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Book Review: *Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence* Edited by Sarah Deer, Bonnie Clairmont, Carrie A. Martell, and Maureen L. White Eagle

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**Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence.** Edited by Sarah Deer, Bonnie Clairmont, Carrie A. Martell, and Maureen L. White Eagle. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008. xviii + 362 pp. Notes, glossary, index. \$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

*Sharing our Stories of Survival* is a heartbreaking and compelling presentation of Native women surviving violence. The text is a timely collaborative offering of essays and poetry, given the international attention on human rights and violence plaguing Indigenous women. Its appeal, as Tillie Blackbear says, is the spirit in which the book was written, with “survivors at the center of the analysis.” There are a multitude of writers, yet it is the voices of Native women and survivors that compel us to consider the circumstances out of which the volume arose and for what purpose it was meant. Native women are experiencing the highest incidences of violence of any ethnic women in the United States, and their safety is mediated by systems that have not historically protected them.

The volume is organized in four sections: an introduction and overview; stories of survival from survivors; advocacy; and practice within tribal legal systems. Included in the collection is a chapter contextualizing advocates as perhaps the heart of the current response and the primary source of support and social change for victims. “There is a sense of futility and exasperation among Native women,” Brenda Hill claims, “because we continue to suffer the highest rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and murder in America, even given the resources of VAWA (Violence Against Women Act).” Most Americans take for granted the basic human right of personal safety. Hill wants us to realize that personal safety for Native women is critical, and the ability of criminal justice systems, “especially underfunded tribal systems, to hold offenders accountable, much less make significant changes in their behaviors and attitudes toward women,” is simply

not occurring in the manner it needs to. The situation thus “warrants a critical analysis of the assumptions and expectations surrounding the current societal response to violence against women.”

For most Native nations historically the role of women as mothers was central to Indigenous culture and Native lifeways. Native women in many tribes had control over children, agricultural resources, and home life. Throughout the text many of the writers explain how colonization and non-Native belief systems were forced upon tribes in ways that continue to marginalize Native women into the 21st century.

The poems positioned at the beginning and end of each essay provide a constant rhythm of Native women’s voices reminding the reader of the current and ongoing difficulties in negotiating basic personal safety and trauma in everyday life. This text is not simply timely but an important testimony that chronicles state, federal, and tribal system challenges that must improve to protect Native women and children and hold offenders accountable.

Perhaps too basic for those specialized in Indian Country practice, the book nonetheless is an invaluable resource useful within academe and a must read for everyone new or inexperienced with tribal community issues. Given how few texts truly deal comprehensively with this topic, it should be required reading for students studying Indigenous issues in any college setting. **Roe Bubar**, *Department of Ethnic Studies and School of Social Work, Colorado State University.*