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Sacred Fireplace (Oceti Wakan): Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. By Pete S. Catches Sr.

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It seems as though there is much Miller excluded. At times, there are understandable restrictions on disclosure of important ceremonial songs and practices. But if he would have provided the current information, in contrast to the older approach to healing, it would have been that much more fulfilling.

Frederick White

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Sacred Fireplace (Oceti Wakan): Life and Teachings of a Lakota Medicine Man. By Pete S. Catches Sr. Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 1999, 227 pages. \$14.95 paper.

Peter V. Catches, the son of venerated Lakota medicine man Pete S. Catches Sr. of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, shares with the public his father's writings, orations, philosophical perspectives, and interpretations of Lakota cosmology and wisdom. For students of Lakota life and culture, this is an opportunity to read firsthand the thoughts and insights about Lakota life and about the surrounding society of a revered spiritual leader.

The text includes the autobiographical accounts of Pete Catches Sr.'s life, calling and ultimate decision to become a medicine man, stories about his travels, efforts to revitalize the Sun Dance on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and personal philosophical views on the challenges Lakota face in everyday life—alcoholism, unemployment, poverty, and pressures of assimilation. This book also includes his vision and dreams, his spiritual mentorship of Lakota men and women seeking visions, and the critical role he played in religious revitalization of several western Teton or Lakota groups. Historical anecdotes relay Catches's perspective on the notorious takeover of Wounded Knee and his role in political negotiations with federal and tribal officials, all at a time when Catches's health was in danger.

Catches describes Lakota cosmology, briefly characterizing the Seven Sacred Rites and their role in Lakota Society. These overviews are not meant to be in-depth, but are personal and thus do not provide the ethnographic substance that some may seek; however, the literature is blessed with numerous and substantial details of these rites, and someone whose interest was piqued by this book can easily search for more detailed accounts, including John Fire and Richard Erdoes's *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* (1972), Elizabeth S. Grobsmith's *Lakota of the Rosebud* (1981), Royal B. Hassrick's *The Sioux, Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (1964), and William K. Powers's *Oglala Religion* (1977). Unfortunately, this book does not provide bibliographic suggestions, but makes no pretense of being a scholarly analysis of Lakota life. Catches's essays are personal testimonials rather than ethnographic vignettes, and give the reader more of the essence of the life of a medicine man, his teachings, and his wisdom.

Pete Catches Sr.—Petaga Yuha Mani, or He Walks with Hot Coals (a name he derived from a vision)—tells of his heritage from a long line of medicine men: all his grandfathers were medicine men, as was his father. Catches's own attachment to and struggle with Christianity was certainly

characteristic of his father, who left the world of Lakota spiritual leadership to join the church. Pete Catches Sr. also worked for the church, and struggled to reconcile the two traditions, finally abandoning Christianity to follow his calling as a medicine man. He states, "I finally became a medicine man sixteen years after I was supposed to. I first had a sacred dream that I could not dispel" (p. 37). Conflict, insomnia, and bouts with alcoholism still could not provide escape from the inevitable reality of his calling, despite his attempts to "get away from this haunting thing that was always close at hand" (p. 39). His sober awakening, literally and figuratively, finally brought him to seek the vision that resulted in his acquiescence to this consuming demand. The fulfillment of his sacred dream, prayer with the Sacred Pipe, and fulfillment of his Sun Dance vow finally enabled him to accept his fate: "When I broke free it seemed that peace had finally come to my spirit, that my physical being was appeased with the thought that the Great Spirit heard my prayer, and that the sacred dream that had tormented me for sixteen years was finally over" (p. 41).

Those of us fortunate enough to have seen Catches lead the Sun Dance on the Pine Ridge Reservation in the years following the 1973 takeover of Wounded Knee know from observation that Catches was indeed a revered, holy leader of the Lakota, as well as an inspiration to numerous tribal members who came from all over the Plains to participate in the revived Sun Dance. Along with Frank Fools Crow and John Fire (Lame Deer), Catches brought a revitalization of belief and practice in Lakota ways to reservation inhabitants, whose spiritual lives lacked cohesiveness and integration in daily life. Catches is deservedly credited for the revitalization of the Sun Dance, so central to observation of Lakota ideology, and so powerful in bringing thousands of individuals to accept new meaning in a life otherwise fraught with alcoholism, unemployment, poverty, and family violence. The resurgence of the Sun Dance—deliberately coinciding with the rise of pan-Indianism and the American Indian Movement—brought the new ideology of Red Power to reservation culture, instilling pride and a renewed identity, fundamental to the rebuilding of reservation life. While perhaps Fools Crow was more actively engaged as an AIM adviser—and John Fire (Lame Deer) from the nearby Rosebud Reservation perhaps somewhat more of a renegade than either Catches or Fools Crow—it was Pete Catches Sr. who was viewed the most sacred and deeply revered spiritual leader of the Lakota in an era crucial to the rebirth of Native tradition. Catches's was called the Sun Dance Chief by the Oglala people, symbolizing this deep reverence.

Sacred Fireplace is less about the substance and content of Lakota ideology than it is a tribute to the personal journey of a famous and revered medicine man, who, in many ways, brought Lakota life and spirituality back to the Lakota.

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