

Indian Voices: Listening to Native Americans. Alison Owings. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9780813549651

The world's history is full of forgotten people; stories omitted because of lost sources, a victor's fabrication, or a society's lack of appreciation. Within American history there is perhaps no group more absent than Native Americans. Whether knowingly or unwittingly neglected, these peoples' stories make up a huge part of our past and present, but most of our collective understanding of their culture, society, and history is loaded with misconceptions. In *Indian Voices*, Alison Owings sets out to correct our flawed understandings of Native Americans and their society by allowing Native people to tell their own stories. Through a series of interviews, Owings challenges contemporary stereotypes of Native Americans, demonstrates the differences between Native tribes and experiences, and allows outsiders a view into the world of contemporary Native America.

With an approachable, conversational tone, Owings allows her readers to easily follow her on a journey through the United States to hear the personal and collective stories of its indigenous people. In seventeen chapters, she provides insight into several different tribes (including members from the Hopi, Iroquois (Haudenosaunee), Kiowa, Lakota, Lemhi-Shoshone, Lumbee, Navajo, Ojibwe, Osage, Passamaquoddy, Pawnee, Penobscot, Yakama, Yup'ik, and Yurok nations as well as a Hawai'ian) through twenty-three individual interviews. Owings spoke with a multitude of Native people, including elders, political leaders, activists, women, men, and younger members of the tribes to fully understand their varying experiences and interpretations of what it means to be native. These interviews include references to historical trauma, personal trials, communal identity, and cultural persistence and revitalization. Owings' background as a

journalist is evident, as her narrative revolves around the voices and stories of the interviewees with as little interruption as possible, ensuring that the book focuses on their perspectives. In this way, her book truly lives up to the title by placing Indian voices at the forefront, encouraging the reader to simply listen.

Each chapter surveys different issues modern native communities face (whether it be violence against women, alcoholism and historical trauma, maintaining or revitalizing traditional cultural customs, protecting native economic or political interests, the role of the military in their society, or dispelling mainstream misconceptions). Each chapter stands on its own, but together the individual stories convey the larger point that Native Americans are still here and their stories deserve to be told. Moreover, the book in its entirety illustrates the fact that these native tribes were not and are not all part of one homogeneous category; each tribe has its own cultural, social, political, and historical identity. This is the first step in understanding who Native Americans were in the past and who they are today.

Throughout the book, their stories help dispel certain stereotypes that “mainstream society” continues to believe about Native Americans. Interviewees contest recurring stereotypes such as that Native Americans do not pay taxes, that they receive federal government hand-outs, that they are rich from casino profits, that they are all lazy alcoholics, and that they all live(d) in tipis. Each interviewee’s story demonstrates the complexity and variation within and between their experiences. One moves from his current role in the Passamaquoddy blueberry harvest to his childhood in a “civilizing” boarding school, while others describe their experiences performing ceremonies as a modern medicine man, leading an “Indian 101” class that teaches US politicians

what it means to be an American Indian, or working in a battered women's shelter. No two stories are exactly the same, but they all share the desire to promote communal healing, cultural preservation, and a wider understanding of what it means to be a Native American.

A common theme of special note is that many interviewees feel that blood does not determine a person's ethnic identity. In one interview, Patty Talahongva said she knew "full-blooded Native people [that] have no connection to their community." This contradicts many contemporary legal norms for determining membership, and suggests that on a personal level, while ancestry and lineage remains important, communal and cultural connections are what fuels their identity as American Indians.

This book would work well within a number of classes, most especially history or journalism, that are focused in community studies, ethnic identity, alternative perspectives, oral history, or Native Americans. Most of the chapters include some historical context—referencing Indian Removal, the 19th and 20th century boarding schools, Dawes Act, the attempt to dissolve reservations in the 1950s, native involvement in the US military and wars, segregation, and/or the native civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Simultaneously, it uses oral history to capture how these individuals understand their collective past, their present community, and their ethnic identity. This book, whether in its whole or in parts, would allow students to understand the complex historical narrative for American Indians as well as an insight into their contemporary communities. The stories told could potentially be useful to researchers looking for first-hand accounts of Native people in the late 20th and early 21st century, but it also provides

us with an invitation to rethink our contemporary stereotypes and examine how others understand the world.

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