

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Summer 1999

## Review of *The Mythology of Native North America* By David Leeming and Jake Page

Thomas H. Lewis  
*Boyd, Montana*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Lewis, Thomas H., "Review of *The Mythology of Native North America* By David Leeming and Jake Page" (1999). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1578.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1578>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*The Mythology of Native North America.* By David Leeming and Jake Page. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. Bibliography, index. xiii + 209 pp. \$22.95.

The authors' admirable aim is to make the Native mythology of North America as accessible as that of Ancient Greece and Judea to an audience more or less ignorant of all three. To do this they anthologize themselves, taking twenty-five myths (out of a total of seventy-five) from their own works. The reader will wish to know first of all who the authors are, what they have written previously, and from what other sources they draw their

material. David Leeming is a professor of English; Jake Page was an editor of a popular science magazine. They have written together on the Divine—both male and female. The source of twenty-one of the myths considered is *American Indian Myths and Legends*, edited by Richard Edoes and Alfonso Ortiz (1984). Richard Edoes is a prolific popular writer and ghost-writer. The *Lame Deer* often quoted by him is a contemporary promoter and practitioner of the revived, re-invented, reconstituted Oglala sun dance. Thus the source material for the bulk of the book cannot be considered “deep” in any ethnographic sense.

The authors say, unblushingly, that the book is “primarily literary rather than historical and anthropological.” The reader must not, therefore, expect the analytic or synthetic management of data found in the volumes of Claude Levi-Strauss on myth, or of Hartley Burr Alexander (*The World's Rim: Great Mysteries of the North American Indians*, 1953) or of Åke Hultkrantz (*The Religion of the American Indians*, 1979). Rather, each story is presented simply in academic English, logically organized (re-organized?) in words Leeming and Page find appropriate, comprehensive, and complete (and how unlike the rough ambiguity so common in autochthonous versions). This allows occasional analogies to be drawn with Hermes, Orpheus, and Jesus. Representative myth examples are given from many regions of the continent, a reasonable coverage, although the Uto-aztecan group that occupies a vast area in western America is mentioned only to be dropped. Similarly, North America evidently stops at the Rio Grande, so the rich and complex Mexican mythology is eliminated.

The inescapable attitude of the authors toward the invisible world may be guessed by the arrangement of the stories under such headings as Deities, Supreme God, Dying God, The Creation, The Flood, The Savior Hero, and The End of the World. One supposes the book would be inoffensive in a Christian religious bookstore or on the shelves of a bible college,

where, as elsewhere, it will be judged by its literary merit.

THOMAS H. LEWIS  
Boyd, Montana