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Review of Lakota Storytelling: Black Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow

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Lakota Storytelling: Black Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow. By Julian Rice. New York: Peter Lang, 1989. Appendix, works cited, index. 252 pp. \$36.50.

The reciting of oral traditions, or storytelling, is the oldest form of human literary achievement. But because time changes everything, including oral traditions, human societies finally are forced to put their stories into written form to preserve them for posterity.

North American Indian tribes have had a long tradition of storytelling, and in the past one hundred years, much of it has been written down by anthropologists, folklorists, and historians. Julian Rice, in *Lakota Storytelling: Black*

Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow, has not only recorded tales but also has fulfilled the two other useful functions of the translator and historian. Rice gives us a key to the cultural background of the stories and provides literary criticism to help us understand them.

As Rice points out, Lakota stories and storytellers had a variety of purposes behind them. Nicholas Black Elk, the subject of Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* and DeMallie's *The Sixth Grandfather*, was a Lakota spiritual leader whose stories were designed, in part, to educate his people regarding the relationship of the Sioux people to the divine. Many of his best stories are vision talks: interpretations of actual interchanges between the spiritual and human worlds.

Frank Fools Crow, also a holy man, is, like Black Elk, interested in kinship and relations. Two of his narratives in this volume deal with reconciliation: one between the Sioux and the American government and the other between Christianity and the pipe religion. Fools Crow's goal is to create new relationships, or reinforce old ones, between the white and Indian worlds. Thus, Fools Crow's address to President Carter (pp. 173-82) is designed to remind the federal government of its bonds of kinship through treaty to the Sioux. As part of this, Fools Crow seeks to impress on his listeners the Sioux interpretation of this relationship.

Ella Deloria's writing is designed to reestablish the relationship of modern Sioux people to their cultural and historical past. In this way, Deloria seeks to preserve the links between twentieth-century Lakota society and traditional culture and to use these traditional forms as a cement to bond the Sioux to one another and to their historical identity. As Rice uses Deloria's words, there emerges from them a theme of respect for traditional life ways.

Lakota Storytelling is a useful sourcebook on Sioux literary traditions. More than that, however, it rescues Indian stories from both the threat of being treated as either anthropological relics or jealously guarded talismans of Indian cultural nationalists. Instead, Rice provides a balanced narrative that helps us all understand

the background of Sioux culture and our own common humanity.

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