

# REVIEWS

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Erika Brady, ed. **Healing Logics: Culture and Medicine in Modern Health Systems.** Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001. Pp. vii + 286, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth. \$19.95 paper.

Gregory Hansen  
Arkansas State University

This compilation of articles is derived from the 1996 Fife Conference at Utah State University. Responding to the conference's theme of folk medicine, Erika Brady writes that the book came about when participants recognized the broadening scope of folk medicine scholarship. Within the past two decades, older models of collection, documentation, and analysis have been widened to include more applied concerns with ways in which humanities scholars are directly involved with public health systems and biomedicine. As folklorists and medical anthropologists who are working within health care organizations and medical schools, they have completed research that brings folklorists, humanities scholars, and doctors into interdisciplinary discussion. Folklorists and health care providers now recognize that folk medicine, complementary and alternative medicine, and biomedicine are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. Participants at the Fife Conference recognized that health care and pure research can be served by studies of the various healing logics that inform belief systems about health and medicine from a range of cultural and intellectual paradigms. *Healing Logics* addresses these concerns in ten intriguing articles from leading scholars in Folklore and Anthropology.

Brady's introduction outlines an historical context for examining relationships between unorthodox health and scientific biomedicine. She first explains how the allopathic model of health treatment has become dominant within Western medical institutions, and she then explores why many physicians and medical researchers have recently become more interested in folk, complementary, and alternative medicine. Her introductory essay concludes with commentary on

the compilation's nine other contributors. Bonnie B. O'Connor and David Hufford's article, "Understanding Folk Medicine," complements Brady's introduction as it provides a clear and thorough introduction to current folkloristic concepts about folk medicine. Their article will be useful to health care practitioners and folklorists alike, and O'Connor and Hufford provide important insights into the logic of folk and complementary medicine.

Following these two introductory chapters, the book is organized into four sections: "Places and Practitioners," "Communication and the Interplay of Systems," "The New Age Dilemma," and "Taking it in: The Observer Healed." The volume provides intriguing reading on a range of topics, including *botánicas* in Latino and African-American communities, an East Tennessee herbalist, New Age sweat lodge practices, the 12th century healer Hildegard von Bingen, *curanderos* in Peru, and Navajo beliefs and health practices. Each of the articles provides perspectives about the interplay between unofficial medical beliefs and practices and humanities and social scientific research. Despite differing themes and conclusions, the articles are unified in the writers' use of ethnographic techniques that document and interpret significant aspects of the emic components supporting the belief systems.

The articles are well written and provide important resources for further study and practical application. The value of understanding cultural constructs about health has become a tenet in medical education, and the writers provide intriguing and useful ways for understanding cultural contexts through folklore scholarship. The importance of ethnographic approaches is central to all the essays, but contributors also provide insightful critiques of contemporary theories and practices within ethnographic study. Bonnie Glass-Coffin, for example, critiques the potential ethnocentrism of cultural relativism. Using experiences in fieldwork and the classroom, she shows how her intellectual training as an anthropologist can foster the sentiment that diverse beliefs and practices can only be granted respect within specific cultural and historical contexts.

One result of overextending relativism is a refusal to examine diverse healing logics through serious scientific scrutiny. Glass-Coffin and other writers provide examples of a double standard in research

on folk medicine. The problem is that researchers are apt to grant a willing suspension of disbelief about traditional practices that are alien to their culture while also maintaining a different system to validate beliefs that they perceive to be part of their own culture. In Glass-Coffin's fieldwork experiences, she notes that she had to develop a reflective skepticism about her own scientific biases when learning about sacred rituals.

William Clements provides another intriguing way to accommodate tensions between folklorists' values and the actual cultural dynamics of a community. He examines rituals associated with contemporary sweat lodges and argues that it is too simplistic to dismiss the New Age movement as insensitive co-opting of sacred rituals. His analysis demonstrates how new meanings and a respectful sense of connection with other people can sometimes be forged from the rich history of western health practices associated with sweating, the dynamic qualities of the sweat lodge tradition, and a complex logic within New Age movements. Barre Toelken's beautifully written memoir of his own healing by a Navajo *hataa'ii*, a singer or chanter, provides eloquent and insightful ways to open oneself to the vibrant epiphanies created by directly experiencing a diverse belief system, while also thinking reflectively about one's own cultural biases. The book contains numerous other approaches to dealing with the tension between utilizing scientific knowledge and honoring diverse belief systems.

The articles challenge the reader to avoid making simplistic conclusions about folk and alternative medicine, and the discussion of competing and complementary logics about health, healing, and medicine will continue in subsequent scholarship. There is great value in questioning the overemphasis on official biomedical practice and examining why folk and complementary medicine remains stigmatized. *Healing Logics*, however, could benefit from additional discussion of deleterious consequences of health fraud and pseudoscience in folk medicine and alternative health care. The book's extensive bibliography is an important resource for further research, but it contains few entries that focus on the negative consequences of unorthodox health practice. The term "quackery," for example, is placed in quotation marks. Quackery is a serious menace to public health, and contemporary

snake oil salesmen continue to ply their trades using new guises for old schemes. There is a growing body of scholarship that analyzes negative consequences of too easily accepting precepts from unorthodox health care, and folklorists, anthropologists, and humanities scholars should seriously examine these negative aspects of non-scientific medical practices. Just as this new volume provides researchers with insights into diverse belief systems about health, scholarship on folk medicine will also benefit from subsequent research that reveals the dangers of refusing to consider any form of treatment without an honest and conscientious application of valid healing logic.

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Archie Green. **Torching the Fink Books and Other Essays on Vernacular Culture.** Foreword by Robert Cantwell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. xxvii + 242, notes, bibliography of Archie Green's writing, index. \$18.95 paper.

Gregory Hansen  
Arkansas State University

A revered advocate for public sector folklore, Archie Green's monumental contributions include lobbying for the American Folklife Preservation Act (Public Law 94-201) and major assistance in establishing the American Folklife Center and the Folk Arts Panel within the National Endowment for the Arts. Green has supported numerous public and private sector folklore organizations, and his wise counsel, tireless activism, and moral compass are at the heart good Folklore work. *His eloquent keynote addresses have inspired folklorists at numerous Folklore conferences, and Green continues to encourage and advise folklorists long after his retirement.* The twelve essays in *Torching the Fink Books* are an inspiring retrospective on his lifework. His articulate writing on topics ranging from folk etymology, country music, public folklore, and laborlore provides a vibrant foray into the scholarship of a premier folklorist.

Past president of the American Folklore Society and current Director of the America Folklife Center, Peggy Bulger, says it well in her notes on the book: "When someone asks me 'What is a folklorist?,' I will tell