

THE SOUTH AND WEST TRANSFORMED

Link to Literature

Black Elk was Lakota Sioux and an eyewitness to the United States-Sioux war. His firsthand account of his life, religion, and the traditions of his people was dictated to the poet John Neihardt and published in 1932. Called *Black Elk Speaks*, the book has become a classic. ♦ *Read the following account by Black Elk. Then answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.*

Black Elk Speaks

I can remember that Winter of the Hundred Slain [the battle with Fetterman and his troops] as a man may remember some bad dream he dreamed when he was little. . . .

When I was older, I learned what the fighting was about that winter and the next summer. Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus [white people] had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road up through our country to the place where the yellow metal was; but my people did not want the road. It would scare the bison and make them go away, and also it would let the other Wasichus come in like a river. They told us that they wanted only to use a little land, as much as a wagon would take between the wheels; but our people knew better. And when you look about you now, you can see what it was they wanted.

Once we were happy in our own country, and we were seldom hungry, for then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives, and there was plenty for them and for us.

But the Wasichus came, and they have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds, and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichu; and it is dirty with lies and greed. . . .

And so when the soldiers came and built themselves a town of logs there on the Piney Fork of the Powder [River], my people knew they meant to have their road and take our country and maybe kill us all when they were strong enough. Crazy Horse was only about 19 years old then, and Red Cloud was still our great chief. In the Moon of the Changing Season (October) he called together all the scattered bands of the Lakota for a big council on the Powder River, and when we went on the warpath against the soldiers, a horseback could ride through our villages from sunrise until the day was above his head, so far did our camp stretch along the valley of the river; for many of our friends, the Shyela and the Blue Clouds, had come to help us fight. . . .

Questions to Think About

1. Why didn't Black Elk's people want a road through their land?
2. **Identify Alternatives** Based on Black Elk's comments, identify basic assumptions that the Sioux and white people held about each other.
3. **Link Past and Present** In what ways might Black Elk's book about his life affect people's views about current U.S. policy toward American Indians?