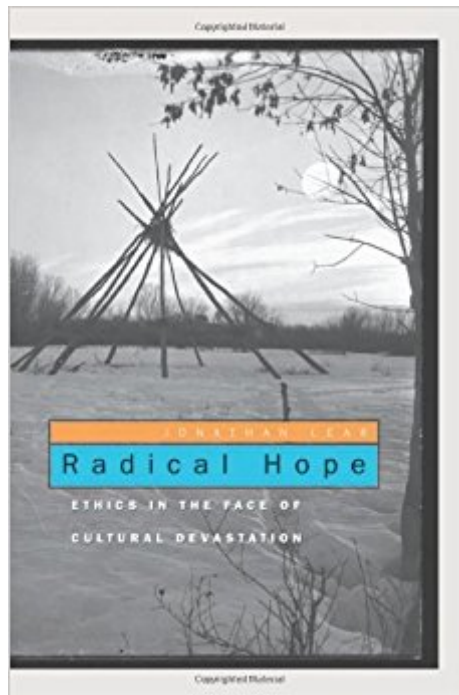




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Radical Hope: Ethics In The Face Of Cultural Devastation



Synopsis

Shortly before he died, Plenty Coups, the last great Chief of the Crow Nation, told his story—up to a certain point. “When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground,” he said, “and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. It is precisely this point—that of a people faced with the end of their way of life—that prompts the philosophical and ethical inquiry pursued in *Radical Hope*. In Jonathan Lear’s view, Plenty Coups’s story raises a profound ethical question that transcends his time and challenges us all: how should one face the possibility that one’s culture might collapse? This is a vulnerability that affects us all insofar as we are all inhabitants of a civilization, and civilizations are themselves vulnerable to historical forces. How should we live with this vulnerability? Can we make any sense of facing up to such a challenge courageously? Using the available anthropology and history of the Indian tribes during their confinement to reservations, and drawing on philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, Lear explores the story of the Crow Nation at an impasse as it bears upon these questions—and these questions as they bear upon our own place in the world. His book is a deeply revealing, and deeply moving, philosophical inquiry into a peculiar vulnerability that goes to the heart of the human condition.

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Customer Reviews

Scholar and author Lear (*Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony*) decodes the courage and

wisdom of the last great chief of the Crow peoples, Plenty Coups (1848-1932), in this "philosophical anthropology" which seeks to pin down the way societies-and the individuals who lead them-carry on in the face of "cultural catastrophe." As a jumping-off point, Lear uses a quote from Plenty Coups's oral history, given to Frank B. Linderman shortly before the chief's death: "But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground... After this nothing happened." The first part of the book explores the meaning of "nothing happened," explicating the idea that history itself comes to an end when the concepts a culture uses to define its world-in this case, concepts tied to hunting, battle, and honor-become obsolete. The second part tackles "Ethics at the Horizon," the possibilities for "radical hope" in the face of inconceivable cultural change through courage, wisdom and flexibility, on both a personal and cultural level. The third part discusses the ramifications of "radical hope," both practically and philosophically. Lear's study is probably too rigorous rhetorically to appeal to a wide audience, and his insistence that "we live at a time of a heightened sense that civilizations are themselves vulnerable" could have been supported with some explicit contemporary parallels, but for those interested in the final years of the Crow nation or the ethical challenges faced by victims of cultural destruction, this book will prove enlightening. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

Lear, a psychoanalyst and professor of philosophy, delves into what he calls the "blind spot" of any culture: the inability to conceive of its own devastation. He molds his thoughts around a poignant historical model, the decimated nation of Crow Indians in the early decades of the twentieth century. The last Crow chief, Plenty Coups, told his white friend and biographer, Frank B. Linderman, about what happened to his people "when the buffalo went away." They were despondent, and in Plenty Coups' words, "After this nothing happened." Lear dissects this phenomenon, and the Crows' struggle for continued survival, in a highly esoteric discussion drawing on the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and other philosophers. What makes this discussion relevant to mainstream readers is his application of the blind-spot hypothesis to the present, in which the twenty-first century was ushered in by terrorist attacks, social upheavals, and natural catastrophes, leaving us with "an uncanny sense of menace" and a heightened perception of how vulnerable our civilizations are to destruction, as was the Crow's. Deborah Donovan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

It was challenging to read and understand

Excellent journey of the Crow Nation after the forced move to a reservation-----in regards to ethics to use in our own lives! A great read for those interested in Ethics and in the History of the Crow Nation! Br. Jack Isbell, OFC

I've ordered this book several times as gifts because it is an incredible read, so well written and very authentic legacy of Chief Plenty Coups - the last great Crow Chief who dreamed of a chickadee when he was a young boy and the bird told him what the days to come would be like for Crow Nation people.

Radical hope explores the question of how cultures, in this study the Crow Tribe, respond to the one situation that cultures are incapable of imagining, the demise of the core culture. The Crow were dependent of buffalo hunting and personal warriorship against their rivals the Sioux (Lakota) and Cheyenne. With the near extinction of the buffalo and the collapse of traditional life on the plains, Crow culture evolved to total irrelevancy overnight. This book focuses on the life of the last great Crow Chief Plenty Coups, who said that after the demise of the buffalo "nothing happened". This is the void that engulfed Crow culture in the last decades of the 19th century. Radical Hope is a detailed exploration of the ultimate chaos that can afflict cultures when they quickly collapse from external pressures. This book shows how insight and the use of traditional problem solving provided Crow leadership with a pathway to re-establishing themselves in this most challenging of circumstances. This book is highly recommended to those people fascinated with how culture institutions respond to crippling challenges and how hope can emerge in the bleakest of circumstances.

a book for our time

This book is a psychoanalyst's philosophical meditations on the words and experience of the last great chief of the Crow, Plenty Coups, a man who witnessed the complete erasure of the culture that formed him, and whose virtues he exemplified. The book is not completely satisfying. It seems unnecessarily repetitious and wordy at times. It seems to promise a tale of psychological and moral triumph, but to fulfill that promise ambiguously. Nevertheless, it provides a penetrating analysis of what one might call paradigm collapse and the suffering of the individuals who experience it. Courage is the core virtue necessary to one's survival of such damage, but, as Charles Taylor,

writing in The New York Review of Books, explains more lucidly than I can, this is a special kind of courage, the courage to hope for a future good that cannot yet be conceived. As our society, and indeed societies around the globe, are facing partial or complete collapses of the assumptions that frame the experiences of their members, these ideas will have an immediate personal significance to the reader who understands that the rules of the game are changing, and that he must change too, or perish.

This is a fine book about the dependence of subjectivity and ethical existence on culture, and their possible transcendence of a ruined culture. It is more philosophy than Indian history, but there is a good deal of the latter too. My only quibble: Lear's high-mindedness can occasionally grate.

The cultural devastation experience by the Crow First Nation echoes the cultural devastation experience by middle class and poor people around the world. Great learnings for the anxious citizens of the 21st century.

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