Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions Study Guide

Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions by Richard Erdoes

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Contents

Plot Summary

Richard Erdoes, author of LAME DEER, SEEKER OF VISIONS, has accomplished the monumental task of providing a definitive depiction of the American Indian through the eyes of a Sioux medicine man. From an inordinate amount of time and reflection, he has transcribed hours of interviews, both written and taped, over a period of years of friendship with Lame Deer, and has successfully portrayed the amazingly rich history and heritage of Indian culture, of the religious beliefs, the rituals and ceremonies, the significant legends, the practice of medicine, the historical desecration of the Indian population, and the injustices and environmental destruction heaped upon a people and a land that is held in sacred reverence. Beginning with the life story of Lame Deer, the reader is lead through the coming of age of a young Indian boy, destined to become a revered medicine man, his sojourns into white society, his experiences with productive and unproductive pursuits, to his maturation into an elderly leader who wants little more than the dignity that his people and his earth deserve. Once the life story has been related, Lame Deer is then able to recall, in accurate and amazing detail, the Indian use of natural medicines, the traditional rituals and ceremonies that provide the Sioux nation with its identity and its sense of self, and the critical symbolism of every act performed. One emerges from this reading in complete awe of the spirituality of this people - its complete reverence for all nature, its respect for each animal and plant, its understanding that every living thing has a purpose within the great spiritual realm, and the existence of the Great Spirit within all things. The complete unification of the Indian with his spiritual beliefs, moreover, leads one to wonder whether the white man could not take a lesson here. Christians, Jews, and Muslims profess their beliefs, many of which compare closely with those of the Indian, and yet they do not seem to be able to practice these beliefs in their contemporary lives the way in which the Indian does.

The other key ingredient in this work is the historically accurate and shameful manner in which the Indian has been treated. While many other works with this theme exist, the injustices are thoroughly personalized when they are described through the eyes of a victim, as they are in this work. That Lame Deer can describe these injustices and lament their occurrence, moreover, and remain a peaceful man, not the angry, rebellious, revolutionary that many would be under similar circumstances is perhaps testament to his way of life. Perhaps Lame Deer knows what all would be wise to remember. This life, this short and fleeting existence on earth, should not be spent in the tasks of accumulating material wealth at all costs, in the desecration of others and the environment for earthly gain, and in the promotion of self at the expense of others. Human beings must return to their sense of oneness with the earth and all beings on it, because only in that lies salvation. Knowing this, and knowing that he has lived according to higher spiritual values, Lame Deer is perhaps at peace.

Chapters 1-5: Alone on the Hilltip; That Gun in the New York Museum Belongs to Me; The Green Frog Skin; Getting Drunk, Going to Jail; Sitting on Top of Teddy Roosevelt's Head

Chapters 1-5: Alone on the Hilltip; That Gun in the New York Museum Belongs to Me; The Green Frog Skin; Getting Drunk, Going to Jail; Sitting on Top of Teddy Roosevelt's Head Summary and Analysis

At the age of sixteen, a young Indian boy (Bureau of Census name, John Fire) spent four days and nights in the vision pit, as a passage into manhood and as a part of Sioux tradition for aspiring medicine men. Sitting in a hole dug into a hill, with a blanket covering his nakedness, a peace pipe and tobacco, and a gourd holding forty small pieces of skin from his grandmother, the lad waited for his vision. With the vision would come the power to heal, and no Sioux could become a medicine man without it. Thus begins the saga of Lame Deer, which is detailed in the first five chapters of the biography, LAME DEER, SEEKER OF VISIONS.

The boy's vision consisted of a huge bird and "a human voice too strange and high-pitched, a voice which could not come from an ordinary, living being." (p. 5). It seemed to Lame Deer as though he had ascended to the sky, above celestial bodies. Here, he was told by the "fowl people" that he would become a medicine man, as well as learn to use his life in a worthy manner. His additional vision was of his great grandfather, the original Lame Deer, who had been shot and killed by the U.S. Army. At this point, the boy realized he was to take his great-grandfather's name. "Then I felt the power surge through me like a flood..." and "I knew for sure that I would become a wicasa wakan, a medicine man" (p. 6).

The original Chief Lame Deer's gun is housed in the Museum of the American Indian, in New York City. He had been killed in a battle with the U.S. army, betrayed by the failure of the government to honor a previous treaty. Specifically, the treaty gave Lame Deer's tribe four square miles of land in South Dakota, that land which is today Rapid City. An additional agreement provided that Lame Deer's people could conduct one last buffalo hunt, in 1877, in their traditional fashion. During the hunt, however, the tribe was attacked by General Miles, who had been told to strike any Indian found off the reservation. The misunderstanding resulted in Lame Deer's death by gunshot. Gates

donated Lame Deer's gun to the Museum. Eventually, the original reservation land was taken as well, converted to a cheap and gaudy tourist site.

Lame Deer's son, Crazy Heart was the young Lame Deer's grandfather. Both Crazy Heart and Good Fox (his other grandfather) were warriors who fought Custer. Though young Lame Deer never knew Crazy Heart, Good Fox often related tales of their earlier bravery and battles including Wounded Knee, in which Sioux suffered what they believe to be the most significant betrayal on the part of the white man.

Lame Deer's father's name was Wawi-Yohi-Ya, translated as "Let-Them-Have-Enough." True to his name, he was a giver, often providing food and gifts to his tribesmen. During the U.S. Census, he was given the white name "Silas Fire," and son Lame Deer became "John Fire." Though Silas Fire was not verbose and never learned to read or write, he had two hundred horses and many heads of cattle, lived by the values of patience and generosity, and cared deeply for his family and tribesmen. Mother was named Sally Red Blanket, an accomplished bead worker, who died when Lame Deer was seventeen.

Unlike the white man, Indian children are as close to their grandparents as their parents, and upbringing is a responsibility of all adult relatives. Most of Lame Deer's childhood was spent with his grandparents, and life was simple. Grandmother prepared meals, a notched stick served as a calendar, and traditional celebrations were maintained. Legends and stories of ancestors were related verbally, and Lame Deer was only able to sit still during the times of his grandmother's telling. Indian children were not subject to physical or other harsh punishment, and many thus did not feel a need to listen to adults. Lame Deer embraced this, perhaps even more than most, as he took after his grandfather Crazy Heart, "daring and full of the devil" (p. 17). Crazy Heart was more aggressive and more hot-tempered than other family members as well. Lame Deer was a risk-taker and often impulsive. Wishing to emulate the status of an ear-piercer, for example, he decided to pierce his sister's ears. His punishment came some time later, when father gave away his beloved gray pony. This was balanced a short time later, however, by a replacement horse.

Lame Deer's idyllic childhood was disrupted when the Bureau of Indian Affairs insisted he go to school, and he hated it. The curriculum was at the third grade level, and that is where Lame Deer remained for six years. At age fourteen, he had to move on to boarding school. His naturally rebellious nature resulted in numerous disciplinary issues, but he refused to become an "apple" - red on the outside, white on the inside. He did not learn English; he endured the physical punishments, and he refused to adopt the white man's societal mores.

With the death of his mother in 1920, Lame Deer's life changed. His sister had died six years earlier, and many Indians were by then dying of white man's diseases, to include measles and tuberculosis, diseases not known to the Indian nation previously. His father left, giving him some horses and cows. Young and impulsive, he bought an old Model T and rodeo clothing, making rounds of reservations, not to compete, but, rather, to experience all that he could and to visit older medicine men, absorbing all that they

could teach him. He was a homeless wanderer who drifted in and out of the white world, rejecting its concept of God, attending peyote gatherings, and womanizing. A brief, forced marriage to a Catholic girl ended in divorce after three years, and Lame Deer was free to pursue life - as an "outlaw and lawman, a prisoner and a roamer, a sheepherder and a bootlegger, a rodeo rider and a medicine man" (p. 30). He was on his final hunt, to discover himself and his full spirit.

Indians never had money. After the Custer battle, money from the dead soldiers was given to children for play. The Sioux term for dollar bills was "green frog skin," and they realized early on that it drove much of what the white man did. When Indians were forced onto or off land, money was always the ultimate reason. Even today, ranchers and farmers are driven by money. They poison prairie dogs to prevent their eating grass that their cows need. Because of a lack of prairie dogs, bobcats and coyotes must hunt stray cattle or sheep. To kill them, dead rabbits are thrown out as bait, with cyanide capsules inside. As ground life is destroyed, so too are the birds of prey that feed on them, including the bald eagle, symbol of the white man's country. The Sioux call the white men "fat-takers." They take all the fat of the land and give nothing back, destroying the land in the process. Americans are consumers, not human beings. Because Indians refuse to accept the frog-skin world, they are deemed lazy and dumb. The Indian, however, understands that the earth, water, and sky truly belong to all humanity, and there is not much time for man to clean up what he has ruined.

Indians share. If they come into money or goods, they pass it around to all tribesmen. They live by the principle of generosity. The white man calls this stupid. Poor people, they say, should not be giving away any windfall - it is simply irresponsible. Whites horde what they have, their money and their property. In addition, they force the Indian to live in the world of frog green skin, so that he must exist as two people in one. If Indians want a life that is more than the government starch food handed out on the reservation or more than the inferior schooling offered on a reservation, then they must leave that reservation and join the world of frog-green paper, giving up some of their souls with that move. Lame Deer's strategy was to reduce his needs and to work only as necessary. He traveled the rodeo circuit, riding buffalo and horses and roping steers. Once he tired of that, there was a stint as a rodeo clown, diverting bulls from riders. During the winters, he became involved in square dancing, occasionally substituting as a caller.

Eventually out of money, Lame Deer sold his rodeo gear and hit the road, declining any full-time work offered, taking a variety of farm jobs as necessary. AT one point, he herded sheep in the hills, a lonely job, but an opportunity to think and allow the spirits to communicate with him. With money in his pocket, however, he soon became social again, spending it freely. In between jobs and "hell-raising," Lame Deer returned to reservations, to learn more from medicine men. During these returns, he often attended peyote meetings, eating the drug and hallucinating under it power. He was involved in peyote for six years, often the target of police hunts, as consuming the drug (as well as living with women without being married) was against the law. Eventually, Lame Deer gave up peyote, realizing that it was contrary to his true spiritual quest. The hell-raising and the "finding out" did not end, however. Lame Deer continued to drink and job-hop,

even becoming a tribal policeman for a while. During World War II, he fought in Europe, but was sent home once it was discovered that he was 39 years old and had lied about his age. "I was like a jigsaw puzzle. Year by year, new pieces were added to form the complete picture. A few pieces are still missing" (p. 55).

Alcohol was introduced to the Indian by the white man, perhaps as a means to control him, making him ineffective in protests against white intrusion and dominanace. Indians can purchase alcohol but cannot take it onto the reservation. They drink in the small towns surrounding reservations but are then often abused by local police. At one point, when Lame Deer resisted arrest for drunkenness, his cheek bone was crushed by the pounding of a cop with a huge ring. Alcoholism is certainly a problem for the Indian nations, and Indians have still not learned how to handle it responsibly. although anthropologists and psychologists posit a number of reasons for the huge percentage of Indian alcoholics, Lame Deer believes the true reasons for drinking is to forget the time when they were free and the environment clean and pure. As well, they wish to lose thought of their horrible current loiving conditions - trailers and shacks. If they accept government-provided housing, they must then abide by strict rules, to include no overnight guests, no visiting beyond ten at night, no painting without approval, etc. They try to forget that there are no worthwhile jobs on the reservations, unless they are willing to "sell their sould" and become "apples" for the white man. Lack of honor and self-worth leads to drink and to abandonment of the principle of caring for one's family and relatives. Lame Deer is quite a satirist. In this section, he speaks to traditional Indian life with no jails, no courts, no money. and no locks or keys. There were, therefore, no criminals. If an Indian did not have enough, it was given to him. Thankfully, says Lame Deer, the white man arrived to bring its "civilized" institutions - money, courts, jails, and whiskey, along with measles, polio, and such.

To be a good medicine man, Lame Deer states, one must experience all of life - the good and the bad. "Sickness, jail, poverty getting drunk - I had to experience all that myself...you can't get so stuck up, so inhuman that you want to be pure, your soul wrapped up in a plastic bag, all the time. You have to be God and the devil, both of them" (p. 68). In keeping with this philosophy, Lame Deer roamed and experienced between 1926-1935. He had many women and even went on a "big tear," stealing cars in a snowstorm, staying drunk on moonshine, and finally landing in a federal prison for nine months. The prison term resulted in much better English skills and a trade as a sign painter. Looking back upon this period of wild activity. he believes that, with the traditional honor and pride of Indians dismissed by the white man as stupid and uncivilized, he had to make himself known in some way, to feel like a man. As he came to understand, however, there are far more important ways in which to make oneself known, and he knew that working for honor and dignity of the Indian, as well as preserving the traditions of the Sioux nation as he practiced his spiritual calling in medicine and ceremony, were his missions.

An experience that altered Lame Deer significantly was participation in a protest at Mount Rushmore. Whites view Mt. Rushmore as a great monument to four of their great leaders, a symbol of America's greatness. In their eyes, a monument of this type must be big, and big it is. To the Indian, it is a sign of destruction. The natural mountain

facade has been defaced, and the monument is not in harmony with nature. Mt. Rushmore, to Indians, is symbolic of betrayal. The Black Hills were given to the Indians by treaty, until gold was found. then, the Indians had to be expelled, by force and war, the survivors forced onto reservations. Now, the site still brings big money through tourism.

A number of issues resulted in a sit-in protest at Mt. Rushmore, behind the heads of four white presidents. A detailed listing of the most important grievances is as follows:

1. The Black Hills were taken by force, in violation of a treaty

2. Gold, trees, iron, uranium and lime have been taken out of the Black Hills, not one penny given to the Indians

3. 200,000 additional acres were taken for a gunnery range, to be returned after World War II. It never happened.

4. Tourism is a huge business in the Black Hills, completely owned and operated by whites Indian "wares, made in Hong Kong, are sold

5. Indians have been forced to lease a great deal of reservation land to whites for grazing, some leases for as many as one hundred years.

Indians want compensation; they want their mountains returned; they want the production and sale of picture postcards of the slaughter at Wounded Knee stopped. Younger, angrier Indians are emerging and, together with elders who are tired of the injustices, they are ready to take action. Re-taking Mt. Rushmore, and re-naming it, was their first symbolic act. Lame Deer participated in this protest and took co-author Richard Erdoes with him. He planted a sacred stake and began to educate the young protesters in the traditional ways of the Indian. Lame Deer was changed by the experience on Mt. Rushmore. He became political and began to think about a law suit against his current town of residence, Winner. His points of suit have been quite clear and include the great disparity between the white section, up on a hill, and the poor. unpaved slum in which Indians and some poor whites live. Schools are unequal; justice is unequal; Indians are clear victims of discrimination along the lines of Jim Crow South.

There was also, at the time of the Mt. Rushmore protest, the beginning of a project to carve a huge statue of Crazy Horse in a neighboring mountain, threatening to dwarf the four presidents, but many Indians saw that it, too, was turning into a tourist trap. Admission charges, as well as gift shops and restaurants had already sprung up, though the project had barely begun. Lame Deer and Erdoes visited the artist and were impressed by his sincerity, although certainly not in favor of another mountain destroyed by so-called art.

Chapters 6-9: The Circle and the Square; Talking to the Owls and Butterflies; Two in a Blanket; Medicine Good and Bad

Chapters 6-9: The Circle and the Square; Talking to the Owls and Butterflies; Two in a Blanket; Medicine Good and Bad Summary and Analysis

Once the reader has a summation of the life experiences of Lame Deer, the reader is lead through a large body of information relative to Indian traditions and beliefs. Thus, chapters six through nine outline the most salient features of Sioux traditions, religion, and principles by which true tribesmen live. It is in these few chapters that the reader is able to fully understand the rich heritage which is often ignored or overlooked as American history is studied in schools. The reader will be struck by the basic gentleness of these first Americans and their overriding respect for everything of nature.

Indians see spiritual symbols in common objects. They have used them for hundreds of years in their daily living. A belt, crafted by Lame Deer's grandmother, for example, told the story of his grandfather's accomplishments, all with configurations of geometric figures. Other simple symbols relate to spiritual beliefs. By far, the most important is the Indian circle or hoop. "Nature wants things to be round" (p. 100). Indians sit in circles, see themselves unified in belief in peace; Indian camps have always been circular, as have been camp fires. These are meant to be in harmony with the round earth, sun and moon. White man's symbol has always been the square or rectangle, typified by his home, his buildings, and walls to separate one another. His gadgets have been square as well - televisions, computers, etc. - corners with sharp edges. There are straight edges and points, symbolic of inflexibility and points in time. White man is a "prisoner inside all these boxes." (p. 101). Tattoos for Indians are symbolic and typify nature or spirits; rocks are holy; painting symbols and stories on rock has been traditional throughout Indian history.

All nature is sacred to the Indian, and the Great Spirit is in all nature, divided into lesser spirits but united at the same time. The four greatest spirits are those of the stone, thunder, moving (wind) and water. Four, therefore, has been the most sacred number, representing not simply the four greatest spirits but the four quarters of the earth as well. The universe has four powers - earth, air, water, and fire; men and women are to each possess four specific virtues; a peace pipe is puffed four times by each participant; four nights and days are the time spent in the pit to have a vision. There is great force in the earth. Much of it was infused into all nature, but there is a great deal not used that the Great Spirit may "bestow" by choice upon humans. When one receives this additional force, he/she must use it wisely and moderately. Color and words have symbolic meaning as well. Red, black, yellow and white refer to the four races of man;

names are given to relate a story or heritage. All nature, moreover, is sacred and is to be revered and allowed to be as created.

The white race continues to alter nature, making it difficult for all creatures to be who and what the Great Spirit intended. Whites have mutated animals and plants and boxed themselves up into homes which have isolated them from the earth. Food is altered by artificial coloring, flavoring, and preservatives and is given to the Indian in the form of government rations. Animals, like the coyote, which appear to serve no purpose, are slaughtered so that no mutated cows and sheep are killed by them. Whites are trying, in effect, to be God, deciding which creatures may exist and altering others in an effort to achieve complete domination of the Earth. In the end, the Earth will revolt against them. Indians understand the sacred nature and intelligence of the animals - buffalo, bear, badgers, and, as a result, love and respect them. When a buffalo is killed, it is a religious act, and every bit of that buffalo is utilized, from skin to intestine and stomach. Badgers, gophers, even the ants and spiders have wisdom and lessons to teach humans; Indians, close to nature, are able to receive these lessons. Lame Deer receives his messages from fowl - the eagle and the owl, and, when he goes off by himself to contemplate or receive visions, it is these creatures that have always spoken to him. After his mother died, he went up the hill alone and received such a message, being told that he had a love within himself for all the earth, much greater than personal love. As well, the birds told him they would share their power with him.

Indian doctrine and practices relative to sex and marriage are worthy of study, because important insights can be gained into the nature of Indian culture and spirituality. Indians are basically shy about love and sex. Traditionally, courtship was difficult; moreover, because entire families lived and slept within the close proximity of a tipi there was rarely occasion to sneak out at night. Parental consent was required for a marriage. If the young did not like the "arranged" betrothal, they simply eloped, going off together for two or three days. Upon return, their marriage was accepted by the tribe. Ceremonial weddings involved the couple wrapped in a blanket, their hands tied together around a peace pipe, and the words of the presiding medicine man. At the end of the ceremony, the pipe was freed, and everyone smoked it. Divorce is uncommon because children are so very important and because extended families are the norm. They do occur, however, and either partner may divorce the other by specific acts, with solid reason.

Children were traditionally born with the help of a midwife, and a good one was highly valued. A grandmother made two dolls for the newborn - a lizard for long life and a turtle for strength. The umbilical cord was stuffed into one of these dolls, and they remained with the child until it reached the age of five. Twins, it was believed were two souls reborn, who, in their previous lives, were extremely close - lovers, husbands and wives, perhaps siblings. Fertility and virility were tied into spiritual beliefs, and medicine men often used herbs in treatment of difficulties in these areas. Always, these treatments were and are used with caution and good judgment, not as the white man uses his drugs for these conditions.

The English term for medicine man actually is a generic word that is used to identify several different individuals within a tribe, each of whom has a role to play in sickness,

treatment, and healing. These include the man of herbs (pejuta wicasa), the man who uses the powers of rawhide and stone to cure (yuwipi), the man with power of prophecy (wapiya), able to rid bodies of bad spirits much like a witch doctor. The most powerful medicine man is the wicasa wakan, who is both physical and spiritual in his practices. He can perform the tasks of all other medicine men but has moved beyond these tasks, having great visions as well. The power comes from the vision, but a true medicine man must then work for his ability to heal, learning from older wicasa wakan. Sometimes, the power is passed through a family; sometimes not.

Herbs and plants are the healing medicines of Indians. From ancient times, the healing nature of each specific herb, flower, leave or root of hundreds of plants and herbs have been passed through generations of medicine men. They are used to cure any illness, any organ problem, and any type of wound, quite effectively. In the final section of Chapter nine, Lame Deer details many types and parts of plants used for a variety of ailments and injuries, stating as well that others must remain secret, known to only a few.

Chapters 10-14: Inipi-Grandfather's Breath; Yuwipi-Little Lights from Nowhere; Looking at the Sun, They Dance; Don't Hurt the Trees; Roll Up the World

Chapters 10-14: Inipi-Grandfather's Breath; Yuwipi-Little Lights from Nowhere; Looking at the Sun, They Dance; Don't Hurt the Trees; Roll Up the World Summary and Analysis

In this section of three chapters, traditional Sioux ceremonies are explained, both in actual performance and, as well, their significance to Indian religious and cultural heritage. The first, the Inipi, is the sweat bath, which is both sacred and steeped in ritual. Inipi occurs before any other ceremony as a cleansing ritual. The origin of the Inipi is the legend of the Stone Boy. According to the tale, a young girl lived with five brothers who hunted and moved often to follow the wildlife. They made camp in an area that gave them uneasiness but remained anyway. Each day the brothers would go out to hunt, and each day one less would return. Eventually, the young girl was all alone and desperate, swallowing a large rock to kill herself. Instead, she gave birth to a boy four days later, who grew very quickly and was determined to find his five uncles. He came upon an old woman who requested that he walk on her back. Realizing that she had a sharp spear sticking from her back, he jumped down upon her neck, killing her. The five bundles turned out to be his dead uncles. Following the instruction of the spirits, he built a hut, in which he placed all five bundles. He then heated rocks and poured water over them, creating steam. The uncles were thereby revived.

Thus, the Inipi is a cleansing re-birth and occurs in much the same way as the legend. Small huts house six or seven people, who enter naked with a pipe. Seated on the earth, which is grandmother and giver of all life, a leader places stones in a small pit in a specific manner, representing grandmother earth, the four wind directions, and the sky, which is grandfather spirit. The pipe is then passed around. Water is poured over the hot stones and steam fills the hut. The merging of water and rock to make steam symbolizes the unifying of grandmother earth and grandfather sky. The steam cleanses mind and body and is thus comparable to church. Songs are sung, and there is time for each participant to voice his feelings, his concerns, or his response to the experience.

The Yuwipi ceremony involves stones and lights. It occurs when someone has a problem or when someone or something is missing. It begins with a request, by sending

a pipe to a yuwipi. People gather in a large room; a dog is sacrificed and cooked, and, at the end, everyone is expected to eat of the dog meat. The room is empty, and all windows and doors covered for complete darkness. The floor is covered with sage because it is a healing plant, and a large rectangle of small pouches of tobacco tied to string encircles the room. Participants sit between the string and outer walls of the room. The yuwipi is inside the rectangle, completely rolled up with a blanket. Four colored flags and four colored horse statues are placed to represent the four faces of mankind and the four directions. An additional red and blue stick represents day and night and has an eagle feather on top, symbolizing the power and wisdom of the Great Spirit. The altar is smoothed dirt with a symbol drawn in it by the Yuwipi. The pipe is also prepared, and other food items are around the room for sharing. Sweet grass is burned, filling the air with a wonderful odor, uniting all participants and purifying the entire room. Drums, songs and prayers follow, and spirits come in the form of tiny lights. Once the ceremony has ended, each participant reflects upon his experience, expresses concerns, or asks questions. The Yuwipi responds, and then the pipe is passed. Smoke of the pipe is the link between earth and sky and among men. The dog is eaten, along with other food.

The sun dance is often viewed as barbaric by outsiders and was actually made illegal for a period of fifty years. It is, however, the most significant of all Sioux ceremonies. During this ritual, Indians dance for days, many collapsing due to lack of food and water. Indian men have their chest skin pulled open. It is, however, the oldest and the greatest ceremony, a sacred prayer and sacrifice, and is performed to fulfill requests. Traditionally, the sun dance was held in the spring, and Sioux from all over came together for it. It lasted for twelve days - the first four for preparation and social interaction, four for instruction by the medicine men, and four days for the actual dance. The preparation includes the cutting of a near perfect cottonwood tree, which is then painted and decorated, in request for plentiful food and good hunting throughout the coming year. It is erected as the center of the dance. Lodges are erected for dancers and spectators. The four-day dance is accompanied by drums and song, and the dancers continue from dawn until sunset for the first three days. On the fourth day, the medicine men proceed to a hill to welcome the sun, and then led the elaborately dressed dancers, depositing a partial buffalo skull at the base of the pole, along with a loaded pipe. The tearing of the dancers' flash is the climax of the sun dance. There are four methods used, and all are horribly painful and endured by the help and encouragement of family and friends. The pain, it is believed, allows great insight, as well as the answer to individual prayers and healing.

The ghost dance seems to have its origin in an eclipse of the sun sometime in the 1880's. According to legend, during the eclipse, a Ute Indian fell dead and was taken to the sky by an eagle. When he came back to life, he told of an Indian utopia he had visited, where he had learned songs and dance that would revive dead, return buffalo to the land, and bring about desired weather conditions. Among the messages brought back were the following: Indian tribes must cease warring among themselves, and the dance would eventually cause the earth to roll up, destroying all things of the white man's world. Underneath, they would find a new utopia, and all dead Indians would be alive again. To be a part of this new world, Indians had to be ethical and honest. The

dance and song became known as the "ghost dance," with elaborate body painting. Fearful that this dance would promote Indian uprising, soldiers were sent to disband the gatherings, and among the killed was Sitting Bull, the Sioux holy man. Enthusiasm for the dance waned. Lame Deer believes the message of the dance was misinterpreted, that it should stand for building a new earth at peace, without environmental destruction.

A more controversial ritual is the use of Peyote by Indians who are a part of the Native American Church. Lame Deer was a part of this church for a period of five years but believes that his visions and purpose have moved him beyond the use of peyote. Because peyote is a hallucinogen, visions come easily, and all Indians want visions. The visions are not as "valuable, however, because they do not come from one's own 'juices.'" To Lame Deer, the use of peyote to conjure visions is much like the "instant culture" of the white man. His friend, Leonard Crow Dog, remains a member, however, and explains the "value" of peyote as this: He believes there is power to know God through peyote, because it is a natural herb and therefore sacred. Because it grows only in Texas and is illegal there, Sioux take risk in obtaining it. A peyote "meeting" lasts sundown to sunup and is filled with symbolism as are all Indian ceremonies, with certain objects representing the Great Spirit and nature. One specific symbol, representing four angels, implores man not to hurt trees or other blessings of nature. At the end of the ceremony, participants talk of their experiences and, of course, consume water and food.

The Upside-Down, Forward-Backward, Icy-Hot Contrary

The Upside-Down, Forward-Backward, Icy-Hot Contrary Summary and Analysis

The native American clown is a sacred individual, who is both humorous and powerful. One becomes a heyoka through a vision or dream of lightning and thunderbirds. The result is that the new clown must then do something personally embarrassing and then, as is the tradition, do everything backwards. This behavior can be a source of ridicule; however, the clown is seen as sacred, protecting his people from lightning and bringing laughter to a people who have endured so much loss and tragedy over the years.

According to legend, the thunderbird was once a great giant, who roamed the earth scooping out riverbeds, ruling over the waters, and lacking wings. When they died, they went to the sky and obtained wings. There are four huge thunderbirds who send thunder from their mouths and lightning from their eyes. Thunderbirds are a part of the Great Spirit. Once an Indian has a dream of lightning and thunderbirds, he must complete his embarrassing act. Because he does not wish to be a heyoka in all of his daily life, however, he undergoes a cleansing ceremony, involving the cooking of dog meat which he then takes from the boiling pot and distributes to the poor and sick. Clowns seem to be holy in most Indian cultures. "He makes no promises. He has the power. He has the honor. He has the shame. He pays for all of it" (p. 235).

Blood Turned Into Stone

Blood Turned Into Stone Summary and Analysis

The most important legend relates to the origin of the Sioux nation itself. A great flood raged over the plains, killing everyone. The bones and blood of the dead eventually formed a pool which hardened into red pipestone rock in Minnesota. The rock, to the Sioux, is sacred. An eagle saved one woman from the flood, by taking her to a mountaintop. She gave birth to twins, who became the original Sioux. Pools of blood show up in a number of other Indian legends as well, although many tales are sketchy, having been lost through the generations. In many of these, however, the key appears to be the red pipestone rock from which the Sioux pipe is made.

The pipe itself has great symbolism and is the most important piece of any celebration or ceremony. The stem of the pipe represents the Sioux backbone and the bowl the head. The stone of the bowl represents Sioux blood. The bowl opening represents the mouth and the smoke, breath. To the Sioux, every grain of tobacco represents every living thing on earth. Smoking tobacco connects all of life to the Great Spirit above. The origin of the pipe is found in the early history of the Sioux. One tribe was experiencing terrible hardship unable to find buffalo to hunt. Two scouts met the White Buffalo Woman, who came to the camp and presented the pipe to the Sioux, showing them how to smoke it and explaining its religious significance - the uniting of grandmother earth with grandfather sky and thus all living things as well. The pipe was thus a peacemaker and was presented to the chief. As she walked away, the woman turned into a white buffalo. This original pipe, as well as the first pipe made by the Sioux themselves, has been preserved and passed down through generations of the same family, known as the pipe keepers. Lame Deer traveled to view these pipes and, holding them, felt a great spiritual strength and knew then that the Indian must save the white man from himself. As the white man destroys the earth, year by year, he is also destroying life. "May through this sacred pipe we can teach each other again to see through the cloud..." of modern civilization and technology and "...make peace with our greatest enemy who dwells within ourselves." (p. 255)

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Author Richard Erdoes, who has transcribed the written and recorded interviews with Lame Deer and some of his fellow Sioux, reflects upon his own life. Born in Europe and moved about among relatives, he experienced the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths with all of their ceremonies, rituals and doctrines. Religion clearly confused him, for as he practiced the rituals of one, he offended the others. Likewise, his opinions about countries and their leaders would gain him praise in one school but punishment in the next, because his country of residency had changed. As the Nazis overran Europe, Richard was forced to go underground and, finally, in 1940, to travel to America. There, he was taken in by some Viennese friends and became, eventually, an illustrator in New York City, marrying another artist and fathering three children. Endroes managed to obtain some traveling assignments in the American West, where he encountered completely unspoiled territory and, eventually, the Indians. Striking up a friendship with a number of Sioux, he traveled frequently to their reservations and hosted them in New York. Eventually, Lame Deer invited Endroes to a sun dance, and the friendship between these two was begun. During this time, they agreed to collaborate on a book, as Endroes had been taking notes and taping interviews over a four-year period. The culmination of research was participation in a yuwipi ceremony with a number of other medicine men. Here, Endroes was given an Indian name, "Inyan Wasicun." It is the author's belief that the Indian heritage is rich with faith, with emphasis on the unity of all life on earth, and the salvation of mankind in the complete reverence for the environment.

Characters

John Fire (Lame Deer)

The central figure of the entire work, Lame Deer is an elderly medicine man who has befriended co-author Richard Erdoes. Lame Deer, as a young adolescent, went into a "pit" dug into a hill, where he remained for four days and nights, in order to get the vision necessary to become a medicine man. From that time forward, he was recognized within his tribe as a spiritual leader but certainly had his sojourns into the white man's world. He drank, womanized, stole, and generally "sowed his wild oats" throughout his young adulthood, performing a variety of occupations in order to make money when necessary and retreating from white society whenever feasible. He eventually settled into a traditional Sioux lifestyle, replete with its rituals and ceremonies, presiding over many of them because of his status within the tribe. As a mature Indian, he has three abiding concerns. First, he does not want the traditional symbolism, ceremonies and rituals to be forgotten, because they hold the rich heritage of the Sioux nation and, as well, synthesize into a philosophical and religious view of the world and all things in it, both living and non-living. Second, he feels the imperative mission to reverse the destruction and mutation of the environment, which the white man has forced on all of nature with disastrous consequences. Third, he wishes to remind Americans, indeed, the world, of the injustices heaped upon the Indian by the white man as the white man settled and conquered the American plains.

Richard Erdoes

Richard Erdoes has compiled years of written and recorded interviews with Lame Deer and other prominent tribesmen into a book which puts forth the Indian cause - its heritage, its culture, its philosophy of life, and its reverence for all that has been created by the Great Spirit. Born in Europe, Erdoes moved among many relatives in many countries and was introduced to a variety of cultures and religions. He came to understand that there must be something far greater than denominational and nationalistic pursuits. Leaving Europe to avoid Nazi arrest, he arrived in New York City and became an illustrator. Still, he was restless. Obtaining some traveling assignments, he and his family traveled west to the plains, where he eventually befriended members of the Sioux tribe, most notably Lame Deer. Through the developed friendship, Erdoes participated in several ceremonies and even a "sit-in" at Mount Rushmore and came to understand the Indian perhaps better than any white man before him. He felt the deep need to codify Indian culture into a work that would preserve its deep spiritual heritage and spiritual significance. The product was ultimately this book, considered a definitive work by both anthropologists and historians.

Pete Catches

A fellow Indian and friend to Lame Deer, Pete Catches believes that he, like Lame Deer, lives in a past time, humbly and close to the earth. He lives with his family in a simple log cabin as close to nature as possible. Pete wants to be a healer but for no fee or fame, as Lame Deer is. The older he gets, moreover, the more he wants to retreat from the modern world as completely as possible. In order to feel and absorb the power in nature, Pete believes that significant time for contemplation is essential. White man has no time for this in his hurry-up world. Pete spends much of his time talking to animals and plants, listening for their wisdom and taking their strength within himself.

Godfrey Chips

Grandson of a Wicasa Wakan, Godfrey became a holy medicine man, a Yuwipi to be specific, at the age of thirteen. His power was realized by older Yuwipi. He has become the interpreter of the messages from the spirits as they come through during the Yuwipi ceremonies. When not engaged in Yuwipi ceremonies, he is a normal teenager, playing games and fiddling with machinery. The one difference is that he now refuses to fight, even when provoked. Godfrey's family is related to Chief Crazy Horse, unanimously accepted as great warrior and one who heard the wisdom of spirits.

Ingam Hoksi

Also known as the "stone boy," Ingam was born from his mother swallowing a large stone in an attempted suicide. He grew rapidly and began a search for his five missing uncles, ultimately finding them dead in bundles. He killed the ugly old woman who had killed the uncles, listened to spirits, and brought the uncles back to life by creating a "steam bath." This legend is the beginning of the important cleansing ceremony, called Inipi, which occurs before all other ceremonies take place.

Rabbit Boy

According to Sioux legend, a rabbit came upon a pool of blood and rolled it around, congealing it and, ultimately, making a young boy. The rabbit dressed the boy in elaborate and colorful clothing and sent him into a village. The villagers wanted to marry him to a young virgin because they believed rabbit boy had great powers that would benefit them. Iktome, the spider-man, was jealous, and talked the other young boys into killing rabbit boy, chopping him up into little chunks. A huge storm came and rabbit boy was scooped up, revived, and was taken into the clouds.

Elk Head Family

This family is an ancient, renown one, most prominent because it is the keeper of the first redstone pipe, given to the Sioux by the White Buffalo Woman. This first pipe, along with the first pipe made in the same way by the Sioux, are maintained by this family to this day, and the pipe will continue to be handed down through the generations.

Leonard Crow Dog

Member of the Native American Church, Leonard Crow Dog is also "road man." Because the meetings of this church membership include the use of peyote, Leonard Crow Dog travels to Texas, where illegal peyote is grown, and brings it back to South Dakota for local church meetings.

Karl May

May was originally a pickpocket and scam man in Europe when author Richard Erdoes was growing. May eventually went to prison for his crimes, and, while there, he became fascinated with the American Indian, read all he could in the prison library, and began to create "penny-dreadfuls," the European equivalent of comic books, making quite a good living. Erdoes read many of May's works and developed a strong desire to study Indians first hand when he arrived in the United States.

Crazy Heart

Grandfather of Lame Deer, Crazy Heart was a famous warrior who had participated in the Indian fight with Custer. He was considered wise and fearless. Lame Deer believes inherited his youthful impulsiveness and need to experience everything from Crazy Heart.

Good Fox

Also a great warrior, Good Fox was a survivor of the Wounded Knee massacre and grandfather to Lame Deer. He was well-respected and had the job of supervising tribal ceremonies.

Objects/Places

Peace Pipe

The most important object of ritual for the Sioux nation. It symbolizes man's relationship to the earth and to the spirits.

Mt. Rushmore

A mountain in the Black Hills, taken from the Sioux and on which are carved the faces of four U.S. Presidents.

Red Pipestone Rock

A specific type of rock, found in Minnesota from which the Sioux pipe bowl is made.

Green Frog Skin

Sioux term for white man's money.

Native American Church

Group of American Indians who use peyote as a part of their religious activities.

Wanblee

Tiny Sioux village in S. Dakota.

Uncle Tomahawk

Name given to Indians who capitulate to the white man.

Clicothehil

Prison reformatory in Ohio to which Lame Deer was sent

Pine Ridge

Sioux reservation in S. Dakota.

Hanblechia

Sioux name for a vision quest, the act of going into a pit for four days and nights to obtain a vision from one or more spirits.

Sweat Bath

Cleansing ceremony that occurs before any other ceremony.

Nagi

The soul or essence of all things.

Themes

Reverence for all of Nature

To the Indian, nature is a part of the Great Spirit, which dwells in every living and non-living thing. As such, nature is to be respected, loved, and protected. A rock has value and spirituality; every tree, bush, plant and flower is placed upon the earth for a purpose and is to be used with wisdom and thanksgiving. Animals, too, have purposes and value and are to be used only as necessary. If a buffalo is killed, every part of him must be used, in order to provide the spirit of that buffalo with proper respect and love. The environment is to be protected and preserved. To the Indian, we are all a part of each other and to defile any creation is to dishonor oneself in the process. For this reason, Indians cannot help condemn what white society has wrought since coming to America. It has destroyed entire ecosystems, taken land that truly belongs to all humanity, fencing it in, blocking it off into pieces of individual ownership, and building edifices to glorify itself. To the Indian, the earth is circular as is all life, and it must be open and unencumbered, and left in its natural state. To desecrate nature is to defy the Great Spirit and to destroy man's basic connection to that Great Spirit.

The wholesale Destruction of the American Indian

The American Indian is the one minority group in this country which has not received equal status with all other Americans. As the first resident of this country, the Indian was confronted with an "invasion" of Anglo-Saxon Europeans who brought with them opposing views of the nature of this land and the concept of "progress." The Indian, who desired no more than to continue his traditional lifestyle, religious practices, and relationship with the earth, was sequentially and systematically pushed into smaller and smaller space, making way for the continuing westward expansion and settlement of whites. In this process, the white man defiled sacred Indian land, massacred entire tribes, and, eventually, forced remaining tribes onto reservations where they were to remain. Treaties with the Indian nations were consistently violated, as the white man found important minerals and land for farming and grazing which he wanted. Further, he brought diseases and alcohol to a race which had heretofore been robust. Today, the Indian has two choices. He may adapt to white culture, leaving the reservation and taking upon himself the mores and values of that culture, thus becoming an "apple" (red on the outside, white on the inside), or he may choose to remain on the ever-contracting reservation, receiving inferior education, government surplus foodstuffs, and subject to a host of rules and regulations which constrict his freedom and independence. The Indian is an "endangered" species, just as are many of the animals and plants that formerly existed in health and abundance.

Two-Faced Justice and Discrimination

Lame Deer speaks, in many sections of this work, about the second-class status of the American Indian, both in American society and within the legal system. He points to towns in South Dakota in which both whites and Indians live. In the white sections, roads are paved; schools are modern and well-furnished, and homes are built with substantial materials. Stores and shops are clean, well-stocked, and beautifully maintained, as are the parks and other public facilities. In the Indian sections of these towns, however, roads remain unpaved; homes are mere shacks or rusted trailers; stores offer meager supply options; schools are old and under-staffed, and public places are an eyesore. Within the legal system, there are two levels of justice. For the white man, there is effective legal representation, juries of peers, and moderate imposition of justice. For the Indian who has chosen to live in a town, however, there is inferior legal representation, non-peer juries, and the imposition of much harsher bond requirements, sentences, and parole and probation guidelines. A particularly severe instance of unequal justice was described in detail, in which a white man had killed an unarmed Indian youth and was acquitted with a verdict of "justifiable homicide." In a time when all other minority groups appear to be gaining in the area of equality, the Indian is not. Lame Deer believes that the true goal of the white culture is the ultimate demise of the Indian, and this consequence will allow the white man to relieve himself of any burden to right the centuries of wrongs.

Style

Perspective

Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions, is the story of the American Indian, specifically the Sioux, from a wholly Indian perspective. It is the compilation of all of Lame Deer's memories, his life, the prejudice against and desecration of the native American and his rich heritage, a complete depiction of traditional Indian spiritual beliefs and accompanying ceremonies, legends and rituals, and a condemnation of the white man's mutation and destruction of nature, as well as his ignorance of the dignity of traditional Indian culture. From this perspective, the reader is given a complete picture of the Indian as he was—free to hunt, roam, share, love, and revere his world to the transformation of his life, as the white man moved westward, bringing with him diseases, greed, money, crime, alcohol, and taking the land, by brute force when he desired, condemning the Indian to a life of squalor, alcoholism, poverty, and poor education. Lame Deer makes no excuses for what has been done to his population - all that has happened has been wrought by the white man, and it is clearly and completely unjust, immoral, and, to him, illegal. His premise remains solid throughout. The white man must make changes now. He must cease to destroy the earth; he must return what he has taken from the Indian; he must make reparations for his theft; he must dignify the rich heritage of the Indian by allowing him the rights to practice his traditions and the land on which to do so.

Tone

Upon reflection, the reader will ultimately discern several distinct tones in this work. First, one enjoys the effective and wonderful satire of Lame Deer as he discusses the impact of white civilization on America. He speaks to all that the Indian missed before "civilized" Anglos settled and modernized their existence - tourist traps, paved highways, deforestation, destruction of ecosystems, and new diseases. "Just think what we missed all of those years," he states. As well, the tone, in numerous sections, is combative. Lame Deer is angry over the devastation of the Indian population and the desecration of usurped land, although his anger has been tempered by age and maturity. Still, he believes whites should pay for their behavior in meaningful ways. Land should be returned; Indians should be allowed to return to their traditional ways of life; reparations should be paid. An overall tone of patronization is also evident. Clearly, Lame Deer sees Indian culture and religion to be far superior to that of whites. He speaks to the Indian connection to nature, to his reverence for all things of the earth, and to his sense of simplicity and peace as far superior to the modern civilization the white man has carved out for himself - the stress of work and lifestyle, the need to achieve and be recognized, and the continual competition he must face in a society that rewards material wealth and secular accomplishments. The work is not, however, so much a condemnation of white society as it is a warning that the continuation of current trends will bring destruction to the earth.

Structure

Clear sections are discernible once the reader has completed the work. Prior to this, however, one is reading what appears to be the dis-organized story-telling of Lame Deer. Because author Erdoes has the obvious goal to make this work as authentic as possible, he allows Lame Deer to veer from the topic at hand, recording and transcribing Lame Deer's words just as spoken. Once the reading is completed, however, a structure emerges. The first section is largely biographical, as Lame Deer relates his childhood, adolescence, troubled and at time wild young adulthood, and his gradual awakening to his purpose as a holy medicine man. The next sections relates traditions and beliefs of the Sioux which make up the overall philosophy and culture, a reverence for the earth and everything that dwells on it, living and non-living. The third section describes, in great detail, ceremonies and rituals which continue to be practiced by the Sioux today, recounting the symbolism and importance they play in Sioux life. There is an additional short chapter on the Sioux clown, placed by itself because perhaps there was no other section in which it logically fell. The final chapter is dedicated to the origin, importance and symbolism of the unique Sioux peace pipe, made of red pipestone, found only in Minnesota. This chapter deserves to sit alone, for the pipe symbolizes the complete religion of the Sioux. Erdoes's epilogue gives the reader solid insight into the life of the author and the reasons for his quest to truly know the American Indian.

Quotes

"I made a new proverb; 'Indians chase the vision, white men chase the dollar.' We are lousy raw materials from which to form a capitalist. We could do it easily, but then we would stop being Indians. We would just be ordinary citizens with a slightly darker skin. That's a high price to pay, my friend, too high. We make lousy farmers, too, because deep down within us linger a feeling that land, water, air, the earth and what lies beneath its surface cannot be owned as someone's private property. That belongs to everybody, and if man wants to survive, he had better come around to this Indian point of view, the sooner the better, because there isn't much time left to think it over." (p. 35)

"The Government takes our Indian boys, our uncles, cousins, brothers, sons, all of us, to fight their wars. World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam. As long a the shooting keeps on, we are the heroes, like Ira Hayes, who won the Congressional Medal of Honor at Iwo Jima. When we come back we are once again incompetent wards of the Government and wind up in a ditch, also like Ira Hayes. it wasn't white men who killed Sitting Bull, but Indians, Hunkpapa Sioux like himself, paid off in green frog skins. A white soldier stabbed Crazy Horse with his bayonet, but it was Indian police who kept him arms pinned to his sides so that the white trooper could use him for bayonet practice. You always find some hungry Indians to do your fighting." (p. 57-58)

"The Lament of the Sioux Reservations Indian: They took the whole Sioux Nation, And put it on this reservation. They took away our way of life, the tomahawk, the bow and knife. They put our papoose in a crib, and took the buckskin from our rib. They took away our native tongue, and talk their English to our young. The old teepee we all love so, they're using now for just a show. And all our beads we made by hand, and nowadays are made in Japan. Altho they've changed our ways of old, they'll never change our hearts and souls. Though I wear a man's shirt and tie, I'm still a red man deep inside." (pp. 58-59)

"Before our white brothers came to civilize us we had no jails. Therefore we had no criminals. You can't have criminals without a jail. We had no locks or keys, and so we had no thieves. If a man was so poor that he had no horse, tipi, or blanket, someone gave him these things. We were too uncivilized to set much value on personal belongings. We wanted to have things only in order to give them away. We had not money, and therefore a man's worth couldn't be measured by it. We had no written law, no attorneys or politicians, therefore we couldn't cheat. We really were in a bad way before the white man came, and I don't know how we managed to get along without the basic things which, we are told, are absolutely necessary to make a civilized society." (pp. 63-64)

"So here is the question: Why do Indians drink? They drink to forget I think, to forget the great days when this land was ours and when it was beautiful, without highways, billboards, fences and factories. They try to forget the pitiful shacks and rusting trailers which are their 'homes.' They try to forget that they are treated like children, not like grown-up people. In those new O.E.O. houses - instant slums I call them, because they

fall apart even before they are finished - you can't have a visitor after ten o'clock, or have a relative saying overnight. We are even told what color we must paint them and what kind of curtains we must put up. Nor are we allowed to have our own money to spend as we see fit. So we drink because we are minors, not men. We try to forget that even our fenced-in reservations no longer belong to us. We have to lease them to white ranchers who fatten their cattle, and themselves, on our land. At Pine Ridge less than one per cent of the land is worked by Indians." (p. 66)

"Once a man had been honored for being a good hunter and provider, but there was nothing left for us to hunt anymore. Bringing home the scanty Government rations, food that we didn't like, that was not natural for us, that we never got used to, didn't bring us honor. We had been warriors once, admired for our bravery. Now we were nothing. In the past a man might have been born a cripple, unable to do the things which brought honor and admiration, but if he was clear-minded and thoughtful he would still be respected for his wisdom alone. but now our wisdom was measured against the white man's cleverness and we were told, over and over again, that we were stupid, uneducated, good for nothing." (p. 78)

"Don't get me wrong - we hold no grudge against Lincoln, Jefferson or Washington. They signed a few good treaties with us and it wasn't their fault that they weren't kept. What we object to is the white man's arrogance and self-love, his disregard for nature which makes him desecrate one of our holy mountains with these oversized pale faces. It's symbolic, too, that this 'Shrine of Democracy,' these four faces, are up to their chins in one tremendous pile or rubble, a million tons of jagged, blasted, dynamited stone reaching all the way down to the visitors' center. If you look up the mountain, the way most tourists do, you see these four heads rising out of something like a gigantic, abandoned mine dump. But nobody seems to notice that." (p. 81)

"That really got me thinking. What does this Mount Rushmore mean to us Indians? It means that these big white faces are telling us, 'First we gave you Indians a treaty that you could keep these Black Hills forever, as Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. Then we found the gold and took this last piece of land, because we were stronger, and there were more of us than there were of you, and because we had cannons and Gatling guns, while you hadn't even progressed far enough to make a steel knife. And when you didn't want to leave, we wiped you out, and those of you who survived we put on reservations. And then we took the gold out, a billion bucks, and we aren't through yet. And because we like the tourist dollars, too, we have made your sacred Black Hills into one vast Disneyland. And after we did all this we carved up this mountain, the dwelling place of your spirits, and put our four gleaming white faces here. We are the conquerors.'" (p. 82)

"You have made it hard for us to experience nature in the good way by being part of it. Even here we are conscious that somewhere out in those hills there are missile silos and radar stations. White men always pick the few unspoiled, beautiful, awesome spots for the sites of these abominations. You have raped and violated these lands, always saying, 'Gimme, gimme, gimme,' and never giving anything back. You have taken two hundred thousand acres of our Pine Ridge reservation and made them into a bombing

range. This land is so beautiful and strange that now some of you want to make it into a national park. The only use you have made of this land since you took it from us was to blow it up. You have not only despoiled the earth, the rocks, the minerals, all of which you call "dead" but which are very much alive; you have even changed the animals, which are part of us, part of the Great Spirit, changed them in a horrible way, so no one can recognize them. There is power in a buffalo - spiritual, magic power - but there is no power in an Angus, in a Hereford." (p. 109)

"At the same time, I want to withdraw further and further away from everything, to live like the ancient ones. On the highway you sometimes see a full-blood Indian thumbing a ride. I never do that. When I walk the road, I expect to walk the whole way. That is deep down in me, a kind of pride. Someday I'll still move my cabin farther into the hills, maybe do without a cabin altogether, become part of the woods. There the spirit still has something for us to discover - a herb, a spring, a flowers - a very small flower, maybe and you can spend a long time in its contemplation, thinking about it. Not a rose - yellow, white, artificial, big. I hear they are breeding black roses. That's not natural. These things are against nature. They make us weak. I abhor them." (p. 127)

"What do I think about birth control? I have thought about it and gone to a lot of people. I asked about ten of my best friends personally and nine of them said, 'No good.' And one says birth control is good, but he's a wino, an alcoholic. You see, the population explosion doesn't worry us much. All these long years, when the only Good Indian was a dead Indian, the bodies at Wounded Knee, the Sand Creek Massacre, the Washita, all this killing of women and children, the measles and small pox wiping out whole tribes - the way I see it, the Indians have already done all the population control one could as of them a hundred times over. Our problem is survival. Overpopulation - that's your worry." (p. 142-143)

"All creatures exist for a purpose. Even an ant knows what that purpose is - not with its brain, but somehow it knows. Only human beings have come to a point where they no longer know why they exist. They don't use their brains and they have forgotten the secret knowledge of their bodies, their senses, or their dreams. They don't use the knowledge the spirit has put into every one of them; they are not even aware of this, and so they stumble along blindly on the road to nowhere - a paved highway which they themselves bulldoze and make smooth so that they can get faster to the big, empty hole which they'll find at the end, waiting to swallow them up. It's a quick, comfortable superhighway, but I know where it leads to. I have seen it. I've been there in my vision and it makes me shudder to think about it." (p. 147)

"'Friend' - white people use this word lightly. Maybe you don't know what real friendship is. The young men who vowed to be a kola to each other would almost become one single person. They shared everything - life and death, pain and joy, the last mouthful of food, even their women. They had to be ready at all times to give their lives for each other. In the same way an older man could adopt a younger one by becoming his hunka. By this the younger man became the son of the older, even if only a few years separated them in age. Men sealed these special friendships with a ceremony." (p. 183)

"As we stand on grandmother earth, raising our sacred pipe in prayer, its stem forms a bridge from earth through man through our own bodies, to the sky, to Wakan Tanka, the grandfather spirit. As the pipe is filled with out sacred red willow bark tobacco, each tiny grain represents one of the living things on this earth. All of the Great Spirit's creations, the whole universe, is in that pipe. All of us is in that pipe at the moment of prayer. Often we are so overwhelmed by this that we cry and burst into tears as we raise the pipe toward the clouds." (p. 239)

Topics for Discussion

The work is filled with Indian legends that have amazing parallels to the Bible. Identify and fully describe three of these legends and compare them to Biblical stories.

What, in your opinion, are the responsibilities of the white man toward the Indian? How can we begin to implement the acceptance of these responsibilities?

In America, there is a high level of significance placed upon education. What ought to occur to improve Indian education?

Traditional Indian medicine relies upon herbs and roots and is steeped in a long history of passing these treatments and cures through generations. What herbs and roots does Lame Deer mention that have become a part of "natural" treatments in white society today?

Identify and fully describe the variety of medicine men within the Sioux nation. Include the specific types of medicine each practices.

Trace the journey of author Richard Erdoes from Europe to his close kinship with the Indian.

Lame Deer gives several warnings to the white man. What are these warnings and what does he see as the potential result of the failure to heed these warnings?