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**Brenda Child. *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation*. St. Paul: Minnesota State Historical Society, 2014. Print.**

<http://shop.mnhs.org/collections/books-american-indian-studies/products/my-grandfathers-knocking-sticks>

The setting of Brenda Child's most recent book opens with a devastating description of her historical focus, reservation life at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She reminds us that following numerous cessions, removals and blatant land theft, the reservation could only be described for many Ojibwe people as "the aftermath of catastrophic dispossession, like a swath of land spared in the wake of a tornado or flood" (3). Yet, as in the aftermath of any such catastrophe, we are reminded again and again of the determination of families and communities to rebuild, reconnect, and survive as some things stay the same, some are rebuilt stronger and others become dear yet distant memories of that time before. For Child, she chooses to tell the story of the reservation after the storm as "the place where Ojibwe labor was reorganized and redefined" (3), a choice that brings into focus the determination, strength and tough decisions that Ojibwe families faced as their homeland was remade along with their relationships to it, to work and to each other.

On its face, Brenda Child's book is an engaging history of Ojibwe families' changing labor practices during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period marked by many forms of dispossession and removal, increasing state intervention in traditional economies, and global disasters such as the influenza outbreak of 1918-19. It is also a deeply moving tribute to her Ojibwe maternal grandparents and the Red Lake community, who constitute the heart of a text that lovingly depicts the resiliency of everyday Ojibwe people struggling to survive the targeted destruction of their way of life by greedy and unjust officials, settlers and governments. Moreover, for this reviewer, Child's attention to the gendered impacts of these changes offers Indigenous feminists a nuanced history that effectively connects Ojibwe women's labor, status, and knowledge at the nexus of ongoing dispossession and more importantly, ongoing resistance.

By the end of her book, readers are left with a vivid understanding why women in Ojibwe communities often stood to lose the most in the transition from the seasonal round to a mixed economy that characterized life on the reservation from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward. At the same time, however, Child summons Theda Perdue's critique of the "declension argument" or the assumption that Indigenous women in modern history are always in a space of perpetual victimhood and loss (185). Rather, she asks, in what ways did women (and men) alter their relationship to work in order to address the real challenges of reservation life and, at the same time, still maintain cultural values distinct to an Ojibwe perspective and philosophy? What develops in answer to this question is a measured and ever-fascinating collection of life stories from her family and others that challenge the easy binary of assimilation and traditionalism that too often over determines histories of

everyday Indigenous lives. Moreover, Child's methodological approach to place alongside personal memory, family and community oral history, and more traditional archival materials produces a masterful example of Indigenous (feminist) historiography that, above all, is as compelling to read as it is sound in its research.

The first part of the book is a mix of memoir and family history as Child examines the life of her maternal grandparents Fred Auginash (Nahwahjewun) and Jeanette Jones (Zoongaabawiik). Opening with her Grandpa Auginash's story, Child is able to tell the history of dispossession for Ojibwe peoples, beginning with the Treaty of 1837 and running through to the allotment era for Northern Minnesota peoples. Grounded in her grandfather's story of an allotment he never lived on and his subsequent removal from his family home, she is able to give this well-known history meaning beyond abrogation and policy decrees. Jeanette's part of her grandparents' story is one that underscores the importance of Child's attention to the role of patriarchal colonialism in women's lives at this time. Her investigation into Jeanette's early life uncovers letters from Indian agents and school authorities concerned over her grandmother's "fall from grace" as a Carlisle graduate, becoming pregnant "out of wedlock" a few years before meeting and marrying Fred. Yet what Child chooses to focus on in these letters is her grandmother's determination to control her life choices and power of her own body. Beyond condescension, the agents note Jeanette's refusal to marry her baby's father or deliver her baby in a hospital. Child recalls the family stories that when the time came Jeanette sought out her grandmother's care; years later, Fred would serve as Jeanette's midwife in her subsequent births (32).

Fred's marriage to Jeanette brought him to the Red Lake community and into a family still immersed in the seasonal round economy characterized by trapping, hunting, sugaring, berry picking and rice gathering. Yet, as Child demonstrates, the oncoming economic depression, war years, and an unfortunate accident which left Fred unable to attend to hard labor such as fishing, required her grandmother to enter into the world of social services, wage labor through commercial fishing and the underground economy of alcohol distribution. This practice led to her grandmother being given the affectionate title of Shingababokwe or "Beer Woman" by her Red Lake community.

The second chapter details Jeanette's and Fred's "criminal" activities, including charges of public drunkenness and welfare fraud respectively, two stories that underscore the surveillance of Indigenous lives and the total lack of regard on the part of colonial agents for the pain that underlie such "criminal" behavior. While the chapter's title suggests it is about religion on the reservation, it is more about the impacts of settler morality and attendant racism that made life more difficult through the criminalizing of Indigenous bodies, former modes of subsistence and traditional religion. In this storied chapter, we learn of Jeanette's struggle to overcome the loss of three children, her father and father-

in-law in a matter of a few years, and the added burden of taking care of a family when Fred could not. At the same time, we learn by way of court transcripts of one tribal judge's seeming sympathy to Jeanette's depression and alleged alcohol abuse. It is these stories that pull at Indigenous readers, myself included, as I recall traces of my own family memories alongside Child's, a connection that is bittersweet and profound.

The second part of the book moves into a more traditional history of work and life on the reservation, yet does not lose sight of the stories of everyday people. Specifically, it attends to three forms of labor in the larger Ojibwe constellation of communities in the region, though with a clear focus on Red Lake. These three forms of work life include fishing, healing and the cultivation of wild rice, all of which underwent major change in these years. Child's decision to focus on these three forms of labor are obvious in the first and final choice, but the chapter on healing is one that highlights a creative and attentive insight to women's contributions and knowledge that characterizes her perspective. It is this chapter that tells the story of healing through the story of the proliferation of the Jingle Dress dance and a new crop of Ojibwe nurses during this period.

Highlighting the resiliency of Ojibwe men, women and children in protecting traditional resources and creatively addressing the criminalization, loss of power and authority over activities they once did without intervention, these three chapters also place into context Ojibwe participation in commercial fishing, government programs during the war and the development in tribal enterprises such as the Red Lake Fishery Association and a wild rice cooperative that operated briefly at Cass Lake. Throughout these chapters, Child reveals the corruption and collusion that seemed to characterize relations between the State of Minnesota, game wardens, and others who came to regulate the harvest of both fish and wild rice in ways that favored white middle class sports fisherman/hunters, tourism and other settler enterprises. With each detailed set of stories, she ends these chapters with a focus on a single person whose life story brings home the human, legal and cultural costs of these injustices for Ojibwe peoples. For example in the fisheries chapter, Child ends with the story of "Naynaabeak and the Game Warden." Characteristic of Child's ability to beautifully weave Naynaabeak's story about her efforts to gain a fishing permit to fish where she always has into a larger narrative of both women and Ojibwe labor history, Child writes, "In Ojibwe culture, water was a gendered space where women possessed property rights, which they demonstrated through their long-standing practice of binding rice together . . . part of an Indigenous legal system that marked territory on a lake and empowered women. From every legal angle that mattered to Ojibwe women . . . Naynaabeak was obliged to set her fishing net in the Warroad River, despite the difficulties she faced in doing so by 1939" (122).

This excerpt and story resonates home in the end of the last chapter, one that recalls the titular metaphor of the book, Grandfather Auginash's knocking sticks. By the close of the

first part of the twentieth century, the impositions of settler economy, patriarchy and moralizing had its impact in transforming what was once the domain of Ojibwe women, the wild rice harvest, to the domain of Ojibwe men. At the beginning of the book, Child recalls that in her early life her grandfather's knocking sticks led her to believe that men were traditionally in charge of the harvest. In coming to know her community and family history as an historian, she recognized that "practices I considered 'tradition' were in fact new approaches to work" (12). In this century, Child notes the continued and new challenges that face the sacred food of the Ojibwe, including our people's changing relationship to it as a commodity, as well as the very real threats of pollution, habitat loss, and genetic research on the wild rice genome. However, Child concludes her careful weaving of family and community labor history with the reminder that knocking sticks, a technology once mocked by some newcomers to the region, are still used by Ojibwe peoples in the harvest and these sticks remain much the same in construction as her grandfather's—a fitting testimony to the endurance of a people, their culture and ways of life.

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