

Al Logan Slagle's essay on repercussions and aftermath wraps up the prevailing thought of the authors that the negative aspects of the AIPRC outweigh the positive. The authors substantiate this view. The AIPRC was expected to be important, to make a comprehensive study, to find new directions for federal Indian policy, and to inspire positive and constructive Congressional action. As of 1984 it has failed. Yet the effort may be praised. The Meriam Report of 1928 was criticized because Indians participated little in the preparation. The AIPRC included Indians as full commissioners and as the majority of staff members. The AIPRC made 206 recommendations. By the time of publication, however, the mood of Congress had shifted to the usual indifference mixed with desire to exploit Indian-owned natural resources. Even Indians are apprehensive about possible changes. As copies of the AIPRC report gather dust, a new Indian policy seems as far beyond reach as ever.

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Joseph Bruchac, ed. *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back: Contemporary American Indian Poetry*. (Greenfield Center, NY: The Greenfield Review Press, 1983), xvi, 294 pp., \$9.95.

Poetry by American Indians may be traced to the writings of John Rollin Ridge, a Cherokee who came to California in the early 1850s, edited several northern California newspapers, and helped create the legend of Joaquin Murieta, and to the works of Alexander Posey, a Creek who wrote romantic nature poems and dialect stories in the style of the local colorists. Nonetheless, few Indian poets existed prior to the 1970s. Since then, there has been a tremendous surge in the numbers of Indians writing poetry, and their work has received a great deal of critical acclaim, as evidenced by the attention given to James Welch's *Riding the Earthboy*, Wendy Rose's *Lost Copper*, and Maurice Kenny's *The Mama Poems*, which garnered the American Book Award for 1984.

Much of this surge may be accounted for by the development of small presses, such as the Strawberry Press, the Blue Cloud Abbey Press, and the Greenfield Review Press, which have taken a proprietary interest in the promotion of American Indian poetry. Joseph Bruchac and the Greenfield Review Press, especially, are to be commended for *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back*. Bruchac, himself an Abenaki Indian and an accomplished poet, has brought together fifty-two Indian writers into a

juxtaposition rich in memory, image, and language. Of all the Indian poets who have contributed significantly over the last decade, only Carter Revard, Carol Sanchez and Bruchac himself are absent.

This collection is rich in a number of ways: in its diversity of styles, of tribal backgrounds, of personal experiences and visions, of landscape and geography, of varying proficiency in language. Such diversity challenges classification, yet there is a thread that holds the poems together. Each of the poets writes about those perilous margins of existence, where memory and dream, space and motion, person and event, past and present, earth and sky, reveal the essence of our beings. They tell us what it is like to be human, and to be Indian, in contemporary American society; they show us how to inhabit a particular moment and embrace all its confusions and contradictions. These poems help us to remember obligations to the earth and to those whose lives over many generations have made this a sacred land.

The most compelling poems are those that compute losses, measure gains, and make equations in human terms. "Combing," by Gladys Cardiff, is about the "simple act" of a mother and daughter preparing each other's hair, "Something/Women do for each other/Plaiting the generations." In "Wild Strawberry," Maurice Kenny describes his memory of an earlier visit home to upstate New York, to the color and sweetness of berries grown naturally in the sun, and to his mother who wrapped "the wounds of the world/with a sassafras poultice and we ate/wild berries with their juices running down/ down the roots of our mouths and our joy." Kenny then contrasts these wild berries with those he eats in Brooklyn, imported from Mexico when they are still green and tasteless.

These poems have other messages. Frank LaPena's "Stone of Many Colors" suggests that our relation to the natural world has been obscured but that we remain, nonetheless, a part of that world and are sacred as well. The poet affirms that he, and all of us, are like a stone of many colors. "Some colors heal/while others/speak of madness." In Wendy Rose's "Loo-wit," or Mount St. Helens, there is a confirmation of the power of the earth to purify itself. Before the time of invasion, Loo-wit had been bound to the earth by "centuries of berries," but since the coming of the whites she had been pummeled by machinery and her slopes abused. With her most recent explosion, she has, once more, begun to sing, "trembling all of the sky about her."

This is indeed an excellent collection of poetry, made richer by the biographical statements that precede each of the sets of poems, and it now stands as the best introduction to the works of this most recent generation of American Indian poets.

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