

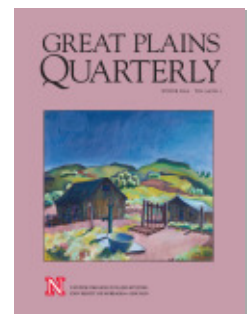


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Conversations with Remarkable Native Americans by Joëlle
Rostkowski (review)

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(Review)



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of self-defense and probably occurred on the Alberta side of the U.S.-Canadian border. Despite this, the court found Spopee guilty and sent him to federal prison, where officials determined he was insane, leading to his transfer to St. Elizabeth's Hospital, an insane asylum in Washington DC. Unable to communicate with the asylum staff, Spopee remained silent and undiagnosed. A Blackfoot delegation to Washington "discovered" Spopee in 1914, leading to his pardon and release. Upon his return to the Great Plains, he had difficulty coping with the extreme changes that had taken place and witnessing his peoples' confinement on an ever-shrinking reservation.

Farr exhaustively researched the life of Spopee, and his analogy of Spopee's incarceration to the confinement of Plains Indians on reservations is brilliant. *Blackfoot Redemption* might have benefited from a broader engagement with such works as Luana Ross's *Inventing the Savage: The Construction of Native American Criminality* (1998) or the literature on the Canton Insane Asylum for American Indians or similar institutions. Spopee's life is a perfect case study and an opportunity on the part of future scholars for examining the United States' criminalization of Indianness and the "othering" of American Indians through the labels of insane or criminal. These colonially imposed institutions allowed Americans to prohibit Indian beliefs and behaviors they opposed.

Audiences of Farr's *Blackfoot Redemption* will enjoy the enthralling account of Spopee's life and Blackfoot history in the northwestern Great Plains.

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Conversations with Remarkable Native Americans.

By Joëlle Rostkowski. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012. li + 143 pp. Photographs, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$23.95 paper.

This book records conversations with sixteen Native Americans who have made their mark in the arts, politics, and law, and who together encompass the breadth of North America. The book begins with an introduction by Deborah Madsen, professor of American literature and culture at the University of Geneva, who, with Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor, edits the series Native Traces for SUNY Press. Central to the series is the concept of *survivance*, turning on its head the usual approach to Native Americans that presents them as marginalized and historicized. Survivance puts Native peoples center stage and focuses on the perpetuation of Native culture today and into the future.

The first chapter, by Joëlle Rostkowski, explicates the concept more fully. She is an anthropologist and ethnohistorian associated with the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in Paris who has long been involved in American Indian rights through her work as a consultant at UNESCO. She writes about Deskaheh, a Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) chief who in 1924 was the first Native American to address the League of Nations and to try to move the issue of Native rights onto the international scene. With the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Native rights again became a topic at the United Nations, and finally, in 1977, an NGO conference was held on "Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations of the Americas." The work of further conferences and working groups bore fruit in the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Central to the declara-

tion is the principle of self-determination, a sticking point that was weakened in the final version. Nonetheless, it was finally passed by the UN in 2007 and accepted by the United States in 2010. This serves as the legal background for the concept of survivance. The document is printed here as the last chapter.

A book of interviews is only as good as the interviewer, and in this Joëlle Rostkowski excels. She has developed personal relationships with each individual interviewed, has a keen sense of what to ask each of them, and draws them out skillfully. Five of the interviewees are from the Great Plains: N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), poet, novelist, and painter; Suzan Harjo (Choctaw/Cheyenne), policy advocate, journalist, essayist, and poet; Richard West (Cheyenne), lawyer and founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI); Emil Her Many Horses (Lakota), curator, NMAI; and Jill Momaday (Kiowa/Cherokee), actress, model, and former chief of protocol, state of New Mexico.

Among the highlights for me is the conversation with N. Scott Momaday, who was appointed a UNESCO Artist for Peace. He speaks candidly of his work as a writer. "I believe in the power of words," he says, and the eloquence of his speech confirms that belief. For all his literary success, his focus is on preparing future generations. "I have always enjoyed teaching. Teaching and writing strengthen each other. Exchanges with the students have kept my mind alive." As other examples, Richard West describes the development of the NMAI and its revolutionary approach to telling stories about Native cultures using objects. Emil Her Many Horses discusses the florescence of women's art in the late reservation period as a sample of survivance; using women's dresses as an example, he developed a beautiful and insightful exhibit for the museum.

This is an engaging and informative volume that offers personal glimpses into the lives of important Native Americans, each of whom has contributed to the processes of renewal and survivance that have helped to shape the direction Native American peoples have taken in the last forty years.

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*"That the People May Live": Loss and
Renewal in Native American Elegy.*

By Arnold Krupat. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2012. xii + 242 pp. Photographs, notes, references, index. \$45.00.

Lest the reader pull up short, wondering either how and why Native American orators and authors would turn to the western genre of elegy, or how in so doing those orators and authors would be able to avoid the tired figure of the doomed *indian*, to invoke White Earth Anishinaabe Gerald Vizenor's apt phrasing of the stereotype created by Europeans and Euro-Americans, so beloved by the dominant society—lest the reader be asking just what is Arnold Krupat thinking, you should know that Krupat wondered the same things. To his credit, and to our good fortune, Krupat opted to resist the temptation to hold that there was no such thing as Native American elegy, and, critically, he opted to recognize crucial differences between elegies first spoken and later written by Native Americans and those penned by European and Euro-American writers. In four chapters covering oral literatures in the elegiac mode from the Haudenosaunee to the Tlingit, from speeches purportedly from Native orators and statesmen such