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Spirits of the Sacred Mountains: Creation Stories of the American Indian. By William E. Coffey. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1978. 122 pp. \$8.95.

Spirits of the Sacred Mountain was written to be a helpful book, as Professor Coffey explains in his preface, "because the human mind cannot fully comprehend the genesis of man, it is . . . necessary for us to relate (his) origin in terms which can be understood and accepted. Without such rationalization it would be impossible to maintain the sanity of mankind. The unfathomable magnitude of the situation would far exceed the capacity to cope with it" (p. viii). The book, he says, "offers many different beliefs concerning the origin of man, and, more specifically, the origin of the American Indian. Perhaps as the reader contemplates these stories and theories, one story or theory will ameliorate the problem for him. If not, hopefully, he will be able to develop his own philosophy which will bring the ever longed for peace and acceptance of his fate" (p. ix).

As Coffey says, the book is more than an anthology of the creation stories of the American Indian. The book is divided into five chapters, but the contents really fall into two main sections: chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-35), which contain a summary of the theories of the origin of man and various explanations for the presence of Indians in North America; and chapters 4-5 (pp. 37-103), which contain a retelling of thirty creation stories and a conclusion.

In the first section of the book Coffey presents and then disproves or discards the main theories of the origin of the American Indian—continental drift, Bering Strait, space visitor, Atlantis, or Old World. He says, "Indians, as it happens, know how Indians originated and how they came to be in this part of the world" (p. 39). What they know in part, it turns out, is a theory of special creation of the races advanced by Vine Deloria, Jr. in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) and further developed by him in *God Is Red* (1973). Coffey states the theory as follows: "If you believe in the Creator, no matter what name you call Him, and believe the Creator could make human beings in one place, then why is it not possible to believe that the miracle could be repeated on every continent? I believe the Creator is clever enough to do that. He could make the Negro people for Africa, the Oriental people for Asia, the Caucasian people for Europe, and the Indian people for the Americas. If He is omnipotent, if He created anything, surely this would only be a minor task" (p. 39).

In the main section of the book Coffey could have provided us with a useful collection of American Indian creation stories. No anthology of these exists. The best collection, which is very incomplete, is found in Stith Thompson's *Tales of the North American Indians* (1929). Most of the scores of anthologies of the literature of the American Indian contain one or two creation stories, but no representative collection of these important stories has yet been published. Coffey's book does not provide the kind of collection that is needed.

The book is labeled as "a landmark in American Indian ethnography" on the dust jacket. This is a misnomer. If the book is intended to be useful for scholars or other serious students, it lacks a number of essential elements. The basis of selection of the tales for inclusion is unclear. Coffey says that the collection "will present the most accepted stories as the primary version and sometimes add others for variety" (p. 41). He presents thirty stories, and no tribe is represented by more than one story. His comments about the stories are sometimes superficial and flippant. Introducing the first story in the collection (one version of the Choctaw creation story), he says: "The favorite Choctaw story goes something like this." After giving the text of the story, he says that the Choctaw "have other oral traditions paralleling many stories in the Bible. This indicates that someone copied. Now, it would not be courteous to accuse someone of such an act, but the Choctaws know their version is correct" (p. 42). For the Hopi creation tale, which is "long and detailed," he says, "Perhaps the people of the earth should heed the words of the elders for any traditional Hopi knows that their stories are true" (p. 48).

In Coffey's retelling, one version of the Paiute creation story is: "God had two sons. The elder, who was independent and self-reliant, became the father of the Indians. The younger was a crybaby, always wanting everything he saw, and he became the father of the white man" (p. 55). Then, on the same page, Coffey comments: "The Paiute have other versions which are longer, but, as far as this author is concerned, this story tells it as it really is. There is no need to say more." In a similar vein, he says of the creation of woman as presented in the Winnebago creation story that "only a small piece of flesh was needed for her. Therefore it is that the man became great in wisdom, but the woman very much wanting in sense." He comments on this passage in a note, saying: "The author disclaims any responsibility for the validity of this statement. He merely writes 'em as he hears 'em" (p. 108).

The order of the stories as they appear in the book is neither alphabetical, geographical, or linguistic. For instance, the stories begin with "Choctaw, Cherokee, Delaware, Hopi" and conclude with "Comanche,

Blackfoot, Kiowa, Other Tribes." A map of the United States on page 36 showing the location of tribes represented by stories in the anthology does reveal that all areas of the country except the north central plains are included. Coffey says he is presenting only a "sample of some of these sacred traditions as typical examples," but he gives no reasons for including those he's selected, and he gives sources for only a handful of them. The bibliography which is included is a general list of some seventy books primarily on the American Indian. About a third of these are anthologies of Indian stories.

Coffey's book contains the evidence of hard work throughout. His analysis of the various theories of the origin of mankind and of the genesis of the American Indian in the first section of the book provide a good general discussion of these theories. In the second part of the book, the anthology proper, his efforts provide a good introduction into the nature and contents of representative Indian creation stories. His anthology is a useful book for the general reader who is interested in American Indian literature. Coffey's style is very readable, and his introductions to each story are informative and interesting. The anthology is the most comprehensive collection of American Indian creation stories available. It is regrettable that the author did not provide an anthology that is useful to both the scholar and the general reader. The book is nicely illustrated by eight drawings in Northwest Indian art style by Cathy Dixon-Hamlett.

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