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2009

# Waterlily

Ella Carter Deloria

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Additional praise for *Waterlily*:

“Exquisite evocation, in novelistic form, of the life of a female Dakota (Sioux) in the mid-nineteenth century, before whites settled the plains. . . . An unself-conscious and never precious or quaint pairing of scholarship and fiction.”—*Kirkus*

“[Deloria’s] novel is a distinguished work of literature at the same time that it is an important exercise in historical reconstruction, based on her wide and deep study of Dakota texts.”—*World Literature Today*

“*Waterlily* is by one who knows the culture from within, and in its instruction about Dakota ethnography the book strikes me . . . as wonderfully fine. Day to day life of the traditional Dakota is rendered in sympathetic detail.”—Arnold Krupat, *The Nation*

“A surprisingly gentle, arresting, and highly readable story that successfully conveys the atmosphere of life in a Plains Indian camp. . . . By portraying ordinary personalities and behavior in the context of their cultural milieu, the author examines ‘certain of the most significant elements of the old life.’ The reader is led to an understanding of the complex moral and spiritual fabric that made up traditional Sioux life.”—Penny Skillman, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“No one is better qualified than Deloria to draw together a series of Sioux female characters such as the ones central to this novel. . . . Deloria was bilingual as well as bicultural. Through her work we see the value of the insider’s perspective as a bridge of understanding for those outside the culture.”  
—Ines Talamantez, *Los Angeles Times*

“*Waterlily* is detailed from the smallest beliefs to major ceremonies, and Deloria has woven many facets of the old Sioux ways together to make a total tapestry. . . . Deloria has combined the best of her academic training under Franz Boas with the sensitivities of a person describing her own culture.”  
—Martha Garcia, *American Indian Quarterly*

“An authentic piece of historical fiction.”—*Booklist*

“This is a gentle, beautiful tale of a long-gone time and a displaced people. . . . Deloria’s beautifully descriptive tale reveals ‘the intricate system of relatedness, obligation, and respect that governed the world of all Dakotas.’”—*Kliatt*

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“Deloria tells universal truths cast in an authentic framework of early nineteenth-century Plains Indian society. . . . The feminine point of view is genius.”—*Journal of the West*

“Deloria’s care in describing ritual events is noteworthy. Such ceremonies are not romanticized or fleetingly referred to as if to hold them in mystery. She depicts events in such a way that their timing, the elements of play-acting, the family involvement, even the personal suffering, are understandable for an initiate reader as for the Sioux.”—Alanna Kathleen Brown, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*

“Ella Deloria’s insights came from her courage and opportunity to cross borders and look critically at the world she had been given through her unique enculturation. Her great deed was that she devoted her life to documenting and understanding Sioux culture while at the same time trying to communicate her insights to humankind in an effort to benefit first her own people and then all those involved in the human condition.”—John Prater, *Wicazo Sa Review*

“A richly female perspective balances traditional male values expressed in warfare and hunting. . . . A captivating narrative.”—Rhoda Carroll, *Library Journal*



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# Waterlily

NEW EDITION

Ella Cara Deloria

*Biographical sketch of the author by Agnes Picotte*

*Afterword by Raymond J. DeMallie*

*Introduction to the Bison Books edition by Susan Gardner*

*University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London*

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# Introduction

Susan Gardner

What does one do with [*Waterlily*]? . . . I don't know what publisher would want to bother with such a specialized subject, but it would be valuable from the standpoint of social history, I'd think. — *Ella Deloria to Margaret Mead*, September or October 1948

I have written a novel. It is not an ethnography so I don't want you to read it. I don't want it published. — *Ella Deloria, in conversation with Beatrice Medicine*

The novel you are about to read is not the version that Ella Cara Deloria (1889–1971) hoped to publish. It is less than half the length of her original manuscript, which she completed in 1947. During the mid-1940s, Deloria, then in her early fifties, was toiling on three manuscripts at once: *Speaking of Indians* (an explanation and defense, addressed to Christian readers, of traditional Lakota culture), a still-



unpublished ethnography of the Lakotas, and *Waterlily*, which she described in a letter to Margaret Mead as being “about a girl who lived a century ago, in a remote camp-circle of the Teton Dakotas [Lakotas].” “Only my characters are imaginary,” she wrote. “The things that happen are what the many old women informants have told me as having been their own or their mothers’ or other relatives’ experiences. I can claim as original only the method of fitting these events and ceremonies into the tale. . . . [I]t reads convincingly to any who understand Dakota life. . . . And it is purely the woman’s point of view, her problems, aspirations, ideals, etc.” (September or October 1948).

She worked at the three manuscripts when she could, since the income from her freelance work for Franz Boas, Ruth Fulton Benedict, and Margaret Mead—trailblazers in the establishment of cultural anthropology as an American academic discipline—was precarious. Often, indeed usually, she did not know when or from whom her next paycheck would arrive. She was seldom certain of being able to pay her rent on time. Some South Dakota winters, she could only afford to heat one room. Any untoward circumstance—the need to nurse her dying father, to pay for an operation for her sister, to help fund her brother’s and other relatives’ education, to survive a bank or crop failure, flood or cyclone, any ill health of her own necessitating hospitalization (for respiratory or kidney infections and blood transfusions, even for dropping an iron on her foot), or breaking her glasses—temporarily bankrupted her.

Deloria added to the manuscripts in small apartments in New York City or New Jersey, in her brother’s rectory or rented space in South Dakota or Iowa, in hotel rooms, and in friends’ houses. Sometimes her base was an ancient car. “If I could live in a hut and have not bills—you’d be surprised!” (E. Deloria to Benedict, 24 June 1942). Her life was migratory, like that of her people traditionally, although her travels were governed by the grant and proposal deadlines of the North American academic year rather than by seasonal, cyclic time. Her household was as meager as it was portable—once she wrote that she only possessed six items of “alienable” property. At that time, those items did not include those most essential to her later professional work: a succession of old or borrowed cars and her typewriter.

Of the three manuscripts, only one, *Speaking of Indians* (dedicated to the memory of Mary Sharp Francis, her “beloved teacher and a

great missionary”), was published in her lifetime—in 1944, by the Missionary Education Movement/Friendship Press. She had no illusions about its scientific value, writing to Mead some years later that her aim was to interest Episcopal laypeople in learning more about Indian peoples. What she considered her great work—an ethnological manuscript variously titled “Camp Circle Society,” “Dakota Home Life,” “Dakota Family Life,” “The Dakota Way of Life”—remains unpublished.<sup>1</sup>

All three books were difficult for her to write because the genres and audiences available to her were culturally inappropriate for what she was trying to accomplish. Each narrative was composed for a different audience (missionaries, anthropologists, the reading public for popular romance fiction—all white outsiders to her original culture), yet each tells the same story about the essential humanity and valid life-ways of the people known collectively as the “Sioux” (Dakotas, Lakotas, and Nakotas). Deloria’s familiarity with these audiences was as thorough as it was stifling; she knew what they expected and that she could not offer them all of what they wanted, or even all of what *she* wanted. The one audience who would have understood most of what she had to say—her own Dakota people—would not have wholly approved of her publishing her ethnological manuscript; some Dakotas would not even approve of her *knowing* what she knew, an anxiety she repeatedly voiced.

Ella Cara Deloria was an outstanding Dakota Sioux scholar and cultural broker in one of the best-known American Indian intellectual families. Her Dakota grandfather, Saswe, was a traditional healer and visionary who converted to Christianity late in life. (Her white grandfather, Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully, was a career Indian fighter.) Her father, the Reverend Philip Deloria, became a Native Episcopal missionary to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation while also maintaining the family tradition of political advocacy and cultural preservation. Her brother, the Reverend Vine Deloria Sr., also an Episcopal priest, was the first Indian to direct that denomination’s Indian mission work, eventually resigning in protest against its racist policies. Her nephew the late Vine Deloria Jr. (emeritus professor of history and religious studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder) was one of the most famous and provocative American Indian intellectuals of the last four

decades. Her other nephew, (Philip) Samuel Deloria, is director of the American Indian Graduate Center Inc. in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Deloria family's tradition of cultural translation and interpretation continues with Miss Deloria's great-nephew Philip J. Deloria, professor of history at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Ella Deloria was the only woman directly related to these remarkable men to leave her mark on the family's public tradition of cultural brokerage.

Most of Ella Deloria's lifework still remains unknown, unpublished, and unanalyzed. Whatever she created—translations and interpretations of Sioux oral traditions; *Waterlily*; an unpublished manuscript of Dakota legends intended for a younger audience; historical pageants produced between 1920 and 1940 for Indian communities; YWCA fieldwork surveys, reports, and programs for "Indian" festivities; *Speaking of Indians*; "The Dakota Way of Life"; and her professional letters—was written "only so that my people may live!" (*Waterlily* 116). Her scholarship was based on what Sioux people told her in conversations and in more-formal interviews. Her oeuvre is thus collaborative cultural remembrance; out of her interviewees' many voices came her texts. All of her writing employed and revised Euroamerican narrative forms—fictive, dramatic, and scientific. Although she never transcended the rhetoric of Indian "progress" (chiefly through Christianity), she constantly struggled with it. Over the course of her working life (which also included stints on public lecture circuits and working for museums), she developed a shrewd ability to encode strategies of dissidence within Euroamerican narrative forms.

*Waterlily* first saw publication four decades after Ella Deloria completed it. Until the book's 1988 publication, Deloria had been best known for her career in ethnology and linguistics, partially funded through Columbia University, the American Philosophical Society, the Bollingen Foundation, the Viking Fund, the National Science Foundation, and the Doris Duke Foundation from the late 1920s to the mid-1960s. Now *Waterlily* has become the success that Deloria wished for, not to mention a profitable one. In the past twenty years, the University of Nebraska Press has sold over 6,300 hardcover copies and 89,000 in paperback. Moreover, in 1996 the Quality Paperback Book Club promoted *Waterlily* in its Native American Firekeepers series. The novel now reaches audiences that did not exist in Deloria's lifetime. In mainstream universities, women's and gender studies

courses have adopted it, as have several in American Indian studies; during the 1990s, there was no other novel by an American Indian woman about several generations of women's experiences before the closing of the frontier on the northern Plains. Several tribal colleges—Lower Brule, Sitting Bull College, and Sinte Gleaska University—have also taught it, extending her audience to Native students.<sup>2</sup>

Today *Waterlily* is revered by Sioux (and other Indian) scholars as an early form of American Indian “literary nationalism.” Critic-novelist Craig Womack advocates criteria an American Indian literary work must meet to achieve artistic and intellectual sovereignty. In his view, early Creek novelist Alice Callahan's *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* is severely lacking: “What are the minimal requirements for a tribally specific work? . . . Callahans's failures might suggest that a sense of Creek land, Creek character, Creek speech and Creek speakers, Creek language, Creek oral and written literature, Creek history, Creek politics and Creek government might be potential considerations in our growing understanding of what constitutes an exemplary work in national tribal literature. Oh, and did I forget to say? It also has to tell a good story” (21–22). No Dakota would articulate a similar critique of *Waterlily*.

A significant body of literary criticism and intellectual history by American Indians has now taken shape, most notably where Deloria's work is concerned. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Philip J. Deloria, Carol Miller, Kelly J. Morgan, Robert Allen Warrior, Craig Womack, and Jace Weaver have contributed considerably, as have Chadwick Allen, Maria Eugenia Cotera, Janet Finn, Alice Gambrell, Ruth J. Heflin, Roseanne Hoefel, Elaine Jahner, Julian Rice, and Kamala Visweswaran. Feminist scholarship, in particular, has analyzed Deloria's status as a tribeswoman in academe: transitory, marginalized, ill-paid, and yet irreplaceable to the scholarship and reputations of the stellar linguists and cultural anthropologists for whom she worked.

All of these scholars have recognized that “The Dakota Way of Life,” *Speaking of Indians*, and *Waterlily* tell the same story, each modulating in a different genre the information Deloria gathered from roughly 1927–37, when she was funded by the Committee on Research in Native American Languages, based at Columbia University and headed by Franz Boas, the doyen of American anthropologists at that time. More precisely, “The Dakota Way of Life” is the source

for the other two books—their urtext. Preceding and infusing that text are the voices and memories of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota people whom Deloria interviewed.

Rather than recapitulate the history of *Waterlily's* composition that I published in 2003,<sup>3</sup> I comment here on the novel as an acceptable and “safe” means of transmitting and disseminating Deloria’s ethnological research. Deloria struggled all her professional life with having to squeeze Sioux narrative styles and values into a Euroamerican epistemological framework; she had, in effect, to square a circle. Her venture into fiction liberated her from many of the representational constraints enforced by the anthropological discourse of her day. It also enabled her to speak about the Sioux without them knowing it and without feeling she had betrayed their confidentiality.

Deloria lacked formal academic qualifications in ethnology or linguistics. Her bachelor’s degree from Columbia University was in physical education. She described her anthropological knowledge as coming mostly from reading, from special training by Boas, and “from attending his and Dr. Benedict’s classes in folklore, beginning anthropology, linguistics, methods of research (Boas) and ethnology (Benedict). No statistics, no physical anthropology at all” (“Autobiographical Notes” 10). For these scholars “salvage anthropology” was a mission—to collect just about anything and everything from “primitive” peoples whose life-ways and very selves were perceived as “dying out.” The method Boas taught “consisted of examining cultures in depth, establishing their history through language, art, myth, and ritual and studying the influences that shaped them in their distinctive environments and in contacts with neighboring cultures” (Lapsley 56).

Deloria’s supervisors praised her as an ideal participant and observer, an “insider/outsider” (tribes)woman in academe. It was a deeply conflictual position. Their glowing recommendations testified to her exceptional value to mainstream institutions rather than to Native people (as is the case today). When Deloria began working with Boas, she served him as a linguist, and it was from linguistic funds that she was normally paid. She also taught in Boas’s Lakota classes. As Boas began to turn the day-to-day work of the Columbia anthropology department over to Ruth Benedict in the early 1930s, Deloria found her fieldwork largely defined by Benedict. In short, her research agenda was defined by others’ projects.

However, Deloria's mission, although it began in the Boasian tradition, turned out to be different. She always felt that if she could explain Indians to white people and white people to Indians, the future of Indians might be less rocky and discriminatory. Like any other American Indian writer one can think of, she was writing for her people's survival, not composing their obituary. She became her people's biographer. Always, she was speaking with her informants, many of whom she also regarded as kin. But however she attempted to organize her ethnological manuscript, it kept escaping the boundaries set by scientific "objectivity." Hers was a conversational anthropology, and many autobiographical comments (spanning several generations of her family) disrupted the linear scientific narrative expected of her. She was not an analyst. She was a storyteller.

During the years Deloria was associated with the anthropology department at Columbia—an exciting, quasi-incestuous, and quarrelsome den, intellectually stimulating, often feminist, and radical in politics—women were among its most brilliant students and its most exploited faculty. Feminist psychologist Hilary Lapsley, in *Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict: The Kinship of Women*, describes women's position during the 1920s:

Highly qualified women still tended to be corralled off to teach at undergraduate women's colleges, given research opportunities on "soft" or no money, or sidelined into certain professional areas judged suitable for women's talents. . . . There were always a few eccentrics and wealthy women "amateurs" who tried to rock the boat, but the reality was that there were few women in positions of institutional power in graduate schools or professions to provide mentoring and patronage. For the most part, women in the twenties relied on older men of liberal leanings . . . even though these same men were liable to treat them as potential wives, probable dilettantes, and sources of free labor. (54)

Moreover, Lapsley writes, although Boas encouraged women's entry into anthropology, "he favored men when making recommendations for jobs and relied on women's willingness to work for little or no remuneration. His desire to advance anthropology meant that he ex-

ploited any source of available labor. Having a male mentor might be considered wonderful for women who generally lacked recognition from men, but it could also mean forming a daughterly attachment that continued unbroken far beyond young adulthood” (60).

When Benedict began her association with Boas, she was still married (although unhappily), which at that time meant that there was no obligation to pay her (or any married women in any profession) a living wage. When she first applied for a position at Barnard College of Columbia University, Boas instead recommended the single Gladys Reichard. Eventually Benedict’s husband’s death, and his will (unsuccessfully contested by his sisters), made her financially independent.

When Boas retired in 1936, Benedict became acting head of the anthropology department, “though she was still paid substantially less than the other associate professor, archaeologist Duncan Strong” (Lapsley 256). Even as acting chair, she could not enter the all-male faculty dining room (Banner 378). Her own experience of discrimination inspired her to find ways to support “women, homosexuals, and Jewish students,” lending them money (as she did with Deloria), books, and even her car on occasion (Lapsley 226). Her will established the Ruth Valentine Fund (named for her companion at the time of her death) to support women scholars without familial or other private sources of wealth, a fund for which Deloria would have cause to be grateful. Nonetheless, it was not until a year before her death in 1948 that Columbia made Benedict a full professor, and she was not immediately awarded Boas’s position.

Margaret Mead’s career was with the American Museum of Natural History, and museum jobs, according to Lapsley, “were not of high status; they were seen as especially suited to women who were unlikely to win scarce academic jobs.” Her supervisor in 1926, Clark Wissler, “had been known to remark that museum tasks resembled housekeeping” (166).

While an undergraduate at Columbia, Deloria had convinced Boas that she really did speak Lakota (he quizzed her). When he visited her at the Haskell Institute (a federally run Indian boarding school) in 1927, twelve years after losing touch, he taught her his way of transcribing the language diacritically; their reconnection was therefore timely and exciting for both of them. She disliked her position at

Haskell, teaching physical education to Indian women students. Acting on impulse (although Boas had cautioned her not to), she resigned her position before Boas could guarantee her an income—a considerable risk. But on Christmas Day 1927, Deloria wrote to him, “[I] want you to know that I would rather do this work on the Dakota than anything else.” She never regretted her decision.

More insight into Deloria’s financial position can be gleaned from the history of the Committee on Research in Native American Languages. Established by Boas in 1927, it folded through lack of funds in 1937—existing in the crucial decade when Deloria worked with him. Funded through a Carnegie Corporation grant administered by the American Council of Learned Societies, it was “one of the few sources of funds for linguistic research in the 1920s, since the field had not yet established a strong academic base. Boas used it to foster and sustain linguistics before its place within the academic world was ensured” (Leeds-Hurwitz 124).

The committee did not insist on formal academic credentials, although it was wary of missionary linguists. Its cofounder, linguist Edward Sapir, insisted, “The field of possible candidates for research should be carefully and honestly canvassed. We *must* have first class quality in our work at the outset, or we may queer ourselves with the linguistic world and fail to get a renewal of our five years’ grant. . . . We must take our research people where we find talent and interest, regardless of our traditional anthropological vested interest” (qtd. in Leeds-Hurwitz 125; emphasis in original).

To economize, the committee decided only to fund investigators’ field expenses rather than provide a salary. But some, including Deloria, had no other employment and could work all year round, so a few exceptions were made by creating research-assistant positions, which were not to pay more than \$100 per month, roughly equivalent in purchasing power in 2008 to \$1,240 (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis). Through other funds, Boas could pay Deloria more, but such additional income was always discretionary and uncertain. Moreover, the committee was never able to adequately fund publication of its researchers’ findings, leading to a considerable backlog.

Nonetheless, given that the Depression simply halted research in many areas, it is amazing that the committee held on for ten years, and it was providential for Deloria that it did. Ultimately it hired nearly



forty people working on more than seventy languages, and during its ten-year existence it spent over \$80,000 (equivalent to \$1,223,262 in 2008) (Leeds-Hurwitz 132). In his final report of 1938, Boas gave the total amounts paid to each researcher. In *Rolling in Ditches with Shamans: Jaime de Angulo and the Professionalization of American Anthropology*, historian of anthropology Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz gives the information in tabular form, combining monies earned for fieldwork and for “writing up.”<sup>14</sup> Deloria’s earnings were in the top six of thirty-nine investigators: \$4,130.06—equivalent in purchasing power in 2008 to \$65,904—for her work with Dakota, Santee, and Assiniboine.

I cite this information to contextualize Deloria’s financial position as an uncredentialed tribeswoman in the academe that both enabled and exploited her. Boas, Benedict, and Mead occasionally paid Deloria at their own expense, and Boas opened his home to her at least once when she was writing up her linguistic research; he also paid for her first railway fare to join him in New York. Despite her supervisors’ acts of individual generosity, there were no other means to challenge the institutionalized discrimination against Deloria and other American women ethnic scholars. Deloria was, of course, perceived as single; however, she was supporting numerous members of her extended kinship network.

The woman whose career with Boas most parallels Deloria’s—Zora Neale Hurston—was desperately dependent on a white patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, who also sponsored Langston Hughes and other artists of the Harlem Renaissance. “Godmother” funded Hurston from 1928 to 1932 (when the Depression affected even someone as wealthy as she), and although Hurston never broke with her, their relationship had insufferable overtones. “Mrs. Mason was a rigid taskmaster who insisted on wielding unnerving control over every detail of Hurston’s life, setting rigid accounting standards, and retaining power over her fieldwork” (Bordelon 11).

Alice Gambrell, in *Women Intellectuals, Modernism and Difference: Transatlantic Culture, 1919–1945*, argues that Deloria and Hurston were “othered” (as well as mentored) by anthropological conventions and discourse; they were also required to “other” their cultures of origin. Yet Gambrell feels it would be misleading to view “these women in a deeply and perhaps irretrievably compromised position—to position them, primarily, as collaborators, (somewhat more melodramatically)

as capitulators to a series of powerful invasive forces, who enabled the leaders of centrist formations to prey upon the margins” (26–27). More positively stated, Ella Deloria became an adept at what cultural critic Mary Louise Pratt calls “transculturation”—a process by which “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (6).

Gambrell brilliantly analyses Deloria’s and Hurston’s incessant revision of their research findings, a process she refers to as “versioning.”<sup>5</sup> In terms equally appropriate to Deloria’s works, Gambrell characterizes Hurston’s anthropological texts as “highly complex, elusive, and even, at times, self-contradictory” (32) and her autobiography *Mules and Men* as “guided by a cacophony of voices—including those of Hurston’s friends, editors, colleagues, teachers, as well as her famously manipulative patron” (115). Such self-revision, she claims, “reflects the sharply determined limits within which Hurston operated—it is a form of self-censorship and a sign of either voluntary acquiescence or victimization” but also leads to “a constant inventiveness” (115–16). “Hurston must subsume her own expression within the various stories, rituals, and explanatory vocabularies of others. . . . [T]he master narratives that she is taught fail to square with her own reading of her experience” (121). Gambrell regards as master narratives not only those of the ethnological establishment but also those of Hurston’s own culture. Not only may these discourses contradict each other but the “insider/outsider” may find both inadequate. Even while Hurston’s primary loyalty was to her culture of origin, her texts—including recourse to multiple genres to refashion her ethnological material—reflect this conflict; Gambrell uses Hurston’s varying depictions of “hoo-doo” over the years to establish her point.

An equivalent “versioning” in Deloria’s work is her many accounts of the Lakota Sun Dance. First she characterized the dance as a wholesome daylong entertainment devised for the YWCA in 1928 (restricted to the search for a Sun Dance pole, which she couldn’t identify as such to a Christian audience since the dance was then outlawed), then she translated George Bushotter’s 1887 Lakota texts (over one thousand handwritten pages) and other Lakota manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Later

she described the dance in a journal article and in *Waterlily*. In the novel the Sun Dance occupies center stage, due not only to its sacred significance but also to its textual placement.

In her analysis of Deloria's work, Gambrell identifies a "resistance to closure" as "an important philosophical premise in all of Deloria's work" (183). In this reading, an "insider/outsider's" work can *never* be finished. There is always too much to tell and no adequate way to tell. My survey of *Waterlily's* textual history, for instance, reveals a novel that, in its final form, was truncated and edited by three Euroamerican women as well as by Deloria herself. The novel's original manuscript, which has been lost, included many passages from "The Dakota Way of Life," which were then excised on the grounds that they would not appeal to a commercial readership. Stylistic tension is palpable as Deloria tried to translate/"version" ethnological description into story. Many concerns appear in letters about the novel sent to Benedict in the 1940s: Deloria's attempt to devise an accessible style for a potentially uninterested and definitely uninformed audience; her determination to present her people in the best light; and her deference to Benedict, whom she entrusted to pull the manuscript together and then to find a publisher.

When she began assisting Boas with Lakota texts in 1927, Deloria had little idea that she would devote her life to an ethnological description of Sioux peoples, particularly the Lakotas, spanning the approximately two hundred years from their arrival on the northern Great Plains to their conquest by American military force. The research agenda Boas set for her was cut-and-dried: she was to retranslate previous collections and help him to analyze Sioux grammar. She thoroughly enjoyed the work, which she did not regard as threatening and for which, with her native and English language fluency, she was more qualified than anyone else. Every one of her supervisors understood that she brought skills that no scholar with a PhD in anthropology could equal. Their academic recommendations extolled her unique contributions. When Deloria applied for a grant from the American Philosophical Society to write up her ethnological findings, Ruth Benedict addressed her irregular academic preparation straight on, artfully dismissing it:

[I] believe that . . . her special qualifications for the work she proposes are so great as to counter-balance her lack of academic status.

... In all his work with the American Indians, Professor Boas never found another woman of her caliber and he gave her intensive and personal training which in reality outweighed the kind of training which often leads to a Ph.D. degree. . . . Both Professor Boas and I found her a person of the highest integrity and competence. Even her gifts in the use of the English language are far superior to those of the usual young Ph.D. (Benedict to Morris, 27 September 1943)

In a letter of recommendation to the Bollingen Foundation Margaret Mead enthused, “Ella Deloria is an extraordinarily gifted person, one of those people who span the world of the arts and sciences as well as the gap between the life of the Indian and the life of modern America. She has sensitivity, imagination, warmth. . . . Everything she writes thus gives a double insight, from inner experience and outer analysis” (Mead to Russ, 27 August 1952).

Once Deloria became associated with Ruth Benedict in the early 1930s, the nature of her research was transformed. Her sources were no longer textual but experiential—living people and their memories of traditional life and culture. All told, she undertook five field trips for Boas and Benedict and two more helped by grants from the American Philosophical Society. In the course of all this work for others, her own agenda of cultural mediation emerged and consumed her for the rest of her life, remaining unfinished up to the day she died.

As early as 1933 Benedict advised her, “Your big Dakota manuscript isn’t ready to send to a publisher, but work still goes on it. That will be a very fine book” (22 October 1933). As late as 1948, a few months before her death, Benedict pronounced herself delighted: “I think you can well be very proud of it” (22 June 1948). But Deloria despaired of it. Her niece Barbara Deloria Sanchez remembers her writing and crying all night, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, trying to finish an assignment on time (Sanchez to the author, 19 June 2006). The very “insider/outsider” position that so impressed her academic colleagues was a burden for Deloria. In a 1947 letter, she lamented to Benedict,

Ruth, it’s just awful! I simply cannot write [“The Dakota Way of Life”] as a real investigator, hitting the high points and drawing conclusions. There is too much I know. I made a hundred false

starts, and can't tell you how many times I've torn up my Ms and begun again. I think the most you can say for it is that it is a composite of Dakota information, and that I am the glorified (?) native mouthpiece. . . .

It is distressing to find it so hard to do this writing in any detached, professional manner! It reads like a chummy book on travel, rather than like a study. . . . I try to keep out of it, but I am too much in it, and I know too many angles. If the outside investigator is like a naturalist watching ants, and reporting what he sees, and draws conclusion from that, I am one of the ants! I know what the fight is about, what all the other little ants are saying under their breath! I did think it would be such a cinch! (13 February 1947)

Deloria both was and was not “one of the ants.” Insofar as she spoke the people's language and was related by blood to some of her interviewees and by social relationship to many others, she had advantages no outside investigator could match. Observing an ex-Columbia student on the Sioux reservations, she reported to Benedict: “His attitude and method are not right for these people. He said his problem was to investigate attitudes and opinions, and he hopes to get these by sending out, or filling out, questionnaires. These people won't express themselves point-blank like that. You have to learn to know them, and get their attitudes and opinions indirectly. They won't *commit* themselves. He complains that different informants promise to come to him—and fail to show up, naturally” (24 August 1947; emphasis in original).

Deloria's ethnological *modus operandi* was deceptively simple: “Kinship terms and the offering of food are inseparable. You can not get in without them” (“Interview Fragment” 11). She toiled down gravel roads, her younger sister as chauffeur, sweltering in temperatures well over 100 degrees and bringing meat (may it not spoil in the heat!) to aged interviewees. She typed as they talked—no incompetent interpreters here!—and at times eavesdropped and took notes without them knowing it (a practice that would give pause to today's institutional and tribal review boards). Sometimes she used her knee as a writing surface. If people couldn't come to her because their horses had died of drought, she went to them, when she had the use of a car. Most of her salary went for transportation, not always with-

out incident. Once, the axle on one of her ancient cars gave way, the brakes failed, and one wheel flew off. Roads turned to gumbo and temperatures way below zero could slow her down, but nothing other than death could stop her.

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She chose the people she spoke with very carefully. “I have seen white people questioning someone who is regarded as a fool in the tribe, and quoting him as gospel; and I have seen the real people of the tribe laughing at him” (“Gamma, Religion” 3). She valued the eldest people as “priceless because they could say, ‘I saw; I did.’ Other men and women, middle-aged to elderly, could do the next best thing: name someone they had known and trusted as their authority. ‘My mother said this . . .’ ‘I heard my grandfather tell . . .’ (and so I know it was true)” (“The Dakota Way of Life” 3). In her seventies, she lamented to her nephew Vine that there were no more old people to interview. When he countered that they would have to be 120 to be significantly older than she, she was not amused. Apparently she didn’t consider herself old; the identity that mattered most to her was that of her people’s daughter (V. Deloria, personal interview).

Deloria preferred to verify her data by interviewing people several times and also by checking what they said against others; hers was a consensual anthropology (DeMallie, personal interview). She often found it particularly illuminating to compare men’s accounts with women’s. However, in matters concerning sexuality, which Benedict particularly wished her to investigate, she had to tread carefully, well aware that most men would politely refuse to answer questions about traditional women’s lives, aspects of which they knew little about anyway. On the few occasions that she did interview men, they gently chided her about indecorum. “Even now,” she admitted in the 1930s, “I hesitate to look at any man’s face when talking, no matter how emphatic I want to be. If I have an entreaty to make, I do it in the tone of my voice, in the choice of words, calling on kinship, etc., any way but with the eyes. . . . In nice Dakota society, people’s first concern is that they shall be regarded as moral in sex” (Boas, f. 38). But even when interviewing women, the majority of her informants, she was not always at ease. Unmarried, she knew that women would be reluctant to share information unsuitable for younger daughters. After all, she had not been initiated into adult female responsibilities in a buffalo ceremony, nor had she ever been present at a traditional birth; her

younger siblings were born with doctor and nurse in attendance, and she had been sent to board at her elementary mission school when their births occurred. The most tortured portions of her ethnological manuscript concern puberty, marriage, contraception and abortion, childbirth, and transvestism. Her interviewees shied away from describing traditional means of contraception and abortion.

The contributors to “The Dakota Way of Life”—Deloria’s co-creators for the ethnological text and, therefore, for *Waterlily*—were nearly legion. A list of named sources prepared for Margaret Mead in the early 1950s contains no fewer than forty-nine “principal ones, with whom I worked systematically for days, or to whom I went back more than one summer” (“Autobiographical Notes” 8). The majority were Lakotas (from Rosebud, Standing Rock, and Pine Ridge reservations), as well as Cheyennes living at Rapid City. The stories they told spanned well over a century, if we include what they recalled their parents and grandparents telling them. Of these forty-nine, some of her “champion talkers” were Makula from Pine Ridge and Fast Whirlwind from Yankton; substantially (if indirectly) they contributed some of the more dramatic incidents in *Waterlily*. Makula recounted his own experience of “buying” a wife (as *Waterlily* is “bought” the first time she marries); the sister of a chief, she refused to come to him any other way. Fast Whirlwind, on the other hand, “threw away” his wife because of her ornery personality. In the original *Waterlily* manuscript, *Waterlily*’s mother, the virtuous Blue Bird, blinds her jealous first husband, Star Elk, by chasing him with a knife since he throws her away unjustly. A woman of the Planters-by-the-Water/Minneconjou band gave Deloria what she considered her best account of the Virgin’s Fire, which appears both in the ethnological manuscript and in *Waterlily* when *Waterlily*’s cousin Leaping Fawn is unjustly accused of sexual looseness. In 1934 Simon Antelope gave her “a full account of the different grades of handling a murderer,” a matter of ethical concern in *Waterlily* (E. Deloria to Boas, 2 August 1935). The dramatic beginning of the novel, when Blue Bird gives birth to *Waterlily* alone, derives also from the ethnological manuscript. Every incident in the novel can be traced to its description in that text.

“My mother’s mother,” Deloria recalled in her unpublished ethnological papers, “was very skilful, and people used to say she was a Two-

woman, but I never heard her speak of it. I wouldn't have understood it then, anyway" ("Two-Women" 97–98). In *Waterlily* the protagonist's aunt, Dream Woman, possesses uncanny artistic ability in porcupine-quill embroidery, but she never speaks of how she came to acquire her powers. It was in a vision "fraught with peril but full of life," as Vine Deloria Jr. later described a vision of his great-grandfather's (*Singing* 18). Originally Ella Deloria wished to recount a vision of Double Woman in her novel, but under pressure from her editors she reluctantly omitted "that sort of supernatural stuff [that] is hard to swallow in this day and age" (E. Deloria to Benedict, 6 July 1947).

Myths about the Double Woman are typically associated with the Oglala Lakotas, but Deloria also collected Yankton and Santee versions. As described by feminist art historian Janet Catherine Berlo, Double Woman "looks like a human woman, yet has two personas":

She had been beautiful, yet was punished for infidelity with acquisition of a second, horrific face. She is at once a benefactress to womankind and a temptress to men. . . . Double Woman figures prominently in discussion of Sioux women's arts, for she was the supernatural agent by which the first woman learned to make art. . . . [T]he myth . . . warns that a woman who becomes too absorbed in her art, creating masterpieces with the help of Double Woman, no longer leads a balanced life. Dreaming of Double Woman is a socially validated way of giving in to the overriding demands of art, yet such a commitment to one's art exacts a toll: one risks becoming socially unacceptable. (2–3)

The versions of the Double Woman myth that Deloria collected at Benedict's behest included queries about the "retiring" or menstrual tipis, where young girls received instruction about sexual and other matters that would affect their adult lives. When a good girl chose wisely, she was rewarded with unparalleled artistic skill. But "the one who broke this rule and ran away from the tipi thereby made the wrong choice and was destined to live forever under the bad nature's control. As its devotee, she would incline towards a futile, pleasure-loving existence and lightly transgressed the rules of propriety whenever they got in her way. Restlessness would mark her life." "In general," Deloria noted, "those touched by the Two-women are to be pitied. Even if they somehow chose correctly and became very



model women and were the secret possessors of porcupine work skill, nevertheless they were under a spell. It was something they could not shake off. . . . But the lewd women in the tribe who never were able to settle down to any sane sort of existence . . . were the most often spoken about as being controlled by the Two-women” (“Two-Women” 92).

Deloria’s lifework was structured by both choices. Her enormous body of ethnological writings was her “porcupine-quill embroidery.” Like the good woman, she chose a life of “industry” rather than “lewdness,” but to pursue her ethnological work at all, she had, indeed, to “run away from the tipi.” She more than “lightly transgressed the rules” of traditional Dakota female decorum in a public domain, and “restlessness” certainly did “mark her life.” As late in her life as 1969, she gave an interview describing a childhood daydream of transgression she had when dozing during a sermon. It is a revision of the parable of the prodigal son. Tempted by biblical references to “harlots” and “riotous living” (English terms she only partly then understood), she associated these exciting activities with the white town across the Missouri River from the Standing Rock Reservation. She ran away, changed into a boy, and was taken in by various white people until starvation forced her to return home. Her father found her, transformed back into a daughter again, and forgave her. He ordered a magnificent feast to welcome her back into his fold. I interpret this dream as an almost uncanny foreshadowing of Deloria’s career in ethnology.

Ultimately, I believe, Ella Deloria’s skills and character were *doubled* (or even multiplied) rather than disabled by her varied identifications. As her great-nephew Philip J. Deloria describes her professional activities, her “conception of a positive notion of Indianness . . . is impossible to locate in rigidly separatist understandings of either Dakota or American societies” (230). But certainly the tensions of being a dutiful relative, a good Christian woman, and an ethnologist extraordinaire were all woven into the texture and design of her life. The paradox of many identifications and affiliations remains among “Native” anthropologists to this day, although they experience their complex position more positively. Kirin Narayan rethinks the “insider/outsider” binary in terms of our present world of global exchange: “Two halves cannot

adequately account for the complexity of an identity in which multiple countries, regions, religions, and classes may come together. . . . I increasingly wonder whether any person of mixed ancestry can be so neatly split down the middle, excluding all the other vectors that have shaped them. Then, too, mixed ancestry is itself a cultural fact: the gender of the particular parents, the power dynamic between the groups that have mixed, and the prejudices of the time all contribute to the mark that mixed blood leaves on a person's identity" (673–74).

Much of Deloria's ethnological work in professional reports can also be read autobiographically. (The only intentionally autobiographical piece Deloria wrote, "Ella Deloria's Life," responded to a request from Margaret Mead.) When I read her ethnological texts, therefore, I do not attempt to assess their "authenticity" or value for that discipline (a subject addressed by Raymond J. DeMallie in his afterword to the 1988 edition of *Waterlily*). Ella Deloria never worked for anyone she could not establish a social kinship relationship with. Franz Boas became a father figure, as was the bishop of the Diocese of South Dakota before him; Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead were professional sisters. In her correspondence, boundaries between confession and profession blur. She never could separate herself from her people nor did she wish to. Her ethnological manuscript is riddled with reminiscences, scrawled all over with extensive notes and incessant revisions. The more she added to her ethnological manuscript, the more her childhood memories interrupted her text. As her father's conversion to Christianity was initially enthusiastic and then troubled, I so regard her own "conversion" to scientific "objectivity." Promises of salvation and salvage were illusory. Whether religious or secular, the institutions Deloria and her father served denied them free agency and marginalized and exoticized them.

As early as 1941, Deloria communicated her anxiety about publishing her ethnological findings to Benedict:

I've been telling non-anthropologists and non-ethnologists that you are having me write up all my Dakota stuff; and instantly they say how wonderful! What a help that will be to those who try to deal with Indians, to have at last a true interpretation of the Indian temperament, etc., etc. Church workers, and social workers, say that. So I tried to slant my first attempt to them.

But . . . [i]t was too simple, and superficial, and would be milk-

and-watery to your kind of person. . . . I can't slant it two ways, naturally.

Then I wrote for you; and again I found I can't possibly say everything *frankly*, knowing it could get out to the Dakota country. . . . The place I have with the Dakotas is important to me; I can not afford to jeopardize it by what would certainly leave me open to suspicion and you can't know what that would mean.

I am writing freely; but ["The Dakota Way of Life"] can't be a commercial book.

Either it must be printed as a book for the scientists only, or some such thing. Even if I didn't sign it, for a commercial book, they'd know I wrote it. My brother is out there. He'd know how I wrote it—objectively. But still it would not be comfortable for him. Honest, it wouldn't. Here you have a practical demonstration of some of the cross-currents and underneath influences of Dakota thinking and life. It trips even anyone as apparently removed as I am, because I have a place among the people. And I *have* to keep it. (20 May 1941; emphasis in original)

Ever fearful of offending her audiences, she asked Benedict to find an alternative mode of publication: "Print it in succeeding issues of the *Folklore Journal*, or some similar publication that Indians won't see?" (20 May 1941). Deloria even considered publishing "The Dakota Way of Life" by presenting the tribe she investigated as fictional, but the only solution she could finally accept was nonpublication, although she hoped that her materials would be made available to graduate students in anthropology.

It was easier for Deloria to collect material in the field, however ambiguous her presence there, than to write a coherent linear narrative from interviewees' oral recollections. With little confidence (and little desire) in her ability to wield ethnological terminology, she depended on others to pull her manuscripts together and constantly asked for direction. If Benedict could not spare the time to help her it would be a "calamity." If her work was to require indexes, tables, statistics, or glossaries, she wanted other people to provide them. She feared that the American Philosophical Society—which retained the right of first refusal—would turn her manuscript down because "it isn't scholarly. No acres of footnotes, bibliography, references to previous works,

all that.” She shunned professional terminology after wrestling with a “terribly confused [section] about the bands, tribes, gentes, etc., etc. . . . I hated it in the end” (E. Deloria to Benedict, 7 April 1947). In the same letter she enjoined Benedict to “cut ruthlessly, and also change my wordings for better clarity. If you think an expression sounds absurdly affected, or if I seem to be trying too desperately for effect, change it. You can’t insult me.”

Certainly, though, Ella Deloria felt no qualms about releasing *Waterlily*. Conventional ethnology in published form was an impossibility; writing a novel based on that fieldwork was not. Had Boas and Benedict not encouraged Deloria to write *Waterlily*, our knowledge of her literary and intellectual legacy would be considerably impoverished. She did hate to let the fictional manuscript go but not from fear of publication. She would miss *Waterlily* and her people, she told Benedict. She insured it for \$1,000 (over \$9,800 in 2008), for “it is worth that to me, to write it again, if it should get lost” (6 July 1947). “It is ironic,” Beatrice Medicine later wrote, “that although she did not want it published it has superseded her ethnographic contributions. It . . . is read like an ethnographic text—which would have displeased her, I am sure. Although seen as ‘sugary’ and ‘idealistic’ by one Native professor teaching American Indian Literature, it nonetheless is important in delineating the kinship dimension in dyadic interaction between members of the *tiyospaye*” (281).

Yet there is no indication in Deloria’s correspondence with Benedict and Mead that she did not want *Waterlily* published. With the war over and paper no longer rationed, she hoped it would sell well, for by the late 1940s her income was even more sporadic and straitened. Instead, several publishers rejected it; over time she may have given up on it. Like every member of her distinguished family, Ella Deloria sought in adverse circumstances to build the new upon the old without fetishizing or fossilizing the latter. *Waterlily*’s eviscerated final form, although an accommodation, is not a surrender. As ethnographic fiction it has succeeded beyond anything she could have dreamed, and she could hardly have anticipated the novel’s impact today.

In her introduction to the unpublished “The Dakota Way of Life,” Margaret Mead refers to the “occasional felicitous event like the life of Ella Deloria” (4), celebrating her as combining “the roles of informant, field worker and collaborator” (2). During her years at Colum-

bia, Deloria “assumed a new role, a . . . teaching role to . . . graduate students approaching for the first time the complexities of comparative culture, which to her were part of the very fibre of her being, informing every perspective, qualifying every judgment” (3). All of us involved with this anniversary edition of *Waterlily* hope that it will enhance the reputation of Deloria’s lifework and captivate more audiences. All readers will be grateful that the University of Nebraska Press *did* care “to bother with such a specialized subject.”

## Notes

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For permission to quote Margaret Mead’s words, I thank the Institute for Intercultural Studies in New York. All references from Deloria’s “The Dakota Way of Life” manuscript are from the Ella Deloria Archive at the Dakota Indian Foundation (DIF), Chamberlain, South Dakota. For this paper I used the online edition at the American Indian Studies Research Institute (AISRI), Indiana University. Under the stewardship of Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, the DIF collection was consolidated and reorganized. It is invaluable.

1. Professor Raymond J. DeMallie of the American Indian Studies Research Institute (Indiana University, Bloomington) intends to publish it. Margaret Mead submitted the manuscript to the American Philosophical Society in the early 1950s, but it was not published.

2. Joyzelle Godfrey, a social granddaughter of Ella Deloria, introduced Ella Deloria’s writings to Lower Brule Community College.

3. Gardner, Susan. “‘Though It Broke My Heart to Cut Some Bits I Fancied’: Ella Deloria’s Original Design for *Waterlily*.” *American Indian Quarterly* 27.3–4 (2003): 667–96.

4. I’m grateful to Professor Raymond J. DeMallie for introducing me to this invaluable reference.

5. Gambrell borrows this concept from Nathaniel Mackey’s 1992 article

“Other: From Noun to Verb,” quoting his definition of versioning—derived from reggae musical practice—as “improvisatory self-revision” (Gambrell 33).

6. See Raymond DeMallie’s afterword to *Waterlily* for more complete detail about Deloria’s extensive translation work.

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