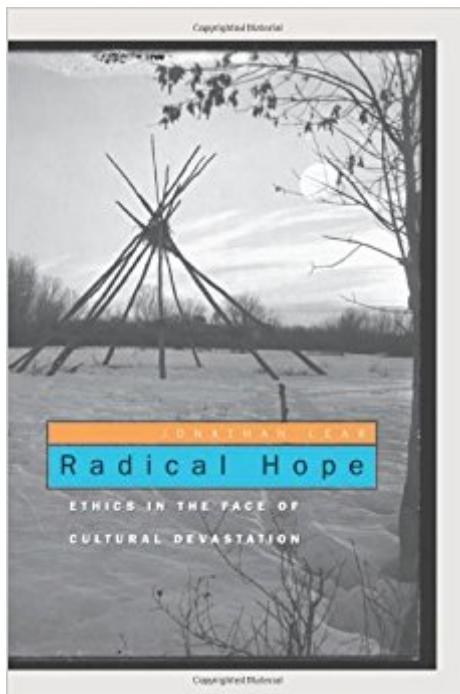


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# Radical Hope: Ethics In The Face Of Cultural Devastation



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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.

In a time when any and everything can be pulled out from under one due to devastating political and cultural de-evolution, a growing and decadent mass media driven delusion and the bulk of wealth being in the hands of a small percentage of soulless idiots, this book offers an "a way." At time when one might be tempted, like many Native American tribes were, to lament the past and vainly attempt to bring it back through the sad but hopeful ritual of the Ghost Dance (instead we listen to the Oldies Radio while media encourages us to celebrate some anniversary of some event that had meaning rather than helping us give meaning to current events). It offers a vision of how a person, a culture and humanity itself can keep what is valuable and authentic from one's past and one's culture while

navigating chaotic upheaval. It's about keeping one's humanity intact in dehumanizing times and both keeping and building a personal and cultural integrity that endures. So, if you have been a victim of mortgage lenders, student loan rip-offs, downsizing, corporate greed, credit card companies or the crisis in our lack of a health care system, this book lets you know that it just something you're going through. It helps you become active rather than passive in your emotional and philosophical response. So, instead of feeling like a sitting duck, you begin to feel like someone facing challenges and helping others do the same. Enduring and radical hope eventually trumps the temporal power of any oppressive junta in a way they cannot see coming. At the same time, it builds heart, soul and culture. This book has come at a good time.

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