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Review of *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* by Jeffrey Ostler

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Until now, the only book-length treatment of the Lakota nation’s effort to reclaim the stolen He Sapa (Black Hills) has been Edward Lazarus’s Black Hills/White Justice (1991), which is as much an apologia for his father Arthur Lazarus as it is a history of events: Arthur Lazarus was the attorney instrumental in eventually winning the Supreme Court case United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, which awarded substantial damages for the United States’ theft of the Black Hills.

Given the monumental importance of U.S. v. Sioux Nation, the central role of the Black Hills in the cultural outlook of numerous northern Great Plains nations, and the fact that the victorious Lakota and Nakota nation plaintiffs are still sitting on an interest-earning settlement now in excess of three-quarters of a billion dollars which they refuse to accept, demanding instead the return of their sacred lands, it is high time that the story be updated by a serious scholar. Jeffrey Ostler is that scholar, though The Lakotas and the Black Hills, like Black Hills/White Justice before it, is designed for a popular audience more than a scholarly one. The book is part of the Penguin Library of American Indian History series edited by Colin Calloway, a collection of short, accessible monographs authored by prominent scholars and boasting just enough citations.
Ostler’s previous work on Lakota history, 2004’s *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, focused on the nineteenth century, so it is perhaps not surprising that more than two-thirds of his new book also focuses on that era, charting Lakota cultural developments and the rise of their empire on the Northern Plains, the mid-century clash with the United States, their eventual defeat, the illegal seizure of the Black Hill in violation of the 1868 second Treaty of Ft. Laramie, and the difficult adjustment to reservation life.

Ostler also delves into the long, tangled story of the twentieth century, which eventually unfolds with a major legal victory against the United States that coincides with renewed national consciousness among Native peoples. The result is that, despite internal disagreements, the general platform has been to eschew the money and demand a return of the land itself.

*The Lakotas and the Black Hills* is by no means an exhaustive, scholarly account of this rather broad topic. Rather, it is a balanced and engagingly written introduction that will appeal to lay people and students. At the same time, however, Ostler has conducted primary research that helps to fill a gaping hole in Lakota historiography.

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