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Winter 2002

Review of *Greengrass Pipe Dancers* By Lionel Little Eagle

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Danker, Kathleen, "Review of *Greengrass Pipe Dancers* By Lionel Little Eagle" (2002). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2331.

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Greengrass Pipe Dancers. By Lionel Little Eagle. Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 2000. Illustrations. 255 pp. \$14.95 paper.

Greengrass Pipe Dancers is an account of Little Eagle's trips in 1988 and 1990 to Lakota communities in South Dakota, notably Greengrass on the Cheyenne River Reservation, on a quest for counsel about an old Oglala pipe bag that had come into his possession, for physical healing for his sick wife, and for his own emotional and spiritual healing following her death. During these brief visits, the author, who claims European and Micmac ancestry, meets several well-known Lakota religious leaders and elders; attends ceremonies including pipe ceremonies, inipis, a yuwipi, and a sun dance; and experiences visions.

Little Eagle states in his introduction that he writes with "absolutely no authority" about the Lakota traditions he describes and that although *Greengrass Pipe Dancers* is "true" he does "not claim that it is completely factual." Readers would be well advised to keep both of these points in mind in accessing the portrait

of Lakota life and spirituality shown in the book and the claim on the back cover that "Crazy Horse's pipe bag is the inspiration for this true story." The author presents no substantial evidence to support the supposition that his pipe bag once belonged to Crazy Horse.

More disturbing is Little Eagle's attribution of long quotations to Lakota spiritual leaders and elders based on memories of his visits and only occasionally backed up with notes taken at the time. He states repeatedly that he humbly respects these people, but is it humble or respectful to put words into their mouths for which they may be held responsible by unwary readers? Of his reconstructed quotations, the author writes that "Good stories are like good recipes: sometimes you will add a few more grains of sugar, or substitute 2% milk for whole milk, or leave out a part all together. The bottom line is what comes out and how it tastes."

I question both the accuracy of the conversations Little Eagle records and how closely his curiously new-age visions of his wife, Crazy Horse, and other figures resemble traditional Lakota spiritual experience. By his own account, Little Eagle's views have been influenced by the Baha'i convictions of his late father-in-law Vinson Brown, who founded Naturegraph Publishers and published such works as *Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian Peoples* (1962). Readers would do better, I think, to learn about Lakota spirituality from Lakotas who themselves have had long experience with their traditions. More authoritative works include *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* by Severt Young Bear and R. D. Theisz (1994) and Ronald Goodman's *Lakota Star Knowledge: Studies in Lakota Stellar Theology* (1992).

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