



# People Of The Rainbow: Nomadic Utopia

*Michael I. Niman*

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Since 1972, the Rainbow Family of Living Light, a loosely organized and anarchistic nomadic community, have been holding large gatherings in remote forests to pray for world peace and create a model of a functioning utopian society. In *People of the Rainbow*, Michael I. Niman offers the first comprehensive study of this countercultural group, also known as the Rainbow Nation or Rainbow Family. Niman's insightful and compelling profile describes the origins and recent history of the Rainbows and explains the eclectic philosophy of environmentalism, feminism, peace activism, group sharing, libertarianism, and consensus government they espouse.

A fictional re-creation of a day in the life of a Rainbow character named Sunflower begins the book, illustrating events that might typically occur at an annual North American Rainbow Gathering. Using interviews with Rainbows, content analysis of media reports, participant observation, and scrutiny of government documents relating to the group, Niman presents a complex picture of the Family and its relationship to mainstream culture—called "Babylon" by the Rainbows. Niman also looks at internal contradictions within the Family and examines members' problematic relationship with Native Americans, whose culture and spiritual beliefs they have appropriated.

The nomadic nature of the Rainbow Family has long exasperated the U.S. government--especially the Forest Service--and has baffled the media. Niman places the Rainbow Family's gatherings in a historical context by framing the group's activities in terms of the long tradition of intentional communities and utopian experimentation within the United States. Concluding with reflections on the successes and limitations of the Rainbow movement, *People of the Rainbow* provides an extensive ethnography of this intriguing subculture and provides fresh insights into the ongoing legacy of utopian communalism.

The Author: Michael I. Niman is an adjunct assistant professor of American studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo and a lecturer in the communication department at Buffalo State College.

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