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Review of *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* By Vine Deloria Jr.

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The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men. By Vine Deloria Jr. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006. xxxii + 237 pp. Notes, bibliography. \$16.95 paper.

This potent volume was Deloria's final gift to his readers. He completed the final editing during a stay in the hospital a few days before his passing into the spirit world of his ancestors. He had made a career out of demonstrating the greater plausibility of Indian traditions and historical memories over against the usually dismissive explanations offered by colonial white academics, missionaries, and government officials. This volume carries on that work with aplomb.

Here Deloria has collected stories from a wide variety of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographies, stories of the wonderful accomplishments of Indian medicine men from a great variety of tribes, from Kiowa and Comanche to Dakota and Omaha. There are early descriptions of Ojibwe tent shaking ceremonies, Lakota *lowanpi* ceremonies, and all sorts of other occasions. These are stories of power used to change the weather, to bring success in battle, to impress white observers, or stories that were simply a natural part of some tribal ceremony. They involve dramatic interactions between humans and other animals or the fantastic healing of someone badly wounded or those deathly ill.

The white writers (anthropologists and amateurs working for the U.S. government) who recorded these stories included them not as useful illustrations of the religious traditions they were documenting but rather as illustrations of the lack of sophistication of Indian cultures. Persistently dismissed as "conjuring" by white observers, these stories have a consistency,

Deloria demonstrates, that demands they be taken much more seriously than the dominant white society has dared. By grouping them in coherent sets, he presents a convincing argument that the stories are not merely the trickery and deception of "witch doctoring." The dreams experienced by these Indian ancestors follow a regular pattern that suddenly forces the reader to hear them as quite plausible narratives rather than as incredible fantasies. The exploits of these old men of great spiritual power are lined up next to one another in such a way as to make their stories compellingly credible.

Indeed, Deloria's collection demonstrates such a consistent display of power in American Indian ceremonial and healing traditions that we are required to consider them with greater gravity than their original collectors ever dreamed. To paraphrase the Australian magistrate in Werner Herzog's *Where the Green Ants Dream* commenting on Aboriginal stories, these American Indian stories occur with such frequency and consistency that they cohere into a palpable truth.

Deloria pairs each story he records with his own commentary on the text, a commentary always executed with insight and the cutting edge we long ago came to expect from him. The collection of these texts alone makes this volume an important addition to any library on American Indian concerns; Deloria's commentaries throughout make it indispensable.

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