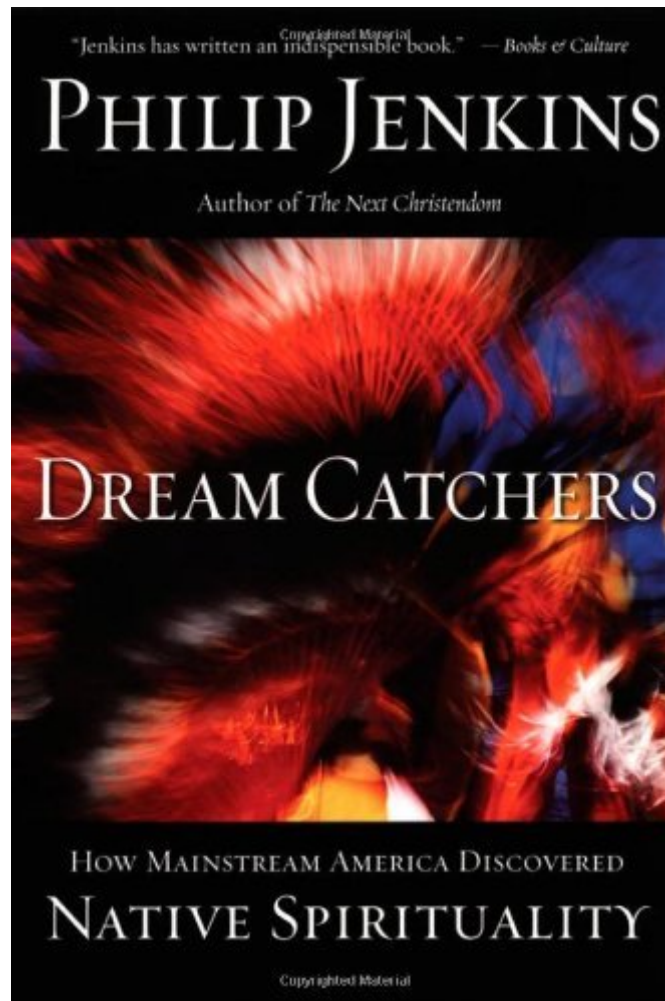


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Dream Catchers: How Mainstream America Discovered Native Spirituality



Synopsis

In books such as *Mystics and Messiahs*, *Hidden Gospels*, and *The Next Christendom*, Philip Jenkins has established himself as a leading commentator on religion and society. Now, in *Dream Catchers*, Jenkins offers a brilliant account of the changing mainstream attitudes towards Native American spirituality, once seen as degraded spectacle, now hailed as New Age salvation. While early Americans had nothing but contempt for Indian religions, deploring them as loathsome devil worship and snake dancing, white Americans today respect and admire Native spirituality. In this book, Jenkins charts this remarkable change, highlighting the complex history of white American attitudes towards Native religions from colonial times to the present. Jenkins ranges widely, considering everything from the 19th-century American obsession with "Hebrew Indians" and Lost Tribes, to the early 20th-century cult of the Maya as bearers of the wisdom of ancient Atlantis, to films like *Pocahontas* and *Dances With Wolves*. He looks at the popularity of the Carlos Castaneda books, the writings of Lynn Andrews, and the influential works of Frank Waters, and he explores the New Age paraphernalia found in places like Sedona, Arizona, including dream-catchers, crystals, medicine bags, and Native-themed Tarot cards. Jenkins examines the controversial New Age appropriation of Native sacred places; notes that many "white Indians" see mainstream society as religiously empty; and asks why a government founded on religious freedom tried to eradicate native religions in the last century--and what this says about how we define religion. An engrossing account of our changing attitudes towards Native spirituality, *Dream Catchers* offers a fascinating introduction to one of the more interesting aspects of contemporary American religion.

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Customer Reviews

This is one fascinating book. Every now and again I run across a book that takes me off in a direction I had not even suspected would be worth examining. Heck, this is a book I could not have even imagined. It is such a treat to be surprised and delighted. In "Dream Catchers", Philip Jenkins guides us through the story of how the Native American (Indian?) culture has been variously (mis)interpreted, (mis)used, and (mis)adapted over the centuries. It is essential to remember that this is NOT a book about the religion or spiritual beliefs of Native Americans. In some ways this seems strange because as I read it I had to keep reorienting myself to this fact. As I read about how White Culture found new ways to use Native American symbols as a label for issues in its own culture, I wanted to learn more about what the actual beliefs of the various North American Native cultures were. This is a topic for study in many other books (it would require a whole library of books and a lifetime of study to really grasp them in a meaningful way, I suppose). Mr. Jenkins takes us on a lively tour through time and through changing culture and purpose. While I cannot do an adequate job of summarizing the book here, and I really want you to enjoy the surprising ride on your own, I can say that there really are three broad periods: 1) Rejection: The Indian as pagan, lost, benighted and in great need of Christianization, 2) Tolerance and Transition: the Period after the Indian Wars and particularly after WWI when Christianity and Western Culture had a great crisis of meaning. There was a huge turning to Indian culture as if it were a monolithic thing.

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