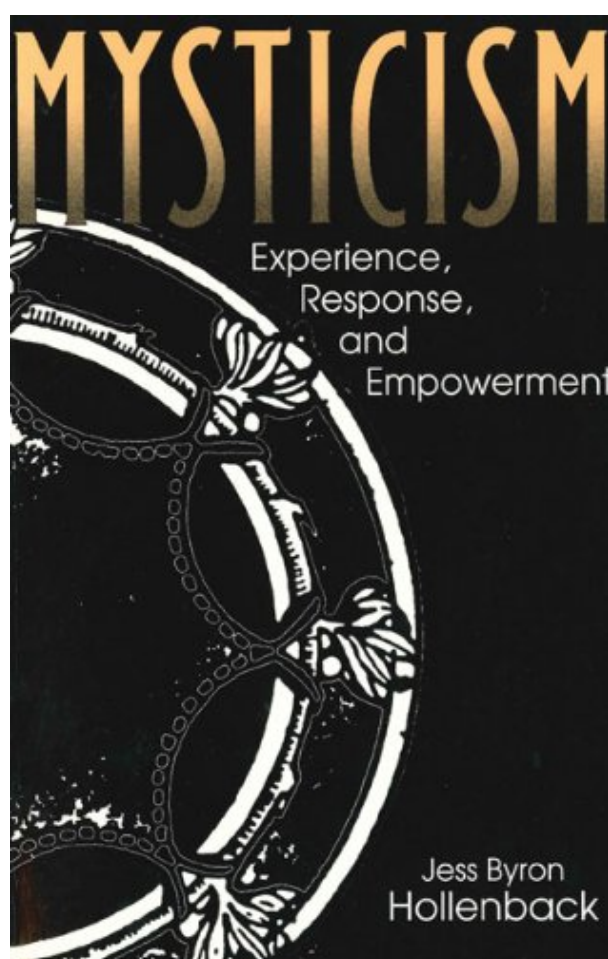
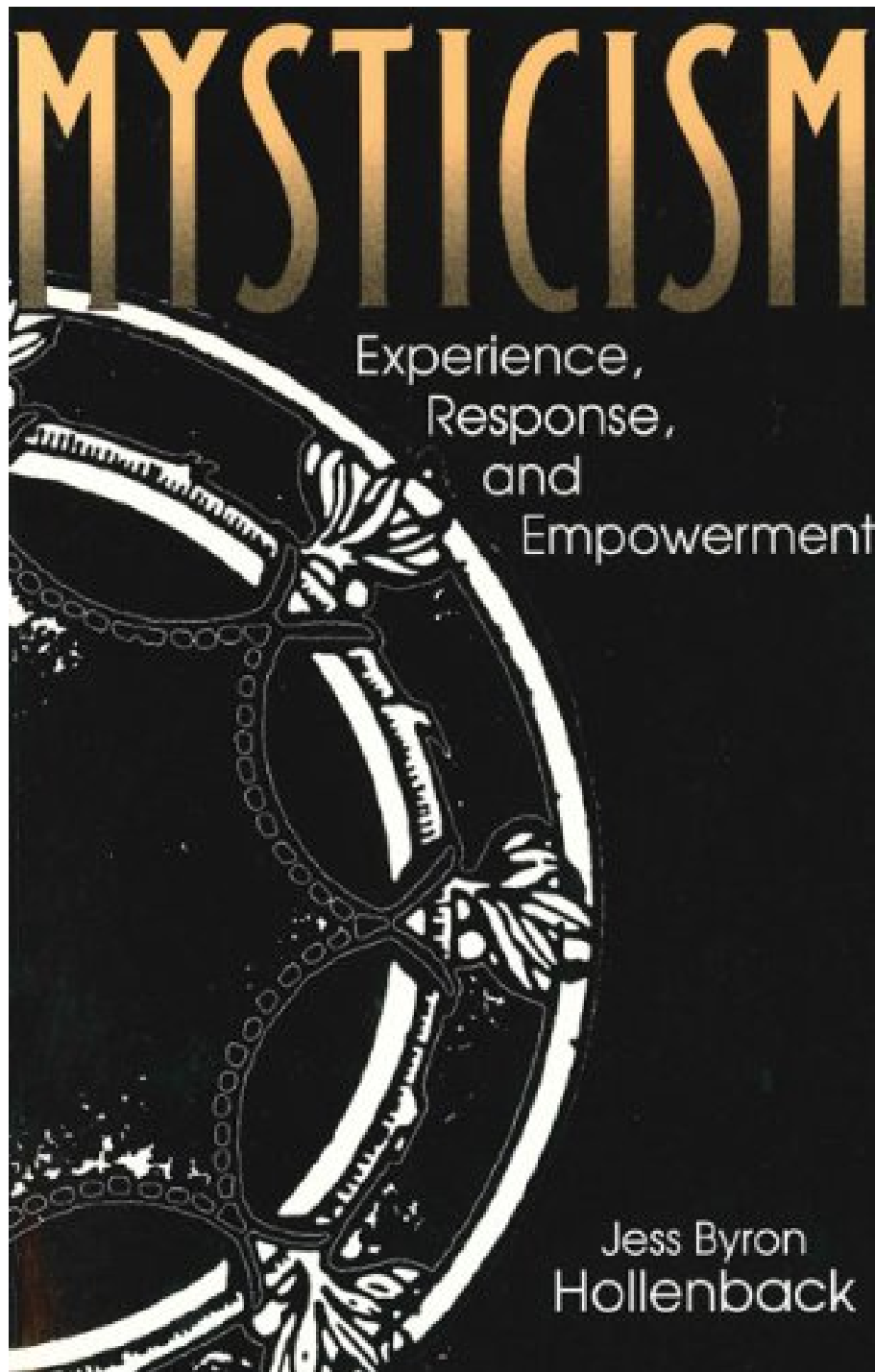


**MYSTICISM: EXPERIENCE, RESPONSE,
AND EMPOWERMENT (HERMENEUTICS)
BY JESS HOLLENBACK**



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Review

“An important contribution to the comparative study of mysticism. . . . Especially noteworthy are extended studies of Lakota mystic Black Elk and Saint Teresa of Avila that demonstrate how the mystical experiences of these two were shaped and conditioned by their respective cultural contexts.”

—Craig A. Burgdoff, *Religious Studies Review*

“Jess Hollenback argues conclusively that the founding fathers and mothers of the modern study of mysticism posited an unnecessary hypothesis that has caused us to miss a central opportunity to understand the subject adequately. He elaborately proves that factors of time, place, and historical and cultural form of the particular religion of the authors being examined vitally affect their mysticism.”

—Noel King, author of *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa*

About the Author

Jess Hollenback is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse.

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MYSTICISM: EXPERIENCE, RESPONSE, AND EMPOWERMENT (HERMENEUTICS) BY JESS HOLLENBACK PDF

This sweeping study of mysticism by Jess Hollenback considers the writings and experiences of a broad range of traditional religious mystics, including Teresa of Avila, Black Elk, and Gopi Krishna. It also makes use of a new category of sources that more traditional scholars have almost entirely ignored, namely, the autobiographies and writings of contemporary clairvoyants, mediums, and out-of-body travelers. This study contributes to the current debate about the contextuality of mysticism by presenting evidence that not only are the mystic's interpretations of and responses to experiences culturally and historically conditioned, but historical context and cultural environment decisively shape both the perceptual and affective content of the mystic's experience as well.

Hollenback also explores the linkage between the mystic's practice of recollection and the onset of other unusual or supernatural manifestations such as photisms, the ability to see auras, telepathic sensitivity, clairvoyance, and out-of-body experiences. He demonstrates that these extraordinary phenomena can actually deepen our understanding of mysticism in unexpected ways.

A unique feature of this book is its in-depth analysis of "empowerment," an important phenomenon ignored by most scholars of mysticism. Empowerment is a peculiar enhancement of the imagination, thoughts, and desires that frequently accompanies mystical states of consciousness. Hollenback shows its cross-cultural persistence, its role in constructing the perceptual and existential environments within which the mystic dwells, and its linkage to the fundamental contextuality of mystical experience.

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—Noel King, author of *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa*

About the Author

Jess Hollenback is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse.

Most helpful customer reviews

23 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

Hollenback's book may yet found a new paradigm.

By A Customer

Mysticism: Experience, Repsonse and Empowerment may yet found a new paradigm for the study of mystical phenomena. The author, J.B Hollenback, offers a masterful review of previous theoretical approaches with a radical new understanding of mystical practice and experience. Hollenback combines a sensitivity to the role of cultural context in shaping mystical experience with an unbiased approach to the claims of mystical practioners. Thus, he avoids psychologistic reductionism and is willing to seriously consider phenomena such as astral projestion and telepathy and examine how they actually work. His thesis: Concentration, often charged with affect, leads to an empowerment of conciousness which enables the mystic to attain abilities not accessible to ordinary states of mind. This focus on the question of power brings mysticism into the forefront of contemporary discussions of power, such as James Hillman's *Kinds of Power*. Hollenback displays exceptional openness to the mystical practices of tribal cultures, and one of his case studies deals with a Native American Shaman. The openness, innovative claims, erudition and conceptual clarity of this book make it a "must" for students of mysticism and comparative religion. For further discussion and critique, see my review in *The Journal of Religion*, 78 (4) 1998, pp. 593-601.

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating

By Thomas

I'm not a psychologist or historian, but a law professor who read this book on a whim. I'm not qualified to judge it within the broader literature on mysticism. But I can say it makes a fascinating read, not least because the author maintains what might be called an agnostic stance toward materialism. I also found his thesis that, to put it colloquially, the historical and cultural background of the particular mystic influence the very nature of the mystical experience for him or her, both provocative and plausible. As another reviewer noted, the treatment of the mysticism of Black Elk was very interesting and completely new to me. Another reviewer complained about the writing style of the author. I did not find the book hard to read at all. Its style is somewhat academic, but not pedantic or obscure. There was something very calm and detached about the style that I found soothing. It is certainly easier to read the Evelyn Underhill's famous treatment.

19 of 42 people found the following review helpful.

Hollenback paradigm is flawed and confused

By Mark Graham

Hollenback spends most of his book dedicated to the premise that the mystical experience is culturally and historically conditioned. What Hollenback never takes into account are the ideas of German anthropologist Adolf Bastian. Bastian recognized that throughout the mythologies and religious systems of the world, the

same images, the same themes are constantly recurring, appearing everywhere. He called these "Elementary Ideas," Elementargedanken. But he recognized also that wherever they occurred, they appeared in different costumes with different applications and different interpretations. He called these provincial differences "Folk Ideas," or "Ethnic Ideas"-Volkgedanken. Now this is a very important distinction. It divides our subject into two quite different departments. Historians and ethnologists are interested in the differences, and one can study the mythologies and the philosophies of the world with an accent on these differences. On the other hand, the problem emerges of the Elementary Ideas. Why are they everywhere? This is a psychological problem, and it's a problem that separates us in our discussion of comparative forms from the whole research having to do with differences.

Hollenback, a historian, spends most of his time analyzing the ethnic ideas, and ignoring the elementary aspect of the mystical experience. Put simply, he is interested in plot and ignores theme. Furthermore, Hollenback associates mysticism with persons who are clearly not mystics, namely Moses, Augustine, who is a conservative fundamentalist if there ever was one, and St. Francis of Assisi and St. Theresa of Avila who were contemplatives. He further confuses the mystical experience (elementary idea) with the relating of the mystical experience (ethnic idea).

In completion, this is a very poorly written and conceived book which amounts to a 600 page waste of time.

See all 3 customer reviews...

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