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REVIEWS

Black Elk's Religion: The Sun Dance and Lakota Catholicism.
By Clyde Holler. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press,
1995. 246 pages. \$39.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

This is a book about the history and transformation of the Lakota Sun Dance, based on written sources dating from the 1866 Fort Sully dance to one attended by the author at Three Mile Camp (near Kyle, South Dakota), directed by Frank Fools Crow in 1983. The theoretical background of this overview is the impact and influence of the Oglala holy man Black Elk on the revitalization and reinterpretation of the contemporary dance. From the historical perspective, the book is meticulous and thoroughly covers all the basic sources currently available. Anyone interested in understanding the diverse history of the Sun Dance tradition among the Lakota (and other native peoples of the Northern Plains) should read this book. Holler has assembled all the basic ethnography and reviews those works in serial fashion, moving through a lineal sequence of narrative descriptions into the contemporary performance of the dance.

In many ways, this book marks a divide between strictly descriptive ethnography and the historical evaluation and interpretation of that ethnography. Holler, who describes himself as a philosopher of religion, presents the Lakota Sun Dance tradition as highly complex, variable, and multifaceted and as having undergone significant reinterpretations in the twentieth century. One of the paradigmatic sources for that reinterpretation is,

according to Holler, the teachings of Black Elk, who was himself deeply affected by his own involvement with Catholic spirituality. Although he does not argue for a direct historical causality of such works as John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* or Joseph Brown's *The Sacred Pipe*, he sees those works (particularly Brown) as embodying Black Elk's own views, which he communicated to other Lakota spiritual leaders such as Frank Fools Crow when discussing Sun Dance practices. Holler sees Black Elk as synthesizing both the Ghost Dance and Catholic Christianity with older interpretations of Lakota religion.

However, the influence of Black Elk is somewhat secondary to the more central concern of evaluating and organizing the ethnographic materials describing the dance—a concern that takes up the middle two-thirds of the book. Holler divides those materials into four historical periods. First he discusses the “classic” Sun Dance from its first partial recorded description by Stephen Riggs (c. 1840), through a variety of early writings by non-Lakota observers such as General S.R. Curtis (1866), Captain George Hill (1867), Frederick Schwatka (1875), Captain John Bourke (1881), and anthropologist Alice Fletcher (1882), to the Sun Dance ban promulgated by the BIA in 1883. Secondly, Holler reviews three “preservation ethnography” accounts of the dance written primarily through collaboration: James Owen Dorsey and Lakota author George Bushotter (1894), John R. Walker's famous 1917 synthesis written with the help of Lakota holy man Sword, and that written by Frances Densmore (1918).

The third period reviews the dance from the time of the ban (1883–1934), through the impact of Christian missionization, to the official renewal of the dance with piercing in 1952. It was during this period that both Neihardt (1931) and Brown (1948) interviewed the elderly Black Elk. The fourth period discusses the Lakota Tribal Council Sun Dance as well as independent dances motivated by a growing discontent with the commercial and popularized version of the tribal council dance, drawing on sources such as Stephen Feraca (1963), Thomas Lewis (1972), William Powers (1977), and Thomas Mails (1978). The more contemporary sources are handled in the opening chapter, where Holler discusses alternative interpretations of Black Elk written by Ray DeMallie (1984), Julian Rice (1990), Michael Steltenkamp (1993), and Hilda Neihardt (1995). This first chapter is a stand-alone section that gives an excellent review of the current (often contradictory) debates over Black Elk and deserves careful study,

showing as it does all the cracks, gaps, and unresolved tensions inherent to preserving, and yet often co-opting, the native struggle for survival and adaptation into nonnative theoretical writings.

The early (pre-1883) works all give a fragmented view of the dance but collectively represent it as primarily related to warfare and the search for individual success or empowerment. It is difficult to determine whether this representation, in its fragmented, anecdotal, prejudicial forms, reflects more accurately the bias of the observers or the actuality of the observed event. Preoccupation with warfare and success in war is by no means simply a native characteristic; nonnative historiography abounds with just this prejudice, and the description of the dance as "war oriented" may be a reflection of the points where members of a largely war-oriented, aggressive culture connected with the Lakota rites. Holler is sensitive to recording alternative theories of the dance; he includes Hill's (1867) mention of the dance as sponsored as part of the initiation ceremonies of the Strong Heart Society or "to effect healing" (p. 55). All the dances recorded share certain features, but none of them is an exact duplicate of any other, including variations recorded by different observers of the same dance. Fletcher's 1882 description is particularly interesting, since she describes various "degrees" of commitment and expectations of the dancers, from fasting, dancing, and giving away property to piercing and "scarification" (possibly flesh offerings). According to Holler, this is the last directly observed description of the dance until 1950.

The reconstructions of the dance (1887–1911) are carried out through collaborations between nonnatives and natives who are remembering the dance. These reconstructions are given in detail, as are the other descriptions, such that the reader gains a very strong impression of the variations and similarities involved. Walker's 1917 reconstruction is framed in terms of his relationship with Clark Wissler of the American Museum, who wanted Walker to write a standard ethnography. The growing tensions between them were based on Walker's inclination to synthesize and mold the Lakota materials into his own unique brand of literature. Walker even became a practicing Lakota Buffalo medicine man and gained access to an advanced order of Lakota holy men (such as Sword) from whom he drew his information. Subsequently, Walker's account claims to be told from the perspective of the Sun Dance leaders, the highest form of the dance being that which led them to "make a new shaman" (p. 88). Sword's

account, written in Lakota (preserved by Ella Deloria, 1929), is the first Lakota view of the dance and discusses its relatedness to warfare and to other goals like success in hunting or love. Densmore's 1911 account relied on fifteen specially qualified Lakota Sun Dance informants, including interpretations by Chased By Bears, an elderly Sun Dance leader.

With the enforcement of the ban on Indian religions by the BIA ("Rules for Indian Courts," 1883), the dance went underground and into the back hills of the reservation. Contemporary Lakota elders claim the dance never ceased, but new interpretations, or at least new emphases, began to develop while war-related vows dropped away. Impacted by Christian missionization under the post-Civil War Grant peace policy, by the horror of Wounded Knee, and by enforced reservation life and the struggle for survival, the Lakota began to reconceptualize religious traditions in an entirely alien circumstance. The repression of Lakota religion by outward aggression, mission education, and policies of imprisonment and the threat of withholding rations led to the disappearance of the Sun Dance as a visible form of communal affirmation and religious celebration. Only after the 1934 circulation of a letter to Indian agents by the new BIA director John Collier ("Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture") was the first annual Sun Dance performed. However, there is little literature on the Lakota dance throughout the 1930s and 1940s other than the Black Elk materials.

Holler then closes the circle—from the conflicting contemporary interpretations of Black Elk, through a review of the history of the dance to and through the ban, and back to Black Elk as a major influence on the reinterpretation of the dance. The emergent interpretation is one that emphasizes Brown's *Sacred Pipe* and the "imaginative framework" used by Black Elk to tell the story of the dance from the perspective of the Lakota holy man Kablaya. The primary emphasis is on the communal value of the dance as spiritual renewal, including a variety of Christian themes: black symbolizing ignorance rather than warfare, escape from piercing as escape from ignorance, the importance of virtues such as meekness and humility, or the role of the White Buffalo Calf Woman as parallel to the Mary tradition of Christianity. It is the integrity of the community and its spiritual vitality, and not the prowess of the individual, that are emphasized. As Holler notes (p. 183), we will probably never know the degree to which this interpretation was shaped by Brown, who certainly wished to

portray Black Elk first and foremost as a “traditionalist”—a concept that emerges only in the mid-twentieth century as a consequence of reaffirming past religious identities.

Holler goes on to discuss the popularization of Sun Dancing through the 1950s and 1960s by the tribal council and the resistance this popularization met by the emerging traditionalist subculture, sparked in particular by the American Indian Movement of the early 1970s. Holler sees the emergence of Frank Fools Crow as the “most respected traditional leader on Pine Ridge” and as the most “influential interpreter of the Black Elk tradition.” I know from personal experience that, although there are some Lakota on Pine Ridge who see it this way, there are many others who would not agree. Certainly the most publicized leader is Frank Fools Crow, so in that sense he is a visible presence who fostered traditional development and a Christianized perspective. However, today there is great diversity on the Lakota reservations, and many distinctive Sun Dance traditions are emerging under different leaders whose prestige and followings are quite large even though there is little or nothing about them in print. Other than this cautionary note, I found Holler’s book very informative, well written, and deserving of careful study. His closing discussion and dismissal of the “dual religious perspective” on Black Elk is also highly valuable and opens the door to an emergent and complex view of native religionists that requires a more nuanced interpretation and greater sophistication in handling primary sources. All in all, this is an important, well-written, and valuable work.

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The Canoe Rocks: Alaska’s Tlingit and the Euramerican Frontier, 1800–1912. By Ted C. Hinckley. New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1996. 458 pages. \$56.00 cloth.

“There will always be those who insist that the acculturation of the Tlingit was essentially a dreary, if not a desperate, travail” (p. 432), but historian Ted C. Hinckley is not one of them. In fact, Hinckley contends that “Euramerican”/Tlingit interaction “manifested an acculturation metamorphosis as unique as the remarkable [Tlingit] people themselves” (p. 10), resulting in a “cultural accommoda-