

problems of hypertension and sickle cell anemia which is endemic to primarily blacks and an oppressive economic situation for many black elderly, with oral interviews. Her ability to intertwine both makes her documentary a worthwhile endeavor—one which is open ended and allows for in-depth discussions of the issues raised by the participants. By focusing on the black elderly and presenting their stories, Webster brings to light a “group” which has been invisible—hidden from the public, sheltered, and ignored.

We are fortunate in having this portrayal of the black elderly. Her film moves us away from the black/white confrontation situations as seen in such novels as *A Gathering of Old Men* or *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and presents us with a vision of human life, human diversity. *The Black Aged: A Diverse Population* is worth viewing for those interested in developing an understanding beyond “welfare” and “subsistence living” conditions of the black elderly. The individual lives, their dignity and pride, reveal these people as separate from generalizations and stereotypes. This videotape could be used successfully in courses which focus on the family, on community, and on the elderly in society.

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Isobel White, Diane Barwick, and Betty Meehan, eds. *Fighters and Singers; The Lives of Some Aboriginal Women.* (Winchester: Allen & Unwin, 1985) xxi, 226 pp., \$30.00; \$15.00 paper.

Fighters and Singers is a collection of fifteen essays written about Aboriginal women of Australia. The authors, mostly anthropologists and all women, wrote of their “sisters,” “mothers,” and “aunts.” The pieces are all informative about tribal life, but they are also warm reminiscences of relationships across cultural boundaries. Among the contributors is Pearl Duncan, the first Aborigine to become a trained teacher in Australia and a former member of the National Aboriginal Education Committee.

What is most striking about the information contained in the essays is the similarity between Australian Aboriginal experience and American Indian experience. Subjects and practices which appear in the stories of

American Indian women are echoed in these accounts.

Although the stories span a century of experience and reflect experiences in fifteen different communities, the themes remain consistent. The women are and have been strong within their families and communities, they have participated in ceremonies and ritual dances, and they have been the “fighters” in the battle to reclaim ancestral lands and maintain the traditions. Many of the women describe kinship relationships, citing the ways kinship is traced, the taboos, and the importance of family in rituals such as marriage or mourning. Many describe arranged marriages and the relationships between co-wives.

Australian Aboriginals have been victimized by missionaries who, although in many cases were supportive of native traditions, still were obligated by their religious training to Christianize the natives and teach them English to replace their native tongues. Lorna Dixon, for example, was told by a mission manager, “Your Aboriginal language is dirty and English must be spoken at all times. I don’t want to hear any of your filthy lingo and if I do, you’ll suffer” (p. 101). Government policies, which changed with different administrations, generally were aimed at assimilation. During the 1940s the official policy was that “half-castes” should marry each other or Europeans to get away from their Aboriginal affiliations and identification. During the 1950s, however, intermarriage was illegal, and mixed-blood children could be taken away from their parents and placed in institutions.

Pressures from the outside have come in other forms as well. Dams have flooded traditional homelands, and bauxite mines have contaminated the water supplies. Industry and government have conspired to relocate tribes, often several times within a generation. The introduction of alcohol has been devastating for the young people of some tribes. By the 1970s there had been some changes, and Aboriginal people were being allowed to return to their ancestral homes in the bush if the land was still available and unpolluted. Not all have been fortunate enough to return to the “outstations,” however.

This collection is significant because women’s stories are often left untold in ethnographic accounts. In fact, Betty Meehan laments that she found it almost impossible to record the story of Bandeyama because every time they began there would be interruptions from one of the many children Bandeyama was raising. Finally, Meehan gathered much of her information from a man, Gurrmanamana, who had fewer family responsibilities than the women. The adaptations of these women is described by Meehan: “With little difficulty she [Bandeyama] has reconciled herself to a changing environment and taken from European culture what she wants. She is able to do this because she is firmly attached to her own land, secure in the fact that its resources are hers and

that its religious forces are fully intact and working for the benefit of her people” (p. 211).

Most of the women interviewed seemed willing, even eager, to tell of their lives and to tell the traditional stories. Mondalmi perhaps best expressed why the women were willing to talk: Of the “old people” she said, “They should have taught us these things, so we would know what to do. We can’t find out now—they all gone without telling us” (p. 34). These women do not want any more of their history and culture lost to future generations.

This collection would be excellent to use in courses including cross-cultural studies of women. What emerges clearly in the essays is the importance of the roles of these women within their communities. Jenny Green points out that “More detailed and insightful investigation of women’s business is now being undertaken in some communities, but the general view that Aboriginal women play only a minor role is still prevalent, though Aboriginal women themselves have never doubted the significance of their functions in all aspects of community life” (p. 57).

Photographs of the women and their families, often posed with the women who recorded their lives, bring the stories and women to life. The stories are not dull studies; they are vibrant and alive and reflect the intimate bonds which were formed in spite of differences in culture or age.

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Sylvia Junko Yanagisako. *Transforming the Past: Tradition and Kinship Among Japanese Americans*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985) xii, 289 pp., \$39.50.

Transforming the Past is a major contribution to our understanding of Japanese American experience specifically and to our sense of ethnic experience generally. Yanagisako’s study transcends its anthropological base to offer crucial insights previously precluded by both facile “understanding” and methodological limitations.

Yanagisako analyzes changes in Japanese American kinship behavior as related to marriage, filial relations, and siblinghood. (Hence three major sections in the book, each with descriptive matter followed by interpretive discussion.) Her work is based on imaginatively conceived,