

**Dancing the Dream: The Seven Sacred Paths of Human Transformation.** By Jamie Sams. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. 274 pages. \$22.00 cloth; \$13.00 paper.

Jamie Sams' *Dancing the Dream* is better reserved for those studying the New Age ethic rather than American Indian ideology. "Widely recognized as one of the foremost teachers of Native American Wisdom," the book purports, "Jamie Sams reveals the seven sacred paths of human spiritual development" (back cover). However, Sams writes that, "The map of consciousness this book presents is a Western, indigenous model that includes the right of each person to incorporate the disciplines that fit his or her individual needs" (p. 193).

Three authors endorse the book, none of whom are of Native American descent. The fact that the material is presented by a self-identified descendent of Seneca and Cherokee ancestry only complicates the book's intention and may entice some readers to question the authenticity of the information presented in the text. *Dancing the Dream* provides a hodgepodge of teachings undermining unique American Indian cultural practices by conjoining the information under the generic term *Native American*.

Sams' teachings, by all indications, took place largely when she was in her twenties. Her education comes from all over North and Central America, and includes Joaquin Muriel Espinosa, who "was ... authentic [*sic*] ... from the Toltec and Yaqui Dreamer lineage and was of Mayan, Aztec, and Yaqui blood" (p. 134).

The challenge to dissolve inaccurate representations of unique American Indian cultures is overshadowed by literary pieces such as this that generalize "teachings" from Native American spiritual concepts. The absorption of such material by the dominant population misinforms otherwise naive minds interested in American Indian cultures and beliefs. Ironically, Sams states that, "My teachers stressed that if you are only guessing or using another person's hearsay as your source, misinformation can create harm" (p. 205).

In the Author's Note, Sams writes, "I have not divulged the details of any ceremonies," and she is true to her word (p. xi). *Dancing the Dream* does not provide the reader with any information about ceremonies or anything else that may be applied to an initiation process, with the exception of "highly recommending" the Pilates method, tai chi, walking, and stretching exercises to remain grounded while on the sixth path of initiation (p. 212). However, she does not miss the opportunity to provide detailed information about the "three divination systems [used] to teach people on the healing path ... giving a blueprint of how to learn to trust the human transformation process a step at a time" (p. 119). A guide to such information, developed by Sams herself, is available at your favorite bookstore.

While the author occasionally draws on her Seneca and Cherokee heritage, she cites either Mayan or Southern Seer Dream Society teachings more often. She profusely makes reference to "Native American wisdom" without providing a reference to the specific tradition's cultural roots. This general classification disregards cultural differences among the more than five hundred distinguished traditions and heritages of Native America. Examples include an explanation of what frog medicine means "in our Native American

traditions" (p. 93); a description of what "our adept Native American Seers and Dreamers" have done (p. 184); and several accounts of her "Medicine Dreams" (pp. 190, 237, 245).

There are an abundance of token expressions and references to Native American wisdom in Sams' book, including the following: (1) "In Native American traditions, we refer to this principle [the golden rule of major religions] as 'walking a mile in another's moccasins'" (p. 147); (2) "and we are asked to make healthy boundaries so that we attain balance in giving and receiving, rest and activity. This gift of balance is found in ... Otter Medicine ... and is also provided by the trees, the Standing People." (p. 115); and (3) "[t]he common symbol accompanying such visions and dreams for centuries was a whirling rainbow. The Whirling Rainbow was originally encountered by secret societies of Native American Seers and Dreamers" (p. 191).

Sams, "Resident Trickster," also weaves references to "Coyote Medicine" into the book, stating, "I don't need to explain the crazy antics of my shock and flow dance to anyone" (pp. xii, 250). Some of the personal experiences she retells are grossly inappropriate and actually debunk the role Coyote plays in many American Indian stories and traditions. For example, Sams first relates a Coyote lesson she learned when she was twenty-four and then explains that "Nearly twenty years later, when I was teaching a workshop ... I told them I was going to reveal a very sacred form of Native American wisdom found in Moon Medicine.... The coyote in me whipped around and dropped her drawers, and I mooned everyone" (p. 136).

Although Sams bases the seven sacred paths loosely on the Medicine Wheel—"a Native American symbol of the life cycles"—only the chapter subtitles and introductory paragraphs include any material relevant to Native American spiritual worldview (p. 46). Are Sams' liberal references to "the Great Mystery" a "coyote sidetrack" so that the reader does not notice that the predominant material in *Dancing the Dream* centers around the teachings of more universal spiritual practices, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and an occasional splash of Catholicism?

*Dancing the Dream* is written in first-person plural, intimating secretiveness and exclusiveness. While Sams chooses to use the "we" format to include the reader, the material is definitely about her and her model of human transformation. She liberally uses various forms of the word *authentic* and readily emphasizes her teaching abilities to justify her book's flawlessness. For example, she shares her fifth- and sixth-path experiences, stating, "Unfortunately, in the past, most people in this situation did not have access to sixth- and seventh-path teachers. I was very lucky in that regard. Today there are many fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-path teachers in the world.... Further illumination can also be received through books like this one" (p. 192-193).

In nearly every chapter Sams refers to the importance of being equitable and unbiased, yet the experiences she relates have a ring of spiritual arrogance. "It is an invasion of the Sacred Spaces of others to blurt out information or advice that was not solicited...." Sams contends. "I have personally stuck both feet in my mouth when nobody had asked me for my opinion or spiritual advice. People who were smug about what they thought they knew

resented the input. Others, who held hard to their limiting judgements, verbally attacked me” (p. 133). Later in the book Sams writes, “Another example of spiritual arrogance is the condescending behavior in the one who believes that he or she is ‘the enlightened one.’ We see this behavior again in the overt or covert competitive comments of people who...must falsely reinforce their authority by demeaning the beliefs or actions of others” (p. 173). Clearly, Sams does not see this behavior in herself.

Finally, *Dancing the Dream* is riddled with contradictions. Throughout the book Sams reiterates that there is no shame or blame in choosing to not walk any or all of these paths. Later, however, she makes condescending comments about others who are not on the same level as she: “Can we honor the spirit housed in the body of a hopeless wino lying in the gutter as equal to our own?” (p. 251)

Lest the verdict need reiteration, *Dancing the Dream* does nothing to further the advancement of accurate portrayals of Indian peoples.

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**The Great Peace: The Gathering of Good Minds (CD-ROM).** By Raymond Skye et al. Brantford, Ontario: Working World Training Center, Incorporated, 1999 (<http://www.greatpeace.org>). \$199 individual; \$395 organization.

I have been working in academia long enough to know that a special schizophrenia operates in ethnohistory. On one hand, Euramerican scholars just adore Native Americans. On the other hand, ethnohistorians’ cuddly fuzzies last precisely as long as Natives themselves remain peripheral, banished, exotic, and silent. Let a living Native step forward to speak and the ethnohistorian’s supposed adoration suddenly curdles, replaced by thunderous allegations of falling standards that hit the podium like the driven rain.

This wearisome routine reflects a continuing and utterly colonial struggle over who shall be empowered to tell whose stories. To date, it has largely been Euramericans who write the “definitive” works on Native America. These works provide stunningly little reference to the traditions, let alone the perspectives, of those they purport to describe. The contents of their books are rigorously Euro-formed, and are seldom if ever sent to their Native subjects for “peer” review.

Thus, many former “informants” simply stopped talking to Western scholars altogether—except to talk back, and take back, the telling of their own traditions. At the same time, college graduation no longer automatically confers on Native scholars the degrees of separation from their own people that the old civilizers had in mind. Instead, Native scholars often work hand-in-hand with oral traditionalists for the good of the community, and openly heed the guidance of dreams and visions.

It was in this new, self-determined mode of telling history that *The Great Peace: The Gathering of Good Minds* came into being. An interactive CD-ROM,