

Scalping Columbus and Other Damn Indian Stories: Truths, Half-Truths, and Outright Lies

Adam Fortunate Eagle

University of Oklahoma Press (Jan 1, 2014)

Softcover \$19.95 (216pp)

978-0-8061-4428-3

Fortunate Eagle's battle for Indian rights is always tempered with humor and humanity—his strength is that he makes the reader laugh while he also proves a point.

Adam Fortunate Eagle shares a lifetime of Indian culture—tales true, false, and everything in between—in his amusing and enjoyable *Scalping Columbus and Other Damn Indian Stories*.

Fortunate Eagle, writer, sculptor, and activist, has been involved in many notable civil-rights battles on behalf of Native Americans, including the takeovers of Alcatraz in 1964 and 1969. He is the author of *Heart of the Rock: The Indian Invasion of Alcatraz* and *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School*. In *Scalping Columbus*, Fortunate Eagle shares his anecdotes casually, with a playful, mischievous sense of humor that often leaves the reader unsure of what is true and what's not. Fortunately, Fortunate Eagle supplies an end-of-book guide to how much of each story is true, fabricated, or embellished.

The title story, "Scalping Columbus," features Fortunate Eagle, with ever an open eye for Indian positive-image publicity, participating in a Bay Area Columbus Day celebration. After being slighted, he pulls the wig off the actor playing Christopher Columbus in a re-enactment of the discovery of the New World—thus "scalping" Columbus. A few years later, Fortunate Eagle capitalizes on a trip to Rome by "discovering" Italy, another humorous but pointed statement about the treatment of Native Americans: "To my delight I found no historic reference that Italy had been discovered by anybody. My sense of logic and reason kicked in. If an Italian can lay claim to discovery of the Americas, with a native population estimated at eighty million in North, Central, and South America, then an American Indian should be able to discover a land called Italy."

There is also a fascinating account of Fortunate Eagle's role in the Patty Hearst saga, but the book is not all civil-rights battles or stories that carry historical significance; there are many that simply aim to entertain, even as they illuminate "Indian wisdom." As if readers were sitting and listening to Fortunate Eagle around a campfire or at a powwow, his voice comes through as intimate and genuine, and even though this means dialect usages that are occasionally a bit strange, grammatical errors like using "drug" for "dragged," or jokes that sometimes misfire, they add to the overall experience nearly as much as they detract.

Scalping Columbus makes it clear just how Fortunate Eagle has charmed so many people over the years—by being himself. Funny, honest, unpredictable, Fortunate Eagle is a master storyteller, and *Scalping Columbus* proves it.

PETER DABBENE (Spring 2014)

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