



Nicholas Black Elk: Medicine Man, Missionary, Mystic

Michael F. Steltenkamp

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Since its publication in 1932, *Black Elk Speaks* has moved countless readers to appreciate the American Indian world that it described. John Neihardt's popular narrative addressed the youth and early adulthood of Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux religious elder. Michael F. Steltenkamp now provides the first full interpretive biography of Black Elk, distilling in one volume what is known of this American Indian wisdom keeper whose life has helped guide others.

Nicholas Black Elk: Medicine Man, Missionary, Mystic shows that the holy-man was not the dispirited traditionalist commonly depicted in literature, but a religious thinker whose outlook was positive and whose spirituality was not limited solely to traditional Lakota precepts. Combining in-depth biography with its cultural context, the author depicts a more complex Black Elk than has previously been known: a world traveler who participated in the Battle of the Little Bighorn yet lived through the beginning of the atomic age.

Steltenkamp draws on published and unpublished material to examine closely the last fifty years of Black Elk's life—the period often overlooked by those who write and think of him only as a nineteenth-century figure. In the process, the author details not just Black Elk's life but also the creation of his life *story* by earlier writers, and its influence on the Indian revitalization movement of the late twentieth century.

Nicholas Black Elk explores how a holy-man's diverse life experiences led to his synthesis of Native and Christian religious practice. The first book to follow Black Elk's lifelong spiritual journey—from medicine man to missionary and mystic—Steltenkamp's work provides a much-needed corrective to previous interpretations of this special man's life story. This biography will lead general readers and researchers alike to rediscover both the man and the rich cultural tradition of his people.

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