



3-15-1982

## Review - Kiowa Voices

Lois B. Fisher

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Fisher, Lois B. (1982) "Review - Kiowa Voices," *Westview*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol1/iss3/9>

This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



## REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS...

## KIOWA VOICES – A REVIEW

– by Lois B. Fisher

KIOWA VOICES, Volume I, is the first of three books compiling information about the Kiowa tribe, which is domiciled in Southwestern Oklahoma. First conceived by Linn Pauahy and James Auchiah, who were concerned about the imminent loss of the Kiowa "cultural chain" due to the death of those who remembered and the lack of a permanent record, this work is the result of numerous interviews and diligent research, including much material held by the Smithsonian and other institutions. Another invaluable resource lies in the folders of Susan Peters, Kiowa field matron, who for fifty years recorded stories and remembrances of many tribal elders. The work was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and from Texas Christian University in conjunction with the Kiowa Historical and Research Society. The Society was approved by the Kiowa Tribal Council in 1975.

Indeed, KIOWA VOICES is the voices of the Kiowa tribe. But Maurice Boyd is the official author, having composed the text, while Linn Pauahy serves as Kiowa Consultant along with the Kiowa Historical and Research Society. Donald E. Worcester is recognized as Associate Editor.

Even a superficial scan of the volume reveals its uniqueness and its artistic as well as its cultural value. Because most of Kiowa history and culture existed prior to very recent times in the form of the spoken word, the song, and the art work, the volume is distinctly pictorial. Besides the major full-color reproductions of paintings by artists Robert Redbird, Al Momaday, Blackbear Bosin, Stephen Mopope, David Williams, Roland Whitehorse, Ernie Keahbone, White Buffalo, Kevin Tonips, and Dennis Belindo, there are numerous drawings by Roland Whitehorse and C. E. Rowell as well as reproductions of symbols and photographs from various collections. The black-on-white drawings emphasize the use of wide margins and the generous use of "white space." Each page is an artistic creation.

But the history and legends are also uniquely presented. Each chapter is introduced with a poem appropriate to the material following. The usual order is to follow the poem with a brief prose explanation introducing a legend set in large print and com-

posed in such simplicity that an elementary school child could read it without difficulty. These legends are the core of Kiowa culture and ritual and reveal the beliefs in Saynday, the culture hero, and Domoye-alm-daw-k'hee, the Earth-maker. Most begin with the words, "Long ago . . ." Because of the large, distinctive print, a reader not interested in history or exposition can easily and advantageously read only the legends.

Following – but sometimes preceding – the legends are vivid and explicit explanations of their origins and their significance to the Kiowa people. Intermixed are more poems appropriately placed to explain the topic. But the frequent use of poetry adds another dimension, that of the oral and lyric nature of the Kiowa culture. It serves as a continuous background of rhythm and color which guides the reader through the Kiowa experience. The book is to be read not only for information but also for immersion in the Kiowa way of life.

Saynday, the Kiowa culture hero, wandered alone on the sunless earth until he discovered the Kiowas living underground. He enabled the people, as ants, to crawl upward through a hollow cottonwood tree and pulled them through a Saw-pole's hole upon the darkened face of the earth.

With this brief myth the Kiowa culture – and KIOWA VOICES – begins. It then turns to the history of the tribe, which is thought to be linked with the Athapaskans, the first of the race to migrate into North America. Later the Kiowas were known to move nomadically between Montana and the Missouri River. Still later the tribe migrated as conditions dictated between Montana south through South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas, to where it broadened its territory to include western Oklahoma, the Texas Panhandle, and northeastern New Mexico.

During these years, the Kiowa culture grew. KIOWA VOICES includes detailed descriptions of the Sun Dance (the major ritual of the tribe), the Buffalo Dance, the Scalp Dance, the Warrior's Dance, the Black Legs Dance, the Rabbit Dance, the Buffalo Medicine Cult Dance, the Feather Dance, and the Gourd Dance. Each has its own legend or origin, purpose, and procedures, reflecting parts of the tribe's history and traditions.

Another detail of the text is the origin and function of each "society" within the

## REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS

tribe. Every person belongs to at least one society and so is active in preparing for various celebrations and rituals. But these groups have another purpose. The Rabbit Order, for example, is "the beginning of a clearly defined training ladder through which nearly all Kiowa youths pass," states the author. Each order has its own legend and ritual, which are intricately woven together. *KIOWA VOICES* describes the societies' contribution to Kiowa tribal unity.

During the development of their culture, the Kiowas finally split — over an incident concerning who had a right to an antelope's udder — the present and only surviving part of the original tribe gradually moving south and now principally centered in the southwestern quarter of Oklahoma, especially in, appropriately, Kiowa County. It is here that the last full blooded Kiowas live, carrying on their tribal customs with modern innovations. But it is also here that the elders fear that the language and culture will die. Many have taken the Christian way and have united the two — Kiowa and Christian — into one way of life, which is both acceptable and sustaining. Others have taken the "Peyote Road" to find the answers to the prayer:

Let us see, is this real,  
This life I am living, is it real?  
You, Sayn-daw-kee, who dwells everywhere,  
Let us see, is this real, this life I am living?

Eating peyote buttons during the ritual of the peyote ceremony produces hallucinogenic experiences. By their own admission, the Kiowas use the peyote ceremony to preserve the Kiowa culture. Monroe Tsatoke records this prayer he voiced during a peyote inspired vision:

O Sayn-daw-kee, mystery and power,  
The ancient medicine wheel encompassed  
our original world;  
Powerful, from the Sun, it gave us Tah'-lee,  
Some say it is a Wheel of Dreams,  
But others know it as a Wheel of Wonder.  
See us through eternal life.

But changes occur, even while Kiowas cling to their heritage.

*KIOWA VOICES* — all three volumes — is invaluable for its preservation of the oral record of rituals, songs, and ceremonial dances of the Kiowa tribe. The sources are

carefully verified by every available method. But, most importantly, it has the sanction of the Kiowa Tribal Council. It is they who insure the authenticity of their own culture.

If a reader approaches *KIOWA VOICES* expecting to find a plea for sympathy toward the Indians or if he expects to find a sentimental treatment of a lost past, he will be disappointed. He will be no less disappointed if he expects to find a militant defense of the Indian way of life. What the reader will find is that rare experience of walking in the Kiowa's moccasins for a time, of almost seeing the world through Kiowa eyes and nearly sensing the tribal spirit as a Kiowa most surely does. It is a delicate balance between truth — which is sometimes ugly and brutal — and beauty — which is often bright and spiritually moving.

For us in Western Oklahoma, *KIOWA VOICES* amplifies the whispers of this Plains Indian tribe to audible — and understandable — syllables. We can hear — and comprehend — James Auchiah's words:

We Kiowa are old, but we dance.  
Ageless. Our dance is spirited.  
Today's twisting path is temporary;  
the path will be gone tomorrow,  
but the folk memory remains.  
Our forefathers' deeds touch us,  
shape us, like strokes of a painting.  
In endless procession, their deeds mark us.  
The elders speak knowingly of forever.

The person who loves beautiful books, appreciates an artistic handling of priceless material, or just enjoys stories about Indians or Indian art can order Volume I of *KIOWA VOICES* from The Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, Texas 76129. The reader will not be disappointed.