



Vine Deloria, Sr.

Dakota Images

A noted Episcopalian missionary, Vine Deloria, Sr., was born at Wakpala on the Standing Rock reservation on 6 October 1901 to a leading Sioux family. His father was a well-known missionary and one of the first Sioux Episcopal priests; his mother was the daughter of Gen. Alfred Sully; and his grandfather was a Yankton subchief and traditional religious leader. Young Deloria attended Kearney Military Academy in Nebraska and, after graduation in 1921, went to Saint Stephens (now Bard) College in New York State, where he set a national collegiate record with his fifty-five-yard football pass. He received his bachelor's degree in liberal arts and then worked a year as the boys' athletic director at Fort Sill (Oklahoma) Boarding School and even tried his hand as a coal miner.

Deloria's father, Rev. Philip Deloria, wished his son to follow in his footsteps as a pastor, and respecting that desire, Vine Deloria entered the General Theological Seminary in New York in 1928. In 1931, he was ordained a deacon in his father's church, and after graduation and ordination in 1932, he was assigned to Pine Ridge Mission. That same year, he married Barbara Eastman and moved to Martin, where he served All Saints Church, played on the local baseball team, and was the first football coach of Bennett County High School. Transferred to the Sisseton-Wahpeton reservation in 1943, Deloria later returned to the Corn Creek District of Pine Ridge, as superintending presbyter of a field that included nineteen chapels and fifteen hundred parishioners. In 1954, he became national executive secretary for Indian work of the Episcopal church, but his outspoken criticism of federal Indian policy made him unpopular, and he ultimately resigned, accepting a call to a church in Iowa. He became the archdeacon of South Dakota in 1961, returning to Pierre to assume major missionary responsibilities for South Dakota. He retired in 1967.

An outstanding orator and storyteller who often used sports examples in his sermons, Deloria was among the first inductees of the South Dakota Hall of Fame. He also received the Indian Council Fire Achievement Award. Remembered as a leading Christian figure among the Indians, Deloria helped his people cope with change while earning the respect of the non-Indian society. Vine Deloria died in Tucson, Arizona, on 26 February 1990.

by JOAN ANDERSON

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