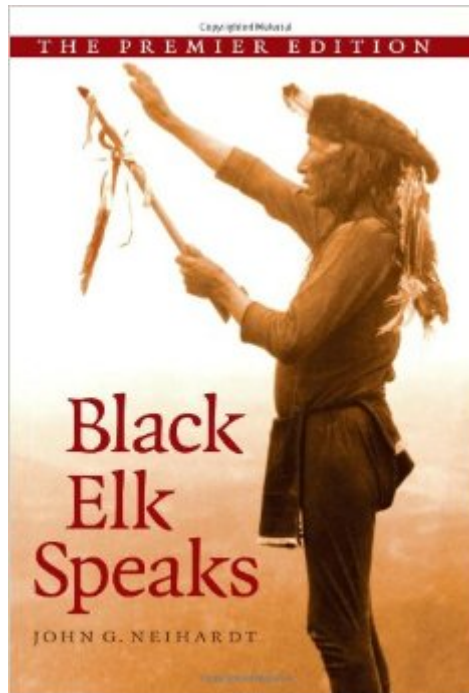


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# Black Elk Speaks: Being The Life Story Of A Holy Man Of The Oglala Sioux, The Premier Edition



## Synopsis

The famous life story of the Lakota healer and visionary, Nicholas Black Elk. Widely hailed as a spiritual classic, this inspirational and unfailingly powerful story reveals the life and visions of the Lakota healer Nicholas Black Elk (1863–1950) and the tragic history of his Sioux people during the epic closing decades of the Old West. In 1930, the aging Black Elk met a kindred spirit, the famed poet, writer, and critic John G. Neihardt (1881–1973) on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The Lakota elder chose Neihardt to share his visions and life with the world. Neihardt understood and today Black Elk is known to all. Black Elk's remarkable great vision came to him during a time of decimation and loss, when outsiders were stealing the Lakota's land, slaughtering buffalo, and threatening their age-old way of life. As Black Elk remembers all too well, the Lakotas, led by such legendary men as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull, fought unceasingly for their freedom, winning a world-renowned victory at the Little Bighorn and suffering unspeakable losses at Wounded Knee. *Black Elk Speaks* however is more than the epic history of a valiant Native nation. It is beloved as a spiritual classic because of John Neihardt's sensitivity to Black Elk's resounding vision of the wholeness of earth, her creatures, and all of humanity. *Black Elk Speaks* is a once-in-a-lifetime read: the moving story of a young Lakota boy before the reservation years, the unforgettable history of an American Indian nation, and an enduring spiritual message for us all. The premier edition features the first-ever annotated edition of Black Elk's story, done by renowned Lakota scholar Raymond J. DeMallie, the original Standing Bear illustrations and new commentary on them, new maps of the world of *Black Elk Speaks*, and a revised index. *Black Elk Speaks* is a must read book for anyone interested in the history of the Western Plains. It brings out both the romantic mythology of the West pictured today and the darker reality of the past. "Midwest Book Review" *Black Elk Speaks* is a classic | The Premier Edition is indispensable. Raymond J. DeMallie enriches the original text while respectfully and sincerely acknowledging and appreciating the original and Neihardt's creativity, adding to the continuing legacy of Black Elk. "Canadian Journal of Native Studies" This is the first edition of *Black Elk Speaks* that includes annotations by a scholar of Lakota history | [and] extends Neihardt's work to a wider audience and honors Black Elk's vision of the interconnection of human beings with all living creatures and the earth in a way that speaks to contemporary environmental issues. "American Indian Quarterly" the compelling story of a cross-cultural collaboration that continues to engage scholars and lay readers alike. "CHOICE" If this title is not yet in your home or school library | take note of the surprisingly low price and the high quality of what SUNY Press calls the Premier Edition of this great work. "Light of Consciousness" If any great religious classic has

emerged in this century or on this continent, it must certainly be judged in the company of Black Elk Speaks. [T]he book has become a North American bible of all tribes; it speaks to us with simple and compelling language about an aspect of human experience and encourages us to emphasize the best that dwells within us. — Vine Deloria Jr.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I didn't read this edition; a little paperback version came to me. I read it long ago and read it again recently. This book had an incredible impact on me. Over the years people have come to criticize the author, John Neidhardt. The book ends somewhat abruptly not long after Wounded Knee and then there is an account of Black Elk's prayer on Harney Peak when he was an old man and he asked to make his people live again kind of tacked on the end. Many seem to feel Neidhardt was exploiting Black Elk to get a book out of him. I don't claim to be an expert on Black Elk and this subject, but from what I know I do not agree with the totally cynical assessment. Black Elk had been off the reservation in the Buffalo Bill Show and given his experiences he was hardly naive or ignorant. Black Elk's son Ben had been in the Carlyle school so he would have known if the book did not reflect his father's vision and words and life. The book was also not an instant bestseller. Neidhardt promoted this book and Black Elk's vision tirelessly until the end of his life and I truly believe it was because he saw the incredible spiritual nature of Black Elk, his life, and visions. And his "great vision" as a youngster can only be described as cataclysmic and psychedelic. When the spirits want you to see something you will see it and no drugs are necessary. Neidhardt left out the

ensuing years on Pine Ridge Reservation and Black Elk's acceptance of Catholicism to frame a lost way of life, the sadness and injustice of it, and the greatness and seeming inevitability of Black Elk's vision. I believe any poetic license taken was in service of bringing forth a greater truth. The book was not meant to be a biography or history of the Lakota, but to preserve Black Elk's vision and so the purpose of the book was accomplished.

I was a student at the time when various fields (Native American studies, Women studies, Afro-American studies, etc.) were just being established, and although I took a minor in anthropology, I never got into the topics underwritten by these new departments. Since I also worked in the book store, I was aware that two of the key texts for Native American studies were *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and *Black Elk Speaks*. Sad to say, but it took me nearly 30 years before I read either book. The former book was written by a sympathetic outsider who painted the American Indian as a helpless victim of European greed--which for the most part he was/is. The latter was dictated to an interested party, John G. Neihardt, and is the words and reminiscences of Nicholas Black Elk, who witnessed as a child or participated in as an adult, some of the major events of the American Indian Wars that were the outcome of the US expansion into the West. For those of us reared on John Ford westerns, manifest destiny and pioneering had a patriotic ring, as well they might most of them having been made in the years immediately following WWII. In the social souring of the sixties and seventies that brought so many discontented groups vocally into the foreground, it became more obvious that the expression of manifest destiny by our European forebearers spelled manifest disaster for the Native American populations across the country. An outgrowth of the discontent of the "younger generation" was the establishment of the afore said departments. That of American Indian studies introduced us to the more honest, or at least more balanced, story of the indigenous people of the country. *Black Elk Speaks* is a superb eye witness account of the Sioux experience with European expansion into the Dakotas.

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