

America—would enlighten us not only about current history in the making, but about the universality in human motivation, human needs, and the human spirit.

—Zora Devrnja Zimmerman  
Iowa State University

**Carol Bruchac, Linda Hogan, Judith McDaniel, eds. *The Stories We Hold Secret—Tales of Women's Spiritual Development*. (Greenfield Center, New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1986) xxiii, 290 pp. \$12.95 paper.**

*The Stories We Hold Secret — Tales of Women's Spiritual Development* is an anthology of thirty-one short fiction pieces written by and about women in America. These are not stories about extraterrestrial visits, enlightenment through gurus, or dramatic religious conversion; rather, these are stories of inner knowing, of our “holy dailiness,” as Linda Hogan says in the preface. The stories are as varied as women's experience, from the quietness of a Native American woman cooking beans and cornbread in her kitchen to the tumult of a woman who for the first time becomes involved with a workers' strike.

Each story evokes—and invokes—evolution, as does the anthology itself: the first section contains stories of women confronting abortion, prison, alcoholism; the next section is of “simple acts,” a Jewish woman revealing her lesbianism to her brother, a harassed factory worker smashing a time-clock, a woman confronting her stepfather who abused her as a child; the third section deals with natural rhythms—gentle musings during a pregnancy amidst poverty, reminiscence during the illness and death of a once ebullient German mother; the last section is about women who have named and fully claimed their special powers. In its affirmation of personal growth as an essential element for societal growth, the book is evolutionary; it is revolutionary in naming feelings and experiences that are often denied.

This book puts to rest any notion that ethnic experience or women's experience is monolithic. We read of a young Japanese woman grappling with her role in a politically oriented Asian American writer's workshop and of an older Japanese woman sadly acknowledging the passing of traditional culture in America. We witness a black woman's rage, Big Mama with a faith that healed, and a black woman's exotic affair with a lesbian lover living in a Harlem tenement. We meet Native American women, one enjoying the simple pleasures of her home, one taking action to aid those protesting at Wounded Knee, another recounting a prayer meeting. Ultimately, these intimate, intensely personal stories are about each woman herself; they illustrate the truth of the cartoon showing a

woman being asked, "I've always been curious. What's your ethnic background?" to which she replies, "Woman."

This anthology succeeds in fostering individual reflection as well as heightening social consciousness. The book moves in kaleidoscopic fashion from one place to another without becoming tiresome; each compelling story introduces us to women who, though we are meeting them for the first time, remind us of parts of ourselves. The stories vary in their level of literary craft; some are by well-known authors and others are by women never before published. By virtue of this variety, each reader is encouraged to tell her own story, to value her own perception. *The Stories We Hold Secret* is part of a brave beginning to move women's issues from the abstract to the concrete by providing a forum for women writing about their lives; let us hope there will be a growing audience to hear and understand.

—Nancy K. Herzberg  
Eastport, Maine

**Michelle Cliff. *The Land of Look Behind*. (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1985) 119 pp., \$13.95; \$6.95 paper.**

"The world is white no longer, and it will never be again."

James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*

"It was never a question of passing. It was a question of hiding."

Michelle Cliff, *The Land of Look Behind*

Passing and its effect on the individual is one of the themes that Michelle Cliff explores in her book, *The Land of Look Behind*. Passing is a recurring theme in much of the literature written by people of color both past and present. In much of this literature passing is detrimental to the character. In her attempt to hide her color, Clare Kendry from Nella Larsen's *Passing* destroys her inner self long before her actual death. When a person does not have a developed sense of self-identity, the self can be lost within any situation.

In the poem "Within the Veil" Cliff states, "Unless you quit your passing, honey—you only gonna come to woe."

Color ain't no faucet  
You can't turn it off and on  
I say, color ain't no faucet  
You can't turn it off and on  
Tell the world who you are  
Or you might as well be gone

These words from Cliff's poem add a haunting reflection to Clare Kendry's life and death.