) on traditional Indian family values. I profitably used *Native Heritage* in my Introduction to American Indian/Native Studies course, and this last selection in particular sparked an extremely lively discussion about the current political and cultural debates on "family values." The largely non-Native undergraduate students in the class were taken aback by McDonald's example of Indian students who, if they receive a phone call telling them they are needed, will suddenly leave an academic environment and return home. Like the administrative officials McDonald criticizes, these students had a difficult time understanding "what is real and true to the Indian community"—in this case, the importance of the family and the obligations that members of the *tiyospaye* possess. After reading *Native Heritage*, however, this task became a little easier.

Other sections of the book are organized around such topics as "land and its resources," "language," "Native education," "traditional storytelling," "traditions," "worship," and "discrimination." Each possesses a composition similar to the "family" section: short anecdotes or analyses, most of which have appeared in previously published works. Hirschfelder also constructively balances descriptive and analytical narratives. In the segment on "traditional storytelling," for example, she juxtaposes Luci Tapahonso's more general presentation on retelling Navajo stories to Janet Campbell Hale's (Coeur d'Alene) personal reminiscence of her father's and uncle's Coyote stories. This integration of the expository with the autobiographical is a very effective means of educating the presumed general (and, I believe, non-Native) reader of *Native Heritage*.

Although I liked the anthology and have actually used it in my own classes, I do have some concerns, some of which are unique to this collection and some of which are endemic to the genre of autobiographical anthologies using narratives by American Indians. In terms of the more local issues, I felt that the individual sections needed more extensive and critical contextualizations. Hirschfelder does provide a short introduction for each topic, but they are very short and function mainly as

descriptive summaries. For example, an extended contextualization would be especially important for any discussion of "worship," or Native American religious traditions, in light of current contentious arguments about non-Native appropriations of these traditions. While the "discrimination" section does contain Woody Kipp's (South Piegan) essay on non-Natives' ignorance of Native spirituality and Trudie Lamb-Richmond's (Schaghticoke) criticism of the commercialization of Indian beliefs, Hirschfelder does not direct the reader's attention to these resources, nor does she comment on "worship" as a potential danger zone for reader/outsider.

My second reservation about *Native Heritage* is a generic one shared by other works in this vein: the presentation of highly mediated accounts as directly authentic statements of the people involved. Many (but not all) of its individual selections are excerpted from previously published English-language ethnographic or anthropological texts and consequently raise many questions about the credibility of their linguistic and narrative status. One of the most dramatic examples of this is Maria Chona's reminiscence, "My Father Told Us The Stories." As anyone with a minimum amount of exposure to American Indian autobiography should know, what we are reading here is not the voice of Maria Chona; rather, it is a fictionalized recreation of Chona by anthropologist Ruth Underhill, "editor" of *Papago Woman*. The content of this anecdote may be very close to the experience of the young Maria, but it disturbs me that Hirschfelder either does not know or care that this selection mimics the Native voice as heard and problematically reconstructed by a non-Native. Other accounts with highly mediated histories and probable editorial interventions include a statement by Arapooish (Crow) from Washington Irving's 1849 *Adventures of Bonneville*; the excerpt from *The Autobiography of a Fox Woman*; Pretty Shield's description of learning by imitating her mother (which was not only influenced by editor Frank Linderman but also translated from the Crow language into sign language and only then, into English), as well as others. Readers should be aware of how deceptive and potentially unreliable these narratives are as sources of information, and Hirschfelder's failure to acknowledge this remains a very serious critical lapse in an otherwise praiseworthy collection.

In spite of the above limitations and because of its many strengths, however, I am encouraged by the impulse that *Native Heritage* represents. It is a useful resource for classes that address

Native issues and a good place to start learning about American Indian cultures for the general reader.

Laura E. Donaldson
The University of Iowa

Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650. By Kathleen J. Bragdon. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. 301 pages. \$28.95 cloth.

Kathleen J. Bragdon's *Native People of Southern New England, 1500-1650* is a long-awaited, valuable addition to the field of Native American history. Most scholars who have written about southern New England Natives, including Francis Jennings, Alden T. Vaughan, Neal Salisbury, James Axtell, and William S. Simmons, have relied heavily on the writings of sixteenth and seventeenth-century European observers of Native Americans. (See Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*; Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*, 3rd ed.; Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Puritans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1634*; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*; William S. Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620-1984*.) Bragdon, too, draws from these sources, but, to provide "a valuable corrective to the bias" inherent in European documents, she also draws from recent archeological research, as well as her own linguistic research (p. 231). Thus, the book benefits from the strengths of several disciplines.

Native People of Southern New England is a strongly revisionist work. Early on, Bragdon makes it clear that (1) she intends to write her history of the "Ninnimissinuok" (a term Bragdon borrows from the Narragansett word for "people" [p. xi] from a Native perspective, not to describe "the impact of our history" on them (p. xiii), and (2) she intends to describe a distinct people, not generic Native Americans. On the first point, Bragdon acknowledges her debt to recent histories of Native Americans, which have "contributed immensely to our understanding" (p. xxiii). At the same time, she complains that the very frameworks of these histories reflect a European, not Native American, perspective, as can be seen in their reliance on economic rationalism to explain Native behavior and their standard linear