

*Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining "Native":
Selected Writings*

Beatrice Medicine with Sue-Ellen Jacobs

Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press,
2001, 371 pages.

Reviewed by **Tony Fisher**

Bea Medicine is an old friend of mine. She and I have exchanged ideas and gossip over the years, and Bea's ideas and advice have been valuable to me. So this is not going to be an "objective" or "critical" review. But Bea wouldn't like it if I were not straight with her or the readers. So I will begin with a caveat. The editing of the book is not very good. Bea would be embarrassed to see Louise Spindler called "Louis," and that's just an obvious mistake.

The volume has six sections, which include 32 papers and a curriculum vitae. The sections are of different size and scope; the larger are "Education," and "Gender and Cultural Identities." They and "Beliefs and Well-Being" and "Anthropology" seem the most important. There are forewords by Bea's son Ted Garner and Faye V. Harrison. All the papers are informative. And several of them contain important ideas or revealing insights into Bea's career and contribution to the discipline. I left *contribution* singular on purpose. Bea's career has been a major contribution to the discipline of anthropology, and all anthropologists can learn from it.

Faye Harrison's essay (honoring Bea with the Malinowski Award in Applied Anthropology, 1996) discusses this contribution. She points out that Bea's life, both in and out of anthropology, has been important for other, younger anthropologists. Bea has lived the life of "an academic nomad," an appropriate irony given the anthropological stereotype for Plains Indians, and she has accumulated the respect, experience, and contacts that a nomadic life provides. In the latter stages of this life, she has lived as an Elder among young First Nations anthropologists or scholars in other disciplines. Because this is how Bea has lived her life, one should bear this in mind while reading her book.

The book covers a lot of different subjects, from a couple of perspectives: inside the discipline of applied anthropology, and from outside social science as a Lakota woman making her way in the world. The latter perspective is best illustrated by Bea's discussion of Ella C. Deloria ("Ella C. Deloria: An Emic Voice"). She is a Lakota/Dakota/Sioux relative of Deloria, and she befriended Deloria in her later years. In three papers she presents Deloria as a complex person, a passionate advocate and defender of Sioux traditions, a scholar striving to meet criteria of ethnographic accuracy, the educated daughter of a church leader, a "mixed-blood" woman in a "full-blood" community, and a Lakota woman trying to live within "Lakota perceptions of proper behavior for a woman" (p. 277). In Bea's assessment, neither Deloria's work nor her life were adequately recognized either by the anthropological world or her Sioux contemporaries. Bea uses her scholarly voice to try to correct that error.

Turning to "Education," there is a short article, "The Schooling Process, Some Lakota (Sioux) Views" (p. 58), which is a very basic report on a meeting concerning

"Lakota Studies." Although the paper is basic and short, it exemplifies some fundamental concepts concerning how to discuss curriculum planning and how to combat school failure. To discuss "Lakota Studies" curriculum one has to employ appropriate Lakota etiquette (p. 61). To combat school failure, "The learner has to have confidence in the giver," and that confidence can be gained, "Once the learner knows the teacher knows Mamma and Pappa, and Mamma and Pappa know the teacher" (p. 63). These comments are more profound when you read or see them in their context, the etiquette that Bea the anthropologist records faithfully.

In the "Beliefs and Well-Being" section there are three articles on the topic of drug and alcohol abuse. An important one of these is "New Roads to Coping: Siouan Sobriety" (p. 207). The author's focus here is how Lakota individuals maintain their sobriety and how they cope with not drinking in their community: a novel focus for an piece on Indian drinking. Another novel concern is that of drinking among Sioux women (like men, learning to drink is almost a puberty rite for young women) (p. 210). The article includes the stages of drunkenness in vernacular English and Lakota (p. 214) as part of the ethnographic description of the phenomenon. Lakota sobriety has to do with individual will power and self-autonomy. Individualism is a significant value for the Lakota, and understanding this aids in understanding Siouan sobriety. Even a ceremonial approach to sobriety is thought to aid individual achievement rather than combat alcohol abuse.

This latter article illustrates two of the things of value in the book. While Bea is looking at things anthropologically she never forgets her Lakota roots. While her Lakota roots anchor her, they free her to use novel and useful viewpoints to describe things ethnographically. Bea's learning to be an anthropologist while remaining Native is of great value—to both anthropologist and others.