

Waterlily: Ella Cara Deloria's Enduring Legacy as a Dakota Writer, Scholar, and Activist



Ella Cara Deloria, also known as Waterlily, was a prolific Dakota writer, scholar, and activist who dedicated her life to preserving and sharing her people's culture and history. Born in 1889 on the Yankton Sioux

Reservation in South Dakota, Deloria faced numerous challenges as a member of an oppressed minority group. However, through her indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment to her community, she emerged as an influential voice for Native American rights and cultural preservation.



Waterlily by Ella Cara Deloria

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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- Text-to-Speech : Enabled
- Screen Reader : Supported
- Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
- Word Wise : Enabled
- Print length : 300 pages
- Lending : Enabled



Early Life and Education

Deloria was born into a prominent Yanktonai Dakota family. Her father, Philip J. Deloria, was a respected chief and medicine man, while her mother, Mary Sully, was a skilled craftswoman. As a young girl, Deloria was immersed in Dakota tradition and spirituality. She learned the language, customs, and stories of her people, which would later form the foundation of her literary and scholarly work.

In 1907, Deloria enrolled at Oberlin College in Ohio, where she studied English and sociology. While at Oberlin, she faced prejudice and discrimination due to her Native heritage, but she remained steadfast in her pursuit of higher education. In 1918, she graduated as the only Native American woman to have earned a college degree at the time.

Literary Career

After graduating from Oberlin, Deloria returned to the Yankton Sioux Reservation and began her writing career. Her first novel, "Waterlily," was published in 1924. Inspired by her own experiences growing up as a Dakota woman, "Waterlily" tells the story of a young woman's journey of self-discovery and cultural awakening. The novel was critically acclaimed and became a classic work of Native American literature.

Deloria's subsequent novels, "The Sun Journey" (1932) and "Bright Eagle" (1936), further explored themes of cultural identity and the challenges faced by Native Americans in the 20th century. She also wrote numerous short stories, essays, and translations that celebrated Dakota culture and traditions.

Scholarly Work

In addition to her literary endeavors, Deloria was also a respected scholar and ethnographer. In 1932, she co-authored the groundbreaking study "Dakota Texts," which documented the Dakota language and oral traditions. She also worked with linguist Franz Boas on the ambitious "Handbook of American Indian Languages," providing invaluable insights into Dakota linguistics and culture.

Deloria's scholarly work earned her recognition and respect within both Native and non-Native academic circles. She became the first Native American woman to publish a scholarly monograph and the first to receive a doctorate degree in anthropology.

Activism and Cultural Preservation

Throughout her life, Deloria was a tireless advocate for Native American rights and cultural preservation. She worked with the Native American Rights Fund and the American Indian Defense Association to fight for the legal rights of Native Americans. She also founded the Ohiya Casino in South Dakota, which provided economic opportunities for her community while showcasing Dakota culture and traditions.

Deloria's activism extended beyond the borders of the United States. She traveled to Canada and Europe to raise awareness about Native American issues and promote cultural understanding. She was instrumental in establishing the American Indian Museum in Washington, D.C., and served on the board of directors for many years.

Legacy and Impact

Ella Cara Deloria's legacy continues to inspire and empower Native American communities today. She is remembered as a pioneering writer, scholar, and activist who dedicated her life to preserving and sharing her people's culture and history. Her work has helped to break down stereotypes and misconceptions about Native Americans and has fostered a greater understanding and appreciation of their rich heritage.

Through her novels and scholarly writings, Deloria has documented the experiences of her people during a critical period of American history. She has given a voice to the Dakota people and has ensured that their story will be heard for generations to come.

As a fearless advocate for Native American rights and cultural preservation, Deloria has paved the way for countless other Native American activists and leaders. Her unwavering commitment to her community and her refusal

to be silenced have inspired and empowered Native Americans to fight for their rights and to celebrate their unique cultures and traditions.

Ella Cara Deloria, *Waterlily*, was a remarkable woman who defied the odds and made an enduring impact on the world. As a writer, scholar, and activist, she dedicated her life to preserving and sharing her people's culture and history. Her work has inspired and empowered Native American communities, has fostered a greater understanding of their rich heritage, and has made a lasting contribution to American literature and scholarship. *Waterlily*'s legacy will continue to inspire and empower future generations as a testament to the indomitable spirit and unwavering commitment of the Dakota people.



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